Directing: A Mirror to Solo Performance
Provocation, Collaboration and Proxy Audience

By
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Acknowledgements

My passion for solo performance began with a performance by Steven Berkoff at the Adelaide Festival of Arts in the 1980s. My mother took me to see diverse, experiential and wonderful local and international theatre throughout my childhood and adolescence. Those experiences inspired me to train as an actor as James Cook University of North Queensland, under the tutelage of acclaimed Dutch theatre maker Jean-Pierre Voos. Some years later, when playing Elizabeth Proctor in The Crucible at The Lyric Theatre in Belfast, I became more interested in the bigger picture of directing. The Master of Theatre Arts in Directing at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand and Victoria University of Wellington shaped my directing practice as an artist and as an academic, to which I am indebted to my cohort and my teachers, particularly Christian Penny. During the Masters (2005 – 2006) I first began to question the phenomenon that is solo performance and the challenges it presented to the director.

My primary academic support during my doctoral studies has been my supervisors Associate Prof. David O'Donnell and Dr. Megan Evans. They have consistently encouraged and challenged my research in a generous and respectful manner. I have enormous admiration for their work, theatrically and academically.

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In loving memory of my dear friend and an extraordinary man of theatre
Willem Wassenaar
1979 – 2014
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Abstract

Solo performance is a challenging, immediate and exhilarating form of theatre. Its popularity in the field of westernised contemporary theatre is evidenced in the increasing programming of solo performances at international festivals and in commercial theatres. However, whilst there is considerable analysis of the genre of solo performance there is little examination of the relationship between director and solo performer in the rehearsal room. Prior research has focused on the theoretical or on the practical, but rarely have the two approaches actively engaged with each other. This thesis contributes a much-needed analysis of directing practice in this area, and an integration of theory and practice that offers tangible approaches in the rehearsal room. In what ways can the director best serve the solo performer to create a theatrical experience that can hold the audience's attention, imagination and memory?

Solo performance is characterised by a heightened presence in both performer and audience, incited by a minimalism that abandons the theatrical premise of artifice and turns to primary storytelling. The rehearsal room relationship between director and solo performer also shares these qualities, heightened and focused by the one-one engagements. Directing in this context contrasts from that of a multi-cast, with distinctly different dynamics arising from an artistic collaboration between two people, rather than with many. This thesis considers how the director is placed as a flexible paradigm as proxy audience and as a bidirectional-mirroring device in the rehearsal process – situating the director as an articulated reflection to the transforming solo performer. I analyse this unique partnership and focus primarily on strategies that directors use to create effective solo performance.

This thesis is comprised of 80% critical writing and 20% for the creative/practice-based research project. I examine the particular qualities of solo performance as a genre; its theatrical origins, function and purpose, the scope of styles and forms and its potential for political and social meaning. However, my focus is on the rehearsal room processes, working predominantly with a director, rather than an analysis of the end product - the performance. I interview practitioners in the field about their rehearsal room experiences, across the spectrum of styles and forms of solo performance. My theoretical framework is centred on Practice as Research (PaR). In order to scrutinise the relationship between director and solo performer I have gained access to the rehearsal room as both director/practitioner and researcher. The PaR component
of this thesis includes the analysis of the experimental rehearsal process and performance of *PocaHAUNTus* - a new autobiographical solo play. In addition I draw on a body of retrospective work – re-examining my direction of five solo performances that occurred prior to this thesis. Production journals, rehearsal and performance footage, interviews, communications and photographs evidence all components.

My research question is not simply “Does a solo performer need a director?” Instead, my research pursues how the relationship between the two might be negotiated, asking: “In what ways can the director best serve the solo performer?” The research examines the fundamental challenges of the genre, namely: the delineation of multiple characters by a single performer, immediacy of the audience relationship to the lone performer, stage geography and scenographic choices. The research also identifies and refines practical strategies to accommodate the intensity of working one-on-one. At its best, the director-solo performer relationship is a vibrant and supportive partnership but because of its intimacy, it is often also a complex and challenging engagement. The contribution of this thesis and its originality is in a PaR model that utilises my past experience of directing solo performance, expands on this foundation through the collection of extensive interview material from a diverse range of significant directors and performers of solo work, and then pursues a new creative laboratory where I test key approaches to directing solo performance.
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Introduction

It is the obvious which is so difficult to see most of the time. People say “It’s as plain as the nose on your face”. But how much of the nose on your face can you see unless someone holds a mirror up to you? (Asimov 224)

Solo Performer: Director Required

The director’s fundamental function in solo performance is to interpret closely the choices made by the performer and to report back what is observed. To do so is to share the directorial perspective with the solo performer, from the position of proxy audience in the rehearsal room, in the absence of an audience, as well as in the absence of a greater creative ensemble of actors. How does the director uphold their responsibility to the performer, to report back, support and encourage, and also ensure that audiences receive a theatrical experience worthy of their attendance and attention? And are there circumstances in which it might be productive to proceed ‘director-less’ into the rehearsal room for a solo project?

I have considerable practice as a director of solo performance and, building on this experience, I evaluate the rehearsal room relationship between director and performer to discover new ways of working and to provide guidance to this process of working one-on-one. In addition, I discuss the working environment of solo performance with practitioners in the field, both directors and performers. The popularity of solo performance is a global phenomenon, however my practice as research (PaR) is based in New Zealand, so I draw on local examples of directing solo performance, as well as utilising numerous international instances. These investigations inform the direction of PocaHAUNTus - a new autographical solo performance as PaR. The PaR is most significantly demonstrated here as “rather than being prescriptive, rigid or predefined, the methods are typically multimodal, hybridized and plastic, morphing as necessary throughout the study so as to be genuinely led by the current practice”(Robson 135). The implication of using a PaR methodology means that I am centrally located in my research as the director of solo performance; my theory is evolved through the practice.
Methodology for Research and Direction

This thesis is comprised of 80% critical writing and 20% for the creative, practice-based research project, as outlined below. These two are inherently interconnected. The exegesis is the shared knowledge where the “the objectives, focus, outcomes and audience for PaR projects are shaped by research imperative and context” (Little 121). In summary, I question, define and analyse the working relationship of the director and the performer in the rehearsal room, in a number of different solo theatrical processes, including text-based works, autobiographical narratives and devised new work. My methodology utilises multiple approaches and decisively, places my own practice as central to the investigation.

This centralisation of my own practice in this research is the established methodology of Practice as Research. Right from the inception of this research PaR was the preferred methodology because it places the practitioner/researcher actively within the study, as a privileged ‘insider’ in the process, providing opportunities to learn a great deal more than from just observing in the rehearsal room. Whilst I acknowledge the excellent rehearsal room analysis and ethnographic approach in Gay McAuley’s *Not Magic, But Work* (2012), I chose to discover/test/analyse the collaborative relationship with the solo performer from my position as practitioner/director – rather than a detached observer. From this position I could draw on my expertise as a director, alongside my skills as a researcher. This methodology acknowledges the “know-how” that I bring to the research. My focus is on process and not on the reception of a final product for an audience.

PaR is the most appropriate methodology for my research. In Robin Nelson’s *Practice as Research in the Arts* (2013) he challenges the privilege of theory over practice and seeks out the ways that PaR is validated within the academy. His definition acknowledges the intensity of this sort of inquiry:

PaR involves a research project in which practice is a key method of inquiry and where in respect of the arts, a practice… is submitted evidence of a research inquiry… PaR projects require more labour and a broader range of skills to engage in a multi-mode research inquiry than more traditional processes. (Nelson 8–9)
In relevance to this thesis, validating the use of my own material was central to examining my research questions. Nelson lists the following evidence (or archives) that reflects a multi-mode research inquiry as likely to include: a product (performance) with a durable record, documentation of process and ‘complementary writing’ (26). He goes on to say “archives can include almost anything” and merits the inclusion of correspondences, post-presentation response and interviews and participant–experiences (Nelson 86–89). These are predominantly ‘insider’ accounts – opposed to audience reception – again locating this research in the rehearsal room. Following this established PaR methodology many of my sources were my own collected archives (particularly journals), my expertise and experiences, critically analysed within the parameters of my research questions. This is part of the evidential corpus of the thesis.

The implications of using a PaR methodology meant a particular attention to achieving criticality in my research. This criticality occurs in my PaR with the shift from practitioner to practitioner-researcher. Nelson identifies how this is achieved:

- Specify a research inquiry at the outset
- Set a timeline for the overall project including the various activities involved in a multi-mode inquiry.
- Build moments of critical reflection into the timeline, frequently checking that the research inquiry remains engaged and evidence is being collected.
- In documenting your praxis in a lineage of similar practices.
- Relate the specific inquiry to broader contemporary debate (through reading and exposition of ideas with references) (29).

As outlined below, I structured this project in accordance with these principles, working to ensure a consistent level of criticality throughout and analysing the resulting evidence and documentation.

I look first to the larger fields of study, addressing solo performance and directing generally. Secondly I examine my own directing practice and those of other practitioners in the area of solo performance - utilising interviews and archival research. The third and final action of my research is the creation of a new solo performance in the context of research that tests specific approaches to directing this genre.
The Distinction, Popularity and Proliferation of Solo Performance

For the purposes of this thesis, I am focusing on performances in which the story-telling is driven by the one performer and which relies on the performance paradigm of audience, script/text and performer. My working definition allows for many other collaborators, such as dramaturgs, designers and/or musicians, who contribute during the development process or even in the final performance. However, these collaborators support rather than drive the storytelling. In addition, I focus primarily on the intimate interaction between director and performer in the solo rehearsal room. Thus, I have found it useful to explore productions - such as Guru of Chai discussed in Chapter Five - which might be excluded in a narrower definition, because performer Jacob Rajan and director Justin Lewis worked for extended periods in the exclusive partnership of the solo rehearsal room. In addition, they had done so on a previous unquestionably ‘solo’ work (Krishnan’s Dairy) and so had a tested and successful process worthy of attention in this thesis.

The interaction between director and performer occurs differently in the creation of solo theatrical performance, in contrast to a production involving multiple cast members (‘multi-cast play’), and so requires a revised directing approach. The working conditions create challenges due to the intimacy afforded with just two people and because the work itself dictates a shift in focus – directing one actor to tell a story differs from the dynamics involved in directing a group of actors to do the same. The leadership model that becomes necessary when working with a cast of many is renegotiated in the more autonomous conditions that occur when two people work together exclusively. The director and solo performer can function as an ensemble of two that is a vibrant, supportive partnership.

The proliferation and popularity of solo performance is evidenced by the increasing presence of solo shows on the international festival and fringe circuits. Touring the international arts festivals in Adelaide and Wellington in 2014, and beyond, included many solo performances, with Robert Lepage’s Needles and Opium, ¹ An Iliad (2012) presented by American theatre company Homer’s Coat, Tom Crean – Antarctic Explorer (2003) by Play On Words Theatre of Ireland and My Stories Your Emails (2010) by British cult cabaret diva Ursula Martinez. In fact, there are entire theatre festivals dedicated to solo performance, as referenced in Chapter One.

¹ This new version of Needles and Opium, featuring Marc Labreche, has an additional (non-speaking) performer – Wellesley Robertson III playing Miles Davis. The original production premiered in 1991.
The popularity of the solo show can be attributed to its mobility and economy on numerous levels. A touring solo company comprised of one actor and usually a minimal set makes the show profitable for both the producer and the venue/festival buying the product. It makes financial sense, especially with economic restrictions and increasing competition for arts funding, to invest in an easily transportable theatre production that can reach many people. As American theatre academic Louis Catron suggests: “in our era of skyrocketing production expenses, the solo play also is markedly less expensive to produce than its multi-character relatives, increasing its attractiveness to producers and – playwrights, directors, and actors” (10). Like the economics of touring a solo show, the programming of these works in theatres is also profitable – consuming considerably fewer resources than, for instance, an elaborate Shakespearean production with a cast of twenty. Solo performances are being widely programmed in professional theatres. For example, the 2014 programme of the National Theatre in London included four solos. Across the Atlantic, the *New York Times* entertainment journalist Cara Joy David suggests that solo performance fits the bill: “Got a hole in your season? Looking for a production that’s simple to assemble? Want to save a few bucks on actors’ salaries? Or maybe just keen to mount something uniquely personal?” This is the appeal of solo performance from an economic and entertainment viewpoint.

Here in New Zealand solo performance has a prominent place in the country’s theatre history and in the current theatrical output. Academic George Parker observes that an abundance of solo performance here can be attributed to an economy of means, like elsewhere, but also suggests that “it is a means of actively engaging with a sense of isolation that typifies the post-colonial New Zealand experience”. At Wellington’s mainstream Circa Theatre, the 2014 season included four solos: *Miss Bronte, Gloria’s Handbag, The Pianist* and *4 billion likes!* These solo performances represented over fifteen percent of the programme. In contrast, in 2004 there were two solos programmed and in 1994 there were none. Circa Theatre’s archivist Linda Wilson attributes this variation to the opening in 1995 of a second, smaller performance space that was compatible with solo performers.

Fringe festivals around the world now present a large offering of solo performances. In New Zealand, Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School students have created their own solo performances for the Go Solo season as part of the final year of study since 1989, and the

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2 The four solos at the National Theatre in 2014 were *A Small Family Business, Analog.Ue, Chewing Gum Dreams* and *100 Acts of Minor Dissent.*
format is now being implemented in the first year programme. Many graduates successfully remount these performances as their professional debut on the local theatre scene, for example, as part of the New Zealand Fringe Festival. These productions are inexpensive to stage and present a taste of the performer’s skills and their theatrical interests. Jacob Rajan’s student solo for Toi Whakaari, *Krishnan’s Dairy* (1997), went on to the New Zealand Fringe and to have international success. It inspired the founding of Indian Ink Theatre Company, along with director Justin Lewis, that now has a repertoire and reputation for outstanding work.

Solo performance is also valued within the education system as a dramatic genre that is provocative and pedagogical. Indian Ink’s work is now part of the New Zealand school curriculum, along with other solo endeavours. Beyond New Zealand, the presenting of a monologue has long been part of secondary school drama courses and as part of the Trinity College of London Drama and Speech qualifications. In the United Kingdom, the GCSE Drama course has final year students either creating their own monologue or using an extant solo script as part of their assessment (“Assessment and Qualification Alliance”). In 2007 an option to create a solo performance was added to the New Zealand school drama curriculum for final year secondary students (“Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI)”). These are a further indicator of how the genre has been both popularised and seen as an important expression of theatrical talent and creativity.

The low production costs and economy of means that is possible with solo work certainly does not detract from its artistic merit. In the past, great theatrical stars had their tour de force in solo form, for example, Welsh actor Emlyn Williams’ one-man shows based on the work of Charles Dickens and Dylan Thomas, and American actress Ruth Draper’s own character-driven monodramas such as *The Italian Lesson* (1925) and *Three Women and Mr. Clifford* (1929). Many solos are of a high standard and have proven a commercial success, thus they have made it to the touring circuit of prestigious festivals. Recent high profile performers embracing the solo genre have included *True Blood* star Denis O’Hare in *An Iliad* (premiered in 2010, continuing to tour internationally in 2014) and Miriam Margoyles’ acclaimed *Dickens’ Women* (2012). Hollywood actor Kevin Spacey undertook the solo drama *Clarence Darrow* at the Old Vic in 2014, directed by Thea Sharrock. Sarah Crompton reviewed the performance in the *Telegraph*, with high regard: “[it was] a master class in acting that we are likely to remember

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3 Kevin Spacey was also the artistic director of the Old Vic from 2004 – 2014.
forever”. Crompton identifies the particular power of solo performance, historically, its minimalistic style and strong connection with the audience:

To see him on stage, alone except for a few props, holding the barnlike space of the Old Vic in the palm of his outstretched hand, is to realise that in his heart and soul he comes from a much older tradition … men who could tell a story in a way which made them complicit with the audience … letting them eavesdrop on his private thoughts.

This type of “confessional or self-revelatory monologue” (Schmor 157) can have a voyeuristic hold on the audience, compelling the spectator to watch. We are presented with a singular performer that requires our complete attention – the human insistence of the appeal by another, another us. In the absence of other actors, solo performance encourages an intimate, complicit relationship with the audience. This collusion between performer and spectator might also fulfil a desire and demand by audiences to escape our heavily mediatised society and return to the simplicity and effectiveness of one person as storyteller. In the 21st century, where much of our engagement is at the computer/screen interface, live theatre offers an important alternative experience. Direct engagement is further intensified by the intimate interaction demanded by the solo performer.

The reception of Kevin Spacey’s *Clarence Darrow*, quoted above, is an example of the popularity and power of solo performance but also begins to indicate the challenges of the genre that has led to some disparagement by theatre audiences, practitioners and reviewers. Criticism of the genre has been directed at its propensity to self-indulgence – with the dedication of an entire performance to one actor. The solo form can indeed be prone to theatrical failure. Common pitfalls in production include a lack of connection with an audience, an inability to find enough variation in pace and rhythm and loss of clarity, particularly in the playing of multiple characters. Even the internationally renowned Robert Lepage has encountered difficulties in the staging challenges of solo performance. A review of Lepage’s *Elsinore* (1997) notes of the solo actor Peter Darling:

Contributing to the play's incoherence, Darling fails to make any real character differentiation apart from swapping doublets, gowns, and crowns. His Gertrude is particularly uninspired: a walking dress, she is a mere tonal shift from Hamlet, and possesses none of Hamlet's already scant emotional drive (Wolff 239).
Another reviewer, John Smythe, suggests the need for the director in solo performance in a recent production of de Sade: “[the actor’s] delivery is halting and sometimes comes in fits and starts … a director on board to interrogate his objectives and develop the means by which he meets them would have undoubted value” (“Little Fun”). As a theatre critic with extensive viewing experience Smythe is well equipped to identify that inconsistencies in the actor’s performance may have resulted from the absence of vigorous feedback and assistance from a collaborator such as a director. The performer seems not to have seen his performance from the perspective of the audience, or has done so inaccurately. The director can be that interrogatory eye, that critical viewpoint and means to guide the solo performer.

From the performer’s perspective, the undertaking of a solo show might be a desire for aesthetic control and autonomy - licence to present his or her own theatrical voice, to make the theatre that the performer would want to see, or a marginalised voice to be heard without censorship. As prominent monologist Mike Daisy asserts in the New York Times: “solo performers are the last vanguard of independent artists in a corporatized theatrical landscape. And this, more than the economy or any other factor, has propelled the rise of solo performances” (Qtd. in Bridger). Perhaps the reason why the solo genre covers so many styles and forms is because it is a reflection of the myriad means of an artist’s articulation – it frees up the theatrical means of expression. The varied creative source material from which solo work derives, and the impact of different kinds of material on effective rehearsal approaches are discussed in detail in Chapter One.

Crompton examines how Spacey’s performance “makes a pressing case for the theatrical power of the monologue”, in the face of some general media criticism about the genre:

[T]he monologue is one of the most flexible and enticing forms. Just look at what Beckett can achieve with a darkened stage and single figure ... singular evocations of entire worlds. Krapp’s Last Tape is the saddest meditation on waste and death that I can think of.

Many prominent international directors have directed Beckett plays, including Donald McWhinnie and Beckett himself. Other seminal solo performances have strong directors at the helm, for instance, Moisés Kaufman’s direction of I Am My Own Wife (2003) and Guy Masterson’s Austen’s Women (2009). Other solo performances conflate the production roles.
For example, British actor/comedian Daniel Kitson is writer, director, designer and performer of *Analog.Ue* (2013). This scenario, where the performer, director and writer are one person, offers economy and autonomy, but faces the challenges of accurate self-evaluation. In Chapter Four I compare this singular approach with the inclusion of the stand-alone director and argue the advantage of a director in the rehearsal room of solo performance.

Directing solo performance is an important area of theatrical practice, yet many performers and directors navigating the theatrical process for the first time do so without guidance or understanding of the inherent challenges. There is little previous analysis of directing solo performance, as is evidenced in Chapter Two. This study will make a significant contribution to understanding how a theatre director encounters the one-on-one relationship of directing solo performance. The skills of this partnership have the potential to become transferable and inform theatre practice across a broader realm.

**Position Vacant: Director of Solo Performance**

Research into the relationship between the director and performer in solo performance requires an examination of three key areas of performance scholarship: the genre of solo performance, approaches to directing in general and the unique directing process encountered in solo performance. Chapter One of this thesis highlights the considerable analysis of existing solo performance, placing the genre within its historical context in theatre history (Cairney and Catron), investigating the dramaturgical impact of the single performer on stage, debating the terminology and definitions that range between monologues to monodrama (Wallace), autobiographical performance (Gray and Heddon) to polylogues – multiple performers on stage delivering monologues (Borowski and Sugiera). Literature on solo performance offers practical guidance to the performer (Sankey, Catron and Alterman) and analysis of the socio-political agenda of the work (Kalb). Research around directing generally, not limited to solo performance, has involved examinations of leadership, collaboration, artistic vision and methodology (Clurman, Bogart, Cohen, Chinoy and Mitchell).

This thesis is original in its focus on PaR and the rehearsal room process, bringing together my own past directing experience of solo performance, talking to practitioners in the field and creating a new solo work *PocaHAUNTus*. In the field of directing solo performance there has been little research, particularly into practical methodologies. I reference the work of
Amy Pinney, an American director who writes about the experience of directing solo autobiographical performance in “Between A Director and a Cast of One: A Beginning Aesthetic” (2006). Pinney promotes “a directing aesthetic for the solo show” (183). Her focus is on theories that she identifies in the politics of the relationship between the director and the performer in the rehearsal process, as is further discussed in Chapter Two. My interest is in a practical directing methodology that includes tangible approaches to working effectively in the rehearsal room of solo performance. Pinney does not campaign for a director to be present in the rehearsal room: “I do not seek to argue one way or the other for the necessity of a director in the rehearsal hall for a solo performance” (183). Rather she “explores what happens when there is a director present” (Pinney 183). I argue that a director in the rehearsal room is crucial, regardless of the form or style of the solo performance and I provide numerous sources of evidence that demonstrates why and how this is so. Pinney is writing in the context of autobiographical work and I discover that this form of solo performance particularly needs the critical eye of the director.

Qualifications Required – the Specialised Task of Directing Solo Performance

Whilst there is much guidance for directors of multi-cast plays, there is currently little practical assistance or theory that can be applied specifically to directing solo performance in the rehearsal room. The directing skills required for solo performance are similar to many of the qualities required for directing multi-cast plays. However, there are areas of directing solo performance that require particular adaptation to the one-on-one relationship. These specific issues include fundamental staging and performance decisions. For example, many solo performances require the performer to play multiple characters. In Dickens’ Women, for instance, Miriam Margoyles portrays twenty-three distinct characters. The solo actor’s skill in successfully inhabiting and transitioning between multiple characters, across a spectrum of age and gender, is crucial to the uniqueness and engagement of solo performance. In addition, solo performance cannot usually rely on dialogue to reveal relationships or time and place and so often ask the audience to create an imagined world around the performer. For instance, in Toa Fraser’s solo play No.2 the audience experiences a big family back-yard get-together, presented by one actor, Madeleine Sami, with little else on stage.4 Thus the specificity of time and place is communicated through stage geography, choices made with scenography and identifying the

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4 I viewed the premiere production of No.2 in 1999 at BATS Theatre, Wellington. No. 2 was later made into an acclaimed feature film in 2006 with a large ensemble cast of actors. Written and directed by Toa Fraser.
particular relationship the character(s) has with the audience. In solo performance a conversation can occur between the multiple characters, such as in No.2 with dialogue between Nana Maria and her grandchildren, or it can be purely a monologue by one character where the audience might be referred to as an additional participant by being directly acknowledged by the performer.

The challenges of staging solo performance must be considered with an understanding of the intent of the playwright or deviser. A director will usually approach each play with an acknowledgement of its origins – whether it is an existing text, or a new work, or a biographical or autobiographical piece. Part of many director’s preparation is to research how the play came about, to know the life of the playwright, the context of the play and the socio-political back-ground. With solo performance these origins are often intensified. For example, when the performer is sourcing material from their own life, whether it becomes fictionalised or not, necessitates that both the performer and director closely examine personal material where there might be emotional sensitivities to the content and the working process. Factors of style also affect the director’s approach, whether the performance utilises, for instance, a polylogue format, or direct address that breaks the imaginary fourth wall between the performer(s) and audience. The approach to the direct address in The Vagina Monologues, where the monologues are based on personal recollections of real people, is a different directing task from Krapp’s conversations with himself and inanimate objects (the tape recorder) in Beckett’s Krapp’s Last Tape (1958). There is scant existing analysis of the distinctive challenges a director encounters with these various forms and styles in the context of solo performance. My thesis analyses and compares these variations, from a unique position that integrates theory and practice.

Beyond this are the challenges to the traditional rehearsal room roles. Whilst the director might previously be the primary decision maker in a multi-cast production, the performer now may have a greater role in the artistic decision-making and the structuring of rehearsals. There is a potential for a shift in the power dynamic in the one-on-one relationship to go beyond collaboration and see the performer sharing the directorial perspective on staging choices.

Solo performance is a specialised directing job. Whilst acting students often encounter solo performance, which is seen as an ideal genre to test or showcase an actor’s skills, the directing of solo performance is not usually taught to directing students. Toi Whakaari and
Victoria University of Wellington jointly offered a Master of Theatre Arts in Directing from 2000 until 2015, and The National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Australia has a Master of Fine Arts (Directing). Until recently London’s Royal Academy of Dramatic Art offered an MA in Theatre Directing. None of these directing programmes regularly includes work on solo performance as a core part of their curriculum. Acting students have a lot to gain from working in the genre of solo performance. Director Sophie Roberts comments on the Toi Whakaari’s season of solos by graduating students:

These pieces are the outcome of the third year actors’ pursuit over five weeks of devising to articulate their passions and questions about creating theatre … Creating this work encourages each actor to address how space, form, performance and relationship to audience inform their individual way of making.

(Programme notes 2010 Season of Go Solo)

Directing solo performance provides the directing student with a similar challenge to the student actor. Directing solo performance also tests mettle, fortitude, encourages investigation of practice and helps the student identify their specific theatrical tastes and talents.

**Key Roles and Responsibilities**

My research investigates the tangible demands on the director when encountering solo performance. I build on the extant analysis of solo performance and investigate what could be of use to the director and performer in the rehearsal room and the benefits of this relationship in the realm of practice. In this regard, the thesis addresses an important gap in previous analysis by Pinney and others that affords a more theoretical approach. My aim is to investigate and discover approaches to directing solo performance that are adaptable to the different forms and styles frequently encountered in the genre.

In this thesis, I pose the following questions that necessitate a PaR methodology where the processes of research are ‘multimodal and dynamic” and demonstrate engagement with both “know-how” and “know what” (Nelson 46). In what ways could the director approach the specialised job of directing solo performance? How do both collaboration and leadership assist the relationship between the director and the solo performer? How does the director adapt the

5 “The key method used to develop know-what from know-how is that of critical reflection – pausing, standing back and thinking about what you are doing” (Nelson 45)
rehearsal process to the particular genre, style and form of the solo performance? How can the director best serve the solo performer and the work? How does the director provide a directorial perspective to the autobiographical solo performer? How do the director and the solo performer view each other’s work and address issues of vulnerability and ethicality? How does this relationship function? Pinney references performance scholar Judith Hamera’s observations and practice in the area of dance studies. Whilst viewing is a fundamental task of the director in any multicast show, in the solo show, that “looking” is bidirectional, between two bodies, and these two bodies can become “remade as each gazes toward, and vicariously inhabits, the other” (Hamera 151). The act of observing affects the body upon which the gaze is cast. The “lens” must be chosen carefully: it will indeed reflect back. (Pinney 186)

I also investigate the metaphor of the director as a mirror to the performer in the rehearsal room of solo performance. Julie Robson provides a list of commonalities in practice-led approaches in performance research in Australia and states: “accounts of method will often resound effectively with strategic use of metaphor” (135). This metaphorical mirror of the director in the rehearsal room provides the solo performer with an informed critique of their performance, from the perspective of an audience. This mirror is an effective, flexible paradigm, is not simply a fixed object (reflective) but is interactive (bidirectional), providing some possible solutions to the challenges of self-evaluation that the solo performer encounters. In this context of viewing each other’s work, how do we manage the renegotiation of traditional role boundaries to suit the specific demands of the rehearsal room of solo performance? How does ‘play’ occur between director and performer, in the absence of other actors? How are the fundamental directorial challenges of character delineation, audience interaction, scenography and stage geography best approached? My methodology answers these questions in a number of different contexts.

In Chapter One I define and analyse the different styles and forms of the genre of solo performance and how they function theatrically. I investigate the creative origins of solo performance. The origins are important because they often dictate the style of performance and thus the specific directorial approach. By uncovering the historical and socio-political background of the genre we are better placed to understand the environment of the rehearsal room.

In Chapter Two I focus on the craft of directing and how the director might choose to approach solo performance. An understanding of the history of directing and the current
approaches to the role help to see how the director’s journey needs to be adapted to working one-on-one. This first stage provides a survey of the field I am working and researching within and a summary of current practice in directing solo performance. In this context of directing solo performance, I analyse interpretations of ‘the mirror’, both literal and metaphorical, and the mirror’s possible reflexivity, purpose and implications in the rehearsal process.

In Chapter Three I provide a review of my past directing practice and demonstrate the type of questions and challenges that arise from working in this genre. I demonstrate how different solo works require unique approaches and identify areas that need further research. This was the beginning point of my PaR, and as Robson acknowledges “the methods employed, are, underpinned by the artist-researcher’s pre-existing arts practice”(135). I examine five of the ten solo performances I have directed in the last decade. They are Porcelain Grin (2007) a co-devised new work; the text-based Steven Berkoff’s Actor (1996), Neil LaBute’s Medea Redux (2000) and Falling In Like (2010); and Eve Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues (1996). These selected solo shows cover a range of forms including existing and new texts and verbatim/docu-drama, and styles - polylogue (a multi-cast presenting independent monologues), monopolylogue (the playing of multiple characters) and single voice. I analyse evidence of the rehearsal processes, along with the contributions from the performer’s perspective, from actors Brooke Williams, Sam Bunkall, Melissa Billington, Andrea Brigden and Wendy Beauchamp. I assess points of overlap, as well as the distinct differences between the challenges presented to the director by the various styles and forms of solo performance. In this analysis I draw on archival production journals, rehearsal plans, video footage (2006 – 2011) and recent interviews with the actors conducted for this research (2012 – 2014).

In Chapter Four I consider similar practices and varying approaches to directing solo performance by theatre practitioners, working with a range of source material, with and without a separate director. This chapter is based on interviews with practitioners in the field of solo performance with a focus on the rehearsal room experience of directing of solo performance. Material in this chapter is sourced from interviews with directors of solo performers: Judy Hegarty Lovett, Justin Lewis and Willem Wassenaar. I also interview solo performers themselves: Conor Lovett, Miranda Harcourt and Lynda Chanwai-Earle. In addition, I question performers who self-direct their solo performances: Robert Lepage, Henri Szeps and William Yang. Finally, I observe first hand the rehearsal room relationships of director Lyndee Jane Rutherford and actor Jason Chasland as they work on the musical solo show ImpoSTAR. These interviews highlight the contrasting opinions of practitioners that advocate and challenge the
director role, and theories of the director as proxy audience and mirror in the solo rehearsal room.

In Chapter Five I present an in-depth case study of the rehearsal room of the New Zealand theatre company Indian Ink and their work on the solo show *Guru of Chai* (2010). This discussion with the director Justin Lewis and solo performer Jacob Rajan includes an examination of their devising and rehearsal process of creating new solo work and the use of mirror systems, particularly the use of director as mirror in solo performance, functioning as a proxy audience. This case study reveals directorial techniques and relationships, including the dramaturg, that are highly effective in the solo rehearsal room.

In Chapter Six I advance the idea that the source material for solo performance influences the director’s working process by reviewing my Practice as Research (PaR) project, the directing of a new autobiographical solo show *PocaHAUNTus*. Here I adopt a PaR methodology in which the rehearsal process is the dedicated laboratory to test directorial approaches with the performer Melissa Billington. The inquiry addresses the power dynamics between director and performer in a devising process that had autobiographical origins and where the project was initiated by the performer. This PaR project was characterised by methods that were “highly idiosyncratic, in that they are personal, instinctual and compelling” (Robson 135). As the project progressed, its individual needs were discovered and accommodated. This terrain was new to Billington and I, and would demand a renegotiation of the working relationship and means of directing practice. For example, I sought to help the performer to overcome the self-consciousness and personal challenges of presenting a new autobiographical work. I compare my experience with Billington with those of Pinney and Australian director L’hibou Hornung. This kind of testing and evaluation occurs concurrently with my directing of any performance. As a researcher-practitioner each and every directing assignment I undertake is part research, part practice, part experiment and part performance. I am always vigilant to document the process and results.

In this final stage of my research I test the effectiveness of several new theories and approaches to directing solo performance in the rehearsal room. These include the specific rehearsal exercises of body doubling that Robert Lepage utilises, Indian Ink’s imagined reality and my own concept of an ensemble workshop. For the purposes of this project, my focus is on action in the rehearsal room as opposed to presentation to the public. This process of
participation, creation, observation and critical analysis is my practice as research (PaR). I acknowledge Gay McAuley’s approach to documenting theatre practice within ethnographic limitations – “the social and professional networks relating the participants in the rehearsal room to each other, and attempting to establish the nature of the social field within which the work is occurring” (9-10), and pursue Kershaw and Nicholson’s promotion of the active, process driven researcher (62–63). I took the position of practitioner as the maker of research that uncovered, documented, reflected, participated and created a performance with a focus on inquiry.

The examination of these three strands - my own directing practice, that of other solo directors and solo performers and my PaR - covered a range of key variants within the genre of solo performance. The investigation included the creative origins of the work, whether the form be autobiographical, biographical, new, devised or an existing text, or a combination there of. In addition I investigated the variations in the style of performance modes: direct address, single voice of one character, monopolylogue, polylogue breaking and maintaining the fourth wall, realism, surrealism, fantasy, verbatim theatre, docudrama and elements of performance art. I debated the use of literal and metaphorical mirrors and the positioning of the director as a flexible mirror paradigm and proxy audience. The combination of observations, reflections, analyses and the creation of a new work provided the best methodology to examine the rehearsal room relationship between director and performer in solo performance. Placing practice as central to my research afforded the ‘insider’ perspective required to understand and inform theatre practice.

In my conclusion I evaluate the research, particularly the implications of the PaR model and offer some recommendations as to how the directing of solo performance can inform theatre practice. This shared knowledge is evidence of PaR where “artists come better to understand their practices in context and that understanding, in turn enhances the artists’ work (Nelson 59). Solo performance is an exciting, polarising and popular theatrical genre. This thesis identifies and analyses the unique qualities that are required to direct solo performance and the importance of the director to stand, actively, as proxy audience.
Chapter One
Defining Solo Performance

Introduction

More than any other kind of live performance, the solo show expects and demands the active involvement of people in the audience. They are watched as they watch, they are directly addressed, their energy resonates with that of the lone artist’s . . . The presence of a single performer in front of an audience of many instantly creates conflicting roles for both performer and viewer—great power and great vulnerability (Bonney xiii)

This singular relationship between solo performer and his or her audience is characterised by its intensity. And before this public interaction occurs, there is an equally intense interaction between solo performer and director, played out behind closed doors in rehearsals. This relationships shares this “great power and great vulnerability” (Bonney xiii) because of the possibilities of conflict arising from the shifting roles in the rehearsal room of two. Research into the rehearsal room process and relationship between the director and performer in solo performance requires examination of three key areas of scholarship and performance: solo performance, the art of directing and the directing process of solo performance. In this first chapter I examine the genre of solo performance within its dramatic parameters of form and style, its historical and creative origins and consider the cultural and political context of this powerful, theatrical field. I begin to consider how the director might approach the challenges of staging solo performance and negotiate the particular partnership with the solo performer.

Definitions, Genre, Form and Style

Whilst my research focuses on the rehearsal room relationships of solo performance, it is beneficial to begin to clarify the genre. Defining the boundaries of solo performance as theatrical genre has been a contentious endeavour. ‘Solo performance’ welcomes all comers, including but not limited to: the monologist, the performance artist, the one-person show and the mono-dramatist. Jo Bonney, acclaimed American director of solos since the 1980s, highlights “the near limitless possibilities inherent in the form” (xiii). There are seemingly endless configurations to the purpose,
presentation and meaning of an actor alone on stage, making it an enticement to audiences and a
great attraction to theatre-makers. Solo performance, and its various monikers of solo show, one-
person show, dramatic monologue and monodrama, is the theatre genre characterised by the single
actor alone on stage. I define solo performance as any theatrical experience, where there is a focus
on one performer on stage that foreground the story-telling function of theatre.

In contrast to the solo performance, I refer to the theatre production where there is more than
one person on stage during the performance as a multi-cast play. A monologue, delivered alone on
stage, like Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” soliloquy, occurs within a multi-cast play but over the
course of the performance there will be more than one actor on stage at some point. I use this term,
multi-cast, because a solo show can have multiple characters but is distinguished by the absence of
multiple cast members. I chose not to use the term ensemble as I argue in Chapter Two that a solo
performance can still be created within the principles of ensemble collaboration – primarily
between director and solo performer.

Within this category of solo performance there are various forms of the genre and styles of
performance. Form is often closely linked to the creative origins of the piece. A solo performance
could be an existing text written by a well-known playwright such as Willy Russell’s Shirley
Valentine (1986) or Neil LaBute’s Falling in Like (2010). The origins could be verbatim or
docudrama such as Anna Deavere Smith’s Fires in The Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and
Other Identities (1992) or Miranda Harcourt and William Brandt’s Verbatim (1993). There are solo
adaptations from books and poems such as Gare St Lazare Player’s adaptation of Samuel Beckett’s
Some solo plays are based on biographical material such as Hal Holbrook’s Mark Twain Tonight
(1954). Others are autobiographical like Swimming to Cambodia (1985) by Spalding Gray or
Robert Lepage’s Needles and Opium (1991). The connection between these forms and their creative
origins are explored in greater detail below.

In addition to form, there are different ways of presenting a solo including direct address to
audience, multiple character playing, single voice or interaction with unseen characters. With regard
to styles of solo performance, there are two terms that are helpful in describing the action on stage:
monopolylogue and polylogue (Borowski and Sugiera 23). A monopolylogue involves the playing
of multiple characters; such as Toa Fraser’s solo play No.2 (1999), where the actor takes on nine

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6 *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1
distinct characters, with dialogue occurring between them. A polylogue, or ensemble monologue, refers to a multi-cast presenting independent monologues often on a shared theme or interwoven together - “a dialogue of independent monologues” (Borowski and Sugiera 23). Examples include Jeff Goode’s *The Eight: Reindeer Monologues* (1997), Thomas Sainsbury’s *The Christmas Monologues* (2010) and Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* (1996). Irish scholar Clare Wallace, editor of *Monologues - Theatre, Solo Performance and Subjectivity* (2006), describes the complexity of the monologue as a theatrical device:

Monologue theatre nevertheless remains contentious, soliciting questions about the very nature of theatre itself, about the nature of performance and audience response, truth and illusion, narrative and experience. Is it an undoing or dismemberment of theatre’s core characteristics - imitative action and dialogue? (2)

A monopolylogue like Toa Fraser’s *No. 2* relocates imitative action and dialogue, but these devices are not discarded. New Zealand theatre reviewer Nik Smythe saw this in action in *No. 2* believing that “the majority of the crowd will attest to having witnessed nine distinct and believable characters using nothing more than her [actor Madeline Sami] body, face, and voice” (N. Smythe). Regardless of form or style, solo performance remains dependent on relationships, whether the dialogue is between character and audience, character and him or herself or between multiple characters played by one performer. Or in the case of Beckett’s *Act Without Words 1* (1957) between character, action and inanimate objects (palm tree, tailor’s scissors, a carafe of water etcetera) without words.

Wallace’s edited collection of essays examines the literary function of the monologue as a genre, in contrast to but not separate from the solo performance in the theatre:

[T]his collection roams around various realisations and modifications of the monologue in plays and in solo performance. It is deliberately poly-vocal and poly-perspectival in its treatment not only of monodrama, but also of semi-monologues, autobiographical pieces, polylogues or ensemble monologues and ultimately transmedial performance. (4)

The contributors to Wallace’s collection examine ways that the monologues are structured, their theatrical effects and purposes and how they serve the narrative of the performance. There are many angles to consider in the solo form, like Bonney’s “limitless possibilities”: opportunities to
investigate subjectivity, subversion, autobiography, gender, identity, sexuality, interaction and more. With its concentrated focus on the single performer, the solo performance enhances opportunities for cultural, theoretical and analytical readings. For example, Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* is a vehicle for individual voices to be heard, women’s voices talking about women’s sexuality that in a multi-cast play may become diluted. Because the monologue stands alone it can make for greater clarity in reading its purpose.

The critical analysis of the genre is often enhanced by an aesthetic in the staging of solo performance that is characterised by minimalism. As Irish Beckett scholar Gerry Dukes notes when discussing Beckett’s solo plays and those that rely heavily on monologue, “the mobility of the actors is tightly circumscribed or eliminated, the scenic design is reduced and simplified so that theatre is stripped down to its primary constituents – light and voice” (120). On the other end of the spectrum are the highly scenic and technologically enhanced solo productions of Robert Lepage. In Chapter Two, and throughout this thesis, I discuss the choices directors make in staging and how these decisions assist the audience’s connection to the performer and the narrative.

Many scholars have addressed solo performance from a specific angle, considering theme, content and theory. For example, and discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, Dee Heddon examines autobiography and solo performance (157–184), Jonathan Kalb questions the opportunities for political intent in the monologue (13–29) and Jill Dolan pursues gender issues within the genre (50). Whilst the director is not often part of the discussion, the work of scholars in this field provides insight into solo performance, an understanding of the potency and the politics of solo performance that can inform the director’s work in the rehearsal room.

**From Thespis to Spalding Gray – Solo Performance in Theatre History**

Tracing the historical beginnings of solo performance reminds the director of the original functions of the genre. In the Greco-European tradition, we can locate solo performance in the conventions of ancient storyteller, retaining the basic formulae of narrative, audience and embellishment. Scottish actor and theatre historian John Cairney’s *Solo Performers: An International Registry, 1770 – 2000* (2001) is an extensive historical catalogue of solo theatre in the form of performer biographies. Cairney acknowledges the origins of solo performance in Ancient Greece:
When Thespis stepped forward from the Chorus in 534 BC, he not only ‘stepped out of line’ in the histrionic sense, but in doing so, he invented the actor, the single protagonist, the first soloist. Therefore it can be said that in the widest sense, the poet-player Thespis, was the original one-man show (4).

The role of the Greek protagonist as political commentator can be traced to the contemporary solo performance with particular implications for self-narrative in ritual/traditional mode, as we see in *PocaHAUNTus* in Chapter Six.

There are several publications that investigate the historical origins of the solo performance. Louis Catron’s *The Power of One: The Solo Play for Playwrights, Actors, and Directors* (2000) concludes his book with an examination of the evolution of the monodrama. Catron states that “we can argue that the earlier shaman deserves credit for that honour” (209) and also identifies the Rhapsodist and Histrione as precursors to Greek and Roman theatre (210). He also points to the nomadic storytellers and solo entertainers in the Middle Ages (Catron 210). However, Western theatre reinvented itself many times over the next millennium, almost exclusively as ensemble, multi-cast incarnations.

Catron picks up the lineage again with the solo performers who managed to sidestep the anti-theatrical laws in eighteenth century England. Licenses to perform were only given to approved plays. However, British satirist Samuel Foote (1720 – 1777) defied Prime Minister Walpole’s prohibition for “acting for gain, hire or reward” by providing “free entertainment” (Catron 215). He disguised the performances, used alternative venues, claimed he was a non-actor and enticed audiences in 1747 with legally acceptable invitations like *An Invitation to a Dish of Chocolate with Samuel Foote* (Catron 216). Many others followed, memorably English actor and writer George Alexander Stevens (1710 – 1780) and his celebrated *Lecture upon Heads* (1764) – calling upon a succession of papier-mâché heads, wig blocks and hand props. It was designed with sophisticated audiences in mind, filled with classical and literary references, puns, word play and comic jargon. Stevens poked fun at famous people and social stereotypes. Numerous performers replicated this successful show, tweaked it a little and took it to the colonies (Catron 217–218). In Australasia, the colonial touring solo performer was influential in the founding of Australian and New Zealand-

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7 Catron explains, “One significant soloist was the rhapsodist (also called a rhapsode), or oral reader, who wrote and performed epic poetry about legends, history, and important individuals…Roman monodramatists included *histriones* (compare that term with today’s ‘histrionic’, referring to acting) who used movement and gestures to enact a variety of characters.” (210-211)
based theatre. The solo had become the latest entertainment. The popularity led to platform readings where families would gather to hear the latest literary works, including Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870) and Mark Twain (1835 – 1910) (Catron 7). Many soloists toured the world with their shows, for example, American actress Ruth Draper (1884 - 1956) and Welsh dramatist Emlyn Williams (1905 – 1987).

Solo performance was transformed again in the late 1960s, 1970s and 80s. At this time performance art was at its most avant-garde and experimental and a generation of solo performance artists embraced this crossover between theatre, art and politics. The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance talks of the genre “which straddled the boundaries of performing and visual arts” (Banes 1019). Performance art was heavily associated with experimentation across artistic disciplines, without censorship or categorisation. The economies of the solo form, both financial and in terms of production values, mean that the risks of artistic experimentation and political radicalisation can be accommodated. These American performers include Spalding Gray, Tim Miller, and more avant-garde performing artists such as Holly Hughes, Karen Finley and Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw of Split Britches. 8

Solo performance is now a popular choice for arts festivals, appealing to both avant-garde and mainstream audiences. Theatre historiographer Ronald Vince acknowledges that the “One-person - usually one character - plays are in fact a staple of modern theatre” (875). There are entire festivals dedicated to solo performances, such as The Uno Festival of Solo Performance in British Columbia, London’s Face to Face Festival of Solo Theatre, soloNOVA Arts Festival in New York and San Francisco’s annual O Solo Mio! Solo Performance Festival. There are many highly acclaimed solos that have had international success, for example, The Blonde, the Brunette and the Vengeful Redhead (2007) by Australian playwright Robert Hewett and Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues (1996). As discussed in the Introduction, solo performances are regularly programmed in mainstream theatres, for instance The National in London, and are often part of professional actor training and school drama curriculum, such as Trinity Speech and Drama and Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. Solo performance’s popularity can be attributed to both its success as a powerful theatrical genre and its more practical qualities of economy and mobility. British performer and playwright Claire Dowie decides on a solo, rather than the multi-cast, version of

8 Karen Finley, Tim Miller, John Fleck and Holly Hughes are the “NEA Four” who took the American government to court for refusing their National Endowment for the Arts funding application based on the subject matter of their work, which included sexually explicit and homoerotic content in the service of important political and social themes.
Easy Access (1998) for the Edinburgh Festival: “Because it’s cheaper … We applied for a grant to tour a full-scale version, but got turned down. So we decided to do it as a solo show” (Sierz).

As I am writing from a New Zealand perspective, it is of note that some of this country’s most influential works are solo performances including Bruce Mason’s The End of the Golden Weather (1962), John Broughton’s Michael James Manaia (1990), Toa Fraser’s No.2 and Indian Ink’s Krishnan’s Dairy (1997). Mason’s work, though inspired by the likes of Emlyn Williams, broke away from the staple of imported European theatre of colonial times by telling a more recognisably New Zealand story. Theatre critic John Smythe rates The End of the Golden Weather as “the seminal play that arguably launched the modern age of New Zealand theatre” (“Powerfully Insightful and Poignant”). Michael James Manaia was a watershed in Maori theatre, and showcased the talent of Jim Moriarty. These performances have entered the collective memory of the audience and have become cross-cultural identifiers. In New Zealand the solo show is a popular form and there is a rapidly growing body of work, often examining the presentation of identity and culture, as George Parker observes in his doctoral research Actor Alone: Solo Performance in New Zealand (2007).

Creative Origins, Political Agendas and Marginalised Voices

Throughout this thesis, we see the important ways in which the creative origin of a solo presents different challenges. In Chapter Two these points of departure can be observed in the director’s approach in the rehearsal room. As the lone actor stands on stage, the legitimacy of the character(s) portrayed becomes crucially important to the spectator. For the director and performer, it is this fundamental question of creative origin that must be addressed in the creating of character(s) – is the character a work of fiction, like Shirley Valentine, or a biographical figure like Clarence Darrow, or the performer’s own personae such as Spalding Gray? The director must be clear about the form of the play, whether it is a work of fiction or something deeply personal or a theatrical hybrid for the purpose of story telling. The emotional and political impact of My Name is Rachel Corrie (2005), being performed by a solo actor, is derived from the knowledge that the performance originates from Corrie’s journals and emails from the Gaza strip. By addressing the source material with integrity, the resulting work is more likely to achieve truthfulness for the audience.
The biographical solo performance has been consistently popular. However, it has also been condemned by American performance studies scholar John Gentile, as a “necrophiliac genre” (147) characterised by an obsessive interest in the dead famous. New York critic, Ben Brantley, stated that “for a while it looked as if all it required to stage a play in New York was a lone actor with a) multiple personalities; or b) a good imitation of a famous dead person; or c) a lot to confess about his (sic) personal life” (Schiavi 205). Solo performers have offered a line-up of resurrected dead people – Hal Halbrook’s *Mark Twain Tonight* (1954), Ed Metzger in *Albert Einstein: The Practical Bohemian* (1978), Lynn Miller’s *Gertrude Stein* (1993), Angelica Page as Sylvia Plath in *Edge* (2003), Kevin Spacey as Clarence Darrow and many more. Craig Bridger recently asserted in the *New York Times*: “The [2010] spring soloNOVA festival, dedicated entirely to the genre, recorded an even sharper rise: up more than a third to 109 submissions last year, from 75 in 2008. Even without a festival there were at least 15 solo shows in New York last week”. Brantley’s reaction implicitly acknowledges the proliferation and popularity of solo performance.

The biographical solo performance presents its own particular challenges for the director and performer to navigate. The audience may come to the solo show with expectations that the performance will be historically accurate, that Sylvia Plath will be darkly poetic and tragic, that it will be “Examining Plath’s torments and tormentors” (Tallmer). However, when an actor successfully brings a historical figure back to life the audience gets an intimate first person narrative insight that might extend beyond expectations.

The popularity of solo shows is not confined to biographical accounts. For example, many of the performance artists of the mainly American avant-garde were sourcing their material from their own lives. Spalding Gray was one of the pioneers of autobiographical solo performance in the early 1980s, through to the 1990s. He wrote and performed monologues based on his personal life: “What I start with is memory. All memory is a creative act. If you have memory, you’re re-creating the original event” (Gray and Schechner 166). Each show evolved through improvised performances until it became a finely tuned script delivered by rote. Gray was both performer and writer/creator. It took some time for audiences to understand the theatrical parameters of his autobiographical performance – to whom was Gray talking to? Theatre director Mark W. Travis observed, “He brought total revelation of himself to the audience, unabashedly presenting his strengths and weaknesses and reflecting upon his own life in a very unique way ... a different form of theatre I had never even considered or been aware of” (Cited by Young 179). This revelatory quality has
since become a popular theme for solo performance. American academic John Schmor identifies the way in which solo performers can raise questions about identity where:

[O]ne character's extended and usually ironically reflexive confession disrupts thematic certainty as it narrates the action. Monologue-drama is significantly dominated by confession, not as the strategic framing device typical of traditional realism, but as the central action and thematic conflict of the play. Confession in monologue-drama of the 1980s poses identity as a question of ambiguous construction or outright artifice. (158)

The presentation of real life in solo performance can expose the tension between art and life and authenticity of performance. John Cairney asks: “The autobiographical device poses the question of how true the actor can be, given the innate falsity of his theatrical position. He is, after all, still telling his ‘lies’ to gain his stage truth. How true can he therefore be about himself?” (23). The idea of “self” occurs in many of the discussions around solo performance. Wallace juxtaposes the monologue as a “means of forging communal bonds and determining identity” (23) and “the spectacle of self as Other, strange and alienated” (13). Dee Heddon’s research into solo performance and autobiography has highlighted the personal as political, where personal experience is used to bring a political matter into focus. Rather than narcissistic performance, or simple confession, Heddon identifies a necessary “self agency” that is more about collective than singular interests (157–161). As Heddon has explained in her work on autobiographical performance, the individual experience is presented but its purpose is to identify with the audience, as a way of examining broader, collective concerns of the greater community:

[G]iven the political imperative that so often drives the making of an autobiographical performance it is fair to suggest that, contra the frequent accusation of “egotistical,” these performances are made with the spectator in mind … to raise consciousness and educate, politicise, incite, anger, move and inspire. (170 – 171)

For example, American performance artist Tim Miller in his solo Glory Box (1999) uses his personal experiences to highlight issues of gay identity, marriage equality and immigration. Identity questions are to the fore in theatre because the audience’s primary question is “who is this?” - who stands before them and what is their context? In solo theatre this encounter with the audience is even more immediate, as the performer is positioned alone on stage and the message of identity is heightened.
The performer’s questions of identity might be found in viewing themselves in the mirror – metaphorically or literally. Could the mirror be a helpful tool for the solo performer? Is the mirror distorted by self-perception? Is the director as mirror a useful device in solo performance, functioning as proxy audience – evaluating and motivating? This flexible paradigm is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two and throughout this thesis.

Autobiography is also strongly connected to comedy. Comedians are often generating jokes by relating their own experience, though often exaggerated and fictionalised for impact. This genre shares many of the qualities of solo performance but specifically utilises humour to deliver the story/ies and then the comedy becomes the driving force. In fact many consider the work of solo performers like Eric Bogosian and John Leguizamo to be stand-up comedy. Stand-up has a long history dating back to the Music Halls of the 18th century and has a strong connection to the clowning traditions. Stand-up, like solo plays, is dependent on the direct connection made with the audience. The comedian is less likely to present a fourth wall, thus removing any barrier to the immediate relationship with the audience. However, as humour researcher Lawrence Mintz explains, this relationship is much more robust and may “have to handle boos or other expressions of disagreement” (577). The comic and the solo performer often work with economy and a minimalist aesthetic. As Aleksandar Dundjerović summarises in relation to Robert Lepage’s solo work: “The performer’s interacting spontaneously and transformatively with an audience makes demands on the actor like those of stand-up comedy” (51). Despite these similarities, I have chosen not to analyse the work of stand-up comedians in this thesis because they rarely use a director. Similar to Henri Szeps and William Yang discussed in Chapter Four, comics use their audience to provide immediate feedback and may modify their delivery to accommodate the spectator’s response(s). Comic content is discussed below, in the context of marginalised voices, where humour is used to impart political ideology.

In contrast to Spalding Gray’s personal immediacy in his monologues, New Zealand playwright Lynda Chanwai-Earle’s “semi-autobiographical” solo play Ka-Shue (Letters Home) (1997) is structured to examine the playwright’s ethnicity over three generations. Chanwai-Earle states, “I am aware that this play is close to the bone as far as my family is concerned but I hope in the end that I have attempted a universal story about immigration” (Ka-Shue 5). The press acknowledged her achievement: "Ka-Shue gives voice to the experience of a young Chinese New Zealand woman ... the staging is simple and effective ... the delight of a girl discovering her Chinese
heritage is beautifully communicated ... a family saga of blockbuster proportions” (Ross). This sort of magnification, achieving the status of “blockbuster” and “saga” with only one body on stage, is the potential theatricality and magic of solo performance. Chanwai-Earle achieves this family chronicle with the playing of multiple characters, by inhabiting those family members and weaving her stories together into a dramatic sequence of events. The dynamism of performance is often enhanced by these real life stories. As we see in more detailed interviews in Chapter Four, Chanwai-Earle finds artistic and emotional tensions in navigating this type of autobiographical material.

Many playwrights draw on their own lives for inspiration, and then find the theatrical means to pursue the story. Stuart Griffith guides would-be playwrights, suggesting that the stimulus for creative writing begins with “some experience of their own, perhaps not important, but containing possibilities” (50). This may be the foundation of multi-cast plays too, however autobiographical content may be more obvious with a solo – that the writer is more clearly embodied in the singular performer. Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw from American performance troupe Split Britches engage with personal stories often told in the format of solo performance. In an interview with Sarah Townsend, Shaw and Weaver explains their connections to the origins of their work:

Our work is based in autobiography but it’s not purely autobiographical. We work with something we call creative truths where we take things we know and we experience, we don’t work with situations that are not ours. But we take the things that are ours and we take some liberties with those and we create truth but it’s based on our own lives.

The point of inspiration in autobiographical solo work is the writer and/or performer’s experiences in the world and through the theatrical medium these are communicated to a broader audience. Similarly, the “necrophiliac” solo performances of biography also have their origins in fact rather than fiction and whilst portraying real characters from history, many of these productions rely on the embellishment of real lives for entertainment and intensity. As director Willem Wassenaar comments in Chapter Four about Wolf’s Lair - a biographical account of Hitler’s secretary Junge Traudl - it was an “interpretation”, rather than a history lesson.

In contrast to Gray’s singular insight into his personal history, acclaimed solo show The 7 Stages of Grieving (1996) by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, examines a wider perspective of Australian Aboriginal history in a post-colonial context:
Though the stories acknowledge real events, family histories and personal experiences of the collaborators, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* is ultimately a work of “faction” - a mixture of fact and fiction. As our lives and histories reflect the political changes and policies of the past 207 years (every Murri has a family history of being taken away, or forced denial of language, or strict protectionist practices)\(^9\) so it can be said that our personal histories are indeed the history of our political relationship to Migrant Australia - one of grief, misunderstanding and injustice. (15)

Here the stories combine autobiography and biography to convey a more complex, longer history than a single lifetime but still choose the single performer as the theatrical vehicle to deliver the narrative. Utilising the medium of theatre to explore post-colonialism provides possibilities for theoretical understandings to be translated into performance. As William Peterson states: “[t]he monologue then has been the single most successful theatrical vehicle through which an ever-increasing number of New Zealanders have been able to “write themselves into the land” while “making culture ordinary” (119).\(^10\)

Stories can be theatrically engineered through editing and juxtaposition for dramatic effect. In her introduction to the published script of *The Vagina Monologues*, Eve Ensler explains the origins of the material: “Some of the monologues are close to verbatim interviews, some are composite interviews, and with some I just began with the seed of an interview and had a good time” (7). In British theatre academic Rebecca D’Monte’s “Voicing Abuse/Voicing Gender” she criticises *The Vagina Monologues* for being outdated, with the editing and adaptation consistently placing women as victims and men as oppressors (210–215). However, in my own experience of twice directing *The Vagina Monologues*, as outlined in Chapter Three, I have found that both the female performers and audiences feel connected to and empowered by the stories. Thus the material is perhaps authenticated within the specific community that is created with each performance.

American theatre critic and academic Jonathan Kalb discusses questions of authenticity in relation to the potential political power of solo performance. Kalb sees “the performativity (the actor’s transformative qualities) make the audience more receptive to the political content” (17).

\(^9\) Aboriginal person from Queensland, Australia.
\(^{10}\) Peterson quotes British cultural critic Raymond Williams: “The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment, under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land” ("Culture is Ordinary" 1958 ).
The solo performer’s audience is asked to accept the single actor as the sole provider of the narrative in a fictionalised world. When the actor is convincingly transformed into character(s) the audience is able to suspend disbelief and become more inclined to believe what is seen and to hear what is being said. The solo performer becomes eyewitness, with the responsibility of accurately recording and documenting the truth, with the audience as potential jury. Kalb promotes the opportunities that are presented in solo performances to challenge common ideology, particularly in the context of America. He comments that “However little we may really be interested in anyone else, we do seem willing to listen to people’s individual stories as possible keys to our own individual development - and that is the narrow political opportunity the solo performer exploits” (Kalb 16). In contrast to using transformation and illusion, some solos utilise Brechtian qualities to enhance the delivery of a political agenda. For instance, the stage might be bare with no illusion to reality or dramatised location. The acting style of the performer might be highly demonstrative and break the fourth wall. These theatrical devices help the audience to distinguish the behaviour of individuals, and remind them that it is a theatrical presentation they were witnessing. Rather than be purely entertained, the audience is aware and critical. Ensler’s The Vagina Monologues promotes these devices in performing her monologues.

Politically speaking, it is the docudrama that has aspired to the representation of truth. Whilst many other theatrical forms pursue “truth”, the docudrama champions its connection to real life and to experiences that are politically engendered and topical. British researcher and writer Derek Paget defines docudrama as “Plays written, compiled, or even improvised directly from ‘documentary’ sources” (379). Docudrama is built on real life events that are presented as dramatised re-enactments, in television, films, plays and solo performances. Docudrama takes a direct approach to its thematic material, relying on the “aliveness” and seeming immediacy of witness accounts, rather than the manipulation of facts, to bring us a story. Anna Deavere Smith conceived, wrote and performed Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities. It documents the racial tension that erupted in Crown Heights in Brooklyn in 1991. The performance takes a verbatim approach as she impersonates interviewees from all sides of the conflicted community. Audiences can find the “truth” authentic and powerful, for instance Smith’s reception in New York City in 1992: “Smith’s audiences were electrified by the chance to talk honestly about race in post show discussions” (Capo 57). But like all the configurations of solo performance, the boundaries between fiction and docudrama can be crossed in the quest for theatricality. For example, in I Am My Own Wife (2003) playwright Doug Wright documents the extraordinary life of German transvestite Charlotte von Mahlsdorf and her survival during the Nazi
regime. The story uses many archival resources but also acknowledges Wright’s engagement with the material – Wright appears as a character in the play. American biographer Michael Schiavi questions how audiences receive the hybrid of history, biography and illusion in Wright’s work. Schiavi asks “why are audiences en masse so invested in gleaning truth from an art form based squarely on illusion?” (196). Is there a moral duty to present the material with historical accuracy? The popular success of these docudramas, and the proliferation of reality television, suggests that audiences are invested in these portrayals, regardless of whether their faith in any purported authenticity is misplaced.

Alan Rickman and Katharine Viner’s *My Name is Rachel Corrie* (2005) is one of the most controversial solos of recent times and highlights questions of authenticity, truth, and political and religious intent. Based on young American Rachel Corrie’s diaries and emails, the show documents her involvement with the International Solidarity Movement on the Gaza Strip until her murder. The website rachelcorriefacts.org is dedicated to exposing that “*My Name is Rachel Corrie* is a simplistic, incomplete, one-sided portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” and offers numerous articles about the supposed lack of objectivity and inaccuracy in the production. Ari Remez directed the play in Jerusalem in 2013 and asserts “In the theater we try to create a debate. Some of the ideas you agree with and others you might not agree with, but the goal is for people to come and listen” (Eglash). In reality, audiences were divided in their opinion of the truth conveyed. Corrie’s story could have been a multi-cast play but its solo form exemplified her aloneness. The intensity of reactions to the play were perhaps aligned to thinking that this was a singular view from one person. The story appeared one-sided because it is only Corrie’s voice – the solo genre increased the potency of the story. Corrie is identified for her American status and for being pro-Palestinian. Regardless of whether the source material is biographical, autobiographical, docudrama, or even pure fiction, issues of identity are more acute in solo performance as audiences are faced with the primary question of “Who is this?” As audiences view and question identity in solo performance, the cultural politics invoked by this questioning are also brought into focus.

In solo performance there are opportunities for political agendas and marginalised voices to take centre stage. For example, queer Chicana performer Monica Palacios explores feminism, sexism, homophobia, ethnicity, sexuality and nationalism in solo performance, like her *Greetings From A Queer Señorita* (1999). Jorge Huerta and Ashley Lucas in “Framing the Macho: Gender, Identity, and Sexuality in Three Chicana/o Solo Performances” note Palacios’s use of comedy and solo performance as political subversion: “The comedy in her performance makes the political
agenda of her work accessible and perhaps even more palatable to audience members who might be uncomfortable with queer issues” (254). The comedy opens the door to more direct communication between performer and spectator. Audience focus is intensified through identification with the sole performer, rather than spread across a multi-cast. This attention has the potential to make the audience more acute listeners and more responsive to the content. There are multi-cast plays about these topics but the solo is a highly effective vehicle for those politicised voices. The voice can be more clearly heard because of the intimacy of the performance, where the audience enters a relationship with a lone individual.

Comedy is often used as a vehicle for marginalised voices, as a forum for political and social agenda. Stand up comedy shares many similarities with solo performance. British theatre critic Alex Sierz interviews writer of “stand-up theatre” Claire Dowie, a comedian who acknowledges that solo performance allows her to embrace the writing of material that has an agenda beyond making people laugh. For instance, Dowie’s solo show Easy Access (1998) is about the sexual abuse of children. Similarly, American feminist theatre scholar Jill Dolan responds to the critics who pigeonhole Holly Hughes’ solo show Preaching to the Perverted (2000) as “stand-up comedy”, dismissing its potential for urging social change:

While such a frame might allay critical anxieties, it also robs the performance of its critically utopian performative gesture – Hughes’ insistence that by studying the anatomy of power in the United States, we can intervene to change it. Such genre categorising also robs the piece of its force as feminist autobiographical performance by explicitly depoliticising the work. (50)

There exists a considerable tradition of queer solo performance, particularly in America, like the work of Hughes and Miller, with a strong political agenda. There are many instances where the solo performer’s intention is to raise awareness of a misrepresented or under-represented part of society, by presenting their own marginalised bodies as evidence. Holly Hughes and David Roman edited the anthology O Solo Homo – the new queer performance (1998), in which Roman argues that gay life itself is a type of performance and is political. He fosters the idea of “self-declaration”

11 In 2001 Peter Lathan asks Claire Dowie about the concept of stand-up theatre: "Like stand-up comedy, only it's theatre. Or, at least, like stand-up comedy as it used to be. Stand-up comedy is changing and there's not always that direct connection between comic and audience that there used to be... The actor is talking directly to and interacting with the audience, responding directly to them in a way that doesn't happen in a normal production. And that means if something goes wrong, you make something of it rather than try to cover it up ... It's always seemed to me to be odd that drama schools teach so many skills but the most important of all, the interaction between actor and audience, is ignored.” (“The British Theatre Guide: A Chat with Claire Dowie”
and sees the performance as pedagogical in that the greater community is given an opportunity to be educated about queer identity.

Personal politics can fuel solo performance – such as Tim Miller’s stance on immigration and gay marriage that inspired his solo show *Glory Box*. As in the work of Hughes, Palacios, Miller and many more, the connection between solo performer/writer and content authenticates, personalises and intensifies the political message. The agendas are spoken by a singular voice to a collected community, or in some cases one actor with multiple voices/characters will be used. In the above examples, the creative origins are closely related to the form of solo performance – and vice versa. Though rarely discussed, the origins also impact on the director’s approach and throughout this thesis are examples of how different forms and styles of solos are managed in the hands of directors. One of the director’s fundamental tasks is to be a proxy audience and assess the performer’s ability to hold the attention of an audience, suspend their disbelief and make a connection. The director must consider the agenda of solo performance and find the best approach to theatricalising the work.

**Creating a Solo Performance**

In addition to the scholarly literature discussed above there are numerous “how to” books on the topic of solo performance. These “manuals” are fuelled by the popularity and commercial success of solo shows. Generally, they guide the actor in creating their own solo performance and are written by teachers, actors or directors, mostly for the student actor. They are of an inconsistent standard, often pitching too widely across the divide between amateur and professional. They value the form for its economy, as an independent vehicle for the actor to move forward in their career and the provision of audition material.

Recent examples include the above-mentioned Louis Catron (2000), Michael Anderson’s *Solo – A guidebook for individual performance* (2006), Glenn Alterman’s *Creating Your Own Monologue* (1999) and Jay Sankey’s *Zen and the Art of the Monologue* (2000). Catron is comprehensive in his approach, providing historical background and describes the various forms and styles of the genre. However, the prime focus of the book is to provide the actor with approaches to creating a solo performance. As the back cover of *The Power of One* entices: “The one-person play has a long and distinguished history, as well as being (a) one of the most economical forms of theatre and (b) a wonderful showcase for an actor, a playwright, and a director
– especially when all three are the same person!” (Catron) The book also contains exercises for the actor and Catron encourages the solo performer to keep a Monodrama Notebook (17). Alterman guides the writing and dramaturgy of the solo performer as he or she creates their own monologue. Anderson is youth-focused and recommends careful consideration when choosing devised or scripted work and suggests “your best resource as a performer is other people” (7). Sankey also has students in mind and uses a question and answer format and includes preparing an audition monologue. The director is not emphasised in these books; rather, the solo is seen as an independent endeavour. However Sankey confesses, “I have yet to have someone other than myself direct one of my live monologues. And I must admit, in retrospect I believe this has been a mistake” (97). This “mistake” alludes to the pitfalls of solo performance, where self-evaluation fails to recognise poor staging choices and acting decisions – where a director becomes crucial in evaluating and motivating the performance. In all these sources, guidance is aimed at the performer and little discussion is given to the relationship between director and performer.

There are also autobiographical accounts of the process of creating a solo performance and highlight the differences between working with one-on-one and the multi-cast. For example, British actor Antony Sher writes a detailed account of preparing his solo show Primo (2004), directed by Richard Wilson, in the book Primo Time (2005). The play is based on Primo Levi’s Auschwitz memoir. As referenced further in Chapter Six, Sher accounts how Wilson uses particular techniques to address the absence of other actors in the process. Sher’s personal diary discusses the tensions in the close relationship with the ruthless Wilson, complaining that he is “Victor Meldrew without the laughs!” (95) Other examples include David Hare’s Acting Up (1999), again recounting the particular tensions of two people working closely together. These sources originate from the actor, providing insight into the conditions of performance, process and origins and some attention is given to the director, when present.

**Conclusion**

Experienced performers, such as Antony Sher, and student actors like Jacob Rajan and his drama school monologue Krishnan’s Dairy which became an international success, have embraced solo performance in its myriad forms. It is a vehicle for many agendas, mirroring its creative origins and the historical and cultural evolution of the form. It examines, in microcosm, ideas of identity, otherness, marginalised voices and authenticity, like Palacios’ Greetings From A Queer Señorita. Beyond the numerous agendas that may motivate a solo performance are the economics of solo
performance. It is a cheap and efficient way of generating income and allowing aesthetic control by performers over their work. Often the actor is not “working for the man” (Bonney xiii) but running their own business on their own terms. Without the economic restraints of a large production the performer can take risks and prioritise their own objectives, artistically and politically.

The genre of solo performance remains topical as the popularity of the solo show continues to grow. The literature that exists is mostly driven from a practical, actor perspective, or analysed within a political or literary context. There is little analysis that relates the theoretical framework to the practical work of rehearsing solo performance, particularly from the director’s perspective. My interest is in what we can learn about the particular relationship between director and solo performer in the rehearsal room.

In the following chapter on Directing Solo Performance, I provide a summary of relevant trends in directing, related to resources and training, as well as the director’s role in the rehearsal room. I consider how the director’s work is observed/documentated in the rehearsal room and the implications for criticality in my PaR. I discuss the directing of solo performance and how the dynamic partnership of two impacts on the working parameters of the rehearsal process. In the context of directing solo performance, I examine interpretations of ‘the mirror’, both literal and metaphorical. I expand on the concept of the director functioning as a mirror device, presenting a complex bidirectional surface against which the solo performer can test and refine performances choices, facilitating his or her transformation in the rehearsal process. Finally I consider the possibilities, challenges and focus of my PaR in directing solo performance—both past and present.
Chapter Two

Directing and Solo Performance – Mirrors in the Rehearsal Room

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, considerable attention has been given to the theatrical form of solo performance but little consideration of the directing of this type of work. Director Amy Pinney, suggests one solution to these directorial challenges, invoking the vivid metaphor of the ‘mirror’, describing a directing process for solo performance that acknowledges this reflectiveness in the relationship between director and performer. Pinney argues:

> While I do not mimic an actor, the spirit of Nemirovich-Danchenko’s desire to offer helpful feedback as a “mirror” rings true. That is, I often do say, ‘this is what I see, is that what you intended?’ so that, even though I am not actively attempting to mirror anything, I am caught face to face. Faced with the inescapable fact of having witnessed, I report to the actor what his or her own careful, specific choices (some of which were made quite some time ago) look like from the house. (183)

In this chapter I focus on the craft of directing and how the multi-cast director’s methodology might be adapted to the rehearsal room of solo performance. An understanding of the history of directing and current directing theories inform the director’s approach and the possible adaptations to working one-on-one with a single performer. I examine seminal ideas of ‘the mirror’, both literal and metaphorical, and consider the implications of the ‘director as mirror’ as a flexible paradigm in the rehearsal room, surveying some of the uses of, and reactions to, this idea. I consider how the director is observed/documented and the implications for PaR.

The Art of Directing

My intention is not to write a complete summary of the art of directing, rather to provide insight into what is the role of the director and how it might adapt to the directing of solo performance, and to highlight the relevant practitioners in the field. There is an enormous amount of literature on directing. I have focused here on director’s practice, particularly in the context of leadership, collaboration and methodology, as relevant to further discussion of how the director
might work with solo performance. I look behind the scenes at the theory, resources and training that inform the director’s craft.

A Hidden World

The modern director assumes many functions – instigator, shaper, visionary, facilitator, leader, maker, conspirator and surrogate audience. The director is ultimately responsible for getting from page to stage to opening night, but he or she is also reliant on the commitment and expertise of the entire ensemble. The work is fuelled not only by the director’s vision but also the input of actors, designers, composers and creative producers. The director has an overall vision, bringing together all the creative elements of the performance. The director’s tasks are affected by the size of the ensemble. The working environment of two differs significantly from that involving a multi-cast.

The director is mostly an invention of the twentieth century. American theatre historian Helen Krich Chinoy described the evolution of the role: “Less than a hundred years ago the director was only an ideal projected by disgruntled critics of the chaotic Victorian theater. He did not even have a name, for the terms "director" or "rigisseur," and "metteur en scène" had barely begun to acquire their present theatrical meaning” (3). In the past it was often playwrights and actor-managers who took seniority and responsibility for bringing a production to performance. The first modern theatre director is attributed to Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826 – 1914) who took on the stand-alone role of bringing large-scale productions to audiences. Duke Georg’s function as a director was originally concerned with establishing historical accuracy but ultimately pursued a natural style of acting that preserved a naturalistic illusion (Braun 16–18). This required time and money. Constantin Stanislavski (1863 – 1938) and Vladimir Nemirovich-Dancheko (1858 – 1943), co-founders of the Moscow Art Theatre, followed, promoting the role of the director and seeking greater insight into the art of acting and encouraging naturalism. The Stanislavskian goal was: “Whatever happens on stage must be for a purpose. Even keeping your seat must be for a purpose, a specific purpose” (Stanislavski 31). Director Katie Mitchell broadly describes Stanislavski’s methodology, focusing on the emotional purpose and its translation into action:

His work divides into two parts. The first involved working ‘from inside out’, using emotional memories from the actor’s life to support the emotional world of the character. The second
involved working ‘from the outside in’, using physical actions as a means of communicating emotion and character. (226)

Stanislavski focused on individual actors by developing a character’s personal idiosyncrasies that motivate naturalism on stage. Braun notes: “he seldom considers the production as a total synthesis with a unified objective … with little account of the psychology of the audience” (76). He influenced many generations of actors and directors, many developing their own variation of Stanislavskian methodology of units and objectives – pursuing the character’s particular rhythm and pace, and the purpose of their action within the text.

In contrast to this naturalism, German director and playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898 - 1956) theorised that theatre/art’s purpose was to ‘awaken’ its audience, thus the spectator is more receptive to the social and political commentary within. Brecht was working against the audience’s stultification, their absorption by the play’s narrative and identification with the protagonist. In Carl Weber’s first-hand account of Brecht’s rehearsals with the Berliner Ensemble, he observes: “Brecht tried to present in his theatre a real view of the world, no gold-plated images, no false heroes” (89).

The desired effect of Brecht’s epic theatre and the aim of the Verfremdungseffekt (alienation effect) was “to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the [play’s] incident” (Brecht and Willett 136). Brecht’s role in the rehearsal room was to work in collaboration with others, his focus on the telling of the story and gestural acting. He was also the playwright and attended to the dramaturgy of the productions. Brecht employed many different techniques to ‘awaken’ his audiences, including direct address to audience, narration, stepping in and out of character, not presenting an illusion of reality on stage, changing costume in view of the audience and more. Interestingly, many of these techniques are employed in solo performance, helping to awaken an audience to political agendas, and proving highly effective in delivering stories and connecting with audiences.

Strong leadership exemplified the modern director. W.B. Worthen states in The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama that “the modern theatre is often called the ‘director’s theatre” (547). He considers that modern playwrights, embracing the innovations of naturalistic or realistic drama required brilliant directors who were able to “shape the play, the players, and the physical milieu of the stage into a uniquely expressive whole” (Worthen 546). Like Brecht, visionary British theatre maker Peter Brook wanted to ‘awaken’ theatre audiences. Brook’s seminal book The Empty Space (1968) addressed the very purpose of theatre and how it must alert its audiences to the human
condition. In addition to the leadership qualities required of the director was a collaborative approach that had creative investigation at its core. Brook broke new boundaries with his engagement with inter-cultural theatre, predominantly at the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris, but also earlier with the Royal Shakespeare Company (Schechener et al. 247). In the rehearsal room, Brook was engaging with a multi-national group of performance artists and was seeking both universality and eclecticism through collaborative and experimental work. Brook’s *The Mahabharata* (1987) was influenced by Brecht, in its epic proportions, its simple set and costumes, the use of music, the acting style, the creation of ensemble and the pacing of scenes (Stodder 156). The central concept of ‘awakening audiences’ is essential to the director of solo performance, who must achieve this through one body on stage.

The director develops his or her own interpretation of directing in the modern theatre, informed and inspired by their colleagues. The director has evolved from coordinating the logistics of stagecraft to presenting an artistic vision and concept, and from an autocratic style to a more collaborative approach that embraces all elements of production. Successful solo performance is reliant on a close collaboration between the director and the performer.

**The Elusive Director**

The director’s style may be evident in performances but their methodology can be elusive. Gay McAuley’s *Not Magic But Work – An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Room Process* (2012) presents a detailed account from the rehearsal room of Michael Gow’s play *Toy Symphony* (2007), directed by Belvoir Street Theatre’s Neil Armfield. McAuley agrees that the director is the key to creating the performance: “at the centre, setting the tone, totally in control of the work process” (208). Because the director is out of the sight of public performance, there remains a prevailing cloak of invisibility and suspicion around the dark art of directing. Some directors being reticent about revealing their trade secrets, perhaps fearful of exposing what their directing involves, could explain the mystery. British theatre director Chris Baldwin describes directing in his practical guide as “secretive and magical … bullying, obscurant behaviour and mysticism” (7).

Such negative descriptions may stem from an older model of directing where the director was often

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12 Some practitioners retain an authoritative style of directing. American director Robert Wilson is known for great attention to detail, perfectionism, precision in the movement of his actors, demanding intricate choreography: “his shows are firmly imprinted with his signature style, his mode of direction must be autocratic. Certainly, his way of working can be repetitive, mechanical, demanding, unfamiliar and uncomfortable for many performers” (Allain and Harvie 75).
dictatorial, retaining a strong hierarchal position. As Chinoy tells us, historically: “He was imaged as a ‘disciplinarian’ who would superintend the ‘whole conduct of a piece and exact a rigid but a just decorum’” (Cole and Chinoy 3). This description is the antithesis of how I argue that the director of solo performance functions – collaboratively, democratically and intimately with the performer.

Directors may be self-conscious and reluctant to allow observers in the rehearsal room as American Professor of English Susan Letzler Cole uncovers in *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* (1992) when she is granted access:

To observe directors and actors in rehearsal is clearly a delicate undertaking; it can be perceived as an intrusion upon, and even a repression of, the conditions necessary to rehearsal (e.g., risk-taking, spontaneity, intimacy). But there is no way to document the collaborative creation of rehearsal except to be present there. (3)

Directors are perhaps now less resistant to observation but the field of rehearsal studies is nascent. Simon Callow introduces Samuel Leiter’s *The Great Stage Directors* (1994) and considers the rehearsal room observer as ill-equipped for the task:

Though there have been studies of directors, they have for the most part been of “great directors,” and they have set out to demonstrate the greatness of their great subject. The author sits in on rehearsals, carefully noting down the obiter dicta of the great man-woman and politely detailing the growth of the production. None of these volumes approaches the work in a properly anthropological spirit, analysing the hierarchies, the ritualized games, the framework of custom and observance that is the substance of the daily life of the rehearsal, nor has any given a convincing account of the enormously complex structures of the process of artistic creation. (ix)

McAuley addresses many of Callow’s concerns and provides insight into the contemporary director’s process and the scholarly field of rehearsal studies. McAuley dedicates a chapter to Neil Armfield’s directing method but he is also central throughout her study of rehearsals for *Toy Symphony* - “the lynchpin of the whole enterprise” (230). She acknowledges that rehearsal observations are restrictive: “it became clear that the critical apparatus provided by theatre studies (historiography, semiotics, text and performance analysis) was insufficient to deal with the complex
interpersonal relations, work practices and collective creative process involved in rehearsal” (McAuley 4). Thus she positions herself as insider and outsider, at once an observer and a participant, using ethnography for methodological guidance in this very human and social environment. In McAuley’s dedication to documenting and analysing every moment of the creative process, she overcomes the restrictions of the observer and finds great insight. In Chapter Six I relate to this insider/outsider dichotomy in taking the critical leadership role of director in a theatre production whilst simultaneously observing as a researcher. For my research, it was beneficial to place my solo directing practice - both past and present - as central to my investigation. This position, within the context of PaR, bore implications for the methodology, providing first-hand insight into the process of directing solo performance, challenges to the interpersonal relationship of the collaboration and necessitating a constant and critical reviewing and documenting of practice.

Despite being the lynchpin, at times the director’s work may be unapparent in the final product. Czech academic Daniela Jobertova critiques the monologues of Bernard-Marie Koltes and finds the director’s contribution “so subtle that many spectators considered it was negligible” (85). Theatre reviews of solo performance sometimes omit the director entirely or account for them like ghosts in the night. For example, British theatre critic Peter Lathan relegates the director Charlotte Bennett’s input as “unobtrusive” for her 2011 production of Chekhov’s monologue On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco (1886). He favours the performer David Bradley whose scarce movements “assume great significance and amuse and move us simultaneously” (Lathan, “Theatre Review” “On the Harmful Effects of Tobacco ”). It would seem that the director is everything, and then nothing. Peter Stein, acclaimed German theatre and opera director, observes this shift in power: “The director is more than a mere arranger of the scenic elements and yet is … an impotent figure by the time the performance arrives” (Delgado and Heritage 11). The performer takes ownership of their performance as it moves across the liminal space from rehearsal room to public presentation. As Callow concludes: “much food for thought about this puzzling profession of being a director, umpire, therapist, trainer, ringmaster, sergeant-major, nanny, and audience of one, whose greatest achievement is - or should be - to make him or herself invisible and, ultimately redundant” (Leiter ix). The uniqueness of the relationship between solo performer and director, is in its closeness, and can intensify the complexity of the transition of functions.

The director’s tasks are multi-faceted, requiring flexibility, organisation and ideally are ever evolving, from one production to the next as the artist informs the work, and vice versa. The director has shifted from autocrat to collaborator. The collaboration is in turn intensified by the
relationship between solo performer and director, where leadership and methodology is often renegotiated. As British director John Caird observes, “Directing is such a subjective craft and the methods of directing are so particularly formed by their subjective experience” (viii). Directing solo performance will require a new approach to new circumstances, which may be driven by the performer’s own agenda and aesthetic.

**Theories of Directing**

Most directing theory comes from the ideas, productions and practice of significant theatre practitioners of the twentieth century. These practitioners inform directing practice but also the production values and political content of performance, as well as the training of actors - such as Anne Bogart’s training methods and promotion of the ensemble with Viewpoints and Suzuki. The roll call is predominantly North American and European. It includes the contributions of the directors mentioned earlier: Stanislavski, Antoine, Brecht and Brook. It would extend to many others, including Jerzy Grotowski’s experimentation with actor training and encounters with the audience, and concepts of ‘poor theatre’, and Vsevolod Meyerhold’s investigation of physicality and symbolism. And to Ariane Mnouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil which has “moved away from psychological realism towards a militant approach to theatre which has drawn on numerous ritualistic traditions and carnivalesque popular forms” (Delgado and Heritage 176). The scope of these practitioners’ influence is far reaching, such as Richard Schechner’s description of Eugenio Barba’s ‘opus’ that encompasses theatre anthropology, actor training and trans-culturalism dimensions (Watson vii). Each of these practitioners has developed their own innovative theatrical style, aesthetics and techniques, often shaped by the socio-political environment of the time. The theory informs the practice/methodology. For example, Brecht was a critic, playwright and director who, like many other significant directors, saw “a theatre that was a laboratory, a place for investigation, analysis, and construction of models” (Weber 84). Innovative directors can pursue visions, theories and ideas in these laboratories – predominantly in the rehearsal room. There is certainly great scope for experimenting in solo performance because the work can occur in microcosm and with limited resources.

However, American academic Rebecca Daniels argues that directing “still lacks a comprehensive body of theoretical material to compare with other artistic disciplines” (10) and this can be attributed perhaps to variances that arise from creative work – the interaction and outcome of performance is never pre-determined. More recently theatre practitioners have contributed their
own theories, informed by their research, directing practice and their lives inside and out of the theatre, for instance, Eugenio Barba’s *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House* (2009) and Anne Bogart’s *A Director Prepares* (2001). In fact, there is now a considerable body of critical theory for directors to reference.

It is also challenging to separate directing theory from theatre theory, dramatic theory and acting theory. Directing theory intersects with semiotics, theories of aesthetics, and can be informed by feminism and gender studies, post-colonialism, phenomenology, post-structuralism, inter-culturalism, cultural materialism and more. Mark Fortier in *Theory/Theatre – An Introduction* (1997) suggests that theory “has often seemed too contemplative an activity to be more help than hindrance in such a practical pursuit as theatre” (3). He goes on to suggest that this can be attributed to the distinctions between drama and theatre, drama being a predominantly written form and theatre as performance. In a theatrical context, any theorising becomes evident in the performance – for example, the audience can observe the semiotics of the objects on stage. Theory becomes active and tangible with its own language to describe the qualities of the performance. For the director, theories can provide a foundation for the preparatory interrogation of the work. The example of the Brechtian influence on Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata* is given earlier.

Returning to the directing of solo performance, it may be that the genre lends itself to queer and gender theories, feminism and post-colonial legacies as solo performance can be employed as a platform for these marginalised voices. Likewise, critical race theory can exercise equality and exorcise discrimination through the solo performer’s direct engagement with their audience. Solo work makes these ideas more dominant since there are no other bodies to defer/distract from, so that greater significance and meaning is made through this singular body, rather than by comparison or interaction. For example, in the work of solo performers such as Tim Miller, William Yang and Anna Deavere Smith, as outlined in Chapter One. The examination of solo performances by academics, and practitioners, specifically through these theoretical lenses can highlight equitable and ethical practices in performances by, and with, ‘othered’ performers, particularly directing praxis. Future productions can be informed and enhanced by this particular engagement with theory. As Fortier concludes: “While theory sometimes seems overly difficult and abstruse, at other times it forces us to realize that many of life’s pressing issues are complex and difficult and not susceptible to ready answers” (218). Part of the director’s function is to acknowledge and engage with the abstruse. We might consider that the directing of solo performance would simplify these perplexities, because the discussion is most often occurring between two, rather than many.
However, the stakes are higher where the personal is identified as political intent, and where the convincing narrative is to be delivered by one performer.

**Suggested Reading for Directors**

There are a number of seminal works on directing. These books include practical guidance in the rehearsal room, historical background to directing, interviews with practitioners and those focused on collaboration in the rehearsal room. Below are samples of each genre that demonstrate how the director’s foundational key skills are the underpinning for working with solo performance.

Many books on directing impart broad practical guidance to the aspiring director or target the established director seeking professional development. They mostly take a chronological approach, tracing the project from the earliest point of deciding on the play to the culminating opening night. In Broadway director and critic Harold Clurman’s book *On Directing* (1972) he draws on a lifetime in American theatre, with a chronological model of directing that was based on the premise that “Actors cannot see their own performance (not on the stage, at any rate) and they hope for a trained eye, sympathetic as well as knowing, to judge and correct them” (110). This point is even more pertinent with the solo performer who has no other actors at his or her side to be a point of reference.

In addition to the chronological approach, other books offer easily digestible nuggets of guidance, like Hauser and Reich’s *Notes on Directing* (2003) and Caird’s *Theatre Craft - A Director’s Practical Companion from A to Z* (2010). Other books provide relevant historical context like Edward Braun’s *The Director and the Stage: From Naturalism to Grotowski* (1982) and Samuel Leiter’s collection of biographies of international practitioners *The Great Stage Directors: 100 Distinguished Careers of the Theater* (1994). These books provide a foundation of knowledge for current directors, providing insight into theatre and directing – but require a degree of adaptation for the context of directing solo performance.

Katie Mitchell’s *The Director’s Craft* (2008) presents a highly detailed approach to the directing process for the modern theatre, and yet draws her methodology from traditional Stanislavskian principles. She uses Chekhov’s *The Seagull* (1896) as her point of reference, to illustrate her methodology in a practical rehearsal application. Di Trevis’ *Being A Director - A Life*
in Theatre (2012) shares this personal and pedagogical perspective. Some books embrace a particular approach such as American professor and theatre director Robert Cohen’s Working Together in Theatre - Collaboration and Leadership (2011). Cohen identifies that collaboration is essential but needs boundaries and thus leadership is required to make the fundamental staging choices: “The biggest part of directing is being able to make decisions” (144). These decisions often occur differently in creating a solo performance, in contrast to the multi-cast, because the process does not consult many but is shared usually between two people. Other volumes offer a more theory based analysis that is aimed at directing students, for example, Schneider and Cody’s Re: Direction - A theoretical and practical guide (2002), or concentrate on the rehearsal room work, such as Bogart’s Viewpoints (2005).

There are collections of essays written by theatre practitioners, such as Toby Cole and Helen Krich’s Directors on Directing: A Sourcebook of the Modern Theatre (1972), which include contributions by Andre Antoine and Constantin Stanislavski. More recently there have been volumes of interviews with directors that have highlighted artistic vision in relation to the current socio-political environment. For example, Richard Eyre’s Talking Theatre - Interviews with Theatre People (1996) and the recent International Women Stage Directors (2013), edited by Fliotos and Vierow. There is also In Contact with the Gods – Directors talk theatre (1996) edited by Delgado and Heritage who disclaim in their introduction that: “These interviews are no substitute for the ‘corporeality’ of theatre they describe” (2). This comment supports the debate, later in this section, that important aspects of director training may not be fully realised in institutions and through books but should occur on the job – there is no substitute from the live experience in the theatre and rehearsal room.

All of these books offer further insight into the different approaches to directing and the rehearsal process. They highlight the individuality of directors but also address the fundamental skills required and production tasks that need to be attended to by all directors. Chinoy describes these tasks as “his multifarious activities” (Cole and Chinoy 4). The literature reviewed above addresses directing in the context of staging multi-cast productions but rarely discusses solo performance. Throughout the thesis I analyse how directing solo performance differs from work on a multi-cast show. I return frequently to these general works on directing, especially Katie Mitchell’s detailed advice, for their insightful framing of the “control” environment of multi-cast work against which I can compare approaches to solo work. As addressed in Chapter One, there are several books on solo performance that provide some guidance to directors but remain focused on
the actor, for example, Louis Catron’s *The Power of One: The Solo Play for Playwrights, Actors, and Directors*. Catron is comprehensive in discussing the genre but places the actor central to the creative process and promotes the actor to multiple roles including playwright and director (13). My research points to the stand-alone director as a necessity in evaluating the solo performance, rather than this conflation of creative roles into one person. And that ideally the stand-alone director meets the solo performer with consideration of the particular skills needed for the job.

**Education and Training**

Many directors were actors, for example, Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Antoine, and moved from a performance role to a directing one. Alternatively, they were involved in other areas of theatre where observation and insight was possible and learned on the job. In the second half of the twentieth century professional vocational training courses for directors became available. In many European countries these courses are within drama schools, academies and conservatories, of note, the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts which offers an MA in Directing. They are now increasingly part of an academic tradition, and are often offered as post-graduate qualification from universities. These courses provide a combination of academic discourse on directing and theatre, and practical skills and experience in theatre production. In New Zealand, the Master of Theatre Arts is unique in that it is taught co-jointly between Victoria University of Wellington and Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School, promoting dialogue between the creative industries and academia. There are still traditions of theatres accommodating interns, the National Theatre Studio and Donmar Warehouse in London both offer trainee directors’ programmes. In addition university and conservatory courses have students taking internships with companies such as The Wooster Group and Théâtre du Soleil. There is also evidence that directing students engage with solo performance, but usually as a self-chosen project. For instance, student Whitney Mosery directed a solo as part of her MA in Directing at the Royal Academy of Arts (London) in 2012. As did Jane Yonge during her MTA at Toi Whakaari in 2014 – a technical project called *Morella*.

There is some resistance to the idea of gaining directing skills from books or from learning institutions. German director Andrea Breth agrees, stating:

Directing can only partially be learned … one can acquire organizational skills, learn about lighting and other technical aspects of the theatre, and increase one’s ability to read and truly
comprehend a play. However … the most important skill a director needs – having imagination and the ability to lead others – cannot be learned. (Flintos and Vierow 142)

From my own experience, as a graduate of the New Zealand Master of Theatre Arts in Directing, the training environment was invaluable in regards to experimentation, guidance and discovering my own vision of good theatre. I have benefitted, of course, from further learning as a free-lance director in my own theatre community. English director Di Trevis reflects on her own career trajectory: “Haphazardly, with things learned by the way. How did anyone become an artist after all?” (xv). Inevitably directors map their own practice and adapt to the given circumstances of each production. Throughout this thesis I argue that solo performance is a good place for directors to hone their skills for all directing. This is not to say that there is no difference between the directing of multi-cast and solo productions, but that the particular skills required for directing solo performance are different and critical but are also transferable.

**A Methodology for Directing**

In general terms the director’s job description, in the context of Western text-based theatre, has changed over the years from an autocratic reign to a collaborative process. Harold Clurman described a one-size fits all approach: “The basic tenets of direction remain the same for all productions. Only emphases change, that is, style” (168) and “new principles of direction are rare; they are usually variations on the old” (xii). However, Clurman dismisses the suggestion of a “director’s theatre”, preferring the idea of a collaboration of actors, director and playwright (14). That collaboration becomes even tighter with one actor. Clurman begins at the beginning and follows the chronological path of a typical production: choosing a script, analysing the text, casting, rehearsals and final preparation for public performance. There is some consideration of the aftermath of the production, Clurman includes notes on previous productions and encourages the actor to keep on rehearsing once the show opens. Clurman’s principles also acknowledge that theatre teaches us that there is not “one art of directing, one method, one correct way” (ix). Other sources often describe a directing practice that has multiple functions, depending on the type of theatrical production. Delgado and Heritage describe the role thus: “strangely undefined and shifting role with a range of responsibilities that require someone who is artist, philosopher, actor, pedagogue, procurer, coach, linguist, midwife, technician and administrator” (1). However, there are fundamental areas that the director needs to address during the course of rehearsals, including textual interpretation, conceptualization, technical requirements, visual aspects of the production,
management of time and people, and working with actors from casting to character work and movement. In addition to mastering these skills, usually over a long period of time, taking in many different production experiences, the director must also cultivate certain qualities. Some of these characteristics are contrasting: able to lead effectively, collaborative, organised, structured, spontaneous, creative, critical, inspiring, supportive, observant, detailed, visionary and many more.

In Katie Mitchell’s *The Director’s Craft* (2009) she organises the director’s job into three distinct phases of the rehearsal process: Part 1: Preparing for Rehearsals; Part 2: Rehearsals; Part 3: Getting into the Theatre and the Public Performances; concluding with Part 4: Context and Sources. McAuley also identifies distinct phases that have particular qualities:

There is the period of great creativity constituted by the rehearsals, followed by the shorter but even more intense practical phase involved in transferring the work to the theatre, fine-tuning the technical requirements for sound and lighting and making adjustments in the response to the reality of set, costumes, props and preview audiences. Upstream of this intensive work, however, there is a much longer period of more intermittent reflection, pondering the nature of the production to come, applying for funding and making decisions about casting and design that will have a determining impact on later work. Then there is a final phase that occurs when the production is up and running. (188)

The preparatory work of the director is crucial, including script analysis and discussed in most approaches to directing practice. The aftermath, the director’s post-production analysis, is an often over-looked phase of the journey of a play to the stage and to the audience. Mitchell dissects the rehearsal process in detail, identifying the importance of the director’s groundwork but the post-production phase is addressed only briefly, but succinctly: “The best way to develop as a director is to analyse your mistakes” (221). For the director of solo performance those mistakes, and successes, may be more obvious as we are assessing the singular, opposed to the many thus allowing a detailed critique. McAuley reflects in great detail on the whole production process of *Toy Symphony* but director Neil Armfield’s contributes little in the way of an epilogue to the process. The value of post-production analysis is evident in Chapter Three where I reflect on past rehearsal processes of my own directing of solo performance and evaluate my understanding and evolution as a director alongside the current research of this thesis.
There is no single approach to multi-cast directing. Daniels writes, “When one looks at the details of putting together a production, the process is comprised of similar elements, even though the emphasis and relative importance of those elements might differ greatly with each individual approach” (10). In addition to this, the director’s skills are developing over time and experience. The accumulation of directing tools, such as rehearsal exercises that work particularly well, ways of engaging with actors and effective analysis of scripts evolve during the director’s career-long journey. And each production will demand some adaptation of the director’s approach – dictated by the style, form and genre of the work. For example, the directing of a large-scale opera or musical will differ from the experience of working with a cast of three in a short play. Some tools will be discarded when more successful approaches are found or according to the needs of the production.

There is no singular path to becoming a multi-cast director and there is no single approach to multi-cast directing. I argue that directing solo performance is another consideration that must be taken into account and the common approaches discussed above may need to be adapted to the rehearsal environment of working one-on-one. The main aspects of directing practice, as discussed above, that require special considerations in the process of directing solo work are collaboration, negotiation of roles, scope for experimentation and adaption to working one-on-one.

**Directing Solo Performance**

Fundamentally, a director's job is to ensure the clarity of the storytelling (Masterton).\(^\text{13}\)

Directing solo performance is most often shaped by its unique partnership between two. Even when there are other collaborators involved there is usually a strong bond between director and solo performer that remains exclusive. In comparison, the function of the director of a multi-cast - as described above in the work of Brecht, Brook and others - is to harness the potential within a larger, collaborative ensemble. In addition, solo performance requires special attention to specific fundamental areas of theatre production. The director’s approach must address character delineation (where there are multiple characters), audience interaction, scenography and stage geography. The different forms of solo performance, such as existing theatrical texts, autobiography, biography, verbatim or docudrama, each require a different focus and dictate the director’s work. In addition to different forms there are styles of performance such as direct address, single voice, multiple

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\(^{13}\) Guy Masterton is an Olivier Award Winning producer, actor, director and writer. He has directed, written and performed in over sixty solo shows, to international acclaim, including *American Poodle* (2007) and adaptations such as *Animal Farm* (1995).
characters and monopolylogue. The director must ensure the staging choices are informed by the style and form in order to achieve the best possible connection and clarity between performer-story-audience.

Few have studied the specialised field of directing solo performance and acknowledged the particular qualities of this creative relationship, despite the theatrical genre having considerable scholarly attention and an enduring popularity, as seen in Chapter One. The lack of scholarship can be attributed, at least in part, to the elusive appearance/disappearance of the director, the particular way the collaboration is negotiated between two (performer and director) and the performer’s desire for aesthetic control over their own work, particularly when they are the writer as well. Amy Pinney is a rare exception, offering useful theoretical ideas regarding what it means to work alone with the solo performer in “Between A Director and a Cast of One: A Beginning Aesthetic”. In the rehearsal room I pursue Pinney’s positioning of the director as proxy audience and the metaphor of the director as a mirror to the solo performer. The bidirectional mirror metaphor is explored more fully later in this chapter. The originality of this project is in its focus on a practical application and testing of multiple approaches to the directing of solo performance, sourced from my own professional practice in this field, and the ideas and approaches of others.

**Missing? - The Director of Solo Performance**

Pinney proposes that the lack of scholarship on directing solo performance may be due to the conflation of creative roles into one person. She cites Richard Schechner (quoted in John Gentile’s *Cast of One: One-Person Shows from the Chautauqua Platform to the Broadway Stage*) who describes a scenario involving a single person serving as ‘author-director-performer’ (Gentile 147). For example, in *Why Kids?* (2003) the performer Henri Szeps is also author and director (see Chapter Four). Szeps writes his own story about familial relationships and then directs himself before performing to the public. Without a director the performer/writer is the ‘auteur’ – the primary author and performer. Often solo performers have a strong desire to maintain creative control over their material – especially when it has autobiographical and/or political substance, for example, Tim Miller’s solo show *Glory Box* (1999) confronts homophobic prejudice in the United States. In these circumstances it is the solo performer’s agenda and creative vision driving the work.

When directors are present in the creative process, the actor often remains central and solo shows are often marketed on the actor’s reputation, or occasionally the writer’s. There are some
famous directors of solo work that would rival the actor for marketing value, for example, Samuel Beckett’s direction of his own solo plays and Moisés Kaufman’s direction of *I Am My Own Wife* (2003). However, Kevin Spacey’s *Clarence Darrow* (2014) directed by Thea Sharrock, Steven Berkoff’s *Shakespeare’s Villains* (1998) co-directed by Mark Sinden, and Miriam Margolyes’ *Dickens’ Women* (1989) co-written and directed by Sonia Fraser, all have the star actor as the selling point.

The directing of solo performance may also be under-documented because of the reluctance of directors to allow observation of their process, the “intrusion” that Cole observes earlier in this chapter. With a multi-cast play an observer may be less obtrusive because there are more people in the room anyway, for example, McAuley integrated with the other observers (stage manager, designers, assistant director etcetera) in the rehearsal room of *Toy Symphony* “made welcome by the director and the actors, by the company staff in the offices and the production crew in the theatre” (2). An observer in the solo rehearsal room may have a far more obvious presence and influence than an observer that joins a multi-cast rehearsal room already peopled by many. With only the director and the performer in the room, the solo rehearsal process is characteristically private, a context that affords intimacy between the two participants. British actor David Hare documents his rehearsal process of *Via Dolorosa* (1998) with director Stephen Daldry in the book *Acting Up* (1999). Hare talks about the adjustments he has had to make in the presence of others in the rehearsal room: “At the end of the day, (set designer) Ian McNeil and his assistant - everyone has assistants except me - came in and looked fairly bored as I worked. But I have toughened enough that it doesn’t any longer effect me how bored or otherwise visitors look” (10). The director remains the first witness and an intimate proxy audience. Observers in the rehearsal room of solo performance can disrupt the dynamics of the relationship between director and performer by unwanted contributions and distraction. Alternatively they can offer support to both parties. Either way, the director must manage any intrusions in the solo rehearsal room with greater sensitivity than with the multi-cast scenario.

Some rehearsal room accounts of solo performance shed light on the role of the director. Hare discusses his perception of this relationship in rehearsals: “To get the best out of my director, I feel I have a duty to keep him entertained. We have to proceed in a way which allows him regularly to hear things fresh, or he will become too implicated by habit” (10). The repetition and the familiarity with the text are common challenges for any director and are heightened in the rehearsal room of solo performance. In contrast to the multi-cast the director is watching just one performer
in great detail. Is the director rendered impotent by the repetition of the solo rehearsal? I consider Henri Szeps and others' support for this position in more depth in Chapter Four. It is enough at this point, however, to acknowledge that the level of detailed observation from a skilled director can be a great bonus for both performer and performance.

In 2010 Rosalba Clemente directed *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (1995),\(^{14}\) discussed in Chapter One, for the State Theatre Company of South Australia. Clemente addresses the challenges of engaging with only one actor (Lisa Flanagan) onstage as opposed to working with an ensemble:

I have directed a one-woman show before and performed in two myself so all I can say is that it gets pretty intense — much more so for the actor than the director! My job is to inspire Lisa and offer her as many good suggestions as I can to help extricate the best performance from her. Sometimes my job will be to shut up and let her play and stumble about. Sometimes we will sit down together and try to unravel a moment that just won't work. Both actor and director bring a lot of preparation to the rehearsal room, a lot of thinking, but the trick is always to let it go and be in the moment — absolutely in the moment, available to every new impulse as it occurs. This is a true conversation, a true collaboration and for me the state of creativity where the best work can be made.

Clemente discovers the rewards for the enduring the intensity - the ‘true conversation’ that working one-on-one embodies. And being in the moment, responding to the impulse of the performer becomes more possible because the focus is exclusively on Flanagan, not on a multi-cast.

**Two in the Room - Leadership and Collaboration**

This intimacy between the director and performer has not always been perceived as helpful to the collaborative process. Clurman sees a red flag - “Rehearsal may be called for an individual actor alone. This is done for intimate consultation, for ‘special treatment’ of individual problems” (117). Mitchell recommends avoiding one-on-one situations, as there are possibilities for it to become a therapy session for personal problems. Instead, Mitchell encourages the whole ensemble to be present when giving notes and to be even handed in the distribution of feedback (129). However, one-on-one with the director can be highly motivating, exciting and helpful for the actor

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\(^{14}\) Originally performed by Deborah Mailman and directed by Wesley Enoch.
– see Chapters Three and Four. Both parties often welcome the opportunity for the undivided attention of the director, giving thoughtful and productive criticism. In the rehearsal of a solo play, the director alone with a single actor is the norm rather than the exception. The relationship between director and performer, one-on-one, is an inherently more intimate and tenacious engagement.

The collaboration that occurs between two in most solo performance may be easier to manage than the logistics of directing a multi-cast. The director of solo performance, and the performer, can be much more singularly focused in the rehearsal room, in the absence of other actors. The director is liberated from the managing of multiple personalities and relationships of multi-casts and perhaps able to be more attentive. Robert Cohen, in favour of collaborative approaches to multi-casts, offers a utopian ideal:

>[a] successful directorial style must sensitively balance the desire to be collaborative, approachable, encouraging, protective, receptive, and sharing, on the one hand, with the clear responsibility to be persuasive, authoritative, decisive, sometimes driving on the other. (14)

Perhaps this ambitious balance can be more efficiently achieved in a rehearsal room of two. The director almost always has multiple functions where she is doing different things for different people. However in solo performance process she can focus primarily on that single relationship, albeit there are usually designers and operators also involved.

Directing a multi-cast rehearsal process demands the coming together of a group and the management of those dynamics. Solo performance provides opportunities for more autonomy for both the director and performer. During a personal communication with British actor and writer Steven Berkoff, he maintained “I direct all my own works and nobody can claim to have directed me in anything. I do admit that Mark Sinden did come in for a few rehearsals of Villains, for which I was much obliged since it’s always good to have a bit of feedback.” (“Solo Performance Query”) Berkoff finds working alone, as actor and director, as preferable to the multi-cast. Australian theatre critic John Shand interviewed Berkoff and says that Berkoff “acknowledges that collaboration can be difficult, so it is no wonder he periodically chooses to work solo” (30). Likewise, an autocratic director might instigate a solo performance project that is driven by their singular vision and desired aesthetic, for example, Beckett’s highly descriptive texts. The director can cast an actor to fulfil her or his vision with minimal input from the actor. Sharing the leadership

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15 Steven Berkoff’s solo *Shakespeare’s Villains* (1998)
and collaborating with one other means more aesthetic control, an attractive proposition for any artist. There are challenges to the one-on-one relationship, tensions that can arise from artistic negotiations and there are the possible pitfalls in the staging of solo performances, outlined in Chapter One. Working collaboratively, one on one, requires attention and flexibility.

In contrast to Berkoff’s dismissal, and Henri Szeps and William Yang who share a similar opinion in Chapter Four, some director and solo performer relationships are close and personal. One example of this is solo actor Conor Lovett being directed by his wife Judy Hegarty Lovett. Another example is Spalding Gray’s original collaboration with Elizabeth LeCompte at The Performing Garage in the 1970s – he had a personal relationship with LeCompte at the time. He also collaborated on many of his theatrical performances with his first wife Renee Shafransky (Gray and Schechner 164). Of course, platonic relationships also afford intimacy where a friendship and long-time collaboration can create ideal circumstances for the intensity that solo performance demands. What do these, and other directors bring to the rehearsal room? How is directing practice and the creative relationship affected by this intense genre?

Adapting to Solo Performance

The director of solo performance must address the fundamental challenges of solo performance and find staging solutions. These staging considerations may have already been addressed when the script was created, or in the devising or writing process. For example, Beckett was inspired by Irish actor Patrick Magee’s voice and wrote *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) for him, directed by Donald McWhinnie. Irish Beckett scholar Gerry Dukes notes that Beckett “brilliantly solved the problems inherent in staging a monologue by the simple expedient of introducing a tape-recorder, so that what the audience hears is the live Krapp on stage and the younger Krapp recorded on tape, and the drama is generated by the contrasts and discrepancies between the two-versions” (113). Beckett carefully considered the challenges of staging solo performance as he wrote the play. Directors, often in collaboration with the solo performer, make carefully considered choices in regards to staging, especially with a single actor playing multiple characters (monopolylogue), for example stage geography may assist the audience in following the action if each character is assigned their own playing space. Indian Ink Theatre Company predominantly uses mask changes, but also exits and entrances and on occasion set pieces, such as a shop counter, as a theatrical

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16 Beckett went on to direct many of his plays.
device to facilitate the solo performer’s transition between multiple characters – one character drops behind counter and re-emerges as another character.

However, solo performance also lends itself to a theatrical simplicity where the audience can focus entirely on the performer and the storytelling. As scholar Eamonn Jordan observes about the monologue in Irish drama “The audience is obliged to rely on the nuances of language and story structure as much as on the visual, with far more emphasis on verbal codification than is the norm in contemporary cultures, where the visual dominates” (147). The monologist is often a singular visual image, such as in Beckett’s *A Piece of Monologue* (1979) or *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Conor Lovett, actor and co-founder of the Gare St Lazare Theatre Company, is a good example of theatrical simplicity that is solely reliant on narrative. The Company’s adaptations of Beckett are described in the Edinburgh Guide thus:

> There’s nothing flashy here. No giant sets. No fancy lighting. Just a man with a story to share. A man with passion and love. Once you have seen this you will never go back. You will not want anyone but Gare St Lazare to do Beckett again. Absolutely unbelievable. (Eades)

The different forms and styles of solo performance each require different attention. For example, a verbatim account like Anna Deavere Smith’s *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* would require authenticity, specific research into real events. In addition, with a single actor playing multiple characters, the director and performer must find ways for the audience to understand whom each character is. On the other hand, in rehearsing a solo piece requiring the actor to play only one character, such as Neil LaBute’s *Falling in Like*, the director would likely focus on direct address and the character’s narrative journey. In a monopolylogue the director’s attention is on the individual performer’s monologue(s) and the effective connections to be made between all of the actors and their monologues. Katie Mitchell addresses the issue of direct address and her particular approach to the one-person play:

> [I]f you are directing a monologue, simply ask yourself who the character is talking to. Are they talking to themselves or another person or people? Are these people or this person imagined or real, dead or alive? Where are these people or this person? Once you have answered these questions, you can ask what the character wants from whom they are talking to. Then, when you rehearse the scene, the actor will need to practice imagining this person or these people. (64)
Mitchell identifies the premise that in a solo performance the actor is always engaged with someone: the audience, or another seen or unseen character, or their own psyche. The director and performer need to establish the theatrical conventions of each solo performance. The audience is heavily challenged to imagine, to suspend their disbelief, so it is important to know what those conventions are. If the actor is playing multiple characters that are defined by different voices for each character then this must be made clear from the beginning of the play and sustained so that the audience can follow the narrative. Further examples of approaches to staging solo performance are explored in greater detail in the following chapters.

In addition to the challenges solo performance presents to the director in terms of narrative content and artistic form, some practical rehearsal elements also need to be adapted to accommodate a cast of one. Mitchell addresses the structure of an eight-hour rehearsal day and how activities might be scheduled for a multi-cast production (173). In multi-cast rehearsals the actors might work independently on scenes, or the director works on a scene that does not require all the actors. This allows downtime for everyone, including the director, over the course of a rehearsal day. With solo performance the director and performer are on most of the time, before each other most of the time and this needs to be taken into consideration when planning rehearsals.

Related to the practical issue of stamina is the fact that the rehearsal environment of solo performance is different to that of the multi-cast, with both positive and negative implications. In a multi-cast context Mitchell suggests “The whole group can do their exercises simultaneously in the rehearsal room” allowing “the actor to dip their toes in their characters in a non-pressurised context” (159–160). This relaxed environment is about safety in numbers, where the actors are less self-conscious with the knowledge that their fellow actors are equally self-absorbed and not focused on watching each other. In contrast the actor in the solo rehearsal process is perhaps more self-conscious. British Beckett scholar Colin Duckworth identifies “the actor’s problems of working with just one other person” in rehearsals for Krapp’s Last Tape, noting actor Robin Cuming’s comment: “it’s so embarrassing working with one other person” (225–233). It seems evident that actors can feel some self-consciousness when working one-on-one. Louis Catron, in The Power of One: The Solo Play for Playwrights, Actors, and Directors, suggests that the lone actor may benefit from an increase in directorial critique in the rehearsal process: “Without the pressure of handling a

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17 This is in part Stanislavski’s notion of ‘public solitude’ – where an actor has a sense of isolation whilst being surrounded by others, whether fellow actors or audience. (Stanislavski 82)
large cast, in the solo play’s rehearsals there can be a comfortable give-and-take actor-director rapport that leads to neat progress toward a quality production” (182). The solo performer needs to be robust and self-confident because you are asking them to “play” without the support of a partner, or a group. The solo performer might feel bereft of the camaraderie and support, as Catron points out that in a multi-cast: “If one actor hits the wall, other actors can directly or by example contribute suggestions” (181). In the solo rehearsal context, the actor cannot observe other actors onstage physically reacting to emotions, receiving their action. To address these concerns the director might create improvisations for one, or step onto the floor to work with the actor on these exercises, thus becoming another actor to engage with. Here the director moves beyond the arguably passive position of the mirror or proxy audience and becomes an active participant.

Finally, the solo rehearsal process is generally more time efficient than a multi-cast production. Shorter rehearsals can be easily negotiated to accommodate the intensity of working one-on-one, including giving ample breaks for both actor and director to work alone. Katie Mitchell identifies that “the group session is a laborious and time-consuming activity” (159) with complicated scheduling of scenes and the multiple contributions of all those involved. Without the input of ideas and observations from a multi-cast and the scheduling issues and other problems associated with steering a series of group rehearsals, there are arguably just two minds and less distraction. The source material arguably takes on even more significance in structuring work on a solo than a multi-cast production. If there is an existing script, the director and actor can consult the script with even greater care and detail, in part due to the luxury of time afforded by a simpler production process than is often the case for multi-cast productions. With an existing text, the director and performer can literally analyse every moment, every word because time permits this detail. When a stalemate occurs in rehearsal for a multi-cast Mitchell advises to “make the text the mediator of any conflict” (121), and this advice is perhaps even more valuable in the solo rehearsal context because there are usually only two mediators, the director and solo performer, and not a multi-cast to defer to. The situation differs in the early work in a devising process, as we see in Chapter Six with a new autobiographical work, as there may be no text yet to refer to. Instead director and performer can return to the objectives and the dramaturgical structure of any emerging narrative as the next best arbiter.

The idea of an arbiter, or mediator, in the rehearsal room can also be explored through the metaphor of the bidirectional mirror. Can the director provide an effective feedback loop to the solo performer where he or she can seek accurate evaluation of the work created?
Directing: A Mirror to Solo Performance and Proxy Audience

In the quote included at the beginning of this chapter, Pinney suggests the director’s role is to provide a metaphorical mirror to the solo performer: “I report to the actor what his or her own careful, specific choices (some of which were made quite some time ago) look like from the house” (186). In rehearsals the director is thus a proxy audience, fulfilling the functions the audience will later serve and in the case of solo performance also providing the kind of feedback that might be offered by other actors in a multi-cast project. I find the term ‘proxy audience’ useful in practice because it reminds me to step back from the intensity of performance making and consider the work’s reception by others. The bidirectional mirror concept, where a feedback loop exists between solo performer and director, crucially needs to include this facet of audience reception. The director cannot ‘be’ the audience but can be proxy audience – a representation of the audience, which may respond like an audience. The focus in this research is not on the actual audience reception to a solo theatrical work but on the director’s function in the rehearsal room anticipating that reception. This thesis posits the research firmly in the rehearsal room, rather than on audience reception and theory. This thesis is new scholarship in the area of what occurs in the rehearsal room between the director and solo performer.

The mirror metaphor has been useful throughout this research, providing a description of the director who moves beyond a simple mirror/mirroring, to become co-participant and co-creator: becoming a more complex bidirectional surface that engages in cause and effect. This mirror is a flexible paradigm, it can become more active in its response, providing feedback equivalent to ‘stepping out of the mirror’ and becoming participant, coach, architect, provocateur or monitor. In order to consider this concept, it is helpful to examine ideas of the mirror in other contexts.

The Art and Science of Mirrors

The mirror has often been invested with both transformative and distorting qualities, in both the humanities and the sciences. In the fairy tale Snow White, the Queen asks the magic mirror:
“Who is the fairest in the land?” assuming she is herself the owner of the title (Grimm and Grimm 186). Eventually she faces the cold hard truth that Snow White surpasses her. In *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* Lewis Carroll takes Alice into a surreal alternative world where, through various encounters, she gains self-knowledge. In Alfred Tennyson’s poem *Lady of Shalott* (1832), the suffering Lady lives in isolation, unable to participate in life outside of her room, restricted to viewing the passing world in a mirrored reflection ‘as shadows of the world’. Her distorted version of the outside existence is a poor substitute for the real thing. These literal mirrors serve as literary metaphors. As literary metaphors they highlight the transformative qualities of mirrors, their ability to enable metamorphosis and provide greater insight, beyond what is physically reflected.

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan explored ‘a mirror stage’ in child development - finding that infants are able to identify their reflection from around six to eight months of age, and thus begin seeing themselves as a separate entity from others. Lacan’s theories evolved into ideas of fixed subjectivity: “What we have here is a first capture by the image in which the first stage of the dialectic of identifications can be discerned” (11). Whilst Lacan describes a literal mirror reflection, it is imbued with greater meaning, shifting from a subjective to a critical point of view. This shifting viewpoint mirrors the work of the director of solo performance who through dialogue with the performer helps instigate this change in perception. Lacan’s work has been highly influential in literary theory, and also in dramatic theory where his ideas around desire, knowledge and truth are contested, and Lacanian psychoanalysis has also been applied to dramatic characters (Buse 11).

A quantitative study conducted at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh considered the actor’s subjectivity by investigating cognitive experiences in performance. In the study “The mirror and the mask: face processing, characterization, personality and performance” Darling, Dean, Goodall, Mastrominico and Wilson writes:

Participants took part in a masked performance workshop in which they wore a mask and attempted to adopt a novel character. One group was able to view their face in a mirror, whilst another was given an inverting mirror. A third group was not able to use a mirror. The group who self-viewed in a standard mirror evidenced significantly greater change to aspects of personality immediately after performance than those in the other two groups. (2)

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18 In an ordinary mirror, if you point with your left hand, the right hand of the reflected image does the pointing. In the inverted mirror, when you point with your left hand, the figure in the mirror also points with its left hand.
This change to “aspects of the personality” relate, in this study, to the seeming transformation in an actor’s psychological characteristics when they take on a character, and are measured in the reception of the face in a mirror, marked against variances in personality factors. The added variant of the inverting mirror distorted the reflection and the participant’s recognition of themselves. The purpose of the study is to examine what occurs to the actor in performance in regards to self-awareness and self-concept. The results suggested benefits for performers that “self-viewing serves an important function in supporting access to self-knowledge” (Darling et al. 2). The audience is on the receiving end of the actor’s transformation. The mask, therefore, presents an interesting parallel to the solo performer’s relationship with the audience. Masked performers also work directly with an audience, eliciting a relationship in a manner akin to the most common contract between solo performer and audience:

First the mask observes the fourth wall, but it seems to be undertaking a constant conversation with itself, full of the nuances of actual speech but actioned through simple gesture, shrugs, nods, changes in speed and rhythm etc. The second way is for all the above to happen, but the mask also stops and tells the audience directly, at a specific point, what it is thinking. This is usually a realisation, or decision point, and uses the audience like a TV camera. (Wilsher 37)

This encounter, between masked performer or solo performer and the audience, is characterised by intimacy and directness. Often the masked performer and the solo performer are colluding with the audience, sharing their individual perspective on a narrative, in direct address that is similar to a soliloquy. As the Edinburgh report concludes:

[T]he data obtained raise an interesting question of how mirrors would contribute to dramatic characterization in participants who were not wearing masks, or otherwise changing their facial appearance. An unmasked actor who observes their own face in a mirror may find it more difficult to enter character than one who does not, because perception of their own face would activate self-referential semantics to a greater degree. (Darling et al. 13)

These ‘self-referential semantics’ imply that the actor may find his/her own ‘representation’ stronger in meaning than that of an imposed imagined character. Thus, it is easier for the actor/participant to see themselves than it is to see themselves attempting to be Hamlet, as an example. The director can potentially short circuit the actor’s ‘self-referential semantics’ by
supporting and strengthening an imagined reality and providing a bidirectional mirror that can communicate and critique in the moment what he/she is viewing. In this situation the director bridges the gap between performer and audience. Whilst this function as proxy audience is not exclusively the domain of the solo director, it occurs in multi-casts as well, the level of detail that can be observed by the director is heightened when working with a single actor.

In addition to the more codified intentions of the performance - read by the director first and audience later - there are also the involuntary emotional responses that are stimulated in the spectator. These responses are the emotional and sympathetic connection made by the audience to the performance. An analogy about conscious/unconscious communication from the scientific field is useful here, as American theatre academic Bruce McConachie puts it: “Doing an action and watching someone else do the same action brought a similar neurological response” (70). The mirroring neurons of the spectator will elicit not only stimulation but also simulation. For example, when the performer breathes a sigh of relief, so might the audience. This precise cognitive response can also occur between the director and the solo performer in the rehearsal room, enhanced by the sheer intimacy of the encounter. Mutual and bidirectional mirroring is occurring in the rehearsal of solo performance, as Pinney discusses below.

Mirrors in the Rehearsal Room

Throughout the previous discussion, I have been focused on the metaphorical, bidirectional mirror of the director in the rehearsal room. But the possibility also exists to utilise a literal looking glass in which the performer can observe their preparation for performance. Gazing into the literal mirror is a rehearsal method discouraged by many who are seeking the ‘inner truth’ of character rather than its external representation. It was famously discouraged by Constantin Stanislavski who warned against the use of a mirror in his own training method: “You must be very careful in the use of a mirror. It teaches an actor to watch the outside rather than the inside of his soul, both in himself and in his part” (17). Stanislavski considered the ‘art of representation’ to be the critical antithesis of his desire for the actor to be truthfully ‘experiencing the role’. It was a doctrine out of which he later developed his method of ‘physical actions’ for actors (Toporkov and Benedetti 112).

Similarly, and by way of contrast, is French physical theatre practitioner Jacques Lecoq’s (1921 – 1999) approach to actor training. His technique involved “abjuring the use of mirrors the body is trained through experience from inside” (Martin 61). He used masks for many of his
exercises, in order to highlight the impact of the physical character. Lecoq warned that the mirror could be a hindrance in the business of mask characterisation: “The student attempts to get as close as possible to these characters, to enter into the mask, without making grimaces beneath the mask, without indulging in parallel imitations imposed from outside, without looking at themselves in the mirror” (Lecoq, Lallias, and Carasso 57). He identified a tension between masks and the mirror.

Stanislavski and Lecoq, therefore, expressed serious doubts about the value of the literal mirror in the actor’s preparation for performance, particularly in an actor’s training. The literal mirror is no substitute for the internal understanding of the actor and the external evaluation of the director. In the solo rehearsal room the feedback loop of presenting work/observing the work/critiquing the work, described in further detail in the following chapter, is heightened by the inherent exclusivity of two participants.

There is less equivocal enthusiasm among other distinguished commentators. Thus American theatre innovator Viola Spolin produced a well-known handbook for actors, *Theatre Games for the Lone Actor* (2001), that encouraged the actor to “side coach” themselves – when preparing for performance without a director. Her goal for the actor is that you “Be your own diagnostician, objectively recognising the state you are in, applying the necessary, recommended, side coaching” (Spolin, Sills, and Sills 8). Spolin advocated the mirror as a vital tool in the actor’s preparation. In her chapter on “Physicalizing Attitudes” (Spolin, Sills, and Sills 81) the mirror is the final point of reference for the exercises. Spolin considered the actor a potentially critical creature, whilst Stanislavski and Lecoq wanted their actors to immerse themselves in subjective characterisation. Spolin empowers the actor to self-critique in the absence of a director.

The Australian actor Frederick Matthais Alexander (1869 - 1955) offered a further influential variant. He developed the Alexander Technique, a postural alignment process which required a degree of self-observation that was achieved with the assistance of multiple mirrors. Famously he had discovered that his recitations of Shakespearean texts had been hindered by throat problems: the medical profession had been unable to provide a solution. He eventually had recourse to an actual mirror in which he detected physical symptoms previously hidden from himself and his doctors. With the help of his mirror he found a new way through his difficulties and thereby created a hugely influential technique for the physical work of actors and others: “I had to admit that I had never thought out how I directed the use of myself, but that I had used myself habitually in the way that felt natural to me” (MacDonald 13). In Chapter Six, actor Melissa Billington describes how, as
a yoga teacher and as a solo performer, the mirror can expose physical and emotional elements that are being expressed unconsciously, such as a hand that fidgets or carries tension when it should appear relaxed. The mirror can assist both the yoga practitioner and the performer to achieve greater awareness and control over some of these unconscious habits.

These examples suggest the centrality of unconscious habits, knowledge of which may be critical in the process of theatrical characterisation. Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal regarded this self-knowledge as essential for his work with actors. But Boal did not use mirrors as such. Instead, in his actor training, he employed numerous mirroring exercises. The actors were paired together and tasked to perfect a series of mirror images for each other, and then offer a range of distortions, the objective being: “seeing ourselves as we are seen” (Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire* 26) The distortions offered an exaggeration of the other’s expressions that revealed idiosyncrasies and habits – the ‘real’ you as seen by others. Boal’s motive is to empower the performer by developing “the capacity of observation by means of visual dialogue between two or more participants” (Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* 120). The co-performer thus operates as a bidirectional mirror that is interactive, distorting and exposing the viewer. The director of solo performance can function in the same way as Boal’s co-performer – participating and critiquing and even distorting what the solo performer is presenting in order to help them see themselves as they 'are seen' and opportunities for transformation.

The literal mirror provides the performer with an exacting image, regardless of whether the performer can acknowledge and understand what it shows them. However, the director as metaphorical mirror might be more helpful than a literal mirror, when the critiquing is informed, positive and respectful in its response. The director is in a position of trust.Whilst Stanislavski was rejecting the literal mirror, his colleague Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko considered the role of the director as the “regisseur-mirror”,19 asking the performer “This is what I see, is that what you intended?” (as qtd. in Pinney 186). Nemirovich-Danchenko insisted that the director as regisseur-mirror must critique “without inflicting humiliation but with love and friendliness to mimic” (as qtd. in Pinney 186). The bidirectional mirror of the director is the voice of an expert and a kindly coach who works to assess the ‘soul’ of the character critically, from the outside, for the benefit of the actor. From the performer’s perspective there is no other tangible point of reference. As Hauser and Reich point out, they need clear feedback: “Actors are notoriously inaccurate about the quality

19 The French term ‘regisseur’ translates as “theatrical director or stage manager, especially in France, Russia, Germany, and Italy, whose duties encompass the artistic interpretation and integration of a play” (“Britannica.com”)
of their performance” (44). The director’s feedback becomes more crucial in solo performance as it cannot be found in the response of other actors.

Shakespeare, most famously of all, used a mirror metaphor in a theatrical context:

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'errestep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, the censure of the which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. (Hamlet Act 3, Scene 2)

This quotation, and scene, has been much analysed by scholars. Hamlet, as the director of the play, speaks to the Player King, advising his actors to be truthful and insightful, not just an entertainment: this is theatre’s ethical duty to its audience. From a directing perspective, Shakespeare’s Hamlet shares much of Stanislavski’s ethos, rejecting any heightened representation in the theatre, instead advocating truthful acting, embracing a reality that is a true reflection of humanity, both good and bad. Hamlet’s acting advice would be useful to solo performers, especially in biographical and autobiographical contexts where the audience, requiring that the theatrical presentation be a true reflection of life, often seeks authenticity.

But the mirror also attracts muscular sceptics, those that disagree with this notion of art reflecting life. One of the most combative was Bertolt Brecht who thought that artists should attack reality with force: “Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it”.20 This mirror considers theatre (the art form) as a political vehicle. In an interview with American journalist Juan Gonzales, Boal desires that the metaphorical mirror becomes a more active participant in his politically motivated creative process:

[…] I would like to have a mirror with some magic properties in which we could, if we don’t like the image that we have in front of us, allow us to penetrate into the mirror and transform our image and then come back with our image transformed.

20 Bertolt Brecht quote is disputed by Samuel Andrews who attributes the quote to Vladimir Mayakovsky.
Evidently, therefore, the mirror has many theatrical possibilities, literally and metaphorically, within the rehearsal room and in transforming the performer. This transformation is crucial to all theatre but is often at the heart of solo performance. The credibility of the transformation is particularly crucial to the audience’s acceptance of a narrative delivered by one actor. Solo performer and director Robert Lepage’s transformations find authenticity in the real artists he portrays, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Jacques Cousteau, and the invention of an alter ego of the performer - a character that is representative of Lepage himself. Boal, Lecoq and Lepage embrace spontaneous play as a tool for transformation. Boal’s co-actor as a metaphorical mirror is instrumental in the transformation of the performer and comparable to the director of a solo performer who is actively engaged in theatrical transformation, especially when embracing this playful quality. When the solo actor is transforming, the director is there to report back on its effectiveness. The performer needs not only a self-reflection in the mirror but also a means by which the mirror helps to actively shape him/her into a new creation, a new character. The director may well witness such and then report back to the performer the shift in characterisation, and other theatrical elements.

The Ethics of the Mirror in the Rehearsal Room

In returning to Pinney’s article, the director of solo performance can be considered as witnessing the creative process as she is herself witnessed by the lone actor. Pinney positions the director of solo performance as serving as a mirror and a proxy audience, describing the director/performer interface as a mirror witness (186). Pinney does not provide a methodology for directing but a way of examining the ethics and responsibility of “looking” between director and solo performer. In considering American theorist Elizabeth Bell’s feminist aesthetic, Pinney asks how the bidirectional exchange between director and solo performer occurs, and in reference to Judith Hamer how it might retain agency for the performer (184). This goal of agency is protective of all parties in the exposing nature of solo autobiographical performance that Pinney is engaged with: “In Hamer’s model, dancer and critic, actor and director, have agency. Both bodies are observing and being observed. Both bodies are vulnerable” (Pinney 187). Thus a bidirectional mirror, in that the director ‘sees’ herself in the performer; her ability to articulate, direct, communicate is reflected back in the ways in which the performer responds to her critique. Pinney

21 “Lepage’s solo shows transform other artists and works of art by personalizing and processing them as resources, connecting the personal environment of the actor-creator (Lepage) with impulses from other artists (Cocteau) or art forms (film)” (Dundjerović 51)
asks what can be learnt as one is doing and one is viewing: “My presence effects the performance, forces the performance to happen somewhere between the public and the private” (187). This is also a central challenge in PaR – achieving criticality even in the action of making. Pinney sees this position as advantageous, stating that the essence of the director/performer relationship is dialogic: “Sometimes we have passed something along the way that I have noticed because of my differently involved position” (188). The director is inside the process, with the performer, but still alert to her role in viewing what the performer may have missed. Pinney suggests an ethical directorial process for solo performance that “values a long-term relationship, privileges dialogue, preserves agency for both participants, acknowledges the unique aspect of each new one to one relationship and remains malleable” (189). And finally the relationship becomes invisible in the end: “a director and a cast of one is a liminal space between the public and the private” (Pinney 190).

However, the director’s ultimate responsibility is to the audience – to provide a theatrical experience that is worthy of their attention. The director’s primary accountability is to be a reflection of the potential audience, but is also the principal support for the solo performer: “How does one go about the work of responsibly viewing another’s doing?” (Pinney 184). This is particularly pertinent in autobiographical solo performance, which Pinney is engaged with. The autobiographical performer/writer may resist or reject an outside critique of the theatrical narrative because of their strong attachment to the original source material – their own story. The metaphorical mirror, can, with Nemirovich-Danchenko’s “love and friendliness” offer an understanding of how an audience might receive any solo work, and may be especially helpful to the solo performer developing autobiographical material to which he or she may hold strong emotional ties. Anne Bogart similarly suggests that the director “tries to be the best possible audience”, whereas Pinney imagines “a specific ideal audience” (186) in the rehearsal room that would be the performer themselves. For Pinney this discussion is in the context of autobiographical performance, thus the performer ‘sees’ their own story in performance. Pinney focuses on “doing my best to see the show through the actor’s eyes” (186) and reporting back what she witnesses. Theatre academic and practitioner John Downie questions the confessional quality of autobiographical solo performance, considering “The presence of the performer herself, in emotional advance of the strategies of dramaturgy, makes the directorial balance tricky; centred more than usually on the issues of risk” (Downie). There is potential for the dramaturgy and the function of the director to be placed in peril in this confessional, personal territory. Pinney closely considers the actor’s perspective, however the audience must remain pivotal in evaluating the work. In the case study of Indian Ink in Chapter Five and throughout this thesis, these issues of viewing
are resolved by situating the director as the pivotal proxy audience in solo performance, whilst still being able to advocate for and support the actor.

When I consider the qualities that Pinney values it is like a wish-list for any working relationship between director and performer(s) but is perhaps more often realised in solo performance because of the generosity of focus, detail and time that the process allows. In considering the many ways that the metaphorical and literal mirror can function in the rehearsal room, and understanding the mirror’s wider context in art and science, the mirror remains a helpful device in this research. In the following chapters I pursue the qualities of relationship, dialogue, agency, focus, detail and time in the rehearsal room experiences of solo theatre practitioners, with the idea of a bidirectional mirror as a central theme to the director’s work. In the following chapters the interviewees address the theory of mirroring, garnering a variety of responses – the metaphorical mirror functioning in different ways to different practitioners. I argue that the director, as a metaphorical bidirectional mirror, can be the expert in responding with his or her intimate knowledge of the work, the performer and the potential audience.

**Conclusion**

The literature on directing is diverse; including practical guidance, actors’ and directors’ perspectives, scholarly evaluations and socio-political analysis. The publications discussed above provide guidance and insight into what is still often perceived as a mysterious occupation. In fact, most directing methodology is not fixed but changing with every experience, every set of variables. Solo performance shares many similarities with the directing approach to a multi-cast play, such as addressing the fundamentals of characterisation, scenography, narrative structure and clarity. On the other hand directing solo performance presents a unique working relationship where elements like rehearsal scheduling, creative control and audience relationship will be renegotiated. While many of the directing processes for multi-casts, such as analysing a script for beats and objectives, can be adapted to the solo rehearsal room, other processes effective in a multi-cast context are made obsolete or difficult by the intimacy of the one-on-one solo rehearsal context. For example, rehearsal explorations and theatre games that work well for an ensemble need to be modified or abandoned when there is only one actor in the room.

The existing literature offers insights into solo rehearsal room relationships but with little discourse on relating the practical work to the theoretical framework of solo performance. Louis
Catron addresses the rehearsal environment as a small part of his examination of solo performance. Katie Mitchell examines the rehearsal process in enormous detail but only considers solo performance briefly. Amy Pinney analyses the role of the director, in terms of function but does not describe how this is practiced in the rehearsal room. My approach to directing solo performance acknowledges that a partnership of two necessitates a greater level of democracy and collaboration than might be the case with a multi-cast project. In addition to this collaborative approach, the director needs to acknowledge the possibility of intense subjectivity from the performer, in the absence of other actors or in the consuming, confessional mode of autobiographical performance. Any subjectivity from the performer needs to be offset by the director providing critical feedback as proxy audience. It is often the case that, when compared to multi-cast productions, the director of solo work may be less of an instigator and visionary, and more of a co-creator and facilitator. This readjustment of the director's creative authority is especially likely in devised solo work or work written by the performer. If the performer/writer is drawing inspiration from autobiographical material, they may have fixed ideas about the end product. For example, they might be convinced that the play should be performed on a proscenium stage, rather than being open to experimenting with other staging options. A balance needs to be found where the director can do their work without inhibition, but still be working within the performer/playwright’s objectives.

Solo performance has special qualities, its reliance on the telling of a story by one individual, its intimacy, its often minimalistic aesthetic, its ability to magnify the emotional potency of the content, so that a single performer can fill the stage with great theatricality and often multiple characters. The great achievement, and seduction, of solo performance is the audience’s submission to these qualities, they suspend their disbelief in the theatrical conventions that allow a single performer to portray many characters. Behind this great achievement is the director and performer’s process of creating a solo performance, and a relationship that has its own particular qualities.

As further addressed in the following chapters, metaphors of the mirror can be helpful in considering the rehearsal room encounter between director and performer in solo performance, and the liminal space between private and public that such a rehearsal context engenders. Perhaps the more complex bidirectional mirroring that occurs in solo performance where the director serves associated functions of reflection, transformation, magnification, documentation, witness and participant, can also be applied to theatre practice in general. Examining the qualities of the rehearsal room of solo performance can prompt contemplation of the bigger picture of multi-cast plays and the very nature of theatre.
To facilitate my research, the most immediate investigation and insight came from participating in the creative relationship between performer and director – being the director *and* researcher. I am “mobilized from within, from an element of playfulness in the know-how process, and from without, through engagement with a range of other perspectives and standpoints to promote the interplay with new ideas” (Nelson 45). Thus I am not just observing or intruding, instead I am practicing with criticality. In the following Chapter, I examine my own directing practice with solo performance and consider the particular qualities of working in this genre, what the significant challenges are and how the flexible paradigm of the director as bidirectional mirror might be helpful to the solo performer.
Chapter Three

Re-visiting Past Productions: Methodology in Solo Directing Practice

Introduction

This thesis has grown out of my previous directing practice. The solo performances that I directed prior to this PhD were viewed as research and rigorously documented at the time, in accordance to my training at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. As Nelson states, “Many insights emerge in the processes of making and doing. Hence documentation of process has emerged as another key dimension of PaR” (28). As a director, thorough questioning and testing of theory into practice always underpin my approach. The interviews with actors, analysed below, were conducted later, as part of my PhD studies – not at the time of those productions. The questions I pursued in these interviews were framed by my current research agenda emphasising director-performer interaction in the rehearsal room and were developed from a reflective, critical position.

I have chosen to examine five of the ten solo performances I directed between 2006 and 2011 that provide a range of directing scenarios, a variety of styles, forms and creative origins. Porcelain Grin was a newly devised work. Neil LaBute’s Medea Redux and Falling in Like, and Steven Berkoff’s Actor are script-based works, and The Vagina Monologues is a polylogue – a collection of monologues. I demonstrate how each different solo work requires a unique approach and suggest areas for further research. While each performer and show differs greatly in personality, content and form, my rehearsal room approach has important similarities and patterns. I document the content of those projects and the directing challenges that emerge. Key challenges include staging decisions such as delineating multiple characters and clarifying audience relationships, and also issues within the partnership, such as negotiating the creative process, leadership roles and responsibilities. I consider how the directing of the solo performer might be functioning as a bidirectional mirror in the rehearsal room.

Key findings in this chapter are illustrated by DVD examples supplied as part of the creative component of the PhD (see Appendix 3). The DVD provides examples of different directing approaches to solo performance, including character delineation, direct address and fourth wall.
My Rehearsal Room

There are almost always the following fundamental directorial challenges of solo performance to address in the rehearsal room: character delineation (when there is more than a single voiced character), audience relationship (is the audience acknowledged, to whom is the character(s) speaking?), scenography and design elements, and stage geography (how do we show where we are and how do we use the space?). Those key challenges of characterisation, physicality and staging are part of all theatre rehearsal processes, multi-cast and solo performance. However, the different forms of the solo performance have influenced my directing approach in the rehearsal room in different ways. Directing LaBute’s published, and much performed text Medea Redux, addressed the key challenges but the process was focused on an interrogation of subtext and finding the rhythm of character and language. In contrast, the newly devised Porcelain Grin required a modification of the process that accommodated changes to the text and shifting boundaries of characters as they developed. Directing solo performance presents its own unique challenges, a distinct adaption and adjustment from working in a multi-cast environment. My rehearsal room process reflects these modifications.

Before entering my rehearsal room, each new scripted project began with a long process of my own research that uncovered the playwrights’ intentions and established my own connection to the work. As Gay McAuley notes: “this first phase of the director’s work process, which might extend over many months, even years, and consists of intermittent burst of activity” (188). Eventually I have an artistic vision of the play that is developed, and sometimes radicalised, by the work in the rehearsal room. For instance, I might at first see Medea Redux as being emotionally driven but then discover in rehearsal that it is the everyday, the mundane, that makes a greater impact in delivery. Prior to the first exploratory session we, the solo performer and myself, may have met or emailed and started to discuss the work. The first physical rehearsal involves acknowledging both the performer and I are committed to the project and explaining how we might work together – in a collaborative process that encourages the performer to express their thoughts as we work. We clarify our expectations; have a mutual understanding of what we want from the process and our goals in the performance of the work. Whilst this is done with some lightness and with democracy, I am taking some leadership from the start in order to guide the project forward. I hope that the actor is reassured that I am at the helm, organised and with a plan.
With an existing text I then proceed with a pre-planned exploratory exercise that I call the World of the Play. This term is widely used for the investigation into all the elements that help us understand the play. For example, in Katie Mitchell’s *The Director’s Craft* she dedicates a whole chapter to “Building the world of the play” in which she advocates for research into Facts and Questions, Place, The writer and the genre, Ideas, Emotions, Character Biographies, Character Tempo, Relationships and more (141). The following version has evolved from a rehearsal exercise with director and teacher Christian Penny at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. In my version I ask the actor to come with a range of items that reflect his or her connection to the play. Those items might be tangible objects like pieces of clothing, images or memorabilia, or more evocative smells and sounds. I do the same task, thus we create the world of the play that is informed by our shared connections to the play. This opens the conversation and the world that the characters, and we ourselves, will inhabit. In this first phase we uncover how each of us reads the play, discovering the personal and public contexts. We then consider these discoveries in relationship to character and relationships. We discuss the play, the writer, the historical/political/geographical context of the time it was written and the time it was set. For example, in *The Vagina Monologues* we considered playwright Eve Ensler’s political intentions of the whole play and then looked at the individual monologues and determined a back-story for each woman, often based on geography.

After this exploratory work we leave the table work and hear the script. I have asked the actor to memorise their lines prior to the first rehearsal on the proviso that a fixed interpretation of the script will not occur and the actor will remain open to new ideas. As solo performer and director Guy Masterton notes in Chapter Six, the director will struggle to move forward if the actor is looking for their lines. With limited tension, from myself or from the performer, I ask the actor to speak the text. I appreciate the anxiety the performer is feeling. I trained as an actor and I know how this moment feels and hope to take the pressure off this moment where I first receive this offer from the actor. Is the tension more or less with just the two of us? The level of tension depends on whether this is a new relationship with an actor and is determined by the content of work. This moment of revelation, of first encounter, may perhaps be a little awkward but is an opportunity to foster a supportive relationship by responding truthfully and with encouragement.

After this first reading of the play we begin to see what work we need to do in rehearsals. Our work will address the fundamental challenges of the genre – of character delineation, relationship to audience and scenic choices. Our attention is often first with establishing character and intention, followed by movement, rhythm, pace, space, inflection, and voice. We try different
ways to investigate these options. These experiments with the physical performance are like stretching. We stretch out the script. It is of flexible, malleable material. How far can we go? Eventually we get clearer about the objectives and how to fulfil them. We then start working in finer detail. Literally, sentence-by-sentence, word-by-word, each movement and each expression is scrutinised. I report back to the actor what I see. I often find the actor is quite unsure of what they are doing. They cannot see themselves so I need to critique what I see and experience. The challenge is to accurately articulate what I observe.

In rehearsals I usually employ my own version of Stanislavskian beats and objectives to segment the text and to isolate character motivation with a physical score. As John Gillett, a teacher of Stanislavskian technique explains, “The smallest sections into which we break down the text are units (In the Studio: events or facts, In the Russian: bits, In the English: units). A unit is defined by a clear piece of thought and action, by a specific dynamic between characters. It might be only one word or a line, or it could run for pages” (189). However, like much of the description and terminology of Stanislavski’s work, it is reinvented and experimented with by directors. With ‘beats’ I am seeking out changes of rhythm and 'objectives' in the text. In rehearsal we investigate the intentions of the character – discovering what does the character want and do in each moment, beat by beat. With a multi-cast play the objectives are mostly played to another character – for example, Character A is motivated by anger at his mother, and thus with all women (his objective). Character A vents his misplaced rage at Character B (action). Determining character objectives can be quite a different task with just one actor because there may not be another character to play the objective to, or the other character is implied, but the exercise is still helpful in exploring the character’s intentions. If the solo has multiple characters then the objectives may be played out between them. With a single character solo the objectives are often about self-expression and how they are perceived by the outside world. For instance, Falling in Like’s protagonist wants to appear nonchalant about her lover’s failure to turn up, despite her sadness and frustration. The changes in rhythm are essential in driving the narrative and character in solo performance, and keeping the attention and interest of the audience.

Following the initial exploratory work, the ‘daily’ structure of rehearsals involves goal setting and reviewing our most recent work. This is followed by warm-up exercises, games based on improvisations around the text, such as creating freeze frames of scenes from the play. Doing these exercises together encourages connection between us - focus, playfulness and creativity. Ensemble building between actors is an important part of encouraging confidence and unification within a company. However, the director and solo performer as an ensemble of two can still create a
vibrant, supportive partnership. I find it productive to make these exercises connected to the themes of our work so that we are considering the play explored at the same time, which gives the exercises a greater focus. In the absence of other actors I participate in these exercises. This interaction is beneficial to us both – it develops our relationship to each other and provides insight into the way we understand the play. We then set about the tasks at hand – exploratory and textual. We work solidly for one to two hours and then stop. I found a variety of different activities in the rehearsal room help keep us focused and engaged in the work – this is echoed by director Willem Wassenaar in Chapter Four. For example, the rehearsal might involve initial discussion and planning, then some improvisation, followed by scene work. The sessions are short and allow time for the actor to be alone and reconcile the direction he or she has been given and do any necessary ‘homework’ – such as practicing a physical sequence or working on the delivery of a section of text. We might break and return for a second session in a day. The next rehearsal is then planned after reviewing the progress made during the previous one.

Outside of the rehearsal room my process involves regular reflections on the work we are doing, in the form of a workbook that includes an annotated script, research, images, rehearsal plans, set and costume sketches and journal entries. This documentation of PaR, as Nelson describes, is part of “the articulation and evidencing of the research inquiry” (36). In addition to this self-reflective discourse I connected with my directing colleagues to discuss my rehearsal practice.

With a devised show, like Porcelain Grin, I consciously take a much more open approach. We are pursuing curiosities and until we are some way into the creative process, we may not know the outcome of work. The basic premise of devising, described here by the Frantic Assemble devising theatre company requires “allowing even the most random event to shape and alter an exercise, to leave the path or idea prescribed maybe only moments earlier and to free up the room in order to make the most of a newfound impulse, influence or inclination” (Graham and Hoggett 26). Sometimes an idea or theme for the devised work has not even been settled on and even the most basic decisions will wait until a first rehearsal. Alternatively the collaborators research a theme and will bring this to the first meeting - for example, in Porcelain Grin we established early on in the process that we would explore dentistry and fairy tales, and then researched this chosen territory individually before coming back together. My devising process has also used the world of the play exercise - I have described this in greater detail in Chapter Six when it is used in early rehearsals of PocaHAUNtus. I have also utilised RSVP cycles, a system of artistic methodology for collaboration that generates and organises material in the devising process, as “a framework the RSVP cycles allow even large groups to retain clarity in what is a potentially chaotic process”
The approach to directing new work may require a renegotiation of roles and challenges to creative control. When the actor is also serving as writer, deviser, historian and perhaps autobiographer, as in *PocaHAUNTus*, he or she will be more vulnerable about their performance. These insecurities became strongly apparent in the development and rehearsal process of *PocaHAUNTus* as a new, devised and autobiographical solo.

My rehearsal room often involves the collaboration of others, particularly designers, technicians and producers, however the majority of the creative engagement has been alone in the room with the solo performer. In ideal circumstances there has been the support of others, but in some circumstances financial restrictions have limited the working party. The stage manager role has sometimes been unfilled, despite being highly valued and desirable especially in the chaotic conditions of devising.

**First Questions**

My first directing experience of a solo play was *A Poster of the Cosmos* (1987) by Lanford Wilson, presented at Toi Whakaari in 2006. The play explores the hysteria surrounding the AIDS virus in 1980s America. As a training director, my purpose with this production was to work intensively with an actor on a text-based solo performance - the solidity and intensity of the material allowing me to focus on challenges of the working relationship between actor and director in solo work. I was interested in examining the idea of solo performance being reliant on a confession and collusion with an audience. The central character Tom, played by Sam Snedden, is being interrogated in a police station and this created a confessional quality, setting up the audience as recipient, judge and jury.

With *A Poster of the Cosmos* I was immediately struck by the challenges of working so intimately. Suddenly there was not the camaraderie of the ensemble, bursting with ideas and input, but instead the potential of a more solemn arrangement between two persons. A big question was how do we play (the concept of ‘play’, with reference to Philippe Gaulier), challenge and explore with just the two of us? The ‘play’ I sought involved being in the moment without any self-consciousness, which promoted creativity free of inside or outside judgment. I became Snedden’s playmate in warm-up exercises and when we encountered conflict in staging or character choices

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22 RSVP – R stands for Resources, S stands for Scores, V stands for Valuation, P stands for Performance (Halprin 112)  
23 Le Jeu (play) – “Philippe Gaulier teaches Le Jeu, the pleasure it engenders and the imaginary world it unveils, bang, bang, just like that. Actors are always beautiful when you can see, around the characters, their souls at play, opening the door of the imaginary world” (“Ecole Philippe Gaulier”)
the text became the third player and gave us the rules of the game – we would defer to the playwright’s intentions.

I recall opening night and Snedden had delivered a compelling and precise performance with the audience on tender hooks. He came off stage and there were hugs and accolades from me for a great performance. The following night he was just a little off the mark, though still brilliant, but this time I was not as forthcoming with praise or affection. This reaction to fluctuations in performance is a reflection of the intensity and intimacy of this one-on-one relationship. This individual attention to the actor, both praise and dismissal was a result of hypersensitivity to even the smallest changes in the performance and would probably not occur with an ensemble. In my experience as an actor and director in a multi-cast, the director is often over-stretched as he or she takes in the whole production and all the actors. The individual critiquing of the actor is not as detailed.

In this first experience of directing solo performance I learnt that communication was paramount to our working relationship, having a common theatrical language, trusting each other in our respective roles and having a willingness to understand the play together. I was still the leader but our decision-making was predominantly democratic. The luxury for me was the ability to work in fine detail with the acting and the text. Without the distraction of multiple actors we worked line by line, over and over again, in our analysis of the text and the choices we made. There was considerably more time than with the demands of an ensemble play. There was also just the one inter-personal relationship to navigate, and one actor to choreograph on stage.

These critical observations occurred whilst working with Snedden in the rehearsal room, I had documented and analysed them in production journals at the time, and I discussed and reviewed them as I proceeded. I worked consistently from what I would now call a PaR standpoint, a process that continually integrated critical reflection, analysis and creative endeavor in my directing work with solo performance. From this starting point, I began to question the options for approaches to the directing of solo performance. I pursue these opportunities in subsequent solo productions, as discussed below.
Five Directing Encounters with Solo Performance

Porcelain Grin

In 2007 I co-devised and directed Porcelain Grin at BATS Theatre in Wellington with Brooke Williams. The production was awarded Best Solo Performance of the New Zealand Fringe Festival. Porcelain Grin was based on a deconstructed tooth-fairy tale – using original and found material in the devising process. Lotte Greensleaves, the central character, wants to become the advertising face of Colgate 2008, but her horrid teeth are holding her back. The dentist promises to fix her teeth. Using a transformative dentist’s chair, Porcelain Grin drew on the magic of story telling of Lotte and her “friends”, Haydn and Melissa, to reveal what lies beneath their porcelain grins – sometimes funny, sometimes fearful, dark or surreal. The production involved multiple characters and a complex narrative. The key directing issues that arose in the rehearsal room included monologue character delineation, the devising process and communicating the narrative to the audience.

Fig. 1. A fairy tale turret for transformations. Brooke Williams as Lotte in Porcelain Grin
(Photographer Robyn Yee)
Actor

Steven Berkoff’s *Actor* was performed at the Hawke’s Bay Opera House as part of a season of short plays called Shorts in 2010. Performed by Sam Bunkall, the piece was a high octane, very physical rant on the personal and professional struggles of being an actor. This was an existing text and required the actor to play multiple characters. The dramaturgical structure of the piece demanded a directing approach in the rehearsal room that focused on finding motifs of rhythm, physicality and voice that would delineate the multiple characters.

Fig. 2. Fast and furious. Sam Bunkall as Actor in *Actor.*
(Photographer Andrea Brigden)
Medea Redux

Neil LaBute’s Medea Redux (1999) was presented at the Hawke’s Bay Opera House as part of a season of short plays in 2011. Melissa Billington took the solo role. Medea Redux is a modern retelling of the Ancient Greek myth of Jason and Medea. Jason betrays Medea with another woman, and Medea seeks the ultimate terrible revenge by killing their two children. LaBute transports us to what might be an interview room of a police station, where the modern Medea gives her statement. This is an existing text, told by a single character in monologue form, in contrast to the multiple characters in Porcelain Grin and Actor. The challenges in rehearsing this piece were about establishing audience parameters, uncovering subtext and finding a varied and contrasting rhythm in an intensely emotional text that was based on reported action.

Fig. 3. Melissa Billington as Woman in Medea Redux. (Photographer Andrea Brigden)
**Falling in Like**

Neil LaBute’s short solo play *Falling in Like* was presented at the Hasting’s Playhouse Theatre as part of the 2012 season of Shorts. In synopsis, a woman sits at a cafe waiting, and waiting, and waiting, for her lover who does not arrive. I worked with local amateur actor, Andrea Brigden. *Falling in Like* was an existing script with one character, as was *Medea Redux*, however the protagonist directly addresses and engages the audience. Key areas in the rehearsal room were the relationship to the audience, timing and rhythm and using improvisation to explore character.

Fig. 4. The audience waits with Andrea Brigden as Woman in *Falling in Like*. (Photographer Sally Richards)
**The Vagina Monologues**

I directed Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* on two occasions as a fundraiser for V-Day (Global Movement to End Violence Against Women and Girls Worldwide) at Toi Whakaari in 2008 with a cast of three women, and at the Hawke’s Bay Opera House in 2011 with eight women. As defined in Chapter One, this is an example of a polylogue, a group of performers presenting monologues. The form of *The Vagina Monologues* is a combination of verbatim theatre from interviews with women and docudrama, with direct address to audience. I was interested in the idea of multiple solo performances on stage and the audience’s reading of this. The other area of observation was the use of intensely personal, mostly verbatim material in *The Vagina Monologues*. With both productions the directing challenge in the rehearsal room was to find the performative quality in the individual monologues but also to create an ensemble performance.

![Fig. 5. Polylogue. The cast of the Hawke’s Bay production of *The Vagina Monologues*. (Photographer Bruce Jenkins)](image)

These five productions all shared, by degrees, the fundamental directing challenges of the genre, such as form, style and audience engagement, but also presented a range of distinct challenges with process and working relationships in the rehearsal room. The PaR methodology has
enabled me to reexamine these encounters, analysing them to provide new insight and build my solo directing practice. I identified with Nelson’s observation of post-graduate students undertaking PaR. Like me, they were often advanced students who brought to their praxis “significant professional experience … prior educational experience, and typically, specialist training … they know how to engage in their practice” (42). My directing training at Toi Whakaari and Victoria University had instilled a research focus to my practice that also acknowledged theoretical paradigms. The following discussion addresses key elements that distinguish the work of the director in the solo rehearsal room: the modifications to the structure of rehearsal day, methodology adapted to address the specific needs of the project, managing the intensity of the one-on-one relationship, clarifying the range of duties to be undertaken including elements of producing and design, attending carefully to the crucial element of audience interaction and considering the idea of the director as a bidirectional mirror in the rehearsal room.

**Starting Points, Time, Detail and Intensity**

In each of these five productions, working one-on-one necessitated the restructuring of rehearsals from my usual arrangement for a multi-cast production. In many ways it freed up our time. We could work together for short and intense periods and then allow additional time for working in isolation. However, regardless of time, the experience was inherently more intense between the two of us, in comparison to the multi-cast where decisions, time and exercises were dispersed between many.

It took three months to devise Porcelain Grin. Our starting point was a mutual interest in solo performance and creating new work. We began in the world of dentistry, discovering in our research resources such as dental jingles, anatomical descriptions and promotional material that supplied a rich terrain for the surrealism we both enjoyed. We often found ourselves completely stuck in our process, unable to make sense of what we were doing and where we wanted to go. On reflection I think this was in part because we retained a traditional rehearsal structure and locked ourselves away together in a room for a whole day. Williams was clear, when interviewed about the process in retrospect, about productivity in the solo rehearsal room:

I do not like rehearsing for solo work for more than five hours a day when devising. I think any longer than that and concentration and intent becomes fuzzy and you can end up going in circles. It is really important to have breaks and acknowledge breakthroughs too. (Williams)
And in that five hours there needed to be breathing space too, adequate breaks from the process and time to just be ourselves and foster our relationship. The work becomes intimate, especially in the devising process, because we are constantly exposing our internal contexts to the work and sharing personal connections — for example, we shared our own encounters with the popular, pretty girls (like the character Melissa) and how we had struggled with self-esteem as teenagers. There needs to be a generosity in disclosing between both parties and a genuine dialogue. Williams acknowledged the intensity of the solo devising work, attributing it to the highly investigative nature of the process: “I think mainly because of the relentless questioning. What am I interested in? What am I trying to say? What theatrical languages can I use? What is my central question?” (Williams). The nature of devising necessitates rigorous investigation but with devising solo it is even more challenging. Those questions are often asked in the creative process of making theatre but without a script or other actors the responsibility to respond to that questioning is on the director and solo performer alone. There might be other collaborators involved but the director and performer determine the primary direction of the project and the process. In retrospect a dramaturg may have provided a crucial outside/inside eye to our scripting process, especially as this was new terrain for us both. The inclusion of a dramaturg in the devising process is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

In contrast to this “starting from scratch”, I sent a selection of plays that I was interested in to actor Sam Bunkall. We jointly decided on Actor, thus the actor had more agency than is frequently the case for choosing a multicast play. We began some discussion by email prior to meeting, expressing initial responses to the play. Then Bunkall came from Auckland to Hawke’s Bay for a very short rehearsal period prior to the performances. Importantly Bunkall had come to our first rehearsal with his lines thoroughly memorised, I had completed my usual research and we had both been pondering the challenges of Berkoff’s writing. We were working under an extremely constrained timeline, by design, and this put pressure on the process. The intensity is driven by the fact that there are just the two of you. The director and performer in solo rehearsals take the entire load and Bunkall felt the weight of this:

… to work for two hours like that can be much more taxing than working for two hours with a larger group where the focus is divided more. For the actor, there is only one set of eyes and ears and for the director, there is only one person inputting ideas on the floor. The actor has no room to slack off or drop the ball because then there is nothing left to work with and time is being wasted. (Bunkall)
Likewise the director must be constantly vigilant and present alongside the actor in order to keep up the momentum. I am watching him and he is watching me.

A similar process was initiated for Medea Redux but this text is a dramatic monologue rather than Actor’s abstract tirade with multiple voices and characters. Medea Redux is a linear account given by a single character. The laconic style of LaBute’s writing was well suited to Billington - it required stillness and a remoteness that she could achieve. I started this process by sending the script for her perusal. We corresponded by email and had a single meeting in Wellington before her arriving in Hawke’s Bay for a short, intensive rehearsal period. We worked for short periods of time that allowed Billington and myself the time to also work alone on the piece. When we worked together the intensity was noticeable to us both, heightened by the personal nature that it embodies:

It is more intimate, more direct and therefore communication between us carries both of those qualities. In order to balance or mitigate the directness in a one-on-one dynamic, care is needed. Delving into the depth of material in the script and in the actor requires that I trust in the relationship, in Sally. (Billington, “Personal Interview”, 16 Dec 2013)

This is similar to the intensive questioning that occurred with Williams in Porcelain Grin. Throughout our work together in Medea Redux, The Vagina Monologues (in which she also performed) and PocaHAUNTus, Billington seeks this care from the director. This care is manifested in a respectful and careful handling of any personal material that is revealed and/or explored: “Perhaps it’s similar to the difference between having one child and having many children at once. It’s a focus on quality over quantity. It gives the director and the actor the opportunity for more depth of discovery in both the process and the performance” (Billington, “Personal Interview” 16 Dec. 2013). It is a maternal role that is one of the benefits of the one-on-one encounter.

Falling in Like also involved consensus on a favoured script from a shortlist of my suggestions. Actor Andrea Brigden and I worked together at regular intervals over three months and then took a break before coming together to work intensively for a week prior to the opening night. Using LaBute’s text gave us a firm starting point, knowing that the writing was solid and engaging. There was little set or movement. It meant we could focus on detail, word by word, using beats and objectives, and improvisation. That level of detail is paralleled by the detail paid by the audience. Brigden, like Bunkall, felt the intensity of being observed “like the audience, the director’s eye is
fixed on the solo performer during the rehearsal process, allowing them to give more detailed feedback which can then be closely explored together” (Brigden).

The intensity of rehearsing one-on-one was counter-acted by the time that was given between rehearsals to reflect and “explore further on my own” (Brigden) and by the fact we could work in more detail: “… there was definitely more time to ‘play’ with ideas together and this was very satisfying from my perspective as an actor. I think that with a larger cast the actor can’t have the same level of attention from the director” (Brigden).

Both of the productions of *The Vagina Monologues* involved intermittent rehearsals, allowing similar amounts of space for working alone, the actor preparing the monologue for the next rehearsal. I worked one-on-one with the actors for the majority of the time, over a six-week period, and then spent several sessions on co-directing the ensemble pieces with the entire cast in the few days preceding the performance. The actors relished the one-on-one contact with the director, despite some initial anxiety about working in isolation. The one-on-one sessions, dedicated to the single actor, allowed time for more critiquing than is usual with a multi-cast rehearsal. Of note, many of the women from the Hawke’s Bay production came from the local dramatic societies that produced musicals with large casts – where time with the director would be minimal. Actor Wendy Beauchamp found that our process allowed for greater detail and intensity: “It gives far more opportunity for collaboration and discussion about the presentation of the piece. It also allows for experimentation and the chance to try ideas from the actor and director that would not normally be possible” (Beauchamp). With Beauchamp we experimented with accent, debating the use of an American accent versus her own, questioning whether the suggested accents would engender authenticity in the monologue; the monologue in question is called *The Flood* and playwright Ensler specifies “Jewish, Queens accent” (25). The use of accents can produce insecurities in actors, especially amateur ones like Beauchamp, but she felt more willing to experiment because we were working alone.

This level of actor satisfaction in the process, which is characterised by the focused attention of the director, is evident in all the interviews here. For the actor, and the director, there is a sense of learning about craft along with the detail in the work at hand. Satisfaction comes from more time and greater detail spent one-on-one. However, along with fulfilment in this encounter, there was also intensity that could be challenging for both the director and performer. To accommodate this intensity the rehearsal schedule can be modified. There are further modifications to the
methodology and process that can help address the fundamental challenges of staging the genre of solo performance.

Methodology and Process

In each of these five productions I adapted my methodology to accommodate the particular form and purpose of the piece. This modification occurred as I practiced criticality in the process by documenting and reviewing my methodology as I proceeded from one rehearsal to the next, or indeed within a rehearsal. An example of modification was a realisation that by using shorter sessions in rehearsals we accommodated the intensity of being one-on-one and created greater detail in our work. There were also obvious variances in working with different actors and different styles and forms of solo performance. Whilst there were common patterns in the process, a review of my approach to each of the five case studies reveals distinct differences in the directing of devised solo performance in contrast to my approach to text-based work. The particular conditions of devising solo work would have implications on the criticality of the PaR methodology, as further evidenced in Chapter Six.

Porcelain Grin embraced creative chaos, in a room literally filled with all the stimuli this world might involve: including images of Victorian dentist nightmares, children’s teeth brushing manuals, dental floss and the dreaded numbing anesthetic needle. We dreamt of what it might be - perhaps a vaudeville show, or a Dennis Potteresque lip sync of dental songs, or puppetry? We followed the theatrical provocations that we were mutually excited by. We used our own version of the RSVP cycles where we adhered to a schedule of developing a scene, showing and then critiquing. This was one way of seeking order, or keeping ourselves on track and moving forward. We set challenges and continued to present and evaluate what we had made. With only two of us in the room, there was potential for there to be less raw material and fewer ideas in the devising process. However, we responded to this challenge by embracing the freedom to bring much more diverse stimuli into the process. Williams and I dug deeper for artistic inspiration and shared more openly.

In the rehearsal room we marshalled a small army of dentistry-inspired characters and scenes, including a giant tooth mascot with an attitude and a dream sequence with the thickly sweet quality of chloroform. Drawing on these characters and the regular showings, Williams developed a draft script that continued to evolve through improvisation and rehearsal exploration. We would make
rules for the performance and then break them. For example, early in the development process we had the character of the dentist physically on stage portrayed by Williams, then we experimented with the idea of an audio-visual apparition of the dentist and finally decided to use a recorded voice for the omnipresent dentist – William’s own voice distorted to a deep timbre. The voice-over was also used to deliver exposition, in the mode of fairy tale narrator. This was another technique for expanding the solo form beyond the one performer on stage and provided clarification to a complex narrative (see DVD Example 1. Appendix 3). Similar to the tape recorder in Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* we could create tension and exposition through recorded voice. The dentist berates Lotte for eating chocolate and neglecting her teeth, with sinister undertones (see Fig. 6). The voice says:

What is that? My dear child don’t you realise that chocolate is the primary cause of plaque of which you have an infestation?
Have you ever seen a Colgate girl with terrible teeth Lotte? No, one must suffer to be beautiful. Repeat after me:
I will have a beautiful smile.
I will brush twice a day and after every meal.
I will floss twice a day.
I will not eat chocolate or drink fizzy drinks.
I will not chew toffees or munch on sticky sweets.
I will not listen to music written or performed by artists with bad teeth.  

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24 Script of *Porcelain Grin* (2007)
In the last weeks of rehearsal I performed some of my usual directorial tasks of examining tempo and the narrative arc. A few days before opening night I began to retreat, to spend less time in the rehearsal room and allow Williams to take command and ownership of the world we had created.

Williams found the devising process both challenging and rewarding and felt this was heightened with the solo form. She acknowledges her lack of experience in devising solo performance:

Now I would approach this work very differently I think. Because I was younger and less experienced I didn’t have a very strong language around devising and so I was quite unclear about my process. I think this made me quite difficult to work with. I think now I would try to establish style and form with the director before I began making so that we were both clearly on the same page and the director and I had more clarity of where the other was planning on heading. (Williams)

In fact, both of us were new to devising and testing out new methodologies. In contrast to Williams, I think that defining the style and form of a devised work at the beginning of the process might be
difficult. In its nature, devised work is about opening all doors and not having a sense of where they might lead – hence Halprin’s methodology in the RSVP cycles.

In contrast to the very open devising process described above, Bunkall came with his lines learnt to our first rehearsal of *Actor*. We could not have proceeded and worked in our time frame if he had not done so. The agenda for our first rehearsal was to reconnect, as we had not seen each since studying at drama school some two years prior, to talk about ways of working and launch into the work at speed. Importantly, given the time frame, we were prepared, focused and enthused to begin and to get *Actor* on stage. We discussed the play and playwright and then got straight to the text. Bunkall spoke the script to me with minimal interpretation. From there we began to work out what we had to do.

The script presented considerable challenges in its interpretation. The text on the page is laid out without stage directions and there is no helpful preamble. The script is organised into paragraphs, but there is limited punctuation and no description of character:

Hello Paul … how are you? … you working? …oh … I’m glad that you’re pulling through … I’m glad to hear all your efforts are beginning to bear … fruit …is that the word? … I’m Fred, how are you? … you working, for TV … directing … that’s cool … then don’t forget me … hah ha ha … your old chum from school … (Berkoff, *The Collected Plays* 229)

Much of our time was spent establishing the facets of the main character - the out-of-work ‘luvvy’ that Berkoff was mercilessly taunting. Crucially, we sought variations in rhythm, physical action and the individual voices of the characters.

*Porcelain Grin* and *Actor* involved creating multiple characters. In both cases I found the best approach to character delineation was to establish, with the actor’s input, a motif or signature, for each of the characters that included a distinct tone of voice, physical action, use of a particular space on stage, an eye line, attitude, posture, and rhythm (See DVD Example 1. Appendix 3). In addition to this the transitions between characters needed to be carefully considered. Bunkall describes the necessity of this:

25 luvvie or luvvy – (facetious) a person who is involved in the acting profession or the theatre, especially one with a tendency to affectation. (“Collins Dictionaries.”)
When performing multiple characters, the transitions and relationships between the characters are as important as finding a distinctive body and voice for each of them. A language and style must be settled upon. This just took time in order to play around with different options and styles and then discussing the merits of each in relation to the story that was being told and also our own tastes in theatrical language. (Bunkall)

We also allocated separate locations on the stage for each character to occupy. For example, the protagonist pivoted from centre stage, the conversations with the girlfriend were shouted upstage right as if to another room. It was crucial that the actor was confident and comfortable with the transitions and this geography helped as markers to the performance. In many of these solo projects I would orchestrate games where the actor was challenged to move through the multiple characters and locations at high speed. This exercise was especially helpful for Actor as it is one of the most frenetic performances I have ever encountered. Bunkall attributes preparation for an audience as a key approach for the solo performer: “You cannot control or contain an audience, you have no idea what kind of day they are having or what mood they are in. You cannot bank on their reactions and you cannot expect them all to be on your page” (Bunkall). Whilst every actor encounters the audience’s ‘mood’, in solo performance the relationship with the audience is a much more direct encounter. The stakes are higher. Bunkall demonstrated energy and precision in his character transitions. This was particularly important in Actor as the performance relied on the lightening speed of delivery and the quick changes from one character to the next. There was a real danger of the actor getting lost, dropping a line or missing a beat. Where other actors might come to the rescue in a multi-cast production, Bunkall observes:

Not so in solo land. It is all you. And this is a challenge. It can be terrifying knowing you are alone and no one can save you. If you pay too much attention to such thoughts it can have a crippling effect. So preparation is key for the confidence required to carry it through. (Bunkall)

In solo performance many choose fewer scenic elements to work with and the form often goes hand-in-hand with a minimalist aesthetic – like Conor Lovett’s man alone on stage in The Beckett Trilogy. Others embrace the generous resources at their disposal, such as Robert Lepage’s technologically advanced work. The stage for Actor was entirely bare but Bunkall endowed spaces

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26 I saw The Beckett Trilogy on May 11th, 2002 at the Harbour Commissioner’s Office in Belfast, Northern Ireland. My performance analysis is based on this experience and reviews of the production.
with being different locations, such as waiting outside of the audition room with other (imagined) actors and coming home to disappointed parents.

As a consequence of this sparseness the rehearsal time was less divided by competing elements and provides greater opportunity to craft each in more detail. Even within our abbreviated rehearsal schedule we still had more time for detail. Bunkall relished the focus on this craft, “As an actor, it is a rare gift to have the director’s attention aimed solely at my performance” (Bunkall) and that, whilst it is hard work, the culminating performance has greatly benefitted from that attention to detail and provided security and confidence for the actor. For example, we rehearsed over and over again the sequence of quick character changes in the audition scene until they were perfect and embedded in Bunkall’s body memory. In Chapter Four the interviewed practitioners also agree that time and detail is afforded in the solo process.

*Medea Redux* shared the same rehearsal time frame as *Actor* but the work was focused on sub-text and stillness, compared to *Actor’s* frenetic pace and physicality. Billington arrived at the first rehearsal of *Medea Redux* with most of her lines learned. We took a considerable amount of time to analyse the script together. Billington had been rehearsing in isolation and wanted to check that her vision of the play matched mine. Billington’s own process involved analysis and memorisation and then the physicality: “As an actor I find that the words are the foundation, the bones and the movement comes out of those words, they move the bones. If I start moving before I have the words I don’t have the underlying reason for it, I don’t have the bones underneath the movement” (Billington, “Personal Interview 16th Dec, 2013”). The physical score of *Medea Redux* involved only the very smallest of movements, reflecting the character’s containment of her emotions and reluctance to expose vulnerability.

In contrast to *Actor*, LaBute’s *Medea Redux* is a single voice, a woman relaying her version of events leading up to the murder of her own child. Aside from *Actor*, I had directed Bunkall in Daniel Keene’s solo short play *Dog* (1999) that also had a single voice. He identifies the different challenge of this:

> When performing just one character’s journey it is important to plot the pace of the piece in order to break up the character’s rhythm so he/she doesn’t become too monotonous. Or if it is important to be monotonous, then to use the monotony wisely and with purpose. (Bunkall)
Our main work with Medea Redux was to discover the changes in the text between beats (in rhythm and objectives) and to consider eye contact and connection with the audience. What was the journey of the piece as a whole? Who was she talking to? This involved incredibly detailed work, analysing line by line. In only a short period of time we could afford the time and scrutiny because of the one-on-one relationship and the simplicity of stage and set. And because it was a solo it needed this emphasis on detail. With all eyes focused on one performer and minimal scenography it is the strength and precision of the actor's work that holds the audience’s attention. Medea Redux highlighted this detailed, yet minimalistic quality and drew my attention as a director into achieving this through textual analysis and a close reading of all aspects of the acting.

With a growing body of solo directing projects I was able to engage more fully with a critical PaR methodology, acknowledging that “all forms of research and knowing involve a process” (Nelson 46) and particularly that this process came from temporal reflection. Now that I knew the solo process afforded time for exploration at this level, with Falling in Like I tried specific new approaches to solo work. In the context of solo performance, I wanted to incorporate acting exercises that would develop character—such as improvisations around the given circumstances of the play’s themes. In Falling in Like this work would focus on the direct address to audience that is sustained throughout (see DVD Example 2. Appendix 3). I had been reluctant to use much improvisation because I felt unsure of the success and benefits of doing this and that it might be awkward for the performer to improvise alone. I had often employed improvisation in multi-cast plays, for example, using hot-seating with the multi-cast of Sam Shepard’s Red Cross. However, after my work with Bunkall and Billington, I felt confident to begin to try new approaches. I asked Brigden to explore the internal monologue of the character by improvising the character’s arrival at the cafe, imagining other people who might be seated close by and consider how the character might acknowledge the other patrons. After this exercise, Brigden became more truthful and more confident in her character’s objectives and actions. I also spoke the whole text to Brigden early on in the process to let her hear the character’s voice from another perspective—similar to the use of an ensemble workshop in PocaHAUNTuS in Chapter Six. We also worked with beats and objectives that were helpful in establishing the changes in rhythm and intention over the duration of the performance. The outcomes of these experiments were that we created a world for the character, a world normally created with the other characters/actors in rehearsal. Brigden found the process intimate:

27 The hot-seating exercise involves the actor (in character) being questioned about their character and responding ‘in’ character. For example, asking Hamlet “Why do you feel so desperate?” and the actor/character replying “I am just so messed up about Dad”.

[...] there was time to explore the character fully and experiment with ideas so I felt more involved in the theatre making ... We explored Stanislavskian units and objectives and improvised ideas around “waiting” to deepen understanding of the character’s potential anxiety and how this might be outwardly or subtly conveyed. (Brigden)

Brigden was actively involved in decision-making that came about from freely exploring our connections to the work. For example, Brigden improvised how she might consult her watch as she gave her lover his final chance to arrive. Together we improvised different waiting scenarios, such as waiting for exam results, a long delayed flight and anticipating the exchange of wedding vows. From this work Brigden “found” her version that suited the character and I was able to evaluate her choices from my directorial perspective. In all my experiences of directing solo performance, each actor has expressed satisfaction in being more involved in the creating of the show, such as Beauchamp’s earlier comments about greater collaboration. This can be attributed to the fact that most of the conversations about choices are between the actor and the director, so there is a sense of mutual input. Even though several actors were involved with each production of *The Vagina Monologues*, they also achieved this sense of involvement.

In my first production of *The Vagina Monologues* in 2007 I employed three actors, with each performer assuming several roles. Our initial explorative work was undertaken together, finding our mutual connections to the work and sharing our own stories. The majority of the time I worked one-on-one with the actor in concentrated and intimate rehearsals. With a strong text, experienced actors and the unified approach, we worked with great joy and efficiency. In 2010 I encountered *The Vagina Monologues* again when I co-directed with Megan Peacock-Coyle at Hawke’s Bay Opera House. This time we worked with eight actors and with the knowledge that the monologues were well crafted and that the rehearsal process would focus on finding authenticity in the delivery of each one.

In both productions of *The Vagina Monologues*, the fourteen monologues were evenly distributed amongst the cast. Directing three actors on the fourteen monologues, as opposed to eight actors, meant that I was pushing for a greater range within those three actors. With three actors there was a greater challenge to character delineation. This experience honed my directing skills in finding those distinct characters and when I approached a single actor with multiple characters, like *Actor*, I was well equipped to work in this area.
Working with several actors on different “Vagina” monologues, involved a similar approach to previous solo directing. However, the fact that the monologues all shared the same theme made this process less isolated and it benefitted from the shared input. The particular content of The Vagina Monologues, intimate stories drawn from real life accounts that included sexual abuse and war crimes, understandably impacted on the rehearsal room process. Many of the actors were strongly affected by the material, empathising with the women and relating the text to their own experiences. It sometimes meant that we explored dark and painful experiences. This meant proceeding with sensitivity, but also, for me, it meant still ensuring that the audience received the best possible rendition of the monologues. The personal nature of the content lent itself to a more collaborative approach where I found myself listening a lot more. Beauchamp, a mother and grandmother, recalls:

It was a collaboration where we sat and talked about the piece and how it might be presented. Sally asked me to explore how the character might be feeling in a variety of ways. It was a very personal piece which I connected to and Sally asked me to put the sympathy aside and present it in a very matter of fact way which did not elicit sympathy but which made the piece much more powerful. (Beauchamp)
Ensler makes suggestions in her director’s notes on the presentation of *The Vagina Monologues*: “The performers must read from script cards as opposed to memorisation … The show works best with a simple presentation, so adding movement or “staging” during the monologues is not necessary” (“V-Day: A Global Movement to End Violence Against Women and Girls Worldwide”). However there is scope for variation: our actors did memorise their monologues because it helped them inhabit the stories more fully, and we made staging decisions that best served the intentions of each actor/character and monologue. For instance, the monologue *The Flood*, based on interviews with older women who had not openly discussed their vaginas before, had a reflective tone best suited to stillness. In contrast, *The Vagina Workshop*, delivered by Andrea Brigden, was much more dynamic, traversing the opera house stage, appropriate to this younger woman and the inter-activeness of the ‘workshop’. The polylogue form presents a somewhat different working environment in that though you are mostly working with the individual actors, a sense of ensemble with the other actors is equally important: “I loved feeling part of a strong female
chorus who all came from different backgrounds and were different ages yet felt connected. It was one of the most powerful and moving experiences of my life” (Beauchamp).

In the rehearsal room of *The Vagina Monologues* I became much more aware of how personal stories, both biographical and autobiographical, could affect the directing process. This would become an important observation in this thesis, and particularly in the PaR project *PocaHAUNTus*. Working with personal content demanded a different engagement on my behalf, more sensitive but also requiring greater criticality. When I critiqued the acting in *Falling in Like* or *Actor*, I could be more robust in my feedback because there was not immediate personal content to consider. In *The Vagina Monologues* I began to find ways of critiquing that acknowledged the vulnerability of the actor but also empowered and motivated the performer, and performance. The relationship between director and solo performer could be a close and effective one.

**Relationships, Collaboration, Negotiation and Shared Language**

Pinney believes that directing solo performance, at its creative and productive best, values a long-term interpersonal relationship, reserves agency in decision-making for both participants and acknowledges the unique aspects of each new one-on-one relationship (189). In my solo directing experience the most productive rehearsal approach has been to establish an effective working relationship that acknowledges shared agency but gives priority to discovering the very best theatrical choices for an audience.

My relationship with Brooke Williams began when I directed her in a text-based multi-cast play as part of my director training at Toi Whakaari. I had also seen Williams perform her self-devised solo *Flash Trash* as part of Toi Whakaari’s 2006 Go Solo season. With *Flash Trash*’s surreal qualities, it suggested that we shared some theatrical interests. In *Porcelain Grin*, Williams and I were co-devisers and co-writers. I was director, producer and dramaturg. Williams was the primary writer, co-deviser and performer. These roles were not fixed and changed over the course of rehearsals. Being collaborative meant that we fully negotiated on all decisions, including design. It was not always easy to make collective decisions and Williams was keen to retain many of her ideas. And I had conflicting concerns. As a director I wanted to clarify the rules governing the performance but also make the environment conducive to creativity and resist the notion of ‘locking down’ the show too early on.
As Pinney observed: “When directing a solo show, I often find myself not leading, but following, even looking over my shoulder, as I follow this actor into her own experience” (188). In the early stages I was William’s playmate, a co-collaborator and contributed ideas. As time went on, I became the guide and shaper of the work but was following Williams’ lead down the creative path. Pinney argues “decisions that belong historically to the director may need to be negotiated differently in a one-on-one relationship” (188). As the director, I felt I should be able to answer fundamental dramaturgical questions for Williams, such as “Will the audience be able to follow the story?” However I was not sure that I was able to make these evaluations from a critical viewpoint. We both struggled with decision-making because we had become so entwined in the work. My director’s role, to stand outside the work and critique felt compromised by being so involved in the process.

Williams did the majority of the script writing. She felt the solo form was intrinsically connected to our own individual ways of seeing the world:

Mainly because the solo form usually ends up speaking about loneliness in some shape or form. This does not mean that you are necessarily making theatre about your own direct experiences, but anything you put on stage is directly related back to you as there is no one else. (Williams)

This comment suggests that the audience would critique Williams, not only on her performance, but also on her writing and her view of the world as presented through her devised work. In Chapter Six Melissa Billington relates to this and shares the vulnerability of authorship. As the director of new solo work, there needs to be sensitivity and support around the debuting of both the work and the performer.

In developing Porcelain Grin our working relationship was strained at times. When the devising process stalls it can create frustrations, and whilst tension can also occur when devising within a multi-cast, the solo process means that there may be just the two of you looking for ideas to move on forward – there may be fewer resources available. There were times of exasperation where we felt stuck in the room and paralysed with indecision and lack of cohesion and communication. Whilst we had a shared theatrical language from our training at Toi Whakaari that helped articulate elements of the performance, we were inexperienced devisers. My leadership felt challenged in such a collaborative process and as a relatively new director I was sometimes unsure of myself in the rehearsal room. We had to constantly renegotiate our roles. For example, I began as
co-devisor but during the process I became more focused on the production elements, such as publicity and design. On the opening night of Porcelain Grin we debuted ourselves, and our work together as recent drama school graduates - a vulnerable place - artistically, professionally and personally.

There were other relationships that emerged that helped to relieve these creative tensions. The dentist’s chair was pivotal and provided both the boundaries to play in and a physical provocation to us both and to the designers. Many rehearsal sessions were spent finding ways in which the dentist chair could transform – into a ship’s bow, a gym bench and more. Perhaps because the resources could be limited when devising with just two, we collaborated heavily with sound designer and composer Gil Craig – outside of the rehearsal room. The performance was punctuated with recorded narrative, the voice of the dentist and an array of music and sound effects – lots of nasty drilling sounds. As the director I became the mediator between these elements, consciously trying to find order and sense in the developing performance. The result of these artistic relationships, of negotiating and collaborating and finding a means of communicating was a strong final product. Reviewer John Smythe found Porcelain Grin to be “a highlight of the Fringe … [that] afford[ed] constant surprises and delight” (J. Smythe, “Visual Surprises and Delight”).

Fig. 8. Transforming the dentist’s chair, playing together in the rehearsal room of Porcelain Grin. Brooke Williams and Sally Richards. (Photographer Megan Peacock-Coyle)
Sam Bunkall was also a graduate of Toi Whakaari that meant that we had some similarities in ways of working and a theatrical language with both understood. This shared methodology and a questioning of the work, an ethos strongly promoted at Toi Whakaari, drove articulation. However Bunkall acknowledges the particular qualities of the relationship between director and solo performer. When discussing the intensity of rehearsals and the impact of being one-on-one, Bunkall felt that “this necessitates a patience and compassion from both parties and a heightened awareness and respect for the other person’s process and state of being” (Bunkall). This occurs more easily when we are face to face, just the two of us. An important benefit of this intense scenario is that a deeper and often more fruitful relationship is established but Bunkall also advises caution:

Communication must be clear, considerate and honest and boundaries must be respected. This is of course true of any professional rehearsal room but I think there is much more to lose when there are only two in the room if these principles are not adhered to, and possibly more to gain if they are. (Bunkall)

In my assessment the one-on-one engagement demands these qualities and also supports them. Communication is clear because it is usually between two people; it can be more considerate and supportive. If the relationship does breakdown then the only recourse is between those two people. When the relationship works then it can be an efficient and highly creative encounter. For example, although Bunkall and I were under time constraints we were able to navigate and negotiate our relationship easily. I can attribute this mostly to the one-on-one engagement, but also to a shared language and sensibility with Bunkall and a strong focus on answering questions that arose from the text. Whilst I also shared these qualities with Williams, the devising process had a language all of its own that we had yet to translate. With Actor we were really clear about the work we needed to do to bring the play from the page to stage. On Porcelain Grin we were creating in the rehearsal room, then committing it to the page.

Billington and I had worked together previously, on the premiere production of a two-hander called Winter by Diane Spodarek and on The Vagina Monologues in 2011. I had been impressed with her focus, stillness and corporeal awareness. For The Vagina Monologues Billington came so prepared that my directing role was more about critiquing performance, than collaborating together from the beginning. That whole process of exploring together had been by-passed. I attribute this to the thoroughness of her approach and her ability to analyse as she memorised the lines. Textual analysis was paramount in her process of discovery:
For me it always comes out of the words. It always comes out of exactly how the words are written by the playwright. That is the most informative ... I feel like I can take that base foundation of the words, the material, the fabric of the words and to start to manipulate that in terms of accent on words or the character’s regional accent and then the pacing and a lot of the pacing will be indicated by how it is written.

(Billington, “Personal Interview, 16th Dec, 2013”)

My role as the director in this scenario was to open the process to discourse. Billington and I had been working in isolation and we now needed to discuss our own interpretations of the script and then discover the acting and staging choices. Because of Billington’s intensely text-based approach to both Medea Redux and The Vagina Monologues, the text became a third player in the room and in line with Katie Mitchell and Amy Pinney’s advice, the text served as a form of mediation when Billington and I disagreed, or became unsure. With Actor, and with the other text based solo works I have undertaken, the text becomes much more active in the process. It becomes the primary other relationship to negotiate and collaborate with. In the early phase of rehearsal both the actor and I share work equivalent to the role of dramaturg in the close examination we give to the script. Later, as we begin to stage the work, we settle into role boundaries between director and actor that are closer to those guiding work on a multi-cast production. As discussed in Chapter Six, the late arrival of the completed script during our work on PocaHAUNTus, and the autobiographical content, would render this kind of text-based mediation more challenging.

LaBute’s text was also an important element in the rehearsal room for Falling in Like. Like Medea Redux, the language is conversational but deeply nuanced, determined by laconic rhythms. The highly crafted scripts provided a solid foundation to begin to build a performance on. For a solo performer, LaBute had expedited some of the rehearsal process by the actual shape of his writing. For example, in Falling in Like we know the shape and rhythm, and intent of delivery from the ways the lines are written:

This is our, I don’t know, whatchamacallit, our spot, I guess. “Our rendezvous.” I’m not sure if that actually means a place or not. Does it? I’m not certain, actually; it’s one of those words that doesn’t come up all the often, I mean, like, in regular conversation – it doesn’t. “Rendezvous.” So when you use it, throw it in sentence … you really should be careful. I believe it’s French. (LaBute, Wrecks 119)
I had known Brigden for several years and had observed her solo work in the 2011 production of *The Vagina Monologues* that I had co-directed. I felt assured of her ability to carry a solo performance. She is a charming performer with a vulnerability and quirkiness that is very watchable. Our established relationship and our working environment were conducive to the intimacy of solo work:

I felt very much at ease in the rehearsal room with Sally in this one-on-one situation. In the early rehearsal period we were able to rehearse at Sally’s home so it was a very comfortable environment and we would usually ease into the rehearsal with a chat first before transitioning into the intensity of rehearsal. Communication was more intimate than working with a director and a large cast. It felt ‘safer’ to explore ideas more intensely and Sally had the time to explore and improvise with me. (Brigden)

Perhaps Brigden's comfort was also due in part to the fact that I was growing more confident in this territory: a combination of a playwright’s strong style that I was familiar with, an actor I had an existing relationship with, the full support of a production team and a growing expertise in directing solos. I was sustained by a developing PaR methodology that accommodated new approaches, analysis, reflection and documentation.

All of these solo productions reconnected existing working relationships. With the actors I was often able to expedite the process because we could communicate clearly and they were familiar with my approach to working. As well as Pinney, the majority of the practitioners that I surveyed, particularly Judy Hegarty Lovett and Willem Wassenaar in Chapter Four, advocate these long-term relationships, where the director and actor fully understand each other’s creative process. In my interviews with Indian Ink in Chapter Five, director Justin Lewis also discusses the challenges when the company works with new actors for the multi-cast productions and how they must spend considerable time getting to know each other before any work can begin. When Lewis works with solo actor Jacob Rajan they can begin at once.

**Role of the Director – What the Solo Performer Requires of the Director**

In interviewing Williams for this thesis some years after *Porcelain Grin*, I found that she had developed clear ideas about what she needs from a director in a devising process. Her retrospective
feedback about her work is a reflection from the perspective of a more experienced performer/maker than she was at the time of our work together on *Porcelain Grin*:

> I think giving deadlines is good. For example, “Tomorrow I want to see five different versions of the scene where Mary finds out her father has died”. Provocations are also good. For example, “Go away and make a five minute piece using a teacup and a sheet with thirty seconds of repeated action and thirty seconds slow motion”. (Williams)

In addition to the practical and productive approach, Williams wants her creativity to be challenged and stimulated by provocations that “encourage the actor to think outside the box and explore theatrical languages … It just keeps things fresh and keeps possibilities open” (Williams). She likes feedback on how to take things further, and questions and curiosity from a director but also pragmatism - being given very specific tasks within a finite timeframe. During *Porcelain Grin* we were testing out these qualities, discovering what we both needed to be productive and creative. In retrospect I learnt a great deal about my directing practice and style in this process – particularly about retaining leadership and assertiveness that would motivate and move the work forward. Devising new solo work is a hothouse for learning. Many of the devising principles that emerged from this process were tested again with *PocaHAUNTus* and required further modification to accommodate the autobiographical content.

Similar to Williams, Bunkall required concise feedback on what he was presenting in the rehearsal room. Bunkall was rarely “in the moment” to such a degree that he could not also acknowledge what he might unconsciously be doing whilst performing. However, he needed an additional perspective from his own, being bereft of other actors in the rehearsal, thus there is a greater reliance on the feedback of the director, to bridge the gap:

> As an actor you learn a lot about the character from the way he/she listens and interacts with others – after all acting is reacting. But in solo performance, you can only listen and react to the audience – and in the rehearsal room this is the director. So there is a much great reliance on the actor/director relationship – you only have each other to bounce off. (Bunkall)

For example, Bunkall would create a sequence of movements that he hoped made clear distinctions between characters. I was able to observe and then describe what he was doing and ask, “Is this what you intended?”, or more directly, “Let’s try it another way”. He needed support and encouragement that he was doing a good job and to know I was attentive. Bunkall needed honesty
and trust from our relationship. He needed me to be calm. The open laughter that he received in rehearsals was helpful in indicating the acceptance and enjoyment by myself as director and as proxy audience. However, what the director finds amusing or engaging might be off the mark. Bunkall notes: “they are not as fresh and detached from the story as an audience is so it is something different” (Bunkall). In Chapter Four actor/writer Henri Szeps considers responses from the director are often misleading. Szeps has observed that the director in rehearsal often finds the same things amusing every time – a suggestion of their own sense of humour rather than being indicative of an audience. An audience can be much more unpredictable. However, the director as proxy audience is also the expert audience because they are familiar with every aspect of the piece, after viewing and scrutinising it so many times. The core principle here, is that the director must retain his or her criticality, despite the familiarity that solo performance encourages by having being focused on one actor.

Another option for retaining criticality in the viewing of the work is to present the emerging work to a trial audience, as Indian Ink and many other companies and practitioners do. In my experience, the collaborators that come on board closer to opening night, such as lighting and sound designers and operators often provide useful feedback. For Porcelain Grin we had a viewing of the work-in-progress to a small group of colleagues. I recall this being a tense moment for all, apprehensive of how it would be received, but the feedback was productive. On other occasions the feedback has been misdirected, for instance, providing a critique of the acting when we had been looking for an assessment of narrative clarity. The director needs to make it clear to any observers about what sort of feedback is needed and to carefully filter this back to the actor.

In Billington’s view, the role of the director is to be a bridge, or indeed filter, between the performer and the potential audience. The director’s position involves trust, exercising care – a maternal, nurturing role as discussed earlier and in Chapter Six. Billington does not seem to need a lot of the preliminary exploratory work on the script with the director because she has been comprehensively researching and analysing as she goes. However, she still needs a level of conversation with the director about her discoveries, either a confirmation or challenge to her perspective on the text. She relies on the theatrical expertise of the director.

Because Brigden and I rehearsed intermittently, she also did a lot of her preparation independently, interpreting the script as she learnt her lines. Brigden was familiar with my directing process and was able to apply some of the questioning of the script herself and in turn bring those discoveries to rehearsals. What she required from me, more than anything else was support and
reassurance. As is clear from the previous examples, this need for encouragement was common to all of the actors I interviewed – a reflection of the anxiety of performing alone. Beauchamp also appreciated the opportunities to learn more about herself as a performer through working one-on-one where the director committed, “To listen, to observe and offer genuine feedback. To value the strengths of the actor and help overcome any weaknesses. To ensure the actor sees the story behind the monologue” (Beauchamp). The content of the solo rehearsals for *The Vagina Monologues* was intense. Working in isolation sometimes inflamed the actor’s anxieties about their individual performances. When all the women involved in *The Vagina Monologues* came together as an ensemble they felt reassured by the camaraderie, by seeing each other perform and by sharing their rehearsal experiences. Again, I was reminded of the sensitivity required in my role as the director, and that in the absence of other actors, I was the solo performer’s confidant.

These solo actors required from me, as their director, a combination of assertive leadership and collaboration that allowed for creativity and growth. They needed encouragement, support and honesty in the clear articulation of what I, as the director, was seeing from my perspective as proxy audience. These attributes in a director are echoed in the following chapter in interviews with practitioners in the field of solo performance. The audience has further requirements from both the director and the solo performer.

**Bridging the Theatrical Space - From Performer to Director to Audience**

Solo performance necessitates a strong connection between performer and audience – the performer’s greatest challenge is to hold the audience’s attention, captivating them with their story alone. In the rehearsal room, in the absence of audience, the director attempts to bridge this gap. The solo actor must consider their relationship to their audience very carefully. Whether acknowledged through direct address or not, the audience are the people to whom the character is talking. The actor-audience relationship can take many forms. In some shows the audience are themselves and the performer is talking directly to them as an acknowledged group of people, as was the case with Spalding Gray’s *Swimming to Cambodia* (1985). Sometimes the solo performer will set up a specific relationship – i.e. if the actor is playing a teacher talking to “pupils” the audience becomes the pupils, or a lecturer to his gathered audience as in Geoff Chappelle’s *Hatch or the Flight of the Penguins* (2007). Sometimes the character is talking to an imaginary person or to herself, like the woman in *Falling in Like* and thus the audience is the character’s imaginary recipient. Sometimes the fourth wall is up and the audience is just a witness, such as in Samuel
Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*, and *Medea Redux* where the character is delivering a police statement (see DVD Example 3. Appendix 3). In all these scenarios, the audience is all the performer has to bounce off, so they are needed and heard and responded to in a more immediate way than in many multi-cast plays. If the fourth wall is up in a multi-cast play, the characters bounce more off each other and feed on the resulting energy of the audience. The story can continue without this relationship because there are other relationships at play. But not so in a solo performance, as Bunkall articulates: “The audience are the raison d’etre of the character. Otherwise it’s a story falling in the woods with no one around to hear it” (Bunkall). A possible exception to this is when the solo actor plays multiple characters, as in *No.2*, where conversations can occur between the characters that also include the audience as a point of reference or collusion.

Each of these interactions between the solo performer and the audience will demand different skills from the actor, and different attention from the director in the rehearsal room. In each case the relationship with the audience needs to be clear from the outset and consistent. It is particularly important for the audience of solo performance to understand the theatrical rules of any given performance because one performer, in their singularity, is already presenting a considerable challenge to suspend disbelief.

Williams derives great pleasure from solo work because of the opportunities for “honesty, potency and ability for the performer to have an intense relationship to the audience” (Williams). She regards the audience as of paramount importance and also the source of great enjoyment, learning and satisfaction as a performer:

It makes you so vulnerable as a performer but you can learn so much. You have to be present, you have to be in the moment, you have to be real because you are the only one there, it is your story and you have invited these people to engage with it. I think solo work teaches clarity of story telling, stagecraft and connection with audience. (Williams)

To consider how the audience receives the story is the primary role for the director in solo performance. I became aware of the importance of the audience early on in rehearsals for *Porcelain Grin*, as the narrative existed in a surreal world where ‘things were not quite right’. As proxy audience I was looking for the rules for the performance so that the audience could follow the journey of the character(s). The rules eventually came from imposing a routine that Lotte, the main character, would follow and ensuring the other characters Williams portrayed were distinctly different. Lotte’s routine was punctuated by visits to the dentists where she was alone, unwatched in
the consulting room and then when she was under the watchful eye of the dentist. There was also a recorded third person narrative in the style of fairy tales: “Once upon a time in the depths of Kilbirnie there lived a little girl by the name of Lotte Greensleeves. Lotte was an unfortunate little girl, for when God was handing out looks, Lotte was looking the other way” (Porcelain Grin 2007). The verbal and visual repetition of Lotte’s routine helped build the form. Williams also sensed the precarious nature of not knowing what we the end product would be:

It is weird to devise without an audience, as it can be overwhelming trying to imagine how an audience will respond to your work. You have to be incredibly clear and focused to engage in solo work. Your vision must be strong and the work is in some way important because otherwise it is easy to swerve off the track, lose faith and end up doing nothing.

During rehearsals of Porcelain Grin I was acutely aware of keeping us on track and motivated. The momentum required by two is arguably greater than a multi-cast as we only had each other to provide stimulus to the creative process. At times, we sometimes suffered from malaise, typical of most rehearsal rooms, but again with only the two of us to motivate progress. To combat this, I planned each rehearsal and constantly reviewed our progress - for example, we would spend an allotted time creating new ideas, and showing them, and then we would review the material we already had. As the director, I attempted to fulfill the missing personnel in the rehearsal room – to be the playful fellow actors, the designers and the dramaturg. In each of these roles, and as a researcher in a mode of PaR, I needed to participate critically in the process. And, like Williams, I wanted the production to get to the point where we could evaluate its narrative arc, by viewing the whole performance.

Once the show opened it was evident how much Williams enjoyed the interaction with the audience. Her engagement, her playfulness with the audience was key to the show’s success. Williams describes the role of the audience and how there was a different collective to play with each night:

With a multi-cast play you are obviously working collectively as a cast and with a director to nut out the rhythm and pace of each scene and in performance you have the other actors driving that with you. In solo work the audience takes over that role. They are the other actors

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28 Kilbirnie is a Wellington suburb.
essentially. You have to be very in touch with them and play with them to determine where you pitch yourself. And that changes every night.

In the rehearsal room, in the absence of that audience, the director must bridge that space between performer and spectator. Ideally the director can respond from multiple perspectives, critiquing afresh with each performance as it is viewed. Williams, and the other actors in this chapter, all continued to happily receive feedback from me once the show had opened. My expert eye, so very familiar with all aspects of the performance, continued to be valued by the actor. In addition to this I was also able to gauge the audience’s reaction each night and report back on that. However, as queried by Pinney, perhaps there is also the danger of the director losing criticality and delivering an unproductive level of hyper-criticism to the solo performer.

Billington also places value on this role of the director as proxy audience. She proposes that the dialogue that you have with other characters in a multi-cast play, in a solo occurs internally in the one character. Then there is the dialogue with the audience. I was the audience throughout rehearsals but was also scrutinising her performance on a completely different level:

Sally is a tougher and more skilled audience than my friends. I can pass ideas by my friends, but the transformation of those ideas into any effective form of theatre requires that skilful witness and co-creator who knows both the process of the actor AND the average mind of the audience and can thus be a bridge between the actor-in-process and the audience’s needs or expectations. (Billington, “Personal Interview, 16th December, 2013”)

This ‘actor-in-progress’ can be vulnerable, especially in the early phases of rehearsal. I argue that the director is both a bidirectional mirror and proxy audience - encouraging openness and creativity, and not disregarding of nascent ideas from the performer. However, as actor Jacob Rajan discusses in Chapter Five, he does not want the director to be a “stroker”, preferring instead that the director employ complete honesty. As we see in Chapter Six, even greater vulnerability can occur when the material being developed in the rehearsal room is based on the actor’s own autobiographical material.

The character in Falling in Like directly addresses the audience as she talks about her relationship with the man she is waiting for at a café for who never arrives (see DVD Example 2. Appendix 3). It is the single inner voice of the character. The text assisted in this relationship as “the monologue was very colloquial and was written as a stream of consciousness which added to
the intimacy between the character/actor and the audience” (Brigden). Brigden describes the relationship thus:

The audience’s role is as a (collective) confidant in this solo performance. The relationship between the character and the audience is very intimate, as is the actor/audience relationship. As an actor in solo performance, I felt I needed to pull the audience in close to me and maintain a level of intensity in my performance that would keep them fully engaged and ‘on my side’. Unlike in a multi-cast play, there is nothing else happening on stage to pull their focus away from the solo performer. (Brigden)

The audience of solo performance has fewer physical elements to observe therefore their attention is more focused on the singular actor. Under this sort of scrutiny from the audience, director and solo performer must pay great attention to every detail. Bunkall realised that “If you ask a bunch of people to look at a man sitting in a chair for twenty minutes, you can bet they will be reading into his every movement. They will expect it to be crafted so that everything carries meaning and has a direct relation to the progress of the piece” (Bunkall). An audience listens, looks and reacts differently to one performer than to many, they are engaged in a much more singular and focused way. Robert Lepage also identifies this as a different experience for audiences who are used to being a “collectivity looking at a collectivity” (Lepage). The intensity that occurs between the solo performer and director in the rehearsal room is emulated in the relationship between audience and solo performer.

Of the five case studies discussed in this chapter, *The Vagina Monologues* has possibly the most robust relationship with an audience. Many audience members find the show confronting in its content but also in its direct address and audience participation. Beauchamp recognised the uniqueness of the interaction: “I have always enjoyed entertaining an audience but this was so different. To take the audience on such a rollercoaster ride. To feel their emotion and know this was reaching them at such a deep level was very humbling” (Beauchamp). The performers needed to be aware that the performance might elicit strong responses and to prepare themselves for this sort of interaction, including laughter. We had rehearsed mostly one-on-one, without an audience, but the eight-actor production of *The Vagina Monologues* was performed in a 900 seat tiered opera house. The much bigger audiences significantly impacted the performers – they had to adapt to the larger space and to the vigorous response from the audience – pace, projection and timing were all adjusted. However, from the responses of audience members that I encountered during the sell-out season, the monologues had retained the impact and intimacy that we had sought in rehearsals.
Each solo performance must clearly establish what is the relationship with the audience. The director’s role is to monitor the clarity of the interaction between performer and audience. It is heightened in solo performance because the audience relationship is much more direct. Consequently the director’s work involves scrutinising detail, providing critical feedback as proxy audience. The director as this sort of bidirectional mirror can provide many of the qualities required and exceed the limits of the solo performer’s self-evaluation.

**Mirror in the Rehearsal Room - Directors as Bidirectional Mirrors**

As part of my retrospective analysis of the solo performances in this chapter, I asked each actor to consider how the director might function as a metaphorical mirror for the solo performer. All the actors found the metaphor useful but interpreted the mirror idea in different ways, determined by the different solo forms they were working with.

When I directed *Porcelain Grin* in 2007 I was only just beginning to think about how the director might be some sort of mirror to the performer. At the time I was more aware of how I was perceived/viewed by the performer. Pinney suggests the mirror is not a simple reflection but that the director witnesses the performer and the performer witnesses the director (186). This exchange between artists is discussed throughout this thesis. Williams says of the process: “It requires constant self examination and it is very revealing. I think you have to be brave to perform and or direct solo work. It is rigorous work that requires vulnerability and strength in equal measures” (Williams). Both Williams and I were looking with great scrutiny into our own metaphorical mirror - self-evaluating.

For Bunkall the director responded to the performer with a real-time immediacy, more active than a staid mirror, more as a co-participant. He relates this back to the proxy audience:

[…] the director has to participate much more actively than when directing a larger group. With a larger group, the play often occurs between the characters but is shared with the audience. In solo performance, the audience IS the other character(s). Therefore it is harder for a solo director to step outside and shape the performance objectively because their input as the other person is just as important during rehearsals. They constantly have to be participating too. In other words, if the performer needs to talk to the audience directly, then
the director needs to be that audience. In that way the “mirroring back” to the performer is often more in the moment – i.e. rather than taking notes to be discussed afterwards, the director will be naturally giving their feedback directly by reacting to the performer as they perform in real time. (Bunkall)

Here the director as mirror begins to become reflexive, functioning with cause and effect as is its mandate. This reflexive action was most apparent in the rehearsal process for Actor, perhaps due to the demands of Actor’s multiple voices and the vast amount of physical action that was occurring right in front of me. The robust nature of the piece demanded an immediate response from the mirror. I felt more like Boal’s co-actor offering an exaggerated reflection to help him see his performance as it is (would be) seen. The delivery of the text and the choreographed movement was extremely fast paced and I instinctively mirrored the animated nature of Bunkall’s characters - thus the bidirectional nature of this mirror. Whilst I usually take notes as I observe in rehearsals, instead I needed to respond in quick time too. In fact, in most of my experiences of directing solo performance I gave notes in the moment, much more so than with the multi-cast where breaking the flow often means some actors will be left sitting around. I felt much more present and more active in my responding and also greater ease in interrupting one actor, than many.

The director as a bidirectional mirror is imbued with more involvement, more action. Brigden saw my participation, for example, where I had also improvised different ways of waiting, as a form of modelling or mirroring: “Sally often modelled improvisations for me in the early stages of rehearsal. This was very useful and helped me to see the character from the audiences’ perspective” (Brigden). Likewise, for Beauchamp, the director is representing the audience’s possible response and actively: “Asking me to think about how I was presenting the piece, about particular phrases and how that might affect the audience’s perception and reaction” (Beauchamp). The roles of director, mirror and audience become conflated – thus the director as proxy audience and mirror. Billington believes the audience’s role as witness or mirror is closely connected to the audience as a community, like Lepage’s “collectivity”:

With a multi-cast play, there is a sense of being within a community of the story - even if characters are at odds, they exist together in ‘the world of the play’. In a solo performance though, there may be different characters, but one actor plays them all and so the audience becomes that wider community. (Billington, “Personal Interview, 16th Dec 2013”)
Billington makes the audience another character and this is perhaps where we discovered ambiguity with the fourth wall in *Medea Redux* (see DVD Example 3. Appendix 3). LaBute’s script does not stipulate a setting for *Medea Redux*. A tape player is specified, and that it is on and recording. We can deduce from the text that she is “alone in what seems like an interrogation room. She addresses an unseen listener … She, like many of LaBute’s characters, indeed like LaBute himself as a playwright, prefers to work by indirection” (Bigsby 31). This indirection had some interesting results in performance of *Medea Redux* when the lone protagonist asks at the start of the play: “You can hear me okay right? can ya? I guess so …” (LaBute, *Bash* 75). On more than one occasion audience members responded directly to the character/actor. Perhaps LaBute’s intent is to create this uncertainty. The audience felt they could engage with her. It highlighted, for me, how important the audience/performer relationship is in solo performance – in this case the audience is brought to a level of intimacy with the actor but is also an implicit witness to the woman’s confession.

The mirror metaphor was useful to me because I was examining my own practice too. I was looking at the actor as a bidirectional mirror, seeking feedback on my directing practice. Whilst looking at the solo performer’s body language, facial expressions and their response to my direction, I was also assessing my own skills as a director. I could assess cause and effect from their reactions to my direction. The mirror clarified my main task in directing solo performance – to articulate what I saw in front of me.

What is evident in the responses from these actors is that the director as a reflexive mirror is a helpful metaphor in lots of different ways – a mirror to see themselves, to evaluate their acting in, to encourage honesty, to bounce ideas off, to ask questions of and more. The outside eye of a director is crucial in solo performance because self-evaluating can be unreliable for the performer. A solo performer requires the specialised skills of a director – to appraise the performance critically and accurately from an audience’s perspective, to address the fundamental staging challenges, to negotiate the sharing of the directorial perspective when required and to understand the special challenges of the genre.

**Future Research – Research Provocations**

These five productions directed prior to embarking on this PhD provoked many questions about my directing practice in general and specifically about approaches to directing solo performance and how research into this area might inform theatre practice.
Porcelain Grin questioned how to let creativity continue whilst also ensuring a forward trajectory in an open-ended process like devising and when the devising team is predominantly performer and director. In this context, how do we manage production aspects – the deadlines from the producer, publicist and designer about what this show will be? What is the relationship between director and performer in solo performance, and how does it differ from the multi-cast devising? What is the best directing approach in the devising process of solo performance? What significance is there in following an idea of Williams’ rather than my own? From the positive reviews and audience responses to Porcelain Grin we knew that we achieved a theatrical, engaging solo performance. We had aspired to this sort of success but there were other benefits. Williams enthuses about the benefits that solo performance affords the actor, in regards to developing performance skills and tapping into creativity:

It is a concentrated expression of everything you need to be a skilled actor. Technical skill, a sense of rhythm and structure, the ability to fully engage an audience, clarity of vision and storytelling and so much more. I have learnt more doing one solo show that I have in any other job. I think every young actor should create a solo piece. It is a way to figure out your voice for creative expression and also engage with your curiosity. (Williams)

This summary by Williams captures the vital ingredients for solo performance - audience engagement, story and an actor’s virtuosity that is skillfully tuned to perfect pitch. A director is needed to evaluate these vital elements. In addition to the benefits for the actor, solos is also an opportunity for directors to sharpen their skills and awareness by focusing on theatre’s most necessary elements, and on the dynamics of a one-on-one artistic partnership. Anya Tate-Manning, recent director/facilitator of Toi Whakaari’s Go Solo season of graduating actors’ monologues clearly sees both actors and the director are pushed to their limits in this environment:

It is a simple, stark, revealing and sometimes terrifying form, one that requires honesty and diligence from the performer and constantly demanding connection with the audience. The performer cannot hide and cannot lie, even when performing a fiction. I love the revealing nature of solo work, and the different approach of each maker. As a director it’s like going to a theatrical gymnasium boot camp for four weeks and emerging a little battered but much more experienced. (Tate-Manning)
The learning opportunities appeared to be greater when the challenges were greater – in my experience this occurred most strongly with new devised work. I was unsure when directing *Porcelain Grin*, particularly our relationship and roles, but also with style and content. Experimenting with the methodology of devising, the challenge of solo performance as a performance genre and the tensions of working one-on-one intensified the learning experience. My methodology in creating *Porcelain Grin* was significantly different from my directing approach to other solo performance, it was more collaborative and required that I contribute content, guide the devising process, and in the later stages provide a dramaturgical perspective. Critiquing William’s own material required sensitivity but also robustness, and flexibility in the roles we took in the rehearsal room.

For Bunkall the solo show is “an opportunity to work with only the structural elements of theatrical performance that cannot be decorated, only refined so they are strong and precisely crafted” (Bunkall). In solo performance, in its often minimalist style, everything the audience is asked to pay attention to is intensely considered and crafted in great detail – a luxury and necessity that is afforded in the time and intensity of working one-on-one.

Billington was also working towards this sort of perfected detail in *Medea Redux*. My role was to report back on theatrical effect that she could not see/hear/feel when performing. For example, she was not aware of what she was doing with her hands and with very little physical action in the piece her hands resting on the table were a focal point – any minor movement would be acutely observed by the audience. In rehearsals I was able to function as a bidirectional mirror to her performance, providing a precise and articulated evaluation.

For Brigden, solo performance was an opportunity to have greater time to work in partnership with the director, to “explore and experiment with the character and the text with a partner to act as a mirror and provide the objective view of the audience” (Brigden). Beauchamp found many new perspectives on performing through her participation in *The Vagina Monologues*. She declares “I have viewed all my performances differently since *The Vagina Monologues*” (Beauchamp). Through the rehearsal process of solo performance she experienced a stronger and more purposeful relationship with the director, and with the content of the work and the audience.

The experience of directing solo performance has made me more conscious of the relationship with the audience and the artistic partnerships that are created in theatre making. It has made me question the most effective ways to approach the very particular circumstances of directing solo
performance. Bronwyn Tweddle, previous course coordinator for the Master of Theatre Arts in Directing at Toi Whakaari and Victoria University agrees that directing in the context of solo performance is useful for the trainee director:

I would agree with the argument that it is a great boot camp: as several challenges of directing (negotiation a relationship; how to give feedback; shaping the arc of the show; how to maintain energy across a rehearsal etc.) are intensified when directing a single person. (Tweddle)

As an emerging director I learnt much about my craft and about theatre during those first encounters with solo performance. I was excited and challenged by the work and to me that is a strong indication that there is a pedagogical benefit.

**Conclusion**

This retrospective analysis of my previous solo directing has provided an important reference-point in my PaR methodology. Whilst I was critiquing my directing process at the time (documenting, evaluating, revising and testing on a daily basis in rehearsals), I gained further insight when all of these different experiences were collated and analysed as a body of work. As Nelson often states “many things you do in a PaR process will be very similar to what you habitually do in making work. The key difference is that you will simultaneously and consciously be pursuing a research inquiry which is likely to require small additional tasks” (97). Building on the theoretical analysis of the genre of solo performance and directing from Chapters One and Two, and this examination of my own practice, in Chapters Four and Five I proceed to analyse the result of interviews with a range of international practitioners in the field. Much of the success of those interviews I believe can be attributed to my ability to enter these discussions from the position of an experienced practitioner and as a researcher. This integrated mode of questioning would continue through to my PaR work on *PocaHAUNTus* where I would test the ‘additional tasks’ for myself, approaches discussed by my interviewees, as well as consider specific challenges of the project, particularly how autobiographical content impacts on the process of creating a new solo performance.

In this chapter I make key observations about my practice centred on how the relationship between director and performer is affected by the particular parameters of solo performances – the demands of working one-on-one whilst addressing fundamental issues of staging, character
delineation, audience relationship and scenic choices. I observed and experienced how the relationship between director and solo performer navigates matters of leadership, collaboration and creative control. I discovered how understanding the performer’s relationship with the audience was crucial. I found effective approaches to directing solo performance that included greater participation and reflexivity and that the mirror is a useful metaphor for the directing of solo performance. I had considered how the director could be the best possible audience for an emerging work – one that is critical, honest and sensitive. I found that the actor and director could learn a great deal about theatre and practice by engaging in solo performance. In addition the parameters shift with different forms and styles of solo performance.

The devising of *Porcelain Grin*, creating a new text, presented the greatest challenge and adaption of my directing process. The relationships were more intense, personal, and our roles in the rehearsal room were shifting and ambiguous. These observations about working relationships also highlight how personalities in the rehearsal room are a significant variant on the process of creating solo performance. Character and text can be notably compromised and/or complemented by the solo performer. Traits and temperaments are, of course, a variant in any rehearsal rooms and in all relationships, but working exclusively with two personalities is a different experience to working with many. The director needs to be conscious of these impelling forces of personality as she proceeds in the rehearsal room.

The case studies in this chapter also begin to suggest some implications for my PaR methodology in the rehearsal room. Positioned as ‘insider’ I was documenting a “perspective valuable to practitioners in learning about processes and compositional strategies” (Nelson 89). In the next chapter I look to other practitioners in the field: directors, performers and writers and question their perspectives and experiences of the relationship between director and solo performer, across a broad selection of styles and forms. They, too, report back from the field by critically evaluating their own practice from within the creative process of theatre making. How might these practitioners help enlighten us to effective approaches to directing solo performances?
Chapter Four

Inside the Solo Rehearsal Room

Introduction

It was important to me that my research would become an accessible and helpful resource for directors working across the genre of solo performance and beyond, in accordance with “the noted disposition within the academy to share knowledge for the general good” (Nelson 37). Thus the ten examples addressed in this chapter offer a diverse range of rehearsal experiences - “a context in which knowing is possible in a variety of modes” (Nelson 83). The selection could have consisted of the most internationally acclaimed, high profile solo performance makers. Whilst I do engage with numerous high profile practitioners, my priority was to have access to a diverse range of current theatre makers who were willing to divulge their practice. I wanted living practitioners whom I could converse with about their current practice. It was also important for me to have some experience of the practitioners’ work and process – to have seen them in action was an important contribution to the PaR methodology. The geographic locale of New Zealand also determined the choice of practitioners and my access to them.

In this chapter I collate my interviews with a range of theatre practitioners about the rehearsal room processes of solo performance. These practitioners include directors, actors, writers and dramaturgs, thus offering multiple perspectives on solo performance and the interaction with the director. This discourse includes internationally acclaimed theatre practitioners Robert Lepage, Henri Szeps, Conor Lovett and Judy Hegarty Lovett and William Yang, and here in New Zealand Lynda Chanwai-Earle, Lyndee-Jane Rutherford, Miranda Harcourt and Willem Wassenaar. In addition to these interviews I observed in the rehearsal room of ImpoSTAR (2011), analysing the interaction between the director Rutherford and solo performer Jason Chasland. I consider and compare the resulting interview material and rehearsal observations in terms of the methodology and purpose of the work, particularly the special qualities of the solo rehearsal room, in contrast to the sole-charge solo performer and that of a multi-cast play. In discussing the material contributed by these practitioners, I focus firmly on the critical evaluation of process in the rehearsal room – the interviewees also serve as valuable models of PaR practitioners, all are regularly documenting and critiquing their own practice.
The interviewees were selected to represent solo performance practitioners working with a range of material, including autobiography, biography, adaptations, devised and existing texts. The material that they worked with influenced the process and the interaction between director and solo performer, challenging the collaborative qualities of working one-on-one and highlighting the relationship between performer and audience. These discussions consider the methodologies, roles, personalities, communications and the ways of viewing and responding that occur in the solo rehearsal room. They often relate their practice as research and comment on adjustments they have made in the rehearsal room to accommodate the genre of solo performance. The interviewees also respond to the potential of the director as a metaphorical mirror in the solo rehearsal room.

In addition to interviews, I observed rehearsals for *ImpoSTAR*, a solo based on autobiographical material from the performer. Analysing the relationship between director and performer in rehearsal, whilst not being directly involved in the process, provided another perspective of this interaction. However, I was also aware that my presence in the rehearsal room might obstruct the one-on-one relationship between director and performer – as discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Gay McAuley’s ethnographic studies. The rehearsal room is often a sacrosanct space where the secret business of creating occurs. While some performers, like Robert Lepage, offer opportunities for observation, others prefer to keep the rehearsal room door firmly closed. In addition to observing in the rehearsal room of *ImpoSTAR*, I asked the same questions of director Lyndee-Jane Rutherford as the other interviewees.29

Many of those I interviewed wore many hats for the projects they were discussing. The interviewees served not just as solo performer or director but could also be autobiographer, biographer, writer, dramaturg, producer and/or designer. For example, Lynda Chanwai-Earle was the performer and writer in *Ka-Shue* (*Letters Home*) (1995). In William Yang’s *Sadness* (1992) and Henri Szeps’ *Why Kids?* (2003), the performers were the sole creators and self-directed. Conor Lovett and Judy Hegarty Lovett adapted Samuel Beckett’s prose for the stage, for example, *First Love* (2008), thus continuing a long-term collaborative relationship as director and performer. Willem Wassenaar was a co-devisor on *Wolf’s Lair* (2009) until he took the mantle of director, whilst his co-devisor Roberts curtailed her writer mode to become performer. Robert Lepage was creator, director and performer in the original *Needles and Opium* (1991) but acknowledges an extended team of creators who developed the piece with him. He has also directed other actors in his solo roles. Miranda Harcourt worked as a devisor with the author of the script for *Verbatim*

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29 The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.
(1993) before engaging with a director. In the rehearsals I observed of *ImpoSTAR*, director Rutherford and actor Jason Chasland shared the role of dramaturg. The nature of solo performance in rehearsal, one-on-one, seems to lend itself to these multiple roles. It may be out of necessity that these extra tasks are taken on but it is also to do with maintaining creative control. Those roles need to be delineated and as rehearsals progress the roles return to a more clear cut actor and director partnership, as discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The actor and director often comprise the central relationship of solo projects. Alternatively, collaborators, like designers, are on board from the start, or at the other end of the spectrum the performer works in complete isolation. I analyse these collaborations along with the impact of the source material on the creative process. I begin with these starting points: First, I asked about the stories that inspire solo performance and what methodology and process followed. In the absence of a director I wondered where they sought reflection on their work – how could they self-evaluate? I queried the logistics of time, intensity and detail and how modifications to the rehearsal structure might be purposeful. I considered the director’s role in bridging the fundamental relationship between the performer and the audience. I queried mirror theories/systems, where the director is situated as a bidirectional mirror to the solo performer – providing an articulated reflection from the position of proxy audience. And finally I ask how directing solo performance could inform theatre practice more widely, including the directing of multi-cast plays – what could be learnt from working in the environment of solo performance?

**Talking with Solo Practitioners**

**Starting Points**

Creative origins are important in all artistic endeavours because they present the viewer with an insight into the artist’s world. They are of particular interest to solo performance because audiences more directly query ‘Who and what is before me?’ and perhaps presume that solo material is autobiographical, due to the personal encounter of a singular actor talking to the audience one-on-one. However, solo performance has many starting points. The *Guardian’s Andy Field reflects on the recent story-telling ventures of performers Daniel Kitson, Chris Goode and Polarbear:**
A well-constructed story, in its apparent simplicity, achieves what more elaborate forms of theatre have tried to for years, which is to seamlessly fold the audience's reality into theatrical fictions. On the simplest level a story is a group of people gathered at a particular time in a particular place. This kind of theatre is spun in the intimate space between one person speaking and the rest of us listening.

Stories and audiences are the essential elements to theatre. Solo performers begin with stories, either existing tales or new inventions born of the creator’s imagination. Some artists begin with their own stories about themselves such as Szeps and Yang. Others find an interest in biographical material, as Wassenaar and Harcourt do, or engage with existing stories like Lovett and Hegarty Lovett. Many performers and directors move between these sources, for example, Chanwai-Earle creating a hybrid between autobiography and an imagined theatrical world, or Lepage’s blend of recent history and autobiography. These projects differ in their origins and purpose, and this affects the methodology in the rehearsal room.

Many solo performances are based on existing texts that are predominantly narrative and character driven. Gare St Lazare Players Ireland tour a repertory of predominantly solo works, mainly originating from the prose of Samuel Beckett. The company’s joint artistic directors are husband and wife, Conor Lovett the performer and Judy Hegarty Lovett the director. This is a highly successful collaboration that has in the last fifteen years toured over sixty theatres in Ireland and eighty cities worldwide in twenty-five countries. As Irish theatre reviewer Ger Fitzgibbon declares:

Conor Lovett has emerged as a world-class interpreter and performer of Beckett’s prose. His work is a master class, demonstrating extraordinary magnetism and disarming directness, allied to a splendid physical precision, both working in the service of his and his director’s clear grasp of Beckett’s text.

In contrast to Gare St Lazare’s text-based solo performance, Quebecois performing artist Robert Lepage’s solo shows are largely created from a blend of autobiography and recent history. Lepage, and his company Ex Machina, are internationally renowned for creating epic, yet intimate productions that have challenged and provoked critics and audiences. Lepage’s work is essentially collaborative, cross-cultural and multidisciplinary: “bringing together actors, writers, set designers, technicians, opera singers, puppeteers, computer graphic designers, video artists, contortionists and
musicians” (“Ex Machina / Robert Lepage”). The result of Ex Machina’s creative process, that engages with diverse artists and geographic terrain, is imaginative, highly visual theatre that embraces innovative technologies. For example, the newer version of Needles And Opium, is described here by New Zealand Theatre critic John Smythe:

The set is actually half a box: two walls at right-angles and a floor, although each plane takes turns to be the floor or a wall as the structure – and the intersecting stories contained within – turn mesmerizingly on a hidden mechanism. Doors, windows, hatchways, trapdoors, beds and small furnishings appear and disappear, as back-projections – often extremely realistic, sometimes sublimely abstract – paint the planes to relocate the action. An invisible team of nine operate the show backstage. (“Absorbing Stories and Theatrical Magic”)

This description gives an insight into the complexity of Lepage’s solo work and the necessary involvement of other collaborators, in rehearsal and in performance. Lepage might discover the starting ideas of a solo show alone in his hotel room on tour, however, he works closely with Ex Machina collaborators in creating his solo shows, including Vinci (1986), Needles And Opium (1991), Elsinore (1995), The Far Side of the Moon (2000) and The Andersen Project (2005). The solo form is chosen by Lepage because it is the best vehicle to exemplify themes of solitude, isolation and uniqueness - “sometimes there are certain things you are better off alone saying” (Lepage). The soliloquy offers a voice to the characters’ journeys, particularly when the material is personal, providing Lepage with “a great opportunity of thinking out loud” (Lepage). Needles and Opium, and his other solo shows, reveals many of the distinct features of Lepage’s directing approach. Personal stories are transformed into performance that creates “an ‘automythology’, where the artist draws creative inspiration from his or her own life while finding connections with known historical figures or a contemporary mythology” (Dundjerović 48). Of note, Lepage often performs the solo role in the first season(s) of the show and then directs other actors in that role.

From Ex Machina’s big, open collaborations, creating epic productions, I now turn to the more insular approach of documentary photographer and theatre performer William Yang. Yang began with a desire to show his images. His first solo exhibition was Sydneyphiles in 1977. Yang directs himself and to begins by “talking with the images” (Yang). The work is autobiographical and created by Yang, though he occasionally works with collaborators. Yang is inspired to tell stories that explore his experience of being Chinese in Australia, where Western and Eastern

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Henri Szeps is also an immigrant, coming from Switzerland to Australia. Szeps is a television, film and theatre actor with more than forty years of experience. He has performed in numerous solo shows, including the autobiographical works I’m not a Dentist and Why Kids? (2003). These plays are connected to major events in his life, work and family. For example, I’m not a Dentist chronicles his birth in a refugee camp in Switzerland, his arrival in Australia and his early career in show business. He also wrote and performed the solo Wish I’d Said That (2011), a fictitious account of an ageing, failed actor. In addition to this Szeps has been directed in several solo productions, notably The Double Bass (1990) by Patrick Süskind and directed by Sandra Bates, and Sky (1992), written for Szeps by John Misto and directed by Denny Lawrence.

In New Zealand, Lynda Chanwai-Earle’s Ka-Shue also explores the stories of migrants with an inter-generational perspective. The production premiered at Circa Theatre in Wellington in 1995 and was directed by James Littlewood. Chanwai-Earle identifies herself as a fourth-generation Chinese New Zealander and a poet, filmmaker, playwright and actor. She classifies Ka-Shue as semi-autobiographical, portraying three generations of women across two continents. Ka-Shue came about after a suggestion by Littlewood for Chanwai-Earle to write a piece centred around the idea of letters home from migrant families. For Chanwai-Earle there were also practical matters influencing the choice of a solo show as it was in some part an economy of measures, not just financially, “For the exact same reason that Jacob Rajan ended up doing a solo as well, performing many different characters, because there were no other Asian New Zealand, Chinese New Zealand actors around - they were few and far between”. Unable to source Chinese actors, Chanwai-Earle played the characters herself. Chanwai-Earle was also inspired by the solo storytelling of fellow New Zealanders, Miranda Harcourt and Jim Moriarty.

31 The title of this solo I’m Not a Dentist refers to Szeps’ success in long-running Australian television series Mother and Son (ABC TV), in which he played a dentist.
32 Jacob Rajan is a solo performer with Indian Ink Theatre Company (N.Z). He is a New Zealander of Indian origin and Malaysian born. See Chapter Five.
ImpoSTAR tells the story of Chasland’s rural New Zealand childhood and his entertainment work as an impressionist of the great divas. The narrative is delivered through music, dance and monologue. The impressions of Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand and Liza Minnelli, to name but a few, are like small biographies as Chasland captures the essence of each diva. When I observed rehearsals, the production at Circa Theatre in Wellington in 2013 was in its third incarnation since its premiere season in 2012; a now much revised and extended performance. The starting point of Chasland’s show had occurred some time earlier. In this restaging he was seeking greater clarity and effective ways of adapting to a new and larger performance venue.

Other theatre-makers are interested in telling stories of others based on verbatim reports and extensive research. The solo work Verbatim, performed by Miranda Harcourt and directed by Colin McColl, has its origins in the accounts of a violent crime, and becomes a fictionalised biography of these people. Harcourt and co-devisor and writer William Brandt conducted extensive research interviewing criminals and their families. The solo play consists of six character monologues – the perpetrator Aaron Daly whom is serving a life sentence for murder, his partner, his mother and sister, the victim and the victim’s husband. Verbatim was presented in prisons throughout New Zealand and was followed by workshops with prisoners that had a drama therapy and rehabilitation ethos (McNaughton). Similar to Lepage’s ideas of solitude on stage, Harcourt considers the solo format of Verbatim to be the most appropriate way to capture the isolation of the characters: “It is no surprise that this form – a verbatim-style piece with a sole actor – was what emerged. The voices of prisoners, and indeed their family and loved ones, are some of the least heard or understood voices in society.” This type of community engagement is often evident in verbatim theatre, docudrama and solo performance.

Other starting points for solo work stem from a biographical or historical curiosity. Along with New Zealander Sophie Roberts, Dutch theatre director Willem Wassenaar created the Almost A Bird Theatre Collective in 2005, making original, devised work and classical adaptations in New Zealand. Wolf’s Lair (2009) tells the story of Traudl Junge, Adolf Hitler's personal secretary. She survives the Berlin Bunker and emerges seemingly ignorant of the genocidal atrocities that occurred around her until deciding to address her past. As theatre reviewer Elspeth Sandys enthuses in the New Zealand Listener: “Sophie Roberts stuns as Hitler's tormented secretary … This is a play designed to disturb the "buried" conscience in all of us, a goal it achieves brilliantly” (“Junge at

33 I viewed ImpoSTAR in 2014 at Wellington’s Circa Theatre on 11 December 2013. My performance analysis is based on this experience, attendance at rehearsals and reviews of the production.
34 I viewed Wolf’s Lair at Wellington’s BATS Theatre on 4 March 2009. My performance analysis is based on this experience, interviews with the director Willem Wassenaar and reviews of the production.
Heart”). Wassenaar and Roberts initiated *Wolf’s Lair* with a desire to pursue the story and to do a solo show that explored Roberts’ acting qualities and scope:

Sophie and I were both having experiences of working in bigger ensembles and we were really looking forward to a very intense making period by a director and one actor. And Sophie had not performed for a while in a very challenging way so she was looking for a meaty subject. (Wassenaar)

These varied starting points, from adaptations of classic prose, or personal stories, biographies of historical figures or verbatim accounts, reflect the great diversity to be found in solo performance. In my own directing experience, the origins of the work impacted on the directorial approach. For example, in general terms, devised work necessitated a renegotiation of leadership, personal stories required sensitivity, and existing scripts need to be scrutinised for changes in rhythm that drive the solo narrative forwards. Despite these different points of departure, there are also commonalities to be found in approaching the rehearsal process for solo performances that are documented below, and they are distinct from multi-cast work. Building on my own experience of directing solo work, I focused my interviews and observations of other theatre practitioners on adaptations to their rehearsal methodology in response to the fundamental challenges of staging solo performance.

**Methodology and Process**

Approaches to theatre making are rarely fixed. As Nelson states, “in the best PaR, there is an intellectual diagnostic rigour in the critical reflection on practice” (60). Each practitioner and each project requires an ongoing evaluation of the most effective process/practice to pursue. Some practitioners choose to work in sole-charge, others will collaborate, but all of them need to address with rigour, the fundamental directorial challenges of solo performance - audience interaction, story-telling, scenographic decisions, stage geography, and character delineation where there are multiple characters. Below, I begin with the work of Gare St. Lazare Players and their text-based work on adaptations of Beckett’s prose35. I move then to the more complex, in regards to process, of the predominantly autobiographical work of Lepage, Yang, Szeps, Chanwai-Earle and

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35 I viewed *The Beckett Trilogy* on May 11th, 2002 at the Harbour Commissioner’s Office in Belfast, Northern Ireland. My performance analysis is based on this experience, interviews with Conor Lovett and Judy Hegarty Lovett and reviews of the production.
Rutherford. Finally, I turn to the devised work, the ‘based on’ true stories of Harcourt and Wassenaar.

Gare St. Lazare’s are reliant on active story telling to animate Beckett’s prose. The approach to their work is seemingly straightforward: “selection of text ... adapt the work, treatment of the text, wrought it ... then into the rehearsal room with what we have” (Hegarty Lovett). The challenges of working with prose adaptation are to make the story ‘present’, happening now, rather than reported action. Caitlin Gahan reviews Beckett’s *First Love* and describes how she receives the story:

*First Love* is essentially a one-sided conversation: full of asides, segues, and things left unsaid or unfinished. And it covers topics such as death, sex, defecation, constipation, the different forms love can take, park benches, graveyards, babies, marriage and much more. It’s a hard task for an audience to follow an actor down such a winding road. Watching *First Love* is not about catharsis, about passive entertainment or even about just watching. Instead, to fully appreciate its complexities, you need to be completely connected to it, to be an active listener, a very observant participant.

This listening is assisted by Lovett’s compelling stage presence, by careful use of pace and by the sparseness of the set: “A single spotlight centres all attention on Lovett and two upturned and virtually unused park benches complete the scenery” (Gahan). The attention that is spent on adapting the text, crafting the story and the minimalist staging choices make Gare St. Lazare’s work an intense theatrical experience.
In contrast, Lepage fuses narrative and language with theatrical tricks, elaborate scenic choices and advanced technology to create the worlds of his solos. In the original production of *Needles and Opium* in 1992, Lepage is suspended in the air in a harness and used projected images and live and recorded music (Shuttleworth). This is reasonably low tech compared with the revisioned 2014 touring version of the show, where Marc Labreche takes Lepage’s original role and is joined on stage by dancer Wellesley Robertson III. In addition to this, the stage crew consisted of production manager, production coordinator, technical director, tour manager, stage manager, sound manager, video manager, lighting manager, costume and props manager, head stagehand, stagehands, rigger, automation consultant, video consultant, make-up artist and set building (“Festival – New Zealand Festival”). Unsurprisingly the result, described in the *New Zealand Listener* by Elspeth Sandys, was visually dramatic:

Watching the spiralling, two-sided cube on which all the action takes place change from a shabby French hotel room to a New York street to a jazz concert stage creates a sense of the vertiginous progress of out of control lives, lurching between comedy and tragedy, but held together by the wonders of imagination. (“Needles and Opium - NZ Festival Review”)

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36 I viewed *Needles and Opium* at Wellington’s Opera House on 22 February 2014. My performance analysis is based on this experiences, interviews with Robert Lepage and reviews of the production.
Lepage’s solo works could be considered multi-cast given the support he has in realising his shows with Ex Machina. Whilst Lepage self-directs his solos and remains at the helm of the shows as a whole, the company supports his artistic vision, contributing to all aspects of the production and the rehearsal room is often full of collaborators. In an interview with British arts journalist John Tusa, Lepage explains the shared responsibility behind the presenting of himself: “I never call them one man shows, because there's so many people in the rehearsal room that take responsibility for whatever happens”. Lepage states “I try to make my process very accessible, very open. It is not a closed circuit process”. We might consider that Lepage has a range of metaphoric mirrors in the room. For Lepage, opening up the process to others is in contrast to what Yang earlier identifies as possible limits to resources – that by having just oneself to collaborate with may restrict the creative input/output.

The original Needles and Opium involves Lepage plays multiple characters: Robert his alter ego, Jean Cocteau and Miles Davis. One of Lepage’s key narrative devices is the employment of a semi-fictionalised version of himself that the audience can identify with. In Needles and Opium, Lepage could connect his experiences to a fictional world inhabited by Cocteau and Davis by creating the character of Robert. Dundjerović explains: “Lepage’s own troubled private life served as a personal resource that he wove with events from the lives of the two artists” (60). The transitions and transformation between these characters, between scenes and different locations, occur within the realm of Lepage’s metaphoric aesthetics – a box of outstanding visual tricks – cinematic projections, a moving body in space, suspended in mid-air with a score of poetry, dialogue/monologue and jazz.
For Lepage, the challenges of staging solo performance are solved by the contributions of many, with ideas and technological solutions. Another solution of Lepage’s is to utilise a body-double to investigate and improvise with theatrical images from an off-stage perspective: “another actor or an actor/dancer or somebody who will actually experiment for me certain parts of the solo show”. The experimental process occurs in the early weeks of rehearsal and then Lepage spends more time on stage and trusts the feedback of his collaborators viewing the progress of rehearsals from the perspective of the audience. This is another way of managing criticality within a PaR methodology – from within the creative process. Here Lepage moves between the two positions that Nelson considers particularly effective in PaR – “the juxtaposition of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ accounts” (89). In Chapter Six I experiment with body doubling in the context of a new solo autobiographical work – PocaHAUNTus – in an attempt to share the directorial perspective with the solo performer.

Yang’s approach is to use monologues as a narrative aid to the stories behind his photographs. There are no other characters or alter egos portrayed by Yang. He begins with his own resources, his photographic images and then finds the text and refines it along with the structure of the

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37 *Elsinore*, directed by Lepage and performed by actor Peter Darling, used a second actor as a body double in performance: “Darling, playing all the characters but assisted by hidden cameras, microphones, projections, and a body double” (Wolff).
presentation. In the beginning nothing is fixed but Yang identifies distinct phases to the creative process:

I have a rough idea of what I might say, and I choose the images in some sequence. Then I talk it out. I try not to write it down, as writing is a different form to speaking. From then it is a matter of editing both the words and the images. I usually leave spaces for audiovisuals, sequences without words, where the experience is less intellectual, more emotional. (Yang)

Yang’s approach to his material, in performance, is to contrast the striking photographic images with understatement in the delivery of his monologues, as Australian theatre critic Bryce Hallett puts it “Yang’s deadpan style and candour”. In *Sadness*, Yang documents two intertwining but contrasting narratives. He juxtaposes the story of his gay friends in Sydney, some ravaged by AIDS, and the history of his Chinese family. Music and the projected images are an important component: “Stephen Rae’s appealing soundtrack adds pulse and a sense of urgency to the quest while the occasional use of dissolves – of transposing one image on top of another – startlingly conveys newness and decay, youth and age, and a feeling of how precious, and fragile, life is” (Hallett).

Yang acknowledges the challenges of solo performance: “With only one performer it is easier for the audience to get bored because there is no interplay with another, so the solo performer has to create his/her own varied world”. These audiovisual elements bridge the narrative and engage the audience with Yang’s stories.
Family is also a catalyst for story telling for Szeps’ solo performances and they both create their work mostly in isolation. Szeps’ *Why Kids?* was inspired by his experience of parenting. The creative process involved a process of refining stage craft and editing text - he was still drafting when he began rehearsing, moving material around as needed. Szeps describes this stage as a hybrid between writing, acting and improvising, “Some of it will come from the writing itself and some from the performing as you start doing it in your living room. That is when the audience starts to come alive for you. The invention of the audience, that is how I direct myself” (“Personal Interview”). Szeps is experienced in creating new work and has honed a process that works for him as author-performer, placing the imagined audience as central to the script’s development. In Chapter Six, I analyse how the dramaturgical process of creating a script for *PocaHAUNTus* impacts on the rehearsal room and the PaR methodology, and consider how a director and/or dramaturg can facilitate the inexperienced author-performer.

The staging choices made by Szeps are conventional for this type of work – the sharing of stories that builds on a convivial rapport with the audience. Australian theatre journalist David Kary reviews *Why Kids?* in 2005: “The play’s recipe is a simple one, Szeps mixes his numerous anecdotes with musical breaks, with Szeps taking over the microphone and singing to taped music”. The set is simple, as ABC radio reports: “And it was just him, standing in front of the audience, one chair, a tiny table with a glass on it, ... and that was it ... Here was the man stripped bare”
(Kafcaloudes). There are also white comedy/tragedy baby masks suspended upstage, because the play was about child rearing Szeps’ chose “the traditional emblem of Theatre - comedy/tragedy - to be baby faces rather than adult ... purely for decoration/atmosphere” (Szeps, “Personal Email.”) (see fig. 13). Szeps uses direct address, relating stories from various characters in a range of situations. The effect is judged by Peter Morrison of the Australian Jewish News: “He talks to the audience, mesmerising us with those piercing eyes, that infectious smile, those undulating vocal inflections, ... and uncannily judged changes of pace and mood”. Szeps achieves this connection with the audience without the assistance of the director. We might consider several reasons for Szeps’ success: that he is a consummate performer and able to build rapport with an audience, and that the personal nature of the stories lends itself to sharing with an audience. Other reviews of Why Kids? were less favourable, Kary found that it was by “no means any work of art, and at times it was a little cloying”. A director might have offered a more impartial critique from the perspective of proxy audience, rather than Szeps’ imagined audience in rehearsal.

Fig. 13. Henri Szeps holds the audience in the palm of his hands in Why Kids?
(Photographer Theatre Ensemble)

Chanwai-Earle is also a writer/performer. In creating Ka-Shue she researched her ancestral background and interviewed family members. Chanwai-Earle uncovered buried stories and produced a semi-autobiographical narrative. At the time, Chanwai-Earle was not experienced in
autobiographical solo performance, though she was a newly trained actor and a writer. The personal content impacted on the process and a director was necessary in managing the development of the work. Interviewing her mother was a deeply personal undertaking and made it difficult for her to edit superfluous text because she felt everything was important, it was “Difficult for me to separate the personal from the public” (Chanwai-Earle, “Personal Interview”). *Ka-Shue* involves five characters over five time frames – 1939, 1941, 1945, 1959 and 1989. To address character delineation Chanwai-Earle, in the production notes of the published script, recommends: “it is preferable to use only one costume and have the actor portray character changes through voice and body” (*Ka-Shue* 5), rather than the one actor, going on and off stage leaving the space empty or changing costumes onstage. She also advises that time and place can be suggested by music – both Western and Chinese, and that the set be minimalistic: “The play works most effectively with minimal props and furniture, which remain on stage throughout” (Chanwai-Earle, *Ka-Shue* 5). Throughout the script there are detailed stage directions that are of further assistance to the staging – “The Ghost is the only character who stays mainly upstage under the red backdrop” (Chanwai-Earle, *Ka-Shue* 7) – here stage geography helps the audience know which character is talking. Another narrative device is the exchange of letters, written, read and recorded on a Dictaphone, and telephone calls that allow the characters to talk to each other. These choices, now preserved in the published script, have come from valuations made over *Ka-Shue*’s rehearsal and performance history. They reflect a desire to create simplicity in the staging that is the most effective way of delivering the story. The theatricalising/fictionalising also creates some distance from the real people Chanwai-Earle has based her story on.
In *Needles and Opium* the autobiographical material is partly disguised by the characters Lepage creates - “I will create different characters that are actually different reflections of my personality, my inner conflicts” (Lepage). Lepage and Chanwai-earle employ a form of distancing from the autobiographical material to find characters and technical elements that best serve the story. In regards to evaluating the effect of these story-telling elements, Lepage uses body-doubles.
and his audience of collaborators in the rehearsal room to provide feedback. In comparison, Chanwai-Earle is having direct conversations with trusted directors whom provide a concise and experienced evaluation on the different elements of her performance.

In rehearsals of *ImpoSTAR* the director had specific elements to focus on that required an outside perspective – particularly space and movement. Chasland (the performer) and Rutherford were assessing the revision of the script for a new, larger venue. They are both experienced practitioners and had a productive working relationship. They had written the script together and much of what I saw was the process of editing that script on the rehearsal room floor whilst considering the staging at the same time. Rutherford was actively on stage marking through the blocking (stage movement) and finding possibilities on the rehearsal room floor. She was an active, bidirectional mirror for Chasland, modeling the moves on stage – like Boal’s ideas of mirroring mentioned earlier. I considered whether this was happening so frequently because Rutherford is a performer herself and this was a way of discovering and articulating what she wanted. Rutherford explains:

> My methodology is organic no matter what size of the cast. As an actor/director who has trained in different methodologies I have the ability to chop and change depending on what actors tend to move towards. I am also a very instinctual director so that helps with what actors need. It is about what actors need, it is not about what I need.

This adaptability and fluidity in directing approach is at the core of much directing practice and reflects a PaR methodology where the application of theory into practice has shifting parameters. In addition, Chasland’s willingness to modify the autobiographical subject matter made the rehearsal process more open to creative possibilities. Rutherford says “We did not stop ourselves if a fantasy story came out of our creating. If it worked for the piece and was entertaining, we used it”. Chasland and Rutherford took liberties and were not purists in regards to the autobiographical content, instead prioritising the creation of effective theatrical moments.

The process of constant refinements in the rehearsals of *ImpoSTAR* was successful. New Zealand theatre critic Laurie Atkinson notes the move, and changes, from the smaller BATS Theatre venue to the main stage at Circa Theatre “cleverly expanded to fill the much larger space and the autobiographical interludes have been made more personal and coherent” (“The *ImpoSTAR: Who Does He Think He Is? - Flamboyant Dreams of Stardom Get the Solo Space*
Chasland plays himself and over thirty different impressions of famous divas. Each of these divas were delineated by a distinct physicality and voice but also by where they were on stage - they each had a spot and a prop or costume, for example, one diva was distinguished by her feather boa, a wig and podium and placed centre stage. And when Chasland referred to his Nana Missy he used an old sitting chair. Unlike the simplicity in the staging of Szeps and Yang, the set for *ImpoSTAR* was “a cluttered attic in a farmhouse … numerous everyday objects mingled with more exotic objects suspended behind the attic and lit to make them look glamorous” (Atkinson, “The ImpoSTAR: Who Does He Think He Is? - Flamboyant Dreams of Stardom Get the Solo Space They Need”). For Rutherford and Chasland those set elements were necessary for telling the story and creating atmosphere. Yang and Szeps used more minimalist means, such as music and images, or relied on rapport with the audience.

In contrast to *ImpoSTAR*’s glamour, *Verbatim* was performed in prisons so the set needed to be easily transportable. In *Verbatim* there are specific stage settings for each of the six characters (see Fig.16). This is to clearly delineate different characters played by the one actor – “we used three different chairs/a bar table/ a child’s cot and for the sixth character just an empty space to
delineate the characters … that represented/homed each character” (Harcourt, “Solo Performance Query”). In addition, explains Harcourt:

Place and space can define character (as in *Verbatim*) or body language/physical delineation of the character (as in the solo version of *Portraits*). To best achieve the delineation you talk of I would approach characterisation using Laban's Motion Factors to define and heighten the ‘shared moment or gesture’ that divides one character from another. (“Solo Performance Query”)

Harcourt is referring here to Rudolf Laban's praxis that is based on the “interrelatedness of mental, physical, and emotional activity” (Gordon 181). Harcourt uses this method to scan the actor’s “own habitual rhythm” and then make shifts appropriate to the character (Harcourt, “Solo Performance Query”). In my own work, whilst not employing Laban technique, my directing has often consisted of those two tasks – observing and then articulating the solo actor’s unconscious habits, and using improvisation, and physical work on beats and objectives to help the actor discover specific physical elements of characterisation. This focus by the director on an individual actor’s physicality is in contrast to the multi-cast where such singular attention is more difficult to achieve.

Fig. 16. *Verbatim* in situ. (Photographer Catherine Lewis)
Willem Wassenaar and Sophie Roberts created *Wolf’s Lair* based on extensive historical research that was eventually distilled to the most curious and interesting material. Rather than a history lesson, *Wolf’s Lair* was an “interpretation” of Traudl Junge. The objective was to examine ideas of “how truth is dependent on specific circumstances that you are in and the subjective reality of time and place” (Wassenaar). From research and improvisations Roberts and Wassenaar found three distinct voices for Traudl Junge covering three different times in her life and this provided form and shape to the show, adding imagined interactions between Junge and the other characters. This was their solution to the staging, and telling, of the story through one actor. In performance, like many of the solos in this chapter, there is austerity of visual elements. In the *New Zealand Herald* review Janet McAllister noted: “The play's visual simplicity - dark dress, dark chair, dark background - lets Roberts' expressively mobile face shine, as her performance jumps effortlessly between Junge at different ages and her remembered women, coquette Eva Braun and martinet Magda Goebbels”. Another common denominator in the staging of these solos was the use of music and sound effects – “*Wolf's Lair* is aurally complex - Thomas Press's wonderful soundscape mixes haunting violins and cellos with recordings of Roberts' voice and the amplified clack of a typewriter” (McAllister). John Smythe of Theatreview was unsure about the character delineations:

There is some confusion as to whether Traudl is always being herself or sometimes enacting other roles. Is the prodding, pinching child her or someone else, and when and where are they in that moment? Is the stern rigid woman her ballet mistress, tutor at secretarial college, or Traudl herself in later life? (“Consummate Performance and Strong Production Values”)

Smythe attributed this confusion to the creation of the script: “It's the actor-director-devised text that does not allow us to get close to her experience or develop a clear enough understanding of the who, what, where and why of it all; that keeps us from empathising with her and/or considering what we might have done in that situation” (“Consummate Performance and Strong Production Values”). Of note, Smythe is reviewing an early version of *Wolf’s Lair* – the show then evolved over several performance seasons. The exacting delineation of characters, along with where and when, is a fundamental challenge of directing solo performance – as it is evidenced throughout this thesis in the successful multi-character solo productions of Lepage, Indian Ink, Harcourt, Williams and Bunkall.
The methodology and process in each of these examples are governed by the need to find ways to tell a story through one person, via content and form. Solo directors, and performers, have a box of creative tools to make this happen but essentially the solo performance is reliant on a connection directly to the audience and holding the audience’s attention by the story telling of one actor. Some solutions are discovered in the devising or the writing of the script, in manipulating the content for theatrical effect. For example, autobiographical work can benefit from a distancing from the original source material, like Lepage’s creation of an alter ego or Chanwai-Earle’s letters and Dictaphone. Many answers are found in rehearsal, creating physical and vocal motifs for multiple characters, deciding on the simplest of sets and costumes in order to focus the audience on the single actor, or using music to create atmosphere. The director’s job is to find clarity in those choices – how does the audience best receive the political and/or artistic information, whether it be narrative, or atmospheric or sub-textual, that they require to experience the performance fully? The director must, along with the performer, discover the magical, theatrical devices that hold the audience’s rapturous attention.

Lepage, Yang and Szeps are writer/performers, and without directors they are highly focused on how the audience will receive their work. Lepage uses a large team of collaborators and technology
to pursue his vision. Szeps and Yang work on a smaller scale, reading an audience on a more intimate level. They all value feedback but through experience, they choose to find it from other sources than a director.

Is a Director Necessary for Solo Performance?

What sort of methodology allows the performer to effectively proceed alone, without a director? How do solo performers discover and evaluate theatrical devices by themselves? Szeps, Yang and Lepage, proceed without the guidance of a director. In doing so, they acknowledge two key factors – extensive experience of ‘reading’ audiences and a desire for autonomy for their own material.

Szeps and Yang are both accomplished performers with years of experience of appraising an audience. In this respect they are using the audience as a bidirectional mirror – actively seeking feedback from the audience and adjusting their work as they perform. For Szeps, choosing to self-direct can be attributed to his formative work in comedy, a genre that has not usually engaged directors. His experience with audiences, founded over many years and honed early on with comedy club gigs, has developed in Szeps an acute sense of timing that is governed by the audience’s responses. Szeps has written a book about this, entitled All In Good Timing (1996) that puts “good timing” at the heart of good acting and focuses on the relationship between actors and audience and timing. He recalls the Australian solo performing legend Reg Livermore sharing his wisdom with Szeps: “It’s easier … you just do your own timing” (Szeps, “Personal Interview”). Going solo meant that he did not have to contend with the timing of other actors on stage. Szeps compares it to being aware of the cars in the other lanes. The one-man show has empty lanes. “It is up to you where the hell ever you want to go, on the spur of the moment, sensing where the audience is and what you have to do” (Szeps, “Personal Interview”). This sensing of the collective audience’s reaction whilst performing is a highly specialised skill.

Yang also relies on the audience for critiquing his performance: “If I want direction I listen to my audience”. Feedback occurs in the reactions of the audience when he performs. He observed: “the more personal I was with my story the more the audience connected with me. They wanted honesty, they wanted intimacy, they did not want spin, they did not want self promotion” (Rhodes). Yang always directly addresses the audience and considers them to be of greatest importance. In addition and similar to Lepage, if Yang needs another opinion he asks other observers in the
rehearsal room for feedback: “Sometimes I ask my production manager if there is a decision I cannot make” (Yang).

In addition, both Szeps and Yang are mining their own personal material. They eschew the director, trusting that they have a better understanding of the work and its reception by an audience than anyone else. It is clear that Szeps enjoys the autonomy of solo performance, preferring the singular relationship with himself. As actor-author he knows the work inside out and a director is perceived as authoritarian and inefficient: “they will suddenly do something that seems to go completely against the grain of what you think the writer wrote then you have long talks and you probably give in” (Szeps, “Personal Interview”). Szeps sees the director, when present, like Denny Lawrence for Sky and Sandra Bates for Double Bass, as controlling. Yang agrees, when there has been a director present he has felt constrained by the ‘traditional’ relationship of director/performer: “I found I had to obey them, as that is the relationship, and I found changing things was too laborious”. Szeps has to work out how the director sees the story: “invariably, after these discussions, or during, I find that when I start doing it in the way that I suggested they will see what I was thinking and then make a judgment on what they want and then I do not argue with that” (“Personal Interview”). It seems to be that with better communication this interaction between director and performer could have greater value.

Szeps sees the director as distinctly outside of the work because the director’s interpretation is his or her own. Szeps explains: “as we are rehearsing, he or she is reading what I am doing and they have their own life, their own artistry, and they will think of a prop or they will think Henri might also need such and such” (“Personal Interview”). He sees some benefit to this input in that the possibilities are “broadened because you have got an additional creator guiding” (Szeps, “Personal Interview”) but ultimately he values his creative autonomy more than any additional input that might come from a director.

Szeps does see the director as having some function, though minimal and aesthetic: “Certainly a director can do a hell of a lot with lighting, with just the look of the thing, the costumes” (“Personal Interview”). The director assists with the appearance of the production, its presentation, cleaned up before guests arrive. Further, he admits that the director’s ‘extra eye’ has been helpful at times with dramaturgical aspects. However the actual physical performance is Szeps’ exclusive terrain:
They do not have a hell of a lot to say to me about performance. I am a good performer. I come up with stuff they have never thought of because I work so fucking hard. You spend a long time looking at all the possibilities and then coming down to what will be most easily digestible for the audience. (“Personal Interview”)

Yang shares Szeps’ conviction: “Some people might need a director because they do not have the confidence to direct the piece themselves, and in the same way I would not compose the music for my shows as I do not have that skill”. Coming from a visual arts background Yang is confident in directing himself in a performance art mode, but not in all aspects of the presentation. Yang directs his own work because he feels his personal stories are best served by himself and that he knows the material better than a director - “the performer does know best how the piece works”. Szeps and Yang find greater clarity in working alone, telling their own personal stories with simple staging.

Lepage directs himself in his own solo pieces and places a high value on autonomy and the possibilities for both vulnerability and power this entails, remaining “the master of my own fate.” Compared to his multi-cast productions: “It is a very different thing and as I said private” (Lepage). This goes some way to explain Lepage’s reluctance to have anyone else direct him, though he works with many artistic collaborators and observers (as proxy audience) on his solo shows, as described above. This differs significantly from Szeps and Yang’s more solitary process.

He has also directed other actors to take over his solo roles, for example, directing Labreche in the restaging of Needles and Opium, discussed below. In describing this process we can begin to appreciate the ways in which the director can be a considerable benefit to the process. Lepage acknowledges that any director would need to be supportive, that “it is always a very personal event when an artist decides to go on stage on his own to tell his story, whatever the story is it is extremely personal and intimate”. Directing other actors to replace him in his solo shows is a process mostly as osmosis:

You are transmitting what you have performed on stage for a few years, touring around the world, and he accompanies you and finishes the tour with you. He is very intimate with you because he follows you, not only looking at yourself doing it in the room but he also hangs out in the wings, he is in the dressing room with you … to understand what it is that you are doing and why you do it. (Lepage)
This is admittedly an unusual arrangement, designed to accommodate international demand for Lepage’s highly acclaimed work. In an interview, Labreche talked to New Zealand journalist Alexander Bisley about how Lepage liberates his autobiographical work to another actor and into the public arena:

Of course it starts from a personal experience, a very intimate and deep experience for him. As soon as it works as a piece of art it’s no longer his thing anymore ... He’s very generous in all those ways that he doesn’t hold himself to things that are very intimate. It’s theatre: it’s made for the public; it’s made to share with people. Even his character can be shared by another actor.

Lepage has, in some ways, liberated himself already, by employing an alter ego to carry his personal narrative in performance. And unlike Szeps and Yang, Lepage has had the benefit of always working with collaborators that are sharing his directorial perspective.

**The Benefits of the Director in Solo Performance**

However, most of the solo performers interviewed, and those I have encountered in my own work, have highly valued, close and endearing relationships with a director. They are able to clearly articulate what they require from a director.

Chasland and Chanwai-Earle were also developing solos based on autobiographical material, however they were far less experienced with the process. They sought assistance rather than complete autonomy. Chanwai-Earle admits to feeling less than assured during rehearsals and she did not feel ready on opening night: “It was utterly terrifying” (“Personal Interview”). Chanwai-Earle attributes her anxiety to navigating new territory - she was debuting as a solo performer and writer, and Littlewood was also new to solo performance. The other considerable challenge was managing their respective roles. Chanwai-Earle was both performer and writer and Littlewood directed, dramaturged and produced. There was difficulty in switching between her roles - “I had to take my hat off as writer and just sink myself into the role of being the actor” (Chanwai-Earle, “Personal Interview”). Consequently, at the point of Ka-Shue’s first public reception, Chanwai-Earle had spent more time with her script than she had with her actual performance as an actor. This
also occurred in the autobiographical work of *PocaHAUNTus* discussed in Chapter Six, and is an issue that director and performer need to navigate carefully and consider how a PaR methodology can accommodate these creative tensions.

When reworking *Ka- Shue* for the Christchurch Arts Festival and further touring, Chanwai-Earle requested that director Jim Moriarty assist her “to really pull the muscle out of my performance as an actor, to help me rediscover the essence of this play, to celebrate each of those characters” (“Personal Interview”). Chanwai-Earle and Moriarty had worked together before, though not in a solo process. Moriarty was highly acclaimed for his solo performance in *Michael James Manaia* (1991), directed by Colin McColl at Downstage Theatre in Wellington. Chanwai-Earle knew what qualities he would bring, as an experienced solo performer himself, he could “[help] you access those characters, [help] you live, breathe, sweat, sink into those characters” (“Personal Interview”). She was clear about what she needed from Moriarty.

Of note, Chinese New Zealand playwright Renee Liang specifically chooses to work with a non-Chinese director. In an interview about her recent solo show *Under the Same Moon* (2015) Liang states: "Even though I grew up in New Zealand I have a Chinese eye" (Chipp). The eye of director Theresa May Adams ensures that Western audiences understand the cultural references and the humour. The quote from Liang also supports the idea of marginalised voices since it assumes there will be many in the audience from cultural backgrounds ‘other’ than that of the performer’s.

Actor Jason Chasland was clear about what he was looking for in his relationship with Rutherford and that was the fundamental requirement of trust. He needed to trust that Rutherford would be honest and guide him through this process to its full potential. As the director of a solo performer Rutherford saw the role as both defender and liberator:

As a director you look after and protect [solo performers] a lot more. Perhaps however because they are the only person it means that they feel safer taking bigger risks because there are not others in the room to perhaps see it fail.

When asked how can the director best serve the solo performer and the work, Rutherford responded:
By looking after the performer’s ego, body and voice. It is all about that performer. The director’s ego doesn’t come in to it. The director can tire his or herself out before opening night but the performer needs to be looked after and carried. The director must also make sure that the performer is comfortable in every moment.

Rutherford’s contribution to the project also included roles of writer and dramaturg. Rutherford found autonomy in taking on these multiple roles: it was “freeing because if something did not work we would sort it ourselves. We worked well together so it was fun and exciting being able to constantly make the show better without having to ask anyone else!”

Other directors of solo performance, like Wassenaar, share this pastoral role that Rutherford is advocating. For Wassenaar the coach analogy encompasses both motivation and pastoral care. In contrast to the clear delineation of the function of the director Ka-Shue’s evolution, ImpoSTAR and Wolf’s Lair necessitated that the director and performer take multiple roles, wearing many hats during the rehearsal process. As a devised solo, Wolf’s Lair was a creative collaboration and at any given time Wassenaar and Roberts might be director, performer, writer, deviser, dramaturg and possibly take other production roles like producer or designer. However, there seemed to be a moment in the trajectory of the rehearsal process when each collaborator had to put down all but one of these hats and focus on a single task. It was crucial that Wassenaar took the helm as director and Roberts needed to surrender herself to the role of character, and let Wassenaar take the outside frame: “She said, okay now I need to get more in the performer mode so I need to let go of wanting to come constantly with ideas. I need you to be from the outside and just direct me a little bit more directly” (Wassenaar). Their roles changed as the show evolved over the duration of rehearsals:

In the end Sophie [Roberts] had much more leadership. As we worked together in rehearsals, as we created improvisations and devised material out of it, she was the one taking that material home. Having talked through the forms we were interested in she was working out a structure. I guess that is kind of a luxury because I ended up shaping the piece and she completely trusted me as a director. (Wassenaar)

These transitional roles occurred smoothly “because we trusted each other and did not have the desire to control so much” (Wassenaar). Wassenaar’s directing role also stretched Roberts’ acting muscles and was certainly tenacious. However as Wolf’s Lair’s public performances loomed, Wassenaar’s enduring support was crucial:
Sophie was really nervous before she performed the show, of course. As a director you are her only support person in that situation, a little bit like being a personal coach, maybe that is a good analogy because its not just the directing … it is also about being their companion when they are on the stage by themselves or that they feel they are constantly supported by you. (Wassenaar)

Harcourt is an experienced teacher of acting and a director herself and knows she needs a director to overcome the challenges of solo performance. She chooses to “work with very strong directors because … the power of my personality will carry through a choice that may not necessarily be the right one” (Harcourt, “Personal Interview”). However, Harcourt also advocates letting the performer present their work without interruption, giving them ownership: “the ability to let the fishing rod run because that is empowering for the performer” (“Personal Interview”). Like many of the interviewees here and throughout this thesis, Harcourt sees the directing function is to provide the performer with reassurance and encouragement: “the director has to be very conscious and overly generous in reminding the actor of that over-arching love of the actor’s work because it is very exposing being up there by yourself” (“Personal Interview”). There is a balance to be found between reassurance and vigorous critiquing. As previously discussed, both Louis Catron and Amy Pinney warn of the danger that with the director’s eyes focused solely on the solo performer, too much critiquing can occur to the point of undermining the performer’s confidence stalling the forward progress of the work. However, in my experience, solo performers have always relished any feedback and found reassurance in the critiquing whether it is generous or not. They required a critical, bidirectional mirror in the rehearsal room.

Performers also require a fine balance between freedom to create and boundaries that ensure effective progress towards opening night. Those solo performers that reject the presence of a director had a desire to be autonomous. They feel that they know the work better than anyone else, and that interaction with the audience is the place to receive feedback. This was not always an issue of clashing egos with directors but placing the creative work central and serving it to the best of their ability. These solo performers believe that the director can assess the aesthetic but not the inner world of the performer/creator.

However, the majority of those interviewed here, and in my own experience of directing solo performance, consider the role of the director is crucial in such an intense and exposing genre. The
director’s role in solo performance is two-fold. Firstly he or she must find solutions to the specific challenges of the genre, for example, delineating multiple characters that are played by a single actor, and to assess these choices from the position of proxy audience. Secondly the director must provide the structure and parameters of the intensity of the one-on-one working relationship that acknowledges creative origins and can renegotiate the rehearsal room roles to support and motivate the performer and the performance. It is these conditions that mark the difference between directing solo performance and work on a multi-cast production. Solo performers require a variety of traits from the director, including honesty, collaboration, directness, support, and sensitivity. Often it was the individual personality of the performer that determined what was needed. For example, strong-willed performers like Chanwai-Earle and Harcourt wanted an authoritative director to drive them. Others sought considerable support and encouragement - a pastoral role. All of the solo performers wanted honest, accurate and articulate reporting back. The director can provide this as a bidirectional mirror and as a proxy for the not-yet-present audience.

These benefits, that the director offers the solo performer, highlights what can be lacking when the actor chooses to be in solo-charge. The solo performer might be ineffective in assessing the solutions that he or she has found for the dramatisation of the stories that are to be told. The autonomy that the solo performer might relish is often achieved at the cost of a distanced, critical perspective.

Relationships, Collaboration, Negotiation and Shared Language

The relationship between director and solo performer becomes a negotiation between democracy and leadership, power and vulnerability. The staging choices for solo performance are often a collaborative decision and form part of initial conversation between director and performer, and continue throughout the rehearsal process. What is paramount is dialogic communication. The director must respond to what is viewed and establish a dialogue with the one performer, in contrast with a multi-directional conversation with multiple cast members.

The actor-director partnerships of those interviewed are often characterised by shared goals and longevity. For example, Lepage has worked with his company Ex Machina since 1994. Longevity is, of course, often beneficial to the multi-cast too, like Ariane Mnouchkine’s work with Théâtre du Soleil. However, a long-term relationship between solo performer and director might be more sustainable given the economic pressures of creating larger companies. The long-term
relationship between Indian Ink performer Jacob Rajan and director Justin Lewis is an important dynamic in their successful collaborations. Judy Hegarty Lovett and Conor Lovett are married and have worked together for many years. Even when practitioners were not long-term collaborators, the relationships between director and performer had some history, for example, after Lynda Chanwai-Earle’s initial direction by James Littlewood, she employed director Jim Moriarty whom she had worked with on previous theatre projects.

Hegarty Lovett acknowledges that working with husband Lovett is different from working with other solo artists, and considers this to be due to the longevity of their working relationship and a shared theatrical language - a “shorthand - our language between each other has become probably incomprehensible to anyone outside of the room”. She also attributes it to their shared relationship to Beckett: “a kind of a mutual understanding of our approach to Beckett’s writing in particular” (Hegarty Lovett). Right from the beginning, Lovett recalls, they had a knowledge and understanding of each other’s interests and tastes.

Wassenaar and Roberts also had a long term relationship, though platonic. Wassenaar and Roberts met in 2005 at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School and worked together on theatrical projects until Wassenaar’s return to Europe in 2011. They found value in carefully discussing how the solo show would proceed right from the start: “Negotiation was really about a desire to be direct and to be honest. I guess we had a clear contract at the start, which helped us a lot, and also knowing each other’s idiosyncrasies and rhythms” (Wassenaar). Understanding how each individual function, both creatively and personally, makes the process both intense and efficient. For Wassenaar and Roberts this was happening on a conscious level, they were self-aware and aware of each other. Wassenaar also notes how the solo relationship is different from the ensemble interaction of a multi-cast rehearsal - that it creates directness and freedom, but also necessitates honesty and openness:

We were able to have disagreements without feeling ‘oh god this is affecting the atmosphere in the room’. We could be less cautious in the way we work together. In the beginning it felt a little bit awkward because theatre is such a team thing and working with just one person, its almost feeling like the director is a personal coach.

For Wassenaar and Roberts the larger ‘team’ dynamic was replaced with a close one-on-one partnership. The contract between director and performer needs to be clear about why they are
working together, expectations about the outcome and how progress will be made and monitored. Once these parameters are in place there can be an environment that is conducive to risk taking and immense creativity. In contrast to this Wassenaar warns of the complacency of a close relationship that might lend itself to “a nice tea time with each other”. He asks:

How do you keep each other awake throughout the process? How do you fuel each throughout the process? If you have input coming from nine people it is completely different than the input that is coming from just two people. That is the big working question - how do you keep awake in the work? (Wassenaar)

Two people can be extremely resourceful, vigorous and maintain the intensity that is inherent in the singular partnership. Wassenaar develops strategies with Roberts that ensure the time is productive – varying the tasks and keeping the process moving. With two well-connected people the familiarity and longevity of their relationship can pay dividends, with highly articulated communication in the rehearsal room, through contributing, viewing and responding. Wassenaar acknowledged that progress on Wolf’s Lair was also assisted by Roberts’ ability to critique her own work:

Sophie does something and then she is instantly able to talk about it. That is her quality. Some actors need some time to come back into the room but she can switch on and off in one second … she would do something and I would say these are the elements that I like, these are the elements I am a little bit confused by, what do you feel about this. Because she is also a director she is able to reflect on her work at the same time.

This bidirectional reflexivity is exemplary of the methodology of PaR where criticality is active within a creative process. Nelson notes this insider, close-up, tacit knowing that becomes explicit through critical reflection in PaR (37). In my experience of directing solo performance, some actors are certainly able to step out of the actor role and critique their performance, to be conscious of what is occurring in their performance mode. However, the level of this consciousness varies. Having the director’s eye examining only the one actor certainly keeps the actor on high alert. As a performer and director myself I know that as I developed a directorial perspective I approached my acting with much more analysis of the whole performance, and not just my singular efforts. However, whilst actors can reflect on their work they are still not sitting as proxy audience,
as the director, able to move and take in all perspectives. Lepage achieves this by using a stand–in body double so that he can function as proxy audience and assess the theatrical effect.

Harcourt’s approach to solo performance is clearly determined by her relationship with the director and an acknowledgement of her own strength of character and strong will. Of note Harcourt, like Lovett and Hegarty Lovett, has also worked with her husband, Stuart McKenzie, as co-writer on Biography of My Skin (2009), Flower’s From My Mother’s Garden (1998) and Portraits and in his capacity as a director and filmmaker. The strength of the director is paramount in the success of their relationship. It determines Harcourt’s methodology:

As a performer, I have learnt now to subsume my own methodology, which you could also just call my bad habits, to the will of the director. But I choose the director. There is an interplay there of will and the desire to subsume my own will by choosing a particular director. So I always choose the director. I would not do the work unless I have the right director. (“Personal Interview”)

Choosing the right director meant that Harcourt could relinquish control but retains the ultimate power by choosing one of New Zealand’s most experienced and respected directors, Colin McColl. With McColl she developed a democratic relationship, which served the work:

Then it [Verbatim] was directed by Colin and certain choices were made, kind of like in partnership with the actor because you have got two minds that work well together, they work in accord and so certain decisions [were made] about how we would play the differences between each one of the six characters, how we would use the space.
(Harcourt, “Personal Interview”)

One of the fundamental issues in creating a solo performance is the choice of staging. As mentioned earlier, in Verbatim, Harcourt used chairs and stage geography to delineate between the six characters. McColl and Harcourt worked collaboratively on these important decisions.

James Littlewood was the director of the premiere season of Chanwai-Earle’s Ka-Shue and the pair had worked together previously on a multi-cast play. Littlewood’s way of working was valued by Chanwai-Earle for its original ideas and intellectuality. Littlewood would make suggestions that Chanwai-Earle would sometimes refuse, seeing the character in her own fixed way.
This attachment to ‘real’ characters is also evident in the autobiographical content of *PocaHAUNTus* discussed in Chapter Six. For the touring season of *Ka-Shue*, Chanwai-Earle engaged a new director in Jim Moriarty with whom she had a more subservient relationship. Moriarty was more aggressive in his manner - “I was too terrified of him to contradict him so I would do as he would ask. I was politely nervous, scared of Jim, in a good way” (Chanwai-Earle, “Personal Interview”). Littlewood was gentler in his approach. This preference for a particular sort of director highlights the importance of the partnership and the shifting parameters of roles in the rehearsal room of solo performance. Chanwai-Earle needed Littlewood at the beginning of her process when she required more support and assistance developing the dramaturgical structure of a new play, and then looked to Moriarty to work on her performance and characterisation with greater vigour. Harcourt and Chanwai-Earle’s process of choosing the right director also highlights the greater creative authority many solo performers have. Seldom would an actor in a multi-cast production have the power to choose the director.

Rutherford and Chasland had met as co-performers on another musical show and Rutherford had directed previous versions of *ImpoSTAR*. There was a definite familiarity between them, a reflection of their established relationship, like Roberts and Wassenaar, Lovett and Hegarty Lovett. There was a lightness and humour to Chasland and Rutherford’s communication that worked well to diffuse the possible tension of working at high levels of intensity and intimacy: “I think the conversation is more conversational with a solo performer because you are one-on-one. With more than one performer in the room you need to be clearer with language so that all in the room can understand it” (Rutherford). I observed Rutherford interjecting when required and Chasland listening to her ideas and instructions. This exchange between director and performer is not different from a multi-cast play but the level of two-way negotiation is. If this was a big ensemble then Rutherford could not accommodate the level of individual attention to each performer’s questioning and conferring. “Because we had a preexisting relationship having worked in a show together, our relationship was tight because we trusted each other. The solo artist needs to be able to trust the director or the process probably would not work” (Rutherford). Negotiations were amicable, and Rutherford attributes this to their established rapport and mutual confidence.

Editing was the main focus of the *ImpoSTAR* rehearsals I attended, and this meant that I was not exclusively observing the director/performer relationship but also seeing them in their roles as
writers and dramaturgs. In addition, like many rehearsal rooms of solo performance, Rutherford and Chasland had other people sharing the space with them. Their stage manager, Ashlyn Smith, was not a silent documenter in the corner but integral to the editing process, accessing music online and also providing feedback and continuity. In other ImpoSTAR rehearsals where the choreographer Leigh Evans worked closely with Chasland, Rutherford was deferred to for decisions but allowed the movement work to proceed without her constant input. Evans was on the rehearsal room floor with Chasland, experimenting and marking the moves, each mirroring the other as they practiced the choreography. Whilst Rutherford and Chasland were not alone, it was evident that there was still an intimacy in their relationship through their shared jokes, banter and affection.

However Rutherford still retained the leadership, moving the rehearsal forward towards pre-determined goals, ensuring the show would be ready for opening night by adhering to the rehearsal schedule. Rutherford often probed with “What do you think?” and offered suggestions and encouragement when the process became stalled, for example, when lyrics and choreography needed to be changed because the performance rights were not available.

The collaborative nature of solo work is dependent on a relationship that is both invigorating and creative, and also supportive and trusting. It can be an incredibly robust exchange between two artists. As Harcourt argues, no matter how strong the solo performer is, they still need a director and in her opinion a director that must be as strong, or stronger, than the performer. These relationships are best negotiated right from the start, seeking clarity in how the project and the relationship will move forward towards a shared goal. They benefit from long-term associations. Developing a language that the director and performer both understand will produce clarity and precision in the work, particularly important in the microscopic detail that is characteristic of solo performance.

Time, Detail and Intensity

By knowing each other’s ways of working, long-term creative relationships provide a familiarity that expedites the creative process. Working one-on-one heightens the qualities of longevity, of intimacy and ease of communication. The collaborative arrangements of solo performance rehearsals provide scope for the detail needed in performance, the intensity of engagement between director and solo performer, and a restructuring of the rehearsal time.

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38 I attended four rehearsals of ImpoSTAR at Circa Theatre. I did not request to see a particular part of their process but rather came unannounced so that I would capture what was unplanned and spontaneous.
Director Katie Mitchell in her handbook *The Director’s Craft* acknowledges “an ideal rehearsal time of six to eight weeks … very different from many situations that directors will encounter early on in their careers, where rehearsal periods can be as short as two or three weeks” (116). Projects in which new material is being developed require longer than this standard six to eight-week period for rehearsal of an existing script. For example, Gare St Lazare could take more than six months to bring a production based on adaptation together, as Hegarty Lovett explains “we would meet in January, we come back to each other in April, we would come back again in June”. This process allows time for ideas to both generate and settle: “This kind of gestation, you are constantly building the picture together and allowing time to kind of expand between thought and practice” (Hegarty Lovett). The final stage of the rehearsal process had Lovett with much of the text learnt, freeing up the process for crafting and staging of the story. *Wolf’s Lair*’s production history is also long-term, covering an eighteen-month period, with an initial six weeks spent creating the show followed by four seasons at various venues where the show changed a great deal from its first incarnation.

When working with an existing script, a shorter rehearsal period is also feasible. In my experience, I have worked successfully in an abbreviated timeframe with Sam Bunkall and Melissa Billington, finding that we came well-prepared to the first rehearsal and the time pressure produced good results by keeping us strongly focused on the task. However, the devising process of *Porcelain Grin* required more time. The interviewees in this chapter are working with new material (new devising processes, new scripts, new adaptations) and this is not compatible with a shorter rehearsal schedule because the material is not performance tested and requires greater dramaturgical attention – an important consideration in the PaR methodology of *PocaHAUNTus* discussed in Chapter Six.

In contrast to the longevity of the entire creative process, the actual time, each day, spent in rehearsal is often shorter than is usual for a multi-cast production, a reflection on the intensity of the solo rehearsal room. Wassenaar considered the process of creating *Wolf’s Lair* as a particularly intense experience, commenting, “time is much more concentrated and focused when you are working with one person”. There is time to work in great detail and scrutiny. Chanwai-Earle also found the experience demanding in contrast to a multi-cast rehearsal because:

When it is one-on-one it is actually more terrifying because you are that possum in the spotlight, that is it, the headlight is on you, there is nobody else out there on stage, you have
got to keep his attention and that director ... is acting as the audience and any moment you are wavering or you are retreating or you are not in the moment then they will pick it up. (“Personal Interview”)

Actors have commented to Hegarty Lovett that the solo process is intense but also note that there is some flexibility: “allowing for the relationship between the actor and the director to develop, to change, to adjust”. The work benefits from this elongated process and also the extension of the creative relationship.

In observing the rehearsals of ImpoSTAR I saw the performer sweating as he went over and over segments of the performance that involved choreography, singing and the delivery of spoken text:

The performer has to work every moment of the day during rehearsals, whereas with productions with many in a cast, people can have rest periods and work on lines etcetera. This pressure continues on during performance also. Solo performers need to look after themselves. I believe that it can get lonely too. (Rutherford)

Rutherford allowed for periods of recovery and time for Chasland to go over his work by himself. However, the performer must develop stamina for the whole show and map out the course of the show, like a marathon. It was evident in the rehearsals that Chasland was conserving his energy when he could by not delivering the vocal numbers with full voice. To deal with this intensity and scrutiny, to keep awake, Wassenaar adjusted the hours spent in rehearsal and the nature of the activities:

When we were working on the floor it was a maximum of three hours a day and then we did other activities like looking at research, dramaturg, writing … I think that variety is very important for the director, and definitely for the performer. To be on the floor rehearsing three hours with full focus and concentration on you is very tiring.

Despite the need to work for shorter periods of time compared to multi-cast shows, the expedience of the relationship between director and solo performer can still obtain the necessary degree of attention to detail. This detail is crucial in any theatrical performance, as director Anne Bogart makes clear:
Something matters to an audience only if you make it matter. If you attend to it, if only for a moment, the commitment of your attention will create the tension of attention. If something is not attended to decisively by the actor and the director, then it will not be attended to by the audience. It will be invisible. (59)

Detail is even more crucial in solo performance since the audience’s attention is on one performer. Wassenaar enjoyed the technical precision that was afforded in solo work and acknowledged that detail is needed when “the focus and the concentration of the audience is going to be very intense during the performance because they are only with this one body”. He also observes that critiques given on the solo performance could be more thorough. When directing a multi-cast show, he finds “There are always little things that I keep forgetting to mention for instance, and I did not have that with Wolf’s Lair at all because you are always able to cover everything” (Wassenaar). It can be understood that the observations that the director makes during a run of a solo are going to have considerably more detail than that of a multi-cast play. Alternatively, the director might give feedback in the moment, as I did with Bunkall during rehearsals for Actor. In either scenario, the feedback can be more thorough because of the focus of the director on one actor.

In regards to working in detail, Rutherford concedes that all performance, whether solo or multi-cast, requires detail and “Every performance, every moment should have great detail”. This detail is similar to Anne Bogart’s ‘attention’, which she applies to all theatrical forms. However, the detail in solo performance is under greater scrutiny from the audience. The director can attend in detail to every element of solo performance, in the absence of the competing attention to members of a multi-cast.

Harcourt agrees that solo performance allows us to work in “microscopic detail”. I provide the example of directing Melissa Billington in the solo show Medea Redux and how we were able to analyse every word and explore every rhythm in the text. It was an intense examination of language and the text became an additional ‘person’ in the room, serving as a mediator to resolve disputes of intentions and action in the script. Lepage has created his own script but also acknowledges the detail attainable in a solo show in contrast to the multi-cast:
When you are a solo artist and you are on your own you do not have to filter what it is that you want to express through the minds or the sensitivities of other people. It is your thing … you achieve faster, a richer and a more detailed story when you are on your own then when you are with a group of people who you have to deal with.

Lepage finds complexity and depth comes from working alone in the conceptual stages of his work. It is a way of creating without censorship. The process is liberating, rather than limiting and creates clarity in Lepage’s artistic ideas. Yang also appreciates the flexibility and autonomy in the process: “there is greater ease in changing things”. However in Yang’s experience, perhaps without the large-scale collaborative efforts that typically characterise a Lepage show, “the resources are more limited because there is only one not many”. The negative impact of reduced creative input is more likely to arise in new and devised work that is more reliant on the collaborative contributions than on projects involving an existing text that has already been performance tested. The challenges of collaboration in solo performance were evident in Porcelain Grin, and are explored in greater detail and practice in the new autobiographical work of PocaHAUNTus.

Time, intensity and detail are key issues in solo performance and are heightened in a rehearsal room shared predominantly by two as compared to creative work with larger groups. Success is found in long-term relationships between director and solo performer, where there is familiarity with each other’s methodology. In addition to the longevity of the relationship, periods of creative gestation may elongate the process. This is particularly so with devised theatre (a solo or multi-cast play), where the process may have intermittent periods of development. Scripted solos can move more quickly through the rehearsal process. The intensity of the one-on-one working relationship means that the creative work of each rehearsal day needs to be shorter. Productivity is best found in shorter sessions - the director and the monologist needs to be able to sustain their concentration and creativity. Whenever the director and performer are working together, greater detail is afforded by the focus on one performer and each word, each movement. This detail is necessary because all eyes are on the one performer, under greater scrutiny by an audience.

Bridging the Theatrical Space - From Performer to Director to Audience

Solo performance condenses the theatrical experience and changes the emotional geography of the audience-actor relationship. It is this dynamic and profoundly effective interplay between a single performer and the witnessing audience community that constitutes a common thread through the critical perspectives on solo performance. (Stephenson 8)
In the rehearsal room the director bridges this interplay between audience and the actor, in the absence of the audience. The director does this by considering how the audience will receive the solo performer in every detail.

The relationship with, and role of, the audience is a significant area of analysis for Lovett and Hegarty Lovett. They have clear objectives for the audience to understand the unique theatrical parameters of their solo performance:

Try to get the audience to think that this guy is just talking to us and maybe he will start the show in a minute ... The audience then is a vital, vital element and it is a conversation where they for the most part do not happen to have any lines ... You are creating an illusion where a guy walks into room, begins speaking to other people in the room to such a natural extent that after a few minutes audiences realise “Oh gosh, this is the show’...We try to make that illusion happen from the very word go, so that even before the word go, the audience are engaged before they even realise they are. (Lovett)

As an actor Lovett achieves this by being as truthful and real as possible. Director Hegarty Lovett must assess his success in creating that illusion – something that the actor alone would struggle to evaluate. As Anne Bogart states, “The quality of attention one offers in rehearsal is the key to a fertile process. The rehearsal is a microcosm of the extended intercourse of attention offered by an audience” (75). This critical idea of Bogart’s is heightened in solo performance in both contexts, the extended attention of the director in rehearsal and the intensified focus by the audience on the single performer on stage. Lovett and Hegarty Lovett’s success is evident in the performance as this review in the Irish Theatre Magazine of The Beckett Trilogy supports: “At times his performance is touched with pathos: he seems to have arrived on stage by accident and to be looking for a way to escape without offending the audience” (Fitzgibbon). The audience is vital, making the director as proxy audience vital.

Similarly, Lepage realises the necessity of having someone to perform for. Lepage’s collaborators function as proxy audience in the rehearsal room, in the absence of a director and other performers: “if you are alone on stage you have to deliver the story to someone and that someone in my case it is often these people who participate in the collaboration of the creation”. Lepage sees his stories being told directly to an audience. He relates it thus:
I always try to establish a kind of a see-through fourth wall in the sense that I very often try to speak directly to the audience but at the same time I try to bring the action back on stage. Sometimes there are characters that are in the wing whom I speak to, or people on the phone that I pretend are speaking back to me so there’s a lot of the dialogue being delivered that way. But I always feel that in my shows you have to be one-on-one with the audience. (Lepage)

In Needles and Opium, and his other shows, Lepage often utilises direct address and opening exposition as a way to establish the theatrical parameters of his particular style of story telling:

I directly address the audience, where I feel I have to put on a role of a storyteller, more than an actor in a certain way, so you go on stage, you speak to an audience who have gathered around your work and you treat them as people who came to hear a story. So for that, the fourth wall has to come down.

Lepage’s direct acknowledgement of the audience is similar to Lovett’s desire to be present, addressing the audience, right from the very start of the performance. Lepage believes that directly engaging the audience from the outset firmly establishes the parameters of their actor-audience relationship. Lepage draws on comparisons with comedians:

[T]hey react to something different, because they are not looking at a play with people. It is not a collectivity (sic) looking at a collectivity like theatre usually is, its a collectivity looking at one person, an individual, so of course their reaction is more vitriolic on the performer because it is like doing a stand up comic. You really have to feel the room and you are in raconteur mode. The audience is often asked to use their imagination when you are in that kind of relationship.

Prior to these interactions in performance, the strength of imaginative world of solo performance can be tested in various ways in the rehearsal room. The audience’s reception of Wolf’s Lair’s was carefully considered by its creators. The final transition to public performance was aided by a trial audience and Wassenaar noted the strangeness of presenting what had been an exclusive relationship until that point:
There is a weird sense of intimacy that you create between the director and the performer, and of course having a third party in the room then all of a sudden makes you realise that you are not the only ones - which is actually quite good because it also takes you a little bit outside of each other’s perspectives.

With *Verbatim* the audience was often actual prison inmates and thus Harcourt, Brandt and McColl were all invested in the authenticity of the imagined work. The prison audiences would provide their own particular response to the work, often quite different from what might be expected from a regular theatre-going audience and Harcourt would in turn respond to these variations:

[…] what we concentrated on the whole time is the audience to whom the play is being played so they are the article of faith, they are the people we had gotten the most to reflect, so the character shifts and changes according to the reflective device of the audience or the reflective surface of the audience. (“Personal Interview”)

Harcourt and Brandt had chosen the form of solo performance because they wanted direct address to the audience, regardless of the size of audience. Each of the characters would reach out to the audience and speak directly to them, providing their account of the crime. The audiences were addressed as individuals - as ‘participants in the drama’. In solo performance this direct address is often crucial to making a successful connection with an audience. Harcourt acknowledges “It is not all about you (the actor) and your performance ... the director’s job is to strengthen the actor’s desire and ability to feed out, to flow out towards the audience” (“Personal Interview”). The audience is paramount in the absence of multiple actors on stage. The solo performer must make an uninterrupted connection with the audience and this is facilitated by staging choices such as direct address.

Rutherford shares Harcourt’s desire to achieve connection with the audience through direct address. When asked to consider the role of the audience in solo performance, Rutherford responds by saying that the audience becomes another character in the play:

Even more so with a solo show because with an audience it becomes a two-hander! For me, it was important for the audience to feel like they were a friend, there with him, having a chat. It was important in rehearsals to get that feeling of intimacy in the monologues.
Part of Rutherford’s role in the rehearsal room was to gauge that intimacy, to be that friend having a chat, before ImpoSTAR came before a bigger audience. As Conor Lovett describes earlier in this chapter, the relationship with the audience needs to share the story in a reciprocal dialogue.

It is not just the director who can be proxy audience, as Lepage demonstrates earlier in this chapter. Chanwai-Earle acknowledges the team work behind getting a solo show on the stage, all the others that are necessary in their assistance in the process - the director, designer, composer, stage manager. They all help “lift that script off the page” (Chanwai-Earle, “Personal Interview”). When these collaborators are in the rehearsal space they often take on the role of surrogate audience members, as Chanwai-Earle observes: “you play off them as an audience, and they are your trial audience before the opening night … Even though they are sitting there thinking about other things you are still reading them, still looking at them” (“Personal Interview”). Again, the solo performer seeks out a bidirectional mirror for their preparation for performance, a desire to have a proxy audience and to have a response to the work, rather than be in isolation.

Szeps and Yang rely on their audience for feedback in the absence of a director in rehearsal. Lepage also responds to audiences, along the input from collaborators in rehearsal. Szeps refutes the idea of director as proxy audience: “No they’re not. No. They have seen the gag. In fact they will like a gag and will laugh at every performance of that gag in rehearsals and that line will never ever get a laugh from a normal audience” (“Personal Interview”). As discussed in Chapter Three with Sam Bunkall there may be a question of the accuracy of the director as proxy audience – the director’s perspective is tainted by the repetition of viewing and experiencing the work. This criticism could also be applied to the director of a multi-cast play. However, the director of solo performance develops an encyclopedic knowledge of the work and in my experience that has meant less laughing at the ‘gag’ as if they have seen it before. I laugh the first time and then move on to scrutinising another aspect. I am in the position of expert on the work, along with the actor, and know each moment in detail.

All the interviewees acknowledge the importance of the audience in solo performance. Most consider the director as proxy audience, for example Harcourt, Lepage and Chanwai-Earle, and acknowledge the director as Bogart’s ‘ideal audience’ holding the mantle of the expert in regards to the overall theatrical vision.
The director bridges the theatrical gap between performer and the not-yet-present audience in the rehearsal room. This role as proxy audience is also a primary function of the director as an actively bidirectional mirror that I discuss throughout this thesis. Below are the responses of the interviewees to this analogy; they describe a range of ways the mirror can function in the rehearsal room of solo performance.

**Mirrors in the Rehearsal Room - Director as Bidirectional Mirror**

Further to the discussion of the director as proxy audience, the interviewees here considered many ways that the director could be a mirror for the solo performer. The conversations below focus on the degrees of self-evaluation that can occur and where and when the director is most helpful. The mirror he or she presents to the performer can provide a simple reflection or critique or, as suggested by Boal, a transformation. This mirror is active, responding and vital.

As seen in the previous chapter, this metaphorical mirror can be interpreted in many ways. The director as a bidirectional mirror was a useful metaphor to describe the input of both directors that Chanwai-Earle worked with on *Ka-Shue*. Here she acknowledges the difficulties of self-evaluation in solo performance and the need for a director to articulate what they view:

> Without their outside eye looking in at me on stage I would not have been able to do it, I would not have known. They were, both of them in their own respective ways, in their own styles, very much the mirrors for me at that time. That was absolutely the mirror that I needed at that time to give feedback and to be that safe trial audience before the opening night. (Chanwai-Earle, “Personal Interview”)

Chanwai-Earle could also read the director’s response in this bidirectional mirror system. With director Jim Moriarty she could tell when he was becoming disengaged with her performance in rehearsals. In my experience solo performers have also observed my facial expressions and body language in the rehearsal room – see actor Sam Bunkall’s comments in Chapter Three. I am not simply a reflective surface but bidirectional, responding and attending all the time with my body language to what is occurring in front of me. Bogart considers at length the importance of ‘attention’ in *A Director Prepares*: “As a director, my biggest contribution to a production, and the only real gift I can offer to an actor, is my attention … A good actor can instantly discern the quality of my attention, my interest. There is a sensitive life-line between us. If this life-line is
compromised, the actor feels it” (74). Bogart works mostly in a multi-cast context. In my experience, the reliability of this lifeline between director and performer is even more critical in developing solo work as neither of us have another tangible point of reference.

Thus the looking is an exchange between director and performer, supporting Judith Hamera’s theory of “look between”, as discussed by Amy Pinney and in reference to Elizabeth Bell in Chapter Two. For the director and the performer, this attention means being ‘on’ all the time, always participating together. This exchange in Pinney’s context is about an ethical responsibility in the choices made in the partnership between director and solo performer that will be evident on stage. In Chanwai-Earle’s experience this was a safe exchange, as if to ask the mirror/director what is seen and know that the response will be ethical and honest.

In contrast to Chanwai-Earle and Bunkall’s experience, Harcourt is too ‘in character’ in rehearsals to be consciously observing the director’s response to her acting. The director is listening to her story with “no sense of observational surveillance camera watching you to find out what you think about my performance” (Harcourt, “Personal Interview”). Different actors function in different ways, with differing levels of consciousness whilst performing. Harcourt still sees the ‘director as mirror’ as offering reliable and robust critique of the work “because the actor cannot see themselves reflected in any other people in the room” (“Personal Interview”). Before Verbatim was presented to audiences, Harcourt states:

The director has a very important role in keeping faith with the reflective surface of the audience. A reflective surface rather than a mirror because the mirror is a simple act of reflecting with no judgment. I think as an actor you want to buy into the sense that there is opinion here and there is not just a hard reflective surface, there is an element of depth and judgment. (“Personal Interview”)

Hegarty Lovett dismisses the metaphor of a mirror as too passive. This is in contrast to the bidirectional mirror I imagine which is vital, talking and completely involved with the performer. Hegarty Lovett suggests a more physical analogy that acknowledges both the creative partnership and individual artist, that is literally hands on:

I see it quite sculpturally … two artists working on one piece of sculpture … chipping away at it, moulding it, creating a piece of art together in a very intimate and personal way. It is one
piece of sculpture and I think both people in some ways kind of behave as one artist but also as individuals in terms of creating that piece of work.

Hegarty Lovett expands this idea further, moving from a partnership to a trio, with the writer/text deeply embedded in the work as much as the actor and director:

I never see it as one person up there I always see it is that triangle of the writer, the director and the actor are absolutely and utterly present in that performance at all times … You really are truly together as a kind of a threesome ... It becomes its own thing, its own entity.

Conor Lovett also sees directorial contribution as an active role, rather than the “the outside eye”. He perceives his work with Hegarty Lovett as a more collaborative process, right from the initial decision in choosing the work, that they are both driving the work, together.

Rutherford’s understanding of the director as mirror would be in a capacity to be honest and encouraging in the face of both desirable and undesirable performances: “if the only performer is looking at the only person in the room, and they can see what that person is feeling whilst doing it, it should help/encourage”. Rutherford acknowledges this exchange between two bodies, across the rehearsal space and urges that to be genuine and purposeful. The director responds to and witnesses what she sees “With honesty. I am always honest with every actor I direct. Of course you have to choose the way you are honest but you have to be honest, both with the good and the bad” (Rutherford). The solo actors interviewed in the previous chapter all looked for an honest and active response from the director as mirror.

There are other analogies for the director of solo performance. Hegarty Lovett uses sculpting and Wassenaar uses coach, as does Jacob Rajan in the following chapter. They highlight the importance of the director as an active participant in the rehearsal room of solo performance. The director is not passive but highly collaborative and an artist as much as the performer and writer.

What can Directing Solo Performance Teach us about Theatre Practice?

The director as bidirectional mirror must be imbued with a collaborative ethos, requiring the many faces and facets of criticism that an audience possesses. The interviewees in this chapter highlight the diverse responses and challenges of directing solo performance. The intensity, detail
and depth of the engagement between director and solo performer can inform directing practice, and theatre methodologies generally. Directing solo performance shares many qualities with all theatre directing, but how do exclusively solo interactions between two collaborators enlighten directing practice? Solo performance, in its dependence on a single actor telling a story, reminds us that theatre’s primary purpose is in communicating and that solo directing is about seeing things from both the side of the performer and from the audience. In addition, all the interviewees in this research found aspects of solo performance that enlightened their own theatre practice, and presented something new in the mirror.

Hegarty Lovett considers working one-on-one over a long period of time serves as a reminder to uncover the potential in all actors, regardless of the type of theatre being made and that this can be brought to a multicast production:

[I]t helps you to realise the depth of possibilities with any given actor at any given time because just by virtue of being with them on a long and extended period like that you appreciate and understand their peculiarities, particular nuances ... Not that you might have the same time [in a multi-cast production] to invest with each actor in that way but that it allows you at least the vision to understand the extent of depth and potential within every single actor. That has definitely informed me.

Exploring, exposing and nurturing the full scope of the actor, and character(s) are hugely beneficial to the actor. In Chapter Three, actors Brooke Williams and Sam Bunkall advocate solo performance for all actors as a tool to hone their acting skills and creativity. Lepage believes those actors who undertake a solo performance, especially creating a story from scratch, become more than actor:

A solo piece makes you more conscious of all the aspects of the production, of the story you are trying to convey, you have to make decisions on absolutely every level, and you have to deal with every department. It makes you a much stronger performer I think and you have much more knowledge about the craft of theatre as a way to convey a story.

This ‘consciousness’ extends to the director. Harcourt agrees that the making of solo performance can teach us about directing and theatre practice because “as a director you are privileged to have that unbelievable relationship with the solo performer and to draw out the
emotional body of the work. Because you are the primary relationship” (“Personal Interview”). She believes directors can learn from acting and vice versa and we should continue to break down the divide between those tasks. As I propose in Chapter Three the training of directors could greatly benefit from using solo performance as a teaching tool – a hothouse for learning theatre craft. It is evident from these interviews, that directing solo performance is an opportunity for learning and insight for both new and established practitioners.

Solo performance can have epic proportions but still be a lone performer on stage, for example, Gare St Lazare’s adaptation of Herman Melville’s Moby Dick (2009). The audience looks through a different lens, rather than taking in the multi-cast they are looking at a single performer. The performer is under the microscope, scrutinised in fine detail, and the director must address this. Wassenaar continued to reflect on this foray into solo performance, learning that:

When you are working on bigger pieces with bigger groups sometimes you lose a little bit the eye for the detail. I have a tendency to do that in my work, to go from big to small, and sometimes I am not getting to that small, I am staying in big pictures and the big effects. Working with Sophie I enjoyed the silences and the minimal efforts that the performer has to do in order to make an effect because everything is watched and experienced through a magnifying glass. I learnt from that to trust the little things and I have taken that on to other pieces.

Gare St Lazare has presented successful multi-cast plays, including Waiting for Godot in 2013. Hegarty Lovett hopes they attain that same ‘real time’ with an audience of an ensemble piece that they achieve with their solo works. Lovett considers this ‘presentness’ in solo performance as a desirable quality in all theatre. The audience knows that they are all physically in the theatre - the dialogic nature of solo performer and audience highlights that.

Rutherford believes that solo performance can reconnect us with audiences through this ‘presentness’. That connection is attributed to the performer being ‘present’, occurring when the text and performance is fully embodied:

We often talk about connecting with each other on stage but I believe the solo performer must connect with the audience, as it is the only thing they can connect with and if they do not, it means there is no connection anywhere! I believe with any performance the performers need
to feel comfortable and be well rehearsed and perhaps with solo performance that is super important. (Rutherford)

With attention to detail and concentrated rehearsals the performer can achieve ease and alertness, and full engagement with the audience. The director is an integral part of finding that quality.

Working on solo performance can remind us of the simple yet powerful exchange of story between performer and audience, and of theatre’s minimalistic requirements as described in Brook’s ‘empty space’. Chanwai-Earle explains:

It can teach us that we do not necessarily need a cast of thousands and vastly expensive sets and costume changes and operatic sized theatre spaces - all you need is one trunk, one suitcase maybe and one actor and you can transport an audience across a hundred years of history, two different countries and through inter-generations of one family and their personal dramas. (“Personal Interview”)

Acting in solo performance can remind the performer of the fundamentals of theatre craft, of understanding the crucial relationship with audience, and to hone their acting skills. Directing solo performance can allow the director to know the full potential of a performer and to remember that the devil is in the detail – solo performance requires a minutely critical eye. Solo performance is a hothouse for both the director and performer.

Conclusion

These interviews and observations highlight the great diversity of approaches to equally varied forms and styles of solo performance. The different starting points for these creative journeys reflect the diversity of the artists involved, from Yang’s slideshows to Verbatim’s violent crime story. Autobiography stands out in this survey as having the greatest impact on the work that lies ahead in rehearsals, with scope for great complexity and theatricality – and some hazards. By acknowledging the starting points of the material, by understanding the qualities of the genre of solo performance, the director can find through improvisation, devising and experimenting, the ways to create the best theatrical experience for the audience. The interviewees here demonstrate the multitude of ways that success can occur in the context of solo performance, and avoid the potential pitfalls.
There are commonalties, specific rehearsal approaches to solo performance that contrast with the multi-cast process. Any methodology for directing solo performance involves addressing fundamental directorial challenges of audience interaction, scenographic decisions, stage geography, and character delineation where there are multiple characters. Necessary attention is given to delineating characters, such as in Ka-Shue and Verbatim, and direct address to audience, as in the work of Lepage, Szeps and Yang. Decisions about content might occur during the writing and devising process, and form might be found in rehearsals. That which is chosen needs to be the most effective way to deliver the story and thus be considered from the audience’s perspective.

The majority of the interviewees deemed the presence of the director imperative in solo performance, in the same manner as it is seen by most to be crucial to a multi-cast play. However, the director of solo performance needs to perform some specific tasks related to the genre, as outlined above. And they need some particular qualities in order to fulfill their responsibility to both the performer in rehearsal and the final performance. These qualities reflect a model of both collaboration and leadership.

One of the key tasks specific to directing solo performance is critiquing. Those interviewed here, with few exceptions, highly value the role of the director to appraise those performance elements the solo performer struggles to self-evaluate. This confirms my own experience of directing solo work. Negotiating a partnership that is conducive to sharing these appraisals between director and performer in open and honest dialogue is paramount. Solo performers relish the undivided attention of the director and look for honesty and vigour in the critiquing of their work. Performers want to be challenged but also want to be supported. Directors want to be the best possible surrogate audience for the emerging work and to have the performer’s assistance in finding the most effective and captivating choices for performance. Many practitioners believe that a relationship with a director is integral to creating a successful solo performance and value many qualities of the partnership – intimacy, collaboration and the stimulus of another creative.

Szeps and Yang are in the minority in this survey when they dismiss the director as proxy audience in rehearsal. Nonetheless, they are reliant on establishing a strong relationship to their audiences that can provide feedback on their performance. In their view, the choice of autobiographical material, simplicity and their extensive experience, negates their need for a
director. They perceive a director as a threat to their autonomy, which they value more than any critical input a director might be able to provide.

With the exception of Yang and Szeps, the interviewees found a long-term relationship, shared language and purposeful collaboration to be preferable. Communication between creators is crucial in obtaining the miniscule detail required of solo performance. The collaborative nature of solo work is dependent on a relationship that is vitalising and imaginative, and also encouraging and honest. It can be an exciting, creative partnership. Practitioners like Wassenaar and Roberts wisely negotiated right from the beginning, how their creative process and the parameters of their relationship will progress towards a shared outcome.

The interviewed practitioners are unanimous that time, intensity and detail are central challenges in achieving productivity in rehearsals of solo performance. The intensity can be accommodated by shorter sessions but can also benefit from a longer process from start to finish, especially in devised work where it can benefit from periods of creative gestation. Shorter, intense sessions can facilitate a more detailed rehearsal process with the director’s sole focus on one performer, thus imitating the attention the performer will receive from an audience.

The interviewees found the mirror metaphor useful but their interpretations of the mirror varied – thus the mirror itself was able to transform to the particular needs of the performer. The director can bridge the gap between the solo performer and the audience, as a proxy audience and a bidirectional mirror in the rehearsal room. In this capacity the director can be a dynamic contributor and a positive critic. The performer reads a response in the director, and vice versa, in a bidirectional mirror exchange. For example, Chanwai-Earle engages her director as a reflection of her performance, reading his body language - for instance, boredom, interest and confusion. The exception to this consensus, again, was Yang and Szeps. Mirroring and proxy audience did not seem relevant to them because they felt that they were able to evaluate their performance from the interaction with the actual audience, a reflection of their experience as performers, the direct mode of delivery that their monologues took and the autobiographical content that they felt required autonomy.

Solo performance prompts us, as practitioners and spectators, to consider the theatre’s essential purpose in connecting through narrative to an audience. Solo performance can require little more than a body on stage and an audience. However, with the collaborative and critical input
from a director, characterisation can be evaluated, the best possible staging choices can be made and the interaction with a not-yet-present audience can be assessed. It can teach us about acting, audiences, performance, stories and directing. Much of the rehearsal room practice of these practitioners reflects my own observations in the rehearsal room. Their observations, like mine, achieve criticality amidst the practice of making theatre.

In the following Chapter Five, I consider the rehearsal room practice of the solo work of New Zealand’s Indian Ink Theatre Company. By examining this highly successful collaboration and their particular approach to the fundamental challenges of solo performance, I am able to consider in detail the creative journey in the rehearsal room and further analyse the function of bidirectional mirror systems in the rehearsal room.
Chapter Five
A Case Study of Indian Ink Theatre Company’s Solo Work

Introduction

In this chapter I present a concrete example of ‘the mirror’ in practice, in the context of New Zealand theatre company Indian Ink’s solo show Guru of Chai (2010). Indian Ink’s creative process brings into sharp focus the essential challenges of directing solo performance within the context of new, devised work that also uses mask as a central theatrical device. Discussions with the creators of Guru of Chai offer some close observations of the role of the director as ‘mirror’ in theatrical collaboration and rehearsal.

This example was chosen for several important reasons. Indian Ink is a highly successful theatre company, producing solo works that have had an artistic, cultural and commercial impact here in New Zealand and overseas. It was important to me to examine a successful, sustained model that could demonstrate a methodology and relationship that other practitioners might consider or emulate; that my doctoral study might be of use to practitioners working in this field. I was also able to physically access Indian Ink, seeing live performances of their solo shows Guru of Chai and Krishnan’s Dairy (1997)39, and interviewing the director and performer. This access provided insight into Indian Ink’s own Practice as Research – their way of working, testing, documenting and achieving criticality. This case history provides another successful model, in addition to those in previous chapters, that clearly demonstrates innovative ways of providing detailed feedback to the solo performer in the rehearsal room. Indian Ink’s process as documented here highlights the benefits of a participatory director who also provides detailed feedback from the audience perspective. It also highlights the importance of dramaturgy in creating new dramatic solo material. In this part of my research I sit outside of the work itself but I am privy to their methodology. I evaluate their approach and then consider how my PaR might be informed and adapted.

Drawing on interviews in 2013 with Indian Ink’s director Justin Lewis, and the solo performer Jacob Rajan, I analyse how the dynamics of collaboration in the solo rehearsal room differ from that

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39 I saw Guru of Chai on two occasions: at Napier’s Century Theatre on October 13th, 2010 and double-billed with Krishnan’s Dairy at Wellington’s Downstage Theatre on April 23rd, 2013. My performance analysis is based on these experiences, my reading of the script supplied by the writers and reviews of the production.
of the multi-cast play, and how working in the context of new, devised work affects the creative process. How, in actual conditions, might the director be placed as proxy audience and mirror in creating solo performance? What are the complexities of this mirror? What are the directorial challenges? How is the one-on-one relationship in directing solo performance encountered and negotiated? How might the director best serve the solo performer and the work?

Backstory to Success

Lewis and Rajan founded Indian Ink in 1997. They are now long-term collaborators and one of New Zealand's most successful touring theatre companies, performing in every major New Zealand theatre and city. They have also toured internationally and won two Edinburgh Fringe First Awards for their solo and multi-cast shows. In addition to the two solo shows, the company’s multi-cast plays include *The Pickle King* (2002), *The Dentist’s Chair* (2008), *Kiss the Fish* (2013) and *The Elephant Thief* (2015). Critics have acclaimed their use of live music, heightened theatricality, humour, pathos and great storytelling. The *Melbourne Age* declared their first play, the solo show Krishnan’s Dairy, to be “a tour de force from a master of multicultural mayhem” (Woodhead). The company has also received the critical attention of Lisa Warrington, and Cluny Macpherson and Paul Spoonley. Warrington suggests that Rajan, who is Malaysian-born of Indian parents, along with Lynda Chanwai-Earle, present New Zealand Asians in greater specificity and from their own stand-point: “newly-emerging Asian/New Zealand voices offer a further theatrical challenge to the bicultural foundation of Aotearoa, creating work which draws on the playwrights’ individual and specific cultural heritages and exploring dislocation” (349–350). The sociologists Macpherson and Spoonley examine how the media influences and shapes images of ethnicity: “As numbers, and interest in the life of minorities increases, televised and live drama and comedy follow and offer new insights into their experiences” (238). They recognise Indian Ink and Chanwai-Earle’s contributions in bringing “Chinese and Indian experiences and stories about New Zealand society to wider audiences” (Macpherson and Spoonley 238). Arguably theatre has a smaller reach than other media, but, as demonstrated by Indian Ink’s solo and multi-cast productions, theatre has successfully given a voice to ethnic minorities, especially via the solo performer.

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40 Aotearoa is the Māori name for New Zealand - the common translation is "the land of the long white cloud".
Indian Ink’s work has provoked discussion around the presence and artistic representation of New Zealand’s ethnic minorities, however director Lewis describes their focus as primarily narrative:

The social, cultural and political implications of each of the works are important and we are conscious of them, but our job as theatre makers is to tell stories, to throw a light on the dark corners of humanity and to lead the audience into a new and exotic world, the world of the plays (Rajan and Lewis, *Indian Ink* 15).

The exotic world they create comes from blending western theatrical traditions, including commedia dell’arte and Lecoq’s silent white Basle masks, with Indian folklore. Indian Ink’s “serious laugh”, that is, using laughter to open the audience to deeper themes, is central to the company’s approach. Their most successful show, a solo, *Krishnan’s Dairy*, is a love story played out across continents and cultures, and has been so influential that the published text is now part of the New Zealand school curriculum (“Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI”)”. Almost nineteen years since it was first created from a drama school exercise, a revival of *Krishnan’s Dairy* toured in 2013 together with their more recent success *Guru of Chai*. Both shows include musician David Ward, singing,

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41 “Serious laughter” is used in Indian Ink’s promotional material. In the script of *Krishnan’s Dairy* it states: “Open their mouths and then slip something serious in’. It’s a central tenet of our philosophy. Laughter is our Trojan horse. With it we are able to gain entry through the fortified gates of a cynical world. The soul is so much more easily nourished with a belly full of laughter” (Rajan and Lewis, *Indian Ink* 10).
playing music and creating sound effects – off-stage in Krishnan’s Dairy, and onstage for Guru of Chai.

Fig. 19. Jacob Rajan as Gobi in Krishnan’s Dairy (Photographer Louise Gallagher)

Methodology and Process: Time, Intensity and Detail

In Chapter One I acknowledged the breadth of the term “solo performance”, and its possible inclusion of stand up comedy and performance art, but state that my research focus is on a process where the director and solo performer are the primary creative team in the rehearsal room. I define solo performance (on page 28) as story-telling driven by the one performer and reliant on the performance paradigm of audience, script/text and performer. Guru of Chai fits this definition, for my research purposes, because Rajan is fulfilling the function of telling the story, his character(s) are the focal point for the audience’s attention and drive the narrative of the performance – much like Wellesley Robertson III’s contribution to Needles and Opium. In my interviews with Lewis and Rajan they report that the inclusion of musician David Ward occurs after their initial rehearsal work on story. In Guru of Chai, the musician is on stage, he is important, is acknowledged by Rajan in the performance and helps to frame the devotion to the Guru. However, because I am focusing on one-to-one interaction of director and performer in the rehearsal room, Guru of Chai is usefully considered as a solo performance by Rajan. And significant to this research, it is the rehearsal room where Rajan and Lewis worked together, prior to Ward’s involvement that I am discussing.
An Indian Ink show takes approximately two years to come to fruition. There are two distinct phases: creating an original written text and rehearsing the text. From a starting point, they create parameters to guide the work. As Lewis describes, “We aim to come at the work from a place of curiosity; with some good questions and a couple of strong hunches. We set up some creative limitations (scale, form, venue etcetera) then it is a kind of testing to see if it works. If not, why not? What needs to change?” British devising theatre company Frantic Assembly have a similar process that balances creativity with progress: “It is possible to imagine that devising implies that we have gone into a room with nothing and tried to make a start from scratch. This is not the case … It is focused and disciplined but it is definitely time to be playing with ‘what if’?” (Graham and Hoggett 5). Whilst the devising process is necessarily open in its early phases it also requires a level of structure to function effectively.

In *Guru of Chai*, Rajan plays Kutisar, a poor chaiwallah (tea seller) and story teller who creates a magical world, capturing the sights and sounds of a crowded Bangalore railway station, and bringing to life a myriad of characters: seven abandoned sisters, a useless poet, extortionists and a corrupted policeman. The story follows Balna, one of the orphaned sisters, whose beautiful singing voice captures the hearts of admirers and leads to heartbreak. The characters, voices and scenarios were created from mask work and improvisation in rehearsal. Lewis would coach Rajan by supporting a shared, imagined reality that was the burgeoning world of the play. From this work together the story is written by Rajan and Lewis, with Rajan more focused on dialogue – directly sourcing the voices of the characters (Rajan). Then follows an editing process, aided by a dramaturg: their long-term theatre collaborator Murray Edmond. Edmond first worked with Lewis and Rajan as dramaturg on *Krishnan’s Dairy*.

The traditional rehearsal structure, including the devising phase, has been adapted to this intense working relationship between director and solo performer. Lewis and Rajan are ‘on’ all of the time, before each other at all times and this is taken into consideration when they are planning rehearsals. As discussed in previous chapters, the intensity of the engagement, one-on-one, means that the director and solo performer may work for shorter periods of time than they would with a multi-cast play. As Rajan says: “I think the best work happens within three hours in the morning and then after that it is all pretty much ridiculous”. As discussed in Chapter Three, Brooke Williams and Willem Wassenaar agree, especially in a devising process where focus and inspiration can diminish in long rehearsals.

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42 The starting point for *Guru of Chai* was the Indian folk tale *Punchkin*. 
Once the text is created, the second phase begins with the rehearsal of the script where the director and performer must address the fundamental staging challenges of solo performance. This includes character delineation when multiple characters inhabit the stage, scenographic decisions, stage geography and the parameters of audience/performer relationship. Describing his directorial process, Lewis states:

The appropriate response is determined by the material and by the form that has been chosen to carry that material. It is about identifying what the work needs - is it a love story, a tragedy, a commedia, a mask show or a storytelling piece? What is the content and what is the form and what do they both need to be alive?

Indian Ink primarily use mask to achieve character delineation, along with posture, voice and stage geography. Whilst masks were used extensively in the rehearsal room of Guru of Chai and much inspiration came from exploring traditional masks whilst in Bali, Lewis and Rajan decided on a simplified approach for performance – over-sized teeth that transformed Rajan’s face throughout. Dionne Christian from the New Zealand Herald discusses the process with Rajan: “He says they started out with more masks but these were reduced to a set of teeth because it took too long to go through 25-30 mask changes. ‘I'm only one person trying to create a whole world.’” Rajan plays Kutisar, who in turn plays sixteen characters, a strong dramaturgical decision to double-layer the characters but to also assist the audience with a reliable storyteller. And like many of the theatrical tricks of conjuring and puppetry in the play, the transition between characters is almost undetectable – “delicately delineating each character with a quick change of his body, face, and voice to create real, compelling characters” (Atkinson, “The Guru of Chai - Many Parts Played by One Gifted Actor”). There are small costume changes too, such as a transformative scarf, and props utilised, again by slight-of-hand – “When a rag and arm can become a grieving widow and a flicking hand a live cockfight, an audience can be said to be totally seduced and we were” (Jackson). Rajan’s position on stage also helps the audience situate and identify the multiple characters. For example, Kutisar is located at his portable chai stand with his beloved red parrot, providing a vantage point to observe the action of the railway station and the plight of the sisters.

Relationships, Collaboration, Negotiation and Shared Language

There are usually other collaborators involved at some point in the process in creating a solo performance, such as designers and technical support. The contributions of other creatives is highly valued by Lewis and Rajan and contributes enormously to their success: “Indian Ink seems to be a
genuinely cooperative enterprise and it would be difficult to unpick the individual contributions of Justin Lewis as co-writer and director, Murray Edmond as dramaturg, John Verryt as designer and the substantial list of the contributors acknowledged in programme” (Simei-Barton). Indian Ink, like Robert Lepage discussed in the previous chapter, dispel the notion that a one-person show is the sole enterprise of one individual. Solos are often the result of productive collaboration between a number of artists, on various scales. However the essence of the theatrical solo process is of close collaboration: predominantly a one-on-one relationship that benefits from the delineation of roles in the rehearsal room. When there are just the two collaborators in the rehearsal room then it is purposeful to know how you are navigating this process together. Lewis acknowledges the strength of their long-term collaboration as creators and as business partners but he also clearly determines the boundaries between director and actor.

Indian Ink’s enduring partnership clearly offers a productive model for creating solo theatre. Lewis recognises that there was an initial period of deciphering “who we are in relation to one another” and then a nurturing of mutual trust and shared theatrical language over time. Lewis and Rajan have now become fluent in each other’s language, creating efficiency in the directing and crafting of solo work and allowing time to focus on the finer details. They have a thorough understanding of their idiosyncrasies. This dialogue has been achieved by providing critical feedback, by looking long and hard at each other, as into a metaphoric bidirectional mirror

Rajan views Lewis as both the leader and the director: “he asks the questions and he structures situations to allow you to find the answer for you, for your character and then he’ll tell you if it is boring or not. And he is honest, he is not a stroker”. The director must find this balance between nurturing the performer and harnessing creativity but also being tenacious about finding the best theatrical elements required to tell a story well, the rigour with which he or she views and responds, critiques and encourages. The responsibilities of the director in viewing and responding are heightened when there are no other actors to whom the solo performer can relate. In Chapter Two, I discussed how Pinney and Catron question whether there might be too much critiquing within this intimate relationship that affords so much detail. As Pinney says, “As a director of solo performance, I am the first receiver of that gift” (186). In Rajan’s case, like Harcourt and Chanwai-Earle discussed in Chapter Four, he wants robust attention from the director. In my experience there is a balance required between the vigorous, necessary critiquing on the one hand, and support for the performer toward courageous vulnerability on the other. Solo work requires openness and is best served by a director that can also be vulnerable, openly expressing honest reactions to what is
presented. In addition to this, the use of mask in Indian Ink’s work demands a particular critique where, as discussed below, the smallest angle or tilt of the mask can alter meaning for the audience. Issues of performance critiquing are heightened further when the content of the work is autobiographical to the performer and potentially disruptive to the PaR methodology, as was the case in *PocaHAUNTus*, discussed in Chapter Six.

The partnership of Lewis and Rajan evidently works and can perhaps be attributed to a mutual sense of humour, some artistic similarities and a clear division of responsibilities. The contributions of other collaborators, such as David Ward, Murray Edmond and John Verryt support this partnership, helping to realise their fantastical ideas. Whilst Lewis retains leadership, the exchange of ideas between Rajan and Lewis lends itself to a symbiotic relationship. This is coupled with a creative framework where Rajan can generate material and depend on trusted feedback from the Lewis.

**Role of the Director – Active Participant**

It is important to acknowledge the impact that the masks have had on Indian Ink’s creative process, on the director’s role and the relationships in the rehearsal room. According to Rajan, masks work directly with the spectators, in direct address, similar to the interaction between the solo performers and their audience. The physical and emotional intentions of the mask must be evaluated from the auditorium, and in rehearsal from the director’s position as potential audience. Rajan states that the mask, in interacting with an unseen other character, must:

[…]

work straight on or in three quarters profile and so they are naturally engendered towards looking at the audience all the time. If I give everything to this imaginary other person there, the audience does not see my reaction so I have to, if it is curiosity, glance at the person but my curiosity is given to the audience, all the time.

Lewis feeds back to Rajan as to whether this action, a glance of curiosity, is theatrically effective from the auditorium. The conventions of mask theatre performance require a specific directing approach, in comparison with realist theatre. Lewis and Rajan, in the forward to the script of *Krishnan’s Dairy*, explain how the mask serves the comedy:

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43 Masks are often imbued with ceremony, as Keith Johnstone notes: “Masks are surrounded by rituals that reinforce their power” (149). The conventions or rules often associated with mask work, in the rehearsal room and on stage, include turning away to put the mask on or leaving the room to do so, and not touching your face throughout a performance. The teeth in *Guru of Chai* share the same conventions as other masks.
It’s a mask’s bread and butter – theatrical gags. Ask an actor to hang up the phone after an argument with his lover and the receiver will be slammed down, the nostrils will flare. He will pick up a photo and stare meaningfully into the middle distance. Ask a mask to do the same thing and the receiver will be slammed down, a hammer will be produced, the phone will be smashed into a thousand pieces, the pieces will be swept up with a broom and pan, tipped into an envelope and the envelope posted to Antarctica. The mask will then eat the photo of his lover and then cry. *(Indian Ink 10)*

In the mode of non-realist performance, Lewis is looking for these heightened actions. In this instance Lewis, as a bidirectional mirror, is reporting back to Rajan and critiquing the essential physicality of his story-telling. This is in contrast, for example to my direction of *The Vagina Monologues* where my task as a mirror to the performer was to discover and assess the ‘real’, the conveyance of a verbatim story without a heightened tone or exaggerated physical expression.

In *Guru of Chai* the central character of Kutisar narrates the story, whilst being intrinsically involved with the plot. Kutisar constantly shares his insight and reactions with the audience – such as his distaste for his nemesis the Fakir, or his affection for Balna. In rehearsals, Lewis will sometimes demonstrate the effect of the mask to show the differences between the very small changes in the angle of the mask. The director becomes an active participant. This process recalls Nemirovich-Danchenko’s concept of the director as ‘regisseur-mirror’, ensuring that what the actor has physically presented is what is intended, and whether it is effective to its purpose. Because of the precision required in the use of masks, the director has to take more of an exacting mirror role, focusing the attention to movement, gesture and posture. This detailed work between the director and performer is typically heightened in solo performance. If rehearsal time permits, the director of a multi-cast play can achieve such detailed and individualised scrutiny but often the director’s attention is dissipated. Lewis explains that the masks talk to one another through the audience and the director needs to be present in rehearsals as the staging is developed to ensure that there is clarity in this transaction. Lewis is that audience in the rehearsal room:

The mask lives with an audience and so my role in many ways is just to be that audience. To create the energy loop between the performer and myself, or between Jacob and myself, that kind of lets the masks come alive. My role is to be the audience in some ways but to be more

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44 See Chapter Four for further discussion of *The Vagina Monologues.*
than an audience, sometimes to be an active audience member, sometimes to be a provocateur, to talk to the mask in character, to tell it if it’s been bad, or if it’s been very, very good. To try to get the mask responding and living.

This energy loop is at the essence of the bidirectional mirror, enabling a circular relationship between cause and effect. This interplay is at that heart of PaR’s objectives, as Nelson states: “To achieve critical reflection, an additional dimension is required to dislocate habitual ways of seeing … mobilized from within, from an element of playfulness” (45). In the rehearsal room Lewis sees his critical position as one that requires flexibility with considerable “putting on and taking off of hats in that early stage”. Lewis ‘dislocates’ the usual rules of play and might take on the role of another character, a coach or a critic. However, in order to achieve the strongest staging possible, this flexibility often must be followed by or alternate with a return to the agreed and delineated roles. As noted in the previous chapter, Willem Wassenaar found that there came a point in rehearsal where Sophie Roberts needed to focus completely on acting and Wassenaar exclusively on directing. Because of Lewis and Rajan’s mutual experience with the solo performance genre, in particular the writing process, their shifting roles have become efficient and highly creative. In the context of new devised work Lewis says he needs to let Rajan:

be free of trying to be the author for a while and just to be an actor. Sometimes, so that Jake can see things, I will get up and do things so he can have a look. Sometimes I will be the actor and he will step out and watch.

Such an active demonstration by the director in the rehearsal room, even if driven by the needs of the actor, has often been questioned. Directors usually encourage actors to come up with their own answers. Harold Clurman in On Directing (1972) addresses the issue of demonstrative directing:

Should the director suggest his ideas or personally demonstrate them by “acting” them out? I believe such a demonstration is dangerous … The peril in demonstrating to an actor how something is to be done is that it leads to imitation on the actor’s part. If the director is a poor actor the result might be grotesque. If he is an excellent actor - Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Reinhardt, for example – the actor becomes “crippled”, hopeless of matching the director’s brilliance (113).
In the realist mode of theatre, truth in acting is concerned primarily with creating and understanding the character’s inner life. For example, when Katie Mitchell discusses blocking she advocates that the director encourage the actor(s) to “let the moves evolve naturally out of the logic of the situation” (181). Like Clurman, Pinney also resists this type of directorial demonstrating and instead chooses to report back verbally on what she has observed (186). However, as demonstrated by Lewis’ directing practice, and particularly in the context of non-realist solo performance and mask work, there is an efficiency and speed that comes with working one-on-one that perhaps encourages the director to take this type of short cut in explaining what she/he means. This contradictory directorial mode - one demonstrative and the other instructive - can be a distinction between solo performances and multi-cast, perhaps reflecting that solo performance often tends towards a non-realistic form. Lewis’ demonstrative participation with Rajan in rehearsals reflects the intimacy of the engagement and the form of the mask-driven solo performance. As Lyndee-Jane Rutherford actively models moves for actor Jason Chasland, she becomes a living, moving ‘mirror’ for the performer. Whether a verbal exchange or demonstration, the director’s viewing and direct responding becomes the main mode of making progress in rehearsals of solo performance.

In rehearsals for solo performance, the performer cannot elicit responses from an audience that is not yet present, nor from other actors on stage, for there are none. Whether working with or without a mask, the solo performer has no other tangible point of reference than the director. Instead the director creates this ‘energy loop’ that responds directly with the performer, in lieu of an audience. Though her discussion is not limited to solo performance, Anne Bogart makes a similar analogy: “The relationship is circular … the actor initiates and the audience completes the circle with their imagination, memory and creative sensibilities. Without a receiver, there is no experience” (69). Lewis is the first receiver. In the rehearsal room he takes the role of a proxy audience. Lewis, however, is not a passive audience, instead actively responding and feeding back to the performer, the conduit in this energy loop. Lewis provides Rajan with the information that a mirror reflection would present but also bi-directional, engaging, analysing and responds to what is being viewed.

Stanislavski’s guidance is that the actor must be truthfully ‘experiencing the role’ and be present, not once removed through a mirror image - not a representation (13). This ‘imaginative reality’, where the actor creates an entire world on stage by himself or herself, is upheld by a contract between the solo performer and their audience whose imaginations permit this suspension of disbelief. Lewis explains what occurs in the absence of interaction with other actors:
[…] when you have got less, you have to stimulate the audience’s imagination more. It is much harder to do a solo performance than a drawing room drama. With a good solo performance you will release the audience’s imagination by indicating this chair and the audience sees their own chair, or the elephant, rather than giving them the chair and giving them the elephant. So maybe that is a thing that solo performance can bring to the performances of multi-casts. How can we release the audience’s imagination more?

The communication between solo performer and director helps build the performer’s characterisations and the imagined world. In an extended rehearsal process, the performer can find it onerous to continue to sustain and generate an imagined reality over time, on their own. To support this imaginative reality Lewis coaches Rajan through conversation. Lewis explains:

Sometimes I take on kind of a role, could be the director, could be the coach, and I talk kind of ‘in character’ to the character … Talking in an imaginative reality. Encouraging him not to break that imaginative reality that he is in. But it is all designed to lead the mask or the character in a particular direction by provoking it, or leading it. There is a difference between the conversation that happens in character and the conversation that happens out of character, so he comes out of character and then we talk as Justin and Jake [Jacob] about what works and what did not work.

The performer is creating this ‘reality’, this imagined world for an audience but the director in the rehearsal room is the first to view it. The director, as proxy audience, assesses the character/performer’s ability to release the imagination of the viewer. This participation of the director ‘in character’ illustrates the practice of the director being both participant and the outside critical eye. It is reflective of a PaR methodology where both the researcher/observer and director/participant, “through engagement with a range of other perspectives and standpoints [are able] to promote the interplay of fresh ideas” (Nelson 45), are in simultaneous action in the rehearsal room. Lewis interacts with the imagined reality, talking to the characters that are presented and generating more material through these interactions. This exploratory work in rehearsal, along with the constructs created by the dramaturgy and the aesthetics of the performance all add to the complexity of Guru of Chai. This is how one reviewer experienced that world:
First, I was afraid in bustling Bangalore, with its hot nights, seedy cockfights and dark underworld. Then I was brave in New Delhi, a city full of Starbucks outlets and opportunity. I stood on a dusty street and shook my head at the antics of a rascal chaiwallah. I hid in the dark corners of a parliamentary palace and saw a hero’s morality fall to the ground like dust. I watched a family grow, stretch, break apart and finally try to mend. I cheered for a child’s courage, I wept for a woman’s loss. I was spellbound. And the whole time, there was only one man on stage. (Fourie)

As an audience member myself, I too was immediately lured into another world. Guru of Chai transported me back to Mumbai’s central station – where I had stood, spellbound, as a nineteen year old with a backpack in tow. Reviewers and audiences have applauded Guru of Chai, nationally and internationally. Their ongoing touring is also a tangible result of their success.

**Bridging the Theatrical Space - From Performer to Director to Audience**

As with the work of all of the interviewees in the previous chapter, the audience is central to Indian Ink’s work. One of the questions pursued by the company when conceptualizing the Guru of Chai was how could the company connect with audiences on a new but fundamental level in a way that got back to the basic art of storytelling. To this end, the production was performed in private homes before it moved to more conventional theatre spaces. Lewis wanted to tell a big story, in a small way: “It is a way that the ordinary world can become part of the theatre. It really provides a new level of intimacy and connection with people in a much less formal way. When people gather in a house, there's a different kind of energy with some staying to have a drink and a chat” (Christian). To accommodate performing in homes and touring, the platform set was reasonably simple, but effective - “an atmospheric and raggle-taggle Indian setting by John Verryt [see Fig.20] of tatty, paint-spattered screens, a platform and a table bearing a primus and a large kettle” (Atkinson, “The Guru of Chai - Many Parts Played by One Gifted Actor”). The set also needed to be transportable – “The set can be packed into a purpose-built box slightly bigger than a suitcase, and there are lights and live music” (Christian). This live music comes via on-stage musician and composer David Ward who provides musical accompaniment and sound effects. He is acknowledged on stage by Rajan but Ward is not a character in the story, rather a definite but subtle presence and integral in setting the tone. In the preliminary notes of the script\(^45\) it describes the role

\(^{45}\) Indian Ink provided me with the unpublished 2009 script for *Guru of Chai.*
thus: “DAVE supports the story throughout with music, sound effects and facial eloquence” (*Guru of Chai* 1). A good example of Ward’s function is the following exchange in the prologue:

KUTISAR: If you don’t believe me, ask Dave. (Kutisar gestures to Dave and Dave beams)

Well, you can ask Dave but he won’t answer. Dave has not said a word in three years. He can sing but he cannot speak. He has taken a sacred oath. Isn’t that right, Dave? (Dave silent)

Ahhhh, I’ll get you one day. I’ll get you, Dave! (Kutisar and Dave enjoy this game.) (*Guru of Chai* 2)

There is also some gentle audience participation and interaction, that makes us feel at home but also involved, and foregrounds the storytelling mode. For example, at the beginning of the play there is verbal exchange with the audience when Kutisar takes on the persona of spiritual leader promising answers to life’s most burdensome questions. The conventions of direct address are established at the beginning of the show, in the same mode that Lepage employs for the beginning exposition in his solo *Needles and Opium*, so that the audience knows the rules of engagement, primarily that the fourth wall does not exist. Later, the Guru asks the audience to count to ten whilst he hides and requests that a woman in the front row find him with a torch as he lurks in the

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Fig. 20. Brewing chai. Jacob Rajan as Kutisar in *Guru of Chai*. (Photographer John McDermott)
shadows. The Guru was not so elusive and is quickly spotted, to the amusement of the audience. In scene three, the Guru runs into the seating area and demands that an audience member hold his parrot whilst he urges the bird to fly home to him. The parrot is eventually lured with an apple and dispatched towards the stage – a human chain of happily bemused spectators hands the stuffed red parrot back down to the waiting Rajan. The direct interaction and participation is one way to ensure connection between performer and audience. As discussed in the previous chapters, practitioners have sought this connection in many ways – through rapport, familiarity, stillness, authenticity, energy and intensity.

Thus, staging choices such as audience interaction can be evaluated by Lewis before the work reaches the greater public, with positive outcomes: “the actor’s incursions into the auditorium – so often a recipe for disaster – succeed in both involving the spectator and advancing the story” (Sandys, “Serious Laughter”) 46. In performance, Kutisar’s narrative is often seeking a direct response from the audience. In the absence of other actors/characters on stage the audience may become the other actors/characters with a nominated task, such as guru devotees, thus creating a dialogue.

Mirrors in the Rehearsal Room - Director as Mirror

Being an active proxy audience and creating this imagined reality with the solo performer becomes a far more participative role for the director than what is usual for a multi-cast production. For Lewis, the focus with a multi-cast play has been on how to “create the space where they are playing with one another and they are less concerned about me”. However the solo director’s role is to remain close to the action, within the action, almost on stage beside the performer, coaching, supporting, right up to the moment where the performer takes to the stage alone in front of an audience. The metaphorical, bidirectional mirror - this ‘director mirror’ - where the solo performer looks to the director to assess his or her performance, is not static but interactive and collaborative, much like an audience, or other cast members. This is particularly relevant for a PaR methodology where the director/researcher is engaged in creative work that is dependent on criticality. Rajan confirms the Edinburgh study’s observation that “self-referential semantics” in the literal mirror are a poor substitute for the critical mirror of the director:

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46 Sandys uses the title “Serious Laughter” for the title of her review. Lewis and Rajan coin this term on their website and as part of their publicity material, see page 179.
A [real] mirror would not do it because I would be immediately thrown out of the imaginative reality that I have here. By looking at myself I think that would shatter the whole thing ... and the director is there as the architect of it all, saying “more of that, less of that, that is boring, do that faster”... that is a very key trust that we have.

One of the ‘mirror’ functions is to deliver a trustworthy response from the director, an honest reflection of what is viewed. The result of the relationship between Lewis and Rajan can be observed in their work. Vanessa Byrnes reviewed the Guru of Chai in the Waikato Times:

It’s beautifully directed, wittily crafted, deeply embedded in an inherent wisdom. Justin Lewis is to be credited for his hand in creating and directing the work with the performer, and for working inside a process that requires enormous trust. That feeling of trust is palpable in the performance.

While that act of truthful observation is a critical function of the director in any multicast show, in the solo show such witnessing is intensified because it is often limited to two participants. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Judith Hamera notes that viewing “bounces between two bodies, and these two bodies can become “remade as each gazes toward, and vicariously inhabits, the other” (Hamera qtd in Pinney 186). The exchange of information is reflected back and forth between director and solo performer, as the action unfolds. This is an intimate process for both participants, exposing and ultimately powerful in examining exactly what it is that is being presented and represented to the audience. The director’s approach to this interaction between bodies and minds, characters, text and action needs to support this ‘looking’ by acknowledging the vulnerability that may occur and providing a safe environment for that to happen. In turn, the performer provides a mirror for the director. The director may evaluate herself in the performer, her ability to articulate, direct, communicate is reflected back with greater clarity than occurs in the manifold interactions of a multi-cast setting.

In Indian Ink’s process, Lewis as the director steps right out of the mirror into a participative role, actively engaging in the theatrical world of the character and then slips back into the mirror, moving between subjective to critical observer.
Conclusion

In the context of the *Guru of Chai*, a non-realistic solo performance, that uses masks and where writing a script is part of the collaborative creative process, how might the director best serve the solo performer and the work? In this context Rajan needs the director to provide structure but also to closely monitor him:

Somebody that can give me a solid framework within which I can be creative … a person to call me up on my old tricks. I need someone who will be brutally honest about what they are seeing and be a great communicator of exactly what it is that I am doing that helps the story and what does not. Somebody who can say you are boring, do something else.

In summary, and acknowledging the impact of the devising/writing process and the use of mask on this case study, Lewis and Rajan say the director best serves the solo performer and the work in several particular ways. They argue, that solo performance benefits from a director who takes a more participative role and is involved in the rehearsal action in a more hands-on fashion, such as improvising an imagined reality with the actor. Rajan and Lewis reason that the relationship between the director and solo performer benefits from a shared theatrical language and from a process that sustains the imaginative reality for the solo performer. The director needs to be the conduit for the energy loop in the absence of the audience – assessing the theatrical impact of parrots, teeth, shadow puppets and duets. There is an onus on the director to be a consummate communicator and to be responsibly viewing the work in a way that maintains agency for the performer and produces a theatrical experience worthy of an audience’s consideration. In addition the director assesses the level of “stroking” required for the individual performer– how much support and encouragement versus motivation and pressure. The director needs to provide a structure for creativity and act as both provocateur and monitor. It is important to identify the type of solo work and its particular directorial needs, adapting the traditional rehearsal structure to suit the intensity of solo work. The relationship flourishes in an environment where the two collaborators know each other well, and have nurtured a creative trust over a period of time.

Many of these actions are shared with any directing experience but most are significantly heightened, experientially and theoretically with solo performance. These approaches provide creative options for the director of solo performance. Indian Ink share many of the qualities of the other relationships between director and performer discussed in this thesis. Their partnership
exemplifies a solo rehearsal room that requires greater intensities of collaboration from those common in multi-cast productions. It demands a concentrated and intimate relationship that rehearses the theatrical potency of solo performance on stage. The complexity of Indian Ink’s narratives, the epic, universal nature of their stories is best suited to a robust directing model that can accommodate this expansive world. This type of solo performance would not be suited to the director-less processes employed by Yang and Szeps, discussed in Chapter Four.

Crucially, the director’s role is to provide a bi-directional mirror to the solo performer that can ‘perform’ in numerous ways: a living, moving, responding mirror that reflects a pre-audience perspective on the emerging performance. The director must offer a complex mirror surface that is multi-faceted, flexible, intuitive, crisp and clear, perhaps even magical (as Boal suggests) when the reflection helps provoke transformation. In a successful collaboration like Indian Ink, this has meant that the director takes on the roles of audience, mirror, coach, architect, provocateur, participant and monitor. The director as a metaphorical bidirectional mirror becomes a vital device at the service of the solo performer.

Indian Ink’s practice with solo performance supports many of the findings of the other practitioners interviewed in this thesis and my own PaR. As a distinction, their working model suggests the importance of input from a dramaturg in creating a new work and the advantages of the experience and expertise of Lewis and Rajan. In the following chapter of this thesis, I analyse my own PaR in the rehearsal room of *PocaHAUNTus*. There is considerable common ground between the rehearsal processes for *PocaHAUNTus* and *Guru of Chai*. They share some stylistic qualities of non-realist and epic story-telling that require a different kind of directing approach to more realistic theatre. They both require feedback from the director but for a highly experienced actor/writer like Rajan that feedback is specific and refined, particularly in regards to mask work. For Billington, as a less experienced theatre maker, she required much broader feedback, on a larger scale – ranging from character delineation to vocal quality to managing issues of dramaturgical structure. My objectives, in this specific research environment, were to further critically observe and practice the engagement of the director and solo performer, but within the context of new and autobiographical material. The objectives of this new project are informed by the observations and analysis of my previous work, including the post-production reflections, and from the interviews and analysis I have conducted on the work of Indian Ink and other practitioners in the field.
Chapter Six
Practice as Research - *PocaHAUNTu*s

Introduction

*Guru of Chai* and *PocaHAUNTu*s share a non-realist style and form and both wrestle with epic stories and explore cultural differences. Beyond these similarities, *PocaHAUNTu*s also presented an important, and often explored genre of solo performance – autobiography. This style of performance presents its own unique set of challenges, along with sharing similarities with other modes of theatrical production.

The central question for anyone planning to perform their own material alone onstage is how best to dramatize oneself. Given that one must inevitably adopt a performing persona or role of some sort, in presenting oneself to an audience (simply “being oneself,” whatever that is, is a practical impossibility), the artist has to decide which “face” or “faces” will best serve his or her creative objectives. Even if one wants to present material drawn directly from personal experience, the task is still to find an appropriate representational strategy by which to do this (Bottoms 520).

The above quote, by British academic and practitioner Stephen Bottoms, challenges ideas of representation and creative control in solo performance. These issues became pivotal questions to arise from the dedicated PaR component of my doctoral research – the examination of directing approaches to an original autobiographical solo work called *PocaHAUNTu*s with Melissa Billington. Over an eight-year period, Billington and I had worked closely together on several productions, including *The Vagina Monologues* and *Medea Redux*, as described in Chapter Three. However, the *PocaHAUNTu*s project was set up to investigate a new set of dynamics in the rehearsal room, where the relationship between the director/researcher and the solo performer navigated both a new text and, as a point of distinction, autobiographical content. The additional research tasks I undertook in *PocaHAUNTu*s acknowledge the particularity of each PaR project – “a model to house distinct, but dynamically interrelated modes of knowing or knowledge and show how they may be mobilized in Pa” (Nelson 47). The project’s PaR methodology facilitated a dual investigation where I was both practitioner and researcher in research-related practice. I could uncover, document, reflect, participate and create work with a focus on inquiry. In addition to the fundamental directorial challenges of character delineation, audience interaction, scenography and
stage geography, I considered specific approaches to directing solo performance. These rehearsal practices, gleaned from my previous directing of solo performance and my study of other directors, include: Robert Lepage’s body doubling, Indian Ink’s imagined reality, video recording, ensemble workshops, leadership models and improvisation-based warm up exercises. In the rehearsal room I also examined more complex theoretical concepts such as bidirectional mirror systems, communication and language, director as proxy audience and the working relationships of the solo performance rehearsal room.

In addition, as the researcher, I was testing the boundaries and rigour of my PaR methodology. What were the critical consequences of my methodology in approaching this project? In summary, the challenges included the very nature of ‘presenting oneself’ in autobiographical performance, and how that can be navigated theatrically whilst the director as researcher maintains criticality – the ability to both direct and to conduct effective research. The methodology was designed to accommodate these specific parameters and included a high level of artistic autonomy for both participants. The “multi-mode epistemological model for PaR” (Nelson 37) would be challenging and complex but allowed me to fulfill my research objectives – the testing of specific approaches to directing solo performance. This methodological paradigm is sufficiently flexible to include these principles for the researcher: ‘artistry, improvisation and decomposition’:

[…] ‘artistry’ refers to a crafted process of research that occurs as part of or alongside creative practice. ‘Improvisation’ refers to actions that take place during a research process that are responses to unpredictable events and venture beyond the confines of predetermined design. ‘Decomposition’ refers to moments when designed and improvised research processes deteriorate in confrontation with experiences that confound expectations of an orderly, rule-bound habitable universe … in which the research may be carried forward in new and unexpected directions. (Hughes, Kidd, and McNamara 188)

The positioning of the researcher within the methodology as both participant and researcher was intentional and of benefit to the research and is evidenced throughout the thesis. The research project moved in unexpected ways as the creative process progressed. The methodology required that I constantly assess and reassess critically, and be a vigilant documenter of the process. What follows is an analysis of the research within a PaR context including the testing of specific approaches to directing solo performance and the mirror paradigm. There is also consideration for how the PaR methodology affected the rehearsal process. Audience responses, which were solicited following performances of *PocaHAUNTus*, form part of the reflective process of the PaR, along
with an assessment of directing in the context of autobiographical material and new work. The conclusion highlights the prevailing challenges of the dramaturgy and creative control.

**Methodology: Her Story – My PaR Story**

My methodology for the *PocaHAUNTus* project was an extension of my professional practice, that sought “substantial new insights” (Nelson 47). I had theories to pursue in the rehearsal room that required more attention than usual, and greater documentation. I relate this to Nelson’s ‘awareness’:

> It has been suggested that much of what is required by way of documentation may already be a part of professional process but that anticipation, preparation and ‘sixth-sense’ awareness can assist in capturing key insights. (47)

The key insights and critical analysis of this part of my research draws predominantly on the testing of specific approaches to directing solo performance – as outlined below under Rehearsals as Research. The documentation I analyse in this chapter is from production journals, pre- and post-production interviews with Billington, plus journal entries that record our meetings prior to the rehearsal period, transcripts of our email exchanges and rehearsal plans. In addition to this I reference the written and illustrative records and collections of our exploratory work together, photographs of rehearsals and performance, projection slides from the show, video of rehearsals and performance, and the final script. I consider commentary by two directors of autobiographical solo performance, Amy Pinney and L’hibou Hornung, and the autobiographical work of actor/researcher Steve Matthews, amongst others in the field and including those interviewed in previous chapters. Their insights are considered in relation to my own directing practice. There are responses from audiences, garnered from post-show forums, and audience feedback that was received verbally and by email. I also interviewed theatre practitioner and academic John Downie, as a critical audience member of *PocaHAUNTus*. These resources were vital in both navigating and analysing the particular concerns that arise from solo autobiographical performance.

> There are many possible approaches to theatre research including critical readings of performance or archival investigation. Theatre, in itself, to quote Brecht, is “a laboratory, a place of investigation, analysis, and construction of models” (in Weber 84). Brecht’s context is political and maintains an aesthetic, and engaging outcome in production. The PaR model accommodates an applied component where practice and theories are explored in rehearsal. In all the solo work that I
examined, my own and that of others, it is in the rehearsal room that the questioning, research and challenges occur. There are discoveries to be made from watching a performance, along with an audience, but as proxy audience in the rehearsal room I can more clearly analyse the mechanics of directing as they occur.

Brad Haseman defines PaR as “concerned with the improvement of practice, and new epistemologies of practice distilled from the insider’s understandings of action in context” (3). I discovered that the best position to be in as a theatre researcher/practitioner was as McAuley articulates, where a balance as a participant and observer is achieved:

The experience of ethnography is that the participant/observer in the field has to be vitally enmeshed in the daily experiences of the people being studied and, at the same time, sufficiently distanced to make observations, write notes about what is occurring and find time to write these up in more detail. (McAuley 9)

I understand that the insider’s view has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are to be actively involved in the action, improving practice in the moment. The disadvantages are that the trajectory of the research can be subverted by the creative act – there can be a loss of criticality. Taking this dual role of practitioner-researcher presented many exciting opportunities and challenges: “characterised by post-binary commitment to activity (rather than structure), process (rather than fixity), action (rather than representation), collectiveness (rather than individualism), reflexivity (rather than self-consciousness), and more” (Kershaw and Nicholson 62–63). In the rehearsals of *PocaHAUNTus* we were able to commit to activity, not knowing the outcome - in doing we would discover. We were free to bend, look back and turn back. Billington and I acknowledged the culminating public performance was not fixed, and for Billington would be an evolving process, continuing to develop the work beyond the premiere season. The PaR was based primarily in action in rehearsal, and to a lesser degree in the final presentation/performance – “Marking two possible approaches to research reflecting different mindsets – process-driven and goal orientated” (Nelson 45). The PaR component of this thesis was a perfect fit for the complexity of the project and the advancement of my research because it could accommodate all the unknown outcomes.

PaR is an exciting tool for researchers that embraces shifting parameters and interdisciplinary notions and can accommodate ‘closeness’ to the work. What was clear to me, from the documentation and analysis, was that the outcome of my research was most evident in the
rehearsal room. However, the research questions are also present in the performance. Everything seen on stage is a result of a negotiation between the director and the solo performer in the rehearsal room.

*PocaHAUNTus – Her Story*

*PocaHAUNTus* premiered on the 12th February 2014 at Studio 77, Victoria University of Wellington, with a five-performance season. It was an original solo performance directed by myself, and written and performed by Melissa Billington. The idea for *PocaHAUNTus* had been percolating with Billington for many years. She first presented me with a folder of images in 2008, expressing a desire to create a performance that explored questions regarding the maternal lineage in her family, particularly her connection as the thirteenth lineal descendant of Pocahontas. We began in earnest in late 2011 when Billington sent me her unfinished novel *A Relative Unknown (The Story of my Grandmother, An Autobiography)*.

In contrast to the primarily aesthetic and theatrical goals of *Porcelain Grin*, Billington hoped that *PocaHAUNTus* would have a further purpose, that it would be transformative for herself: “the idea is that by looking back, I look inwards and by making changes now, I heal myself now and for the future, but also for my ancestors in the past” (“Personal Email”). In addition, Billington also wanted to create a transformation in the audience. Australian theatre director L’hibou Hornung shares this aspiration for transformation, wanting the solo performer to empower the spectator(s), rather than simply document a story. However, in Billington’s view any transformation began with herself:

If you want to awaken all of humanity, awaken all of yourself.
If you want to eliminate all of the suffering in the world, eliminate all that is dark and negative in yourself.
Truly, the greatest gift you have to give is that of your own self-transformation.
*(Attributed to Lao Tzu)*

Billington wanted to awaken her audiences and many of the comments from audience members suggested they had experienced some level of ‘awakening’ and engagement with the performer: “I can still feel it in my heart, wow, I really feel truly affected by the experience … it was truly transformative on so many different levels, and really made me feel like your work was like
medicine- for myself and many others. whilst the measurability of this sort of transformation is arguable, it remains indicative of an enduring effect on some members of the audience.

we might consider performance studies in this context and the binary between a liminoid (temporarily transportive) and liminal (permanently transformative) experience for the audience of performance. victor turner proposed two distinct categories, a division between liminal experiences that permanently transform the participants, and those that are liminoid, related to transformational ritual but offering only a temporary transformation and then return to the pre-existing state, such as occurs in much aesthetic performance (loxley 156–157). schechner suggests greater fluidity in the liminal / liminoid distinction, operating along a continuum of ritual and aesthetic performance, the performance is attempting to be both (schechner 66–67).

the binary approach of turner is actually a useful reflection of the multiple ways in which billington’s and my own goals were in conflict. in pocahauntus, billington was more interested in liminal/transformative aspects; as director i was more concerned with the liminoid/entertainment aspects. as the director i was seeking a cohesive narrative and mise en scène that took the audience on a temporary journey, returning them to reality after the theatrical experience. billington’s prevailing liminal goals resulted in a piece of theatre that challenged audiences with non-linear narrative, audience participation and the utilisation of some inherently non-theatrical forms to tell a complex cultural story. for billington the experience was unquestionably transformative, and hence liminal, while the audience potentially had a liminoid experience, depending on what degree of engagement they felt with the performer. the promotional flyer for pocahauntus, written by billington, announced:

with an aim to bridge these seeming opposites, to take the poison of ancestral patterns and transmute it into potion for the present and future generations, melissa plays with the premise that performance is performative in the western world, yet transformative in most indigenous cultures. (“promotional flyer for pocahauntus”)

pocahauntus developed into a multimedia solo performance that employed a range of performative and non-performative elements to tell interweaving stories. our attempt to offer both the liminal and the liminoid experiences, and billington and my differing objectives perhaps did not best serve the work, and added unproductive complexity.

47 see further feedback from audience members on pages 230 – 233.
The three main narratives in the piece followed Pocahontas, Billington herself, and Billington’s female ancestors. The first narrative offered a post-colonial, feminist reading of Pocahontas that sought to challenge Western, white male perspectives of a First Nation encounter. The story of Pocahontas has been much maligned and romanticised in Western literature, cinema, art and children’s books. For example, the Disney film *Pocahontas* (1995) has been challenged on its historical accuracy, especially its emphasis on a questionable romance between John Smith and the protagonist, and for “reusing stereotypical conceptions in the depiction of Pocahontas and her tribe” (Blum 4). *PocHAUNTus*’ political and historical account was interwoven with the personal history of Billington’s life as a traveller, yoga teacher and philosopher/activist. The third narrative thread was the recent history of Billington’s mother, grandmother and great grandmother, dominated by murder and madness, and how the writer acknowledged that lineage. The play raised questions of identity, sexuality, gender, religion and globalisation. The performer invoked, lectured, danced, drummed, sang, poetised, took on multiple characters and utilised projected images of significant relatives and historical figures – both real and mythological. Billington played a total of ten characters. This is the list of dramatis persona from her final script of *PocHAUNTus*:

**Characters:**

Melissa Elvira Billington—writer, actor, investigator of the story(ies)

Phyllis Hunter Robertson—Melissa’s mother’s mother, wild-child, lover, “crazy”

Willie Anne Peyton Robertson—Melissa’s mother’s mother’s mother, mother of many

Pocahontas/Matoaka/Lady Rebecca\(^{48}\)—Melissa’s grandmother on both sides, to the 10th powa\(^{49}\)

Josephine McCandlish—Phyllis’ friend and neighbour

Wahunsenacawh—chief powa-full dreamer, Pocahontas’ father

Rolfe Robertson—Willie Anne’s husband, frustrated free-thinker, abuser?, killer

John Rolfe—the man who married the converted Pocahontas

John Smith—the man “saved” by Pocahontas and from whose writings we have historically based most of our story of her and her people

Columbus—Italian explorer employed by the Spanish to create a trade route with India by travelling west

Thomas Dale—in charge of Virginia colony for a spell, known as a tough man, raped Pocahontas?

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\(^{48}\) These are the three names that Pocahontas used as she travelled from her native America to the United Kingdom.

\(^{49}\) Billington explains the term: “Powa is an Algonquian language base word that is the root of Powhatan and pow-wow. The latter means dreaming together. The former means people who dream. Powa is similar to Mana and is a connection to spirit, the implicate order, an ability to shape shift, to heal plant or animal worlds, to connect with others. It depends on context. So I use it instead of power, which means to be able to (manifest one's desire) and is connected to the word potent, because it has a wider, more spiritual, premise. It is both a play on words and a type of power”. (Billington. Personal email. 18 July 2014)
The personae dramatis included familial characters, Billington’s grandmother Phyllis and great grandmother Willie Anne. Historical figures like John Rolfe, Wahunsenacawh, John Smith and Columbus map out the legendary Pocahontas’ life including her transformation into Lady Rebecca who traveled to Georgian England. These characterisations were symbolic rather than realistic. Billington did not endeavour to create fully realised characters but representations that functioned within the style of narrative. Thus, our rehearsal work was to ensure character delineations were clear to the audience through obvious on-stage costume changes, rather than creating the psychology of three-dimensional characters. Billington played herself (in a performance mode) and narrated the numerous stories. The main narratives followed Pocahontas, Phyllis (Billington’s mother’s mother), Willie Anne (Billington’s mother’s mother’s mother) and Billington’s own life story. The stories were literally worlds away from each other. In the early 17th century Pocahontas encounters John Smith and wonders at the absurdity of the colonialists. In the 1930s Willie Anne protects her children from her abusive husband on a ranch in Virginia. In the 1950s, Phyllis, Willie Anne’s daughter, struggles to conform in the conservative society of Middle America. In addition, Billington accounts her own travels, from America to Scotland to the Caribbean, to India, to New Zealand: “I’ve circled the globe to come home to mySelf” (Billington, PocaHAUNTus). Billington creates a discourse between herself and the other characters, sometimes as an observer and sometimes in more direct engagement with their narratives. The themes of redemption, colonial corruption, and patriarchal oppression are played out within her stories. What was challenging for me was to understand and articulate Billington’s particular vision, to find the most effective theatrical language to present such an eclectic new work, and to experiment with directorial approaches and document the results.

The stage was traverse with a projection screen at each opposing end. One projection screen was devoted to the family tree/tree of life and photographic images of Billington’s relatives. The other screen was more multi-faceted with a variety of still images, ranging from the Hindu goddess Kali Devi to maps of old Virginia, and moving images from Walt Disney’s Pocahontas (1995). When developing blocking for a traverse audience configuration, the director must carefully assess the positioning of the performer, ensuring that her performance is not privileged to a particular direction – this danger is even more so with only one performer because the audience has just one point of focus, unlike a multi-cast where they can look elsewhere for action and reaction. In addition, working with projected imagery necessitates a close evaluation of focal points for the audience. The director must assess where the audience’s eye is drawn and ensure that this is desirable. To aid the geographical expanse of the stories, the other major set piece was the marking
of the floor with a roughly drawn map of the world. Suitcases were used as personal props. A large tree stump was posited beneath the projection of the family tree. These props served to provide individual characters with their own designated areas that we hoped would help clarify the action, for example Wahunsenacawh delivered his oratories from the tree stump.

Costumes were used to both delineate characters and demonstrate the connectivity between them. This device for the playing of multiple characters is often employed in solo performance. Sometimes an actor will just use a single item, like a scarf, and wear it in different ways to denote different characters. Costume changes in PocaHAUNTus were quite elaborate and a major part of the action on stage, facilitating transitions in character, time and place, but also an extended metaphor for colonisation of America. For example, Lady Rebecca (Pocahontas’ Anglicised personae) struggles into the Georgian dress of the day, representing the many constrictions placed upon women at this time, and then she is ceremoniously stripped to become Pocahontas as a young woman happily turning cartwheels in the nude – in her pre-colonial state of freedom. (see DVD Example 4. Appendix 3)

Fig. 21. Melissa Billington as Lady Rebecca
(Photographer Katherine Wyeth)
The theatrical delivery included narration in the first person by Billington in the style of a lecture. Billington had considerable factual information that she wanted to impart and she considered that this was most effectively delivered in direct address to the audience. Intentionally, or not, there was a Brechtian quality to this choice of delivery – perhaps the audience would not be swept along with emotion and consuming narrative and consequently maintain a critical distance. Would Billington’s goal of transformation be best served by this means of communication? There is a tradition of theatrical lectures as a style of delivery for solo performance, of note George Alexander Steven’s satirical Lecture on Heads, (discussed in Chapter One), and New Zealand’s Hatch – Or the Plight of the Penguins (in Chapter Three). This set up provides a purpose and a relationship for the audience to embody. These considered and specific roles assigned to the audience make the premise and goals of the performance clear. In contrast PocaHAUNTus also included songs, voice-overs, audience interactions, and dancing and ceremonial invocations. Billington described the performance as a different style of theatre that strived to be transformative and performative. Retrospectively, Billington expressed some uncertainty about the theatrical experience for audiences: “There was a lot of re-evaluation and redefining of what that [the theatrical experience] actually means” (“Personal Interview” 3 March 2014). For example, Katherine Wyeth sings a version of Still I’ll Rise by Maya Angelou from off-stage during PocaHAUNTus. Whilst in Indian Ink’s Guru of Chai the involvement of musician Dave is clarified and consistent, the presence of Wyeth is not explained. I contested this choice of Billington’s because its purpose was not clear to me. There were many aspects of the project that would charter unknown territory for us both, and perhaps for the audience. The challenges of the project would also impact on the research methodology itself as Billington’s attachment to her story came into conflict with directing and dramaturgical decisions.

Points of Departure – Working Together

Billington and I had worked closely together on several productions. The longevity of our personal and professional relationship had been beneficial to working together in the rehearsal room. I had shared my theatrical language with her, mostly garnered from my director training at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School and we communicated with both ease and vigour. Our methodology had been centred on exploring the world of the play and identifying rhythm, beats and

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50 In discussing the style of address she was aiming for Billington often referred to “TED talks” – TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) is a non-profit web-based organisation devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less) (“TED”).
objectives, as outlined in my rehearsal room methodology in Chapter Three. I considered Billington to be a strong performer who excelled in understanding the psychology and politics of a given text and with extensive physical training in yoga and dance, a corporeal commitment to embodying character and action. In our previous work together, Billington was always open to investigating and trying new approaches.

I had perceived our process for PocaHAUNTus thus: a long term project taking approximately two years, working by distance for some of that time, and meeting monthly to share ideas. I would provide provocations and guide exploratory work, leading to a devising process where characters would emerge and a script be written. My research questions would be tested during the rehearsal period rather than the early devising process. Thus, after the completion of a working script and dramaturgical assessment and workshops, there would be a dedicated rehearsal period in the performance space. My research focuses on directing approaches, however part of the process with a new script involved devising with Billington. I had significant input into the script until Billington felt able to complete the writing on her own.

To begin with we explored ideas that were generated from Billington’s unfinished novel. We undertook a series of provocations included collecting images, objects, sounds and smells, considering what was provoked within us by the world of her novel (see Fig.22).
We used improvisations to explore characters. At times, Billington resisted improvising around the characters as she perceived them to be ‘real’ and ‘relatives’ and she was reluctant to portray characters without a thorough investigation of their authenticity. There was also an early indication of how emotive that work was for Billington: “I might go a little crazy as I attempt to shape-shift into them and their stories and their world ... So if they were crazy, won't I be?” (“Personal Email”, 30 Jan 2012) The challenge for me as the director, in these early exchanges, was to encourage Billington to be open and to share her stories and to provide security, a safe place in which she could to explore and reveal. I ensured that those exploratory sessions were in such an environment.

With the performer’s vulnerability in mind I began to reconsider my role as director and acknowledge the guardianship bestowed on this position in the context of autobiographical new work. In previous productions with Billington we had used an existing text and thus the territory to explore was mostly within the confines of that script. In contrast, guiding the autobiographical performer meant I was extracting story from another human being rather than text on the page.
Alison Oddey, in *Devising Theatre – A practical and theoretical handbook* (1994), describes different examples of how directors might function in the devising process and investigates leadership roles that are democratic or hierarchical. For instance, British devising theatre company Forced Entertainment has “two directors, sharing responsibility for rehearsals, performance quality, steering meetings, and the eventual form of the show” (Oddey 44), while The Burning Show Company has “everyone in the group being responsible for something in the set” (Oddey 43). In the context of devising for solo performance, I envisaged a process that would combine the democratic and the hierarchical. I recognised the mutual vulnerability as we set out to navigate unknown terrain together. We wanted to keep the process open to creative inspiration, necessitating that there is no judgment or censorship, particularly in the beginning stages of research provocation and exploration. However, I also wanted us to keep on track, for both the PaR and the premiere public performance.

After several months of exploratory work together, Billington wanted to work on writing a script by herself. She had collated enormous amounts of resources from letters, interviews, scholarly analysis and research, and wanted to work through this to extract the material for her script. I continued to contribute to the process and the ideas that we had already discovered were further developed. This way of working, of exploring together at first and then one person taking the mantle of writer is not uncommon. As discussed in Chapter Five, Indian Ink Theatre Company work successfully in this way, albeit with an experienced dramaturg who has a long-term involvement with the company. It allows for roles to become clearer and for practitioners to work to their strengths. There would still be opportunities to use improvisation to find scenes and work through script difficulties and to experiment with workshops with other actors. We would collaborate with a dramaturg (Stephanie Sinclaire), costume designer, musicians, choreographer and audio-visual specialists. Billington would write a series of drafts and we would continue to meet. I would advise, motivate and monitor Billington's process - especially encouraging a dramaturgical shift from ideas and themes to stories, action, characters and theatricality. This new clarity and consensus in our roles came from a review we undertook of our process to date and a discussion of how we would most successfully move forward. The benefit for my research was that once Billington delivered the script, we would enter into a more traditional rehearsal period where I could focus on my role as director and pursue my research questions as we readied the show for its premiere.

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51 ‘Burning Horizon – People Show No. 97’ (1990).
Whilst the work was highly emotive for Billington, it was at times frustrating for me. I struggled to bring together all the layers of stories, and was at times perplexed by the complexity of the narrative. Billington’s ideas were often philosophical, spiritual, political and physical. For example, her own reading of Pocahontas challenged the white male perspective and made her aware of the physicality of the protagonist – a young girl, naive to her sexuality, enjoying her body in motion. She wanted these ideas, and many others, interwoven, both metaphorically and literally into the performance. I needed to understand this world and guide her. I wrote in my production/research journal at the time: “There is a truck load of wonderful stories and all these wonderful ideas about how it could be presented. But the truck is dangerously overloaded and first needs to deliver the basic story via ‘conventional’ narrative and character ... identifying the road for the truck is my job as director. She is in the thick of it” (“Personal Journal”).

Realising that Billington’s scriptwriting would require more assistance than I was able to provide, especially in an environment where I was already a participant and researcher, I sought the involvement of a dramaturg. We were assisted with the dramaturgy by painter and director Stephanie Sinclaire (recent artistic director of the King’s Head Theatre of London) and by British actor Katherine Wyeth to read some of the other characters and the voice-overs. We began a series of four workshops focused on extracting the stories from the performer/writer, encouraging the stories to take the form of characters that were in dialogue with each other and an attempt at addressing how the audience would make sense of the myriad themes, characters and time frames that were presented. These dramaturgical issues could stand in the way of the crucial work of the director to find the theatrical language of the performance. In the workshops we worked in a collaborative manner with all of us contributing feedback. Billington would work on amendments to the script between each workshop but often seemed overwhelmed by the enormity of the task and her outside commitments. Sinclaire and I shared similar ideas and were able to work harmoniously.

However, whilst these workshops with Sinclaire were helpful in finding some clarity in the narratives, there was much more re-writing, writing, shaping and editing needed. The dramaturgical challenges of the *PocahAUNta*us script affected my PaR methodology and the performance. The script issues were manifold and included the challenges of creating drama from reported action, crafting rhythms in language, differentiating characters and clarifying the narrative by assessing what was being understood by the reader/audience. The unfinished script would at times obstruct my directing approaches. On reflection, and considering Edmond’s consistent involvement with Indian Ink in developing new work, a dedicated dramaturg is best utilised right from the beginning of the process and throughout rehearsals. Sinclaire’s involvement was limited to those four
workshops. As I argue for the presence of the director in solo performance, I reason for the attendance of a dramaturg in new and autobiographical solo performance to assist in finding greater clarity and theatrically effective structure in an emerging script.

The Nature of the Rehearsals

Rehearsals occurred in the performance space at Victoria University. This was hugely beneficial, as we would not need to transfer from one environment to another and could experiment and exploit the architectural parameters of the actual stage. Billington found that access to the space was invaluable, allowing her to connect with the environment physically and psychologically. She could physically explore the opportunities of the space – climbing to the balcony, cart-wheeling across the stage. Feeling connected and safe in the theatre allowed her to ‘reveal’ the very personal nature of her work. Whilst Billington relied heavily on direction, she also found that a lot of her work needed to be done solo. Hornung comments that allowing the actor ‘space’, in the emotional/creative sense, is key to a productive rehearsal room: “With only one actor to work with, the director can run the risk of ‘over directing’. The director must learn how to give space as well as “bear witness and paraphrase” (Hornung). Billington and I rehearsed together for relatively short periods of time, an hour or two, and then I left the building and allowed her to continue working alone. Thus Billington benefitted from the space and place to be creative.

In the first week I intentionally rehearsed without anyone else in the room and encouraged a safe, creatively conducive environment – especially as there was nudity and we were working in a semi-public space within the university’s theatre department. Our collaborators, audio-visual technicians and designers were briefed on the content of the work and contributed with sensitivity to both the research and to Billington’s revelations. From week two, technological demands necessitated that we had one, or more, of our collaborators with us in rehearsals. Billington relates it thus: “In that process of adding folks in, the main concern I had was around nakedness - of my body/mind/soul and of the body of work as it became clearer and was refined” (“Personal Interview”, 21st June 2014). The presence of others in the room made both of us vulnerable at times as we exposed our process, particularly in phases of impasse. However, the eyes of others also had benefits: “Others in the room are like reflections, not necessarily direct mirrors, but reflective surfaces, that show me fragments of the work and how it might affect fragments of humanity” (Billington, “Personal Interview”, 21st June 2014). As described in my methodology in Chapter Three, I have always valued the support of a trusted colleague to view my directing work in rehearsal. In PocaHAUNTus our main audiovisual support was Moira Fortin, a fellow PhD student
and experienced director. Similar to the input of the stage manager in the rehearsal room of *ImpoSTAR*, as discussed in Chapter Four, Fortin was actively contributing, rather than occupying the position of a passive observer. Fortin provided the continuity usually delivered by a stage manager. She was invaluable in being able to discuss the work with me, from both a research and a performance perspective. In retrospect, a stage manager might also have doubled as an additional documenter of the research process. As Nelson identifies: “If it is possible for somebody beyond the solo artist or deviser-director to take responsibility for documentation, it allows the ‘artist’ to focus on the process of making although the ‘practitioner-researcher’ will need to be in dialogue with documenter. But this is a luxury that not all can afford” (88). We did not have the resources for this position, and I was also aware of the exclusivity of the one-on-one relationship between director and performer that I was pursuing, that may have been disrupted by an ever-present other in the rehearsal room.

Rehearsals were constructed around the daily needs of the production but followed a basic structure of warm up exercises, reviewing our progress and goal setting for the day, ‘marking/blocking’ movement, editing the script and specific scene work. Each day would also involve some discussion around technical and production issues, for example, the sequencing of projections and the sourcing of props. The fundamental directorial challenges of character delineation, audience interaction, scenography and stage geography were approached in the same way as I have outlined in Chapter Three when I describe my methodology. The scenography evolved from the blocking – the movement of the characters around the stage and was predominantly symbolic. The map of the world on the stage floor is an example of finding a solution to the complexity of a narrative that literally traversed the planet. We wanted to physically show the audience where we were in the world, that this was Pocahontas standing in England or Billington in her homeland of America.

In addition to using costume, we delineated characters by exploring voice and body motifs for each role and finding their locale on stage. For example, we chose to place patriarchal, slow moving chief Wahunsenacawh on the tree stump, beneath the family tree. Our process, through experimentation and improvisation, was to find Wahunsenacawh a physical motif of slow movement and ceremony, a vocal motif of deep gravitas and to give him an identifying piece of costume and a place to reside. We also developed rules for each character in regards to audience interaction: for example, for Lady Rebecca there was a fourth wall, whilst Josephine McCandlish

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52 Due to unforeseen circumstances, our assigned stage manager was unable to fulfill her role. In the nature of theatre collaboration, Fortin, Billington and myself attended to the stage manager’s tasks.
openly conversed with the audience. These rules and motifs helped the audience to identify characters, time and place and were crucial in such a complex narrative and essential to good practice in directing solo performance.

As discussed in previous chapters, a shortened version of rehearsals of between two and four hours a day works best for solos, accommodating the intensity of the one-on-one encounter. I set ‘homework’ tasks for Billington to prepare between rehearsals, for example, to rehearse a scene for us to work on the next day. Billington would spend further time working on the script, amending the writing and learning the lines: “Mostly I memorised and memorised and memorised. And because the script was still edited after the final show, this was an on-going process” (“Personal Interview”, 21st June 2014). This creative process is similar to that used by Henri Szeps in Chapter Four, where he combines simultaneous writing and performing, in front of an imaginary audience. However, Szeps works without a director and must be self-evaluating and self-governing, and to undertake this process alone needs substantial experience. With a director present there can be an immediate dialogue about how the writing and performing are being received. Actors that work with devised or new scripts are accustomed to learning lines that may well be discarded or changed. However, Billington was reluctant to commit lines and staging to memory before we had decided on the final version. This was demonstrative of her inexperience with the devising and writing process for theatre and also her need to maintain creative control over the final product. I believe that the autobiographical material was the underlying concern for Billington, driving her desire to perfect and authenticate the text and staging before it was memorised. This put considerable pressure on the time available to rehearse the play, and at times compromised the directing and research. As noted by interviewees in Chapter Four, when working with new material, including new devising processes, new scripts, new adaptations, the material is not performance tested and requires greater dramaturgical attention and time. Time became an issue for both the PaR and performance schedule.

In my own prior experience of directing new material, the challenge each time was that I needed to experience the whole of the work so that I could make decisions about the dramaturgy based on the trajectory of the audience’s complete journey – from beginning to end. To allow time for the work to reach the point of wholeness is crucial. To ensure the theatrical success of PocaHAUJTus, I needed to have Billington on the stage before me, without script in hand, with lines learnt so that we could focus on the theatrical work of movement, scenography and character delineation. Before this could occur we needed a workable script. In addition, I needed to assess, analyse and document my approaches within my PaR methodology – I needed to be able to direct in
order to achieve criticality and clarity. As acclaimed Australian actor/director/writer of solo performance Guy Masterton, notes:

During rehearsals, it is virtually impossible to direct an actor hunting for lines, therefore it is very important for the actor to understand that the lines are going to be their best friend and worst enemy! They need to know them OR AT LEAST what they are saying so that the show can build. If not, the director will be unable to evolve the performance through the actor.

For example, to work with multiple characters, switching at speed between them including physicality and vocal delivery, the actor must have an excellent command of the lines. To evaluate, as the director, the effectiveness of delivering lines as the actor is moving from one end of the stage to the other means that the lines need to be memorised. For the lines to be memorised the script needs to be complete.

This is outlined in Chapter Three, where I discuss my work with Billington on existing solo texts Medea Redux and The Vagina Monologues. We had worked in a timely fashion, producing work in a short period of time, aided by the memorisation of her lines prior to rehearsals. In the development process of PocaHAUNTus the autobiographical content necessitated that time be more flexible to accommodate the exploratory nature of the work. As Hornung describes it: “Seeking strengths as building blocks and articulating developments and new discoveries is the main task for the director, especially in the initial rehearsals”. This articulation of what is offered by the performer to the director reminds me of Pinney’s flashlight analogy, setting off into the dark, looking over my shoulder and pondering my own position in the process:

I’m on rearguard. I look for things behind me that we’ve already passed, looking for what I can see from where I am positioned. Sometimes I see what the actor sees, sometimes not. Sometimes we have passed something along the way that I notice because of my differently involved position. (187–188)

I was following Billington as she revealed her stories. I was checking behind us as we progressed to see if I could notice anything we had missed along the way. From this renegotiated position, however, I was still managing rehearsal time, intensity and detail in this autobiographical process. Through my research I discovered ways of working in the solo rehearsal room (as described below in my research findings) that afford more time and insight, allowing the performer to focus more on her performance on stage. The different styles in PocaHAUNTus required a range of directing
approaches. For example, the segments integrating digital images and her live physical movement required a more demonstrative approach where I stepped on stage to show Billington the effect, or used another actor as a body double to do this (see DVD Example 4. Appendix 3). With the audience participation scenes I needed to literally be the audience. Due to the narrative complexity of the script much of our time was spent ‘marking’ - setting where, when and how action occurred - costume changes, movement, placement, props, projection and voice-over. Making these staging choices involved experimenting and negotiating and were important in helping the audience navigate the narrative.

**The Nurture of Rehearsals - Midwifery**

Midwifery is a helpful analogy for the directing of an autobiographical solo work. You are bringing a new life into the world but it is definitely not your own child! All your attention is on the mother and child-to-be. Delivering a baby can be a fearful and vulnerable place for all, however the midwife’s role is to work with autonomy, competence, and confidence, helping to ease fearfulness and create a positive environment.

New solo autobiographical theatre is particularly revealing, and may make the solo performer feel especially vulnerable as the work is developed. Pinney had queried: “As the director of a solo show is the only other person in the theatre during rehearsals, any ‘discriminating’ or ‘attending’ is going to have to come from that director. Is there a possibility of too much attention?” (186) Could intense attention from the director be problematic or would these exercises help diffuse the intensity in a way that successfully supported the performer? Soon after the conception of this project Billington was expressing her concerns that foreshadow her later insecurities about how she would be seen:

If I come in and do some kind of non-trendy performance for you, but you can clearly see I have put my whole heart and soul into it, you won't shoot me down. You will praise me for the effort and then work out how best to use the material. (“Personal Email”, 30 Jan. 2012)

Billington acknowledged at the beginning of our work together that *PocAHANTus* was a daunting prospect. This was the performer’s own story and her own theatrical interpretation. She debuted as script-writer, deviser, historian and biographer. At times, she became co-director too, as she sought
to gain a directorial perspective, standing beside me as we watched the body double or the ensemble explore her script.

I shared this vulnerability with her but had some different concerns. I also was encountering the territory of autobiographical solo performance for the first time and it laid bare my established working methods and required modification, particularly through the adjustment of leadership. The performance would be a reflection of the director’s vision but also that of the performer given the autobiographical subject matter. I was uncertain about this particular creative process. Billington was perhaps more insecure about the content of the project. How could I, as midwife, prepare the mother for birth? What directing approaches work best in dealing with the insecurities arising from this work? How does the director uphold the artistic integrity of the work, whilst also supporting the performer to do their best work? Pinney comments:

[D]uring one particularly intense scene I was directing, as a friend I wanted to ask, “Are you OK?” Instead, as a director I said, “Can you hold that pause a little longer?” Balancing concern for a friend and yearning for good drama is a tension that directors of the solo show will encounter. (189)

To balance the care and concern of the performer - and friend - and the welfare of the project as a whole, I could address some of this vulnerability by ensuring there was a safe environment and our roles were clearly defined. As referenced in the introduction to this thesis, Pinney notes: “In Hamera’s model, dancer and critic, actor and director, have agency. Both bodies are observing and being observed. Both bodies are vulnerable” (187). If there is an acknowledgement that we are both exposed in viewing each other then we can seek to have balance in these observations. The director must find his or her own agency within the very personal work of the autobiographical solo performer by finding a constructive way to observe and reflect on their practice, perhaps via the performer’s feedback. It is also worth considering Anne Bogart’s great wisdom:

[I]t doesn’t really matter how erudite or naïve the observation, but, as an actor, she needs the person responsible for watching, the director, to say something around which she can organize her next attempt. To try to say something in a state of flux even if you do not know the right thing to say is the point. Make an observation. To be silent, to avoid the violence of articulation alleviates the risk of failure but at the same time there is also no possibility for advancement.” (49)
Whilst I was embroiled in Billington’s stories and focused on the research objectives of my PaR, I sometimes became less vocal, had less agency. I pursued the rehearsal exercises (see below) and they proved effective in many ways. I maintained criticality and thoroughly documented my analysis of our work and progress. However, as a director I had less tenacity in the rehearsal room than in previous projects, and lost some articulation and authority within this process. As midwife, I had executed good care but perhaps had not intervened strongly enough when there had been a need.

There was much work to be done, and an unfinished script and the pressure of time began to impact on both the research and the emerging performance. However, the PaR methodology remained effective, since we were able to use the rehearsals to pursue specific approaches to directing solo performance, as is evidenced below.

Rehearsals as Research

This project was an opportunity for me as both researcher and director to try new approaches that I had been considering over the term of my study and to assess the impact of new, autobiographical material on the process. Some research was more active and participatory and other lines of inquiry were more observational. In addition to addressing the fundamental challenges of staging solo performance, the following research practices were assessed in the rehearsal room, all within the context of a new autobiographical performance.

Games for One

Warm-up exercises are a common approach to the beginning of rehearsals. Initially warm-up exercises might be used as icebreakers but their main purpose is to build ensemble, the connectivity between actors, and to awaken the actors’ senses to the work ahead. These exercises often have a competitive edge, encouraging playfulness and using improvisation. I was particularly interested in how we could create an ensemble with just the two of us and how my participation, or non-participation in warm-up activities, including improvisations and working with an imagined reality, might affect the process. How could these games help develop a relationship between the director and solo performer? Could these games serve as a welcome disruption to the intensity of working one-on-one? Through the director’s participation, less effectual games for one can become more purposeful games for two.
I planned the beginning of each rehearsal around warm-up exercises that would engage Billington in the work ahead, encourage spontaneity and humour and explore specific scenes that required our attention in that rehearsal. Sometimes these were games for one, such as Magic Object. For this warm-up Billington used the myriad of suitcases on stage as props for new situations. For example, one suitcase became a writing bureau; another suitcase became a makeshift resting spot. The exercise became more energetic and enjoyable when I elected to get actively involved by also playing the game and responding to Billington’s offers with contributions of my own. There was less self-consciousness and more playfulness with the two of us. We started another game for one called Buzzy Bee. The participant(s) ‘buzzes’ with energy around the space. They stop and are given a letter of the alphabet and asked to make a still image of something beginning with that letter – for instance, J for Jug, or for Jealous. My version of this exercise is to give Buzzy Bee a theme from the work we are currently doing. For example, with PocahAUNTus it could be J for Josephine McCandlish or Jailbait, alluding to Phyllis’ alleged sexual abuse by her father. We began with just Billington playing. Again, when I joined in, my participation was a positive contribution.

The director's active participation in warm-up games and rehearsal exercises can provide much needed engagement, especially in the absence of other actors. It can also help to generate new material and/or ideas for staging. Bringing my animation onto the rehearsal room floor seemed to lift Billington’s energy levels and she reacted as if there might be an audience for her work. In addition, Hornung also advocates that being a mobile director helps the actor maintain focus and energy, and encourages the actor to acknowledge the entire seating area that will be occupied by potential audience. I found that keeping mobile as I directed was particularly helpful in assuring the staging worked well for all the audience in this traverse setting.

As tensions arose in our working relationship, the use of these sort of warm-up exercises, playing together, would be important in beginning rehearsals in a positive and lively manner. In addition to readying the actor for the work ahead, they served an important function in my directorial process. Playing together with Billington I was reminded of how engaging she could be when not self-conscious. I was reminded that the audience enjoys watching a performer who is relishing their work. Positioning myself as co-participant also helped shape our relationship as one with a shared perspective – I looked with her from on stage, she with me from off stage.

53 Magic Object and Buzzy Bee, like many drama exercises, are handed down, shared between practitioners, who in turn develop their own versions and titles for the games.
Body Doubling

I sought ways of sharing the viewing with Billington, providing insight into the directorial process and helping her achieve some of the necessary distance on the work advocated by Hornung above. I had found some of my insight in possible approaches to the material when interviewing Robert Lepage for my research in Chapter Four. Lepage self-directs his solos. However, he utilises a body double in rehearsal, “another actor or an actor/dancer or somebody who will actually experiment for me certain parts of the solo show” (Lepage). This actor does not only mimic Lepage’s actions but also improvises with theatrical images that Lepage wants to scrutinise from off-stage.

In rehearsals I experimented with this idea of body doubling - giving the performer an opportunity to view the action on stage, portrayed by a stand-in to see if the visual image is what they intended and successful. Billington chose scenes that she particularly wanted to examine in regards to physicality and interaction with the projection screen. She wanted to match up the live choreography to the movement of the projected images and to see the effect - “I need to see myself”.

We chose the Kali Davi scene that involved a poem Billington wrote about her father’s mother on her deathbed. Whilst the audience listened to a recording of Billington eerily intoning the poem, a sequence of eleven images of Kali the Hindu goddess and ending with an image of Billington’s elderly grandmother were projected. The desired theatrical effect was to have Billington replicate these images in real time in front of the projection, recreating the postures of the goddess and ‘inhabiting’ these different guises of Kali. The images, and Billington’s choreography, were intended to contrast the power of Kali, the power possible in women with the dying old woman. We wanted to ensure the synchronisation and fluidity with these images (see DVD. Example 4. Appendix 3).

Victoria University student Maggie White was chosen to body double Billington as she was of similar height and had a background in movement training. I asked White to first observe Billington during the sequence of Kali images and to be aware of her physicality and movement, and then present them back to us. It was extremely helpful for Billington to observe White in regards to placing her own body precisely into the image, matching up the projected image to her own stage presence. We were able to experiment with different movements, transitions and postures. For example, to have White’s arms move with staccato through each position of Kali’s
multiple limbs (see Fig. 23 and 24). The body doubling exercise meant that we could work together to evaluate the overall effects of the theatrical image from the same audience perspective. As a result, Billington was able to adjust her movement and positioning to achieve a stronger theatrical impact. There was a dark and ethereal effect from the intoning of the poem and its stark imagery of her grandmother’s deathbed - “Dry, unpracticed mouth broadens in a tentative grin. There is life still in them there hills of her cheeks; light still in those there caves of her eyes”, *(PocaHAUNTus* 10)* accompanied by the grotesque beauty and power of Kali and Billington’s postures. (see DVD Example 4. Appendix 3)

![Fig. 23. Body Doubling: Billington observes White in front of the projection of Kali (Photographer Sally Richards)](image1)

![Fig. 24. Billington as Kali (Photographer Katherine Wyeth)](image2)

We also used the body-double approach to explore a scene where Billington takes on the persona of a Spanish official delivering the Requirement of 1513 to the native inhabitants, declaring divine right to possess their territory. A voice over in fast-paced Spanish plays whilst the official interjects with an English summary – symbolic of the lack of real communication and understanding between the two parties. I directed White in the scene, demonstrating the staccato effect I was after that would give the official an authoritative air. White moved swiftly from one

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*54* From the poem *Homeland Security* by Melissa Billington, appearing in the script of *PocaHAUNTus* (2014).
position on stage to the next. When she stopped she delivered her lines, then moved to the next position. Then Billington, herself, began to direct White to move to certain areas of the stage, to consider the effect of slow and fast motion. Billington could see that the faster motion had greater impact as the audience could see and hear that the official was not listening but simply talking at them. White also contributed ideas such as using a declaratory gesture. This sort of detailed investigation from both the audience perspective and from the performance space helped Billington to consider the theatrical effect of each move she made from one position on stage to the next. Pinney, Hornung and Lepage all seek ways to assist the performer to gain distance on their work, to find an outside, critical view on how the narrative translates into theatrical elements.

The final sequence that we experimented with using a body-double was the clip from the Disney film *Pocahontas* (1995). Pocahontas sings the *Colors of the Wind* to John Smith, him declaring, “There’s so much we can teach you. We’ve improved the lives of savages all over the world!” (Gabriel and Goldberg). In this particular scene in the play Billington as Pocahontas was naked, in her pre-colonial state of naturalness, and interacted with the action of the film, attempting to synchronise with the animated Pocahontas on the screen. White first watched Billington’s interpretation and then presented it back to Billington. Prior to the body doubling exercise I had attempted to explain my reading of the scene and how I felt it required that additional outsider perspective to be made clearer. I also expressed concerns that too much imitation of the Disney version was confusing for the audience, as if Billington supported this version. I directed Billington to step away from the projection, and observe the video from a distance. These two modes of viewing the film, one interactive and one observational, reflected the perception of Pocahontas as insider and outsider. However, it was not until we worked with White that I could fully articulate my thoughts, and that Billington could see and agree with my evaluation. (see DVD Example 4. Appendix 3)

Whilst I had previously given feedback on all of these scenes, she benefitted from seeing them for herself. The body doubling exercise gave her confidence in her own performance from seeing the theatrical image and reassurance in my directing – that what I was reporting back to her was accurate. For example, Billington had been unsure of changing the rhythm of the Spanish official until she saw White stop moving and then declare, thus commanding our attention, giving the character authority. With so much at stake for her, the body doubling exercise gave her an outside perspective on her work in-progress that is usually only afforded to the director. Through this exercise I discovered that a body double was an effective way of affording the solo performer an outside perspective and that it encouraged the creative input of all those involved – director,
body double and performer. I observed how empowering it was for Billington and myself, and that it created a positive and productive working environment.

**Video Recording**

The exploratory work with White was video recorded and whilst Billington and myself did not dedicate much time to analysing the footage during rehearsals, in retrospect the material had potential to be a helpful way to share the directorial perspective. For example, it might have been useful to film the costume changes to show Billington that the changes required more decisiveness and confidence, which would be more captivating for the audience.\(^{55}\) In the rehearsal room of the Frantic Assembly devising theatre company, the video camera has become essential when all the collaborators/devisors want to be working together, rather than having someone documenting: “capturing all the possibilities that emerge by accident … It is also a great shorthand way of explaining to a performer what you liked and what you want them to do” (Graham and Hoggett 35). Indian Ink has also begun to use video as a rehearsal tool. Actor Jacob Rajan highlights the diminished ability to self-evaluate whilst in performance mode:

> […] although it [video documentation] does flatten out the performance and it is not a great judge of how good it is I think it would be helpful, sometimes, because I look back on DVDs of live performance … I do learn a lot and that piece of direction that Justin gave me, I now get what he means because I have seen it … it is a spatial thing, he will say ‘look up when you deliver this line’ or ‘wait half a beat’ … and then I will see it because I won’t really hear it when I am doing it.

Video recording rehearsals was effective in allowing the performer to accurately see and hear her performative choices. Body doubling allowed the performer to observe and manipulate the choices of another actor. However, in both these instances the performer still needed to interpret the information that arose from these observations. The director can guide the performer through these reflections, especially in autobiographical solo performance where the personal material might hinder accurate self-assessment. The director in this mode is exemplary of the bidirectional mirror – providing an interactive response not simply a one-way reflection or report.

\(^{55}\) During costume changes Billington was continuing to deliver the text – talking while dressing/undressing. The costume changes were under-rehearsed and lacked fluidity.
Another exercise that could offer an outside view for Billington was an ensemble workshop. My idea was to ask a group of actors to do a sight-reading of the entire script, on their feet in the performance space, while Billington and I observed (see Fig. 25 – 28). The objective was to provide an opportunity to experience the script from outside, to assess its fluidity and clarity as a whole, to see how other actors interpreted the characters and story and afford a directorial perspective to Billington. It was also a chance to evaluate the script as a multi-cast experience.
Billington gives us her potted history, traversing the stage and the globe, she comes to the difficult event of the abortion of her child. This had been delivered conversationally with little emphasis, Billington choosing to let the words speak for themselves. During the ensemble workshop an actor paused after the line “I took it as a sacrifice, not lightly” (Billington, PocaHAUNTus 8) before moving on. The narrative had been moving at a fast pace up until this point and the pause allowed the audience to consider the implications of this moment in Billington’s life.

In another scene, where Willie Anne (Billington’s great grandmother) telephones her Mama in desperation, with a violent husband threatening her children. Billington had been playing this with restraint. The stand-in actor delivered the text with far greater emotional charge and I could see that this was more connecting for an audience. Billington focused on observing the individual performances in the ensemble workshop – how the unfamiliar Native American or Spanish words were challenging for the actors to pronounce. Whilst this observation does not concern characterisation, Billington could now understand that hearing those words for the first time might be challenging for an audience. Billington also appreciated the precision of some of the actor’s miming and saw how it helped build a reality for the audience. Through the ensemble workshops she gained some insight into the bigger picture that took in the overall theatrical effect in communicating the story to an audience - the directorial perspective. We acknowledged these observations and adopted some ideas when we came back to these scenes in later rehearsals and they were effective in creating variation in rhythm and developing characterisation.

During the ensemble workshop I was able to observe where the script seemed drawn out, where it came alive and suggest further edits to Billington. For example, I could clearly see that the travel stories at the beginning of the play, as discussed earlier in this chapter, required editing. Although in my judgment, the script needed further editing, Billington did not always agree because of her attachment to the material and in this instance, a belief that the ponderous nature of the longer passages were a metaphorical representation of her enduring global movements. This highlights the difficulty of directing an autobiographical work where the performer was also the writer. This might well be the issue with directing any new piece of writing, but the writer’s commitment to their script is intensified when it concerns with such personal material and will be self-performed. Whilst the afore-mentioned consistent involvement of a dramaturg would have aided the writing, I was still able to effectively provide opportunities for Billington to stand outside of the work and offer her ways to assess her own performance. This helped to inform the decisions she was making as well as giving her greater confidence in my guidance. However, I deferred to Billington's defense of her material, and focused on making it work as best I could. This process
was still primarily focused, for Billington, on herself rather than what the audience would experience. As the director I needed to attend to both the performer and the future audience, creating conflicting directorial concerns – protection of the performer and concern for the theatrical content and aesthetic. Despite concerns about how the criticism would be received, I needed to bring our process back to the essential ingredients of theatricality, of characterisation, action and conflict. The use of the ensemble workshop revealed some of these elements, or their absence, to Billington and I.

Solving theatrical questions such as enlivening reported action and developing character, were key concerns for director Richard Wilson and actor Antony Sher when preparing for the solo play *Primo* (see Chapter One). Wilson used an ensemble of four actors over a two-week workshop to assist in exploratory improvisations. This play was about Jewish writer Primo Levi and his experience of Auschwitz. Their work together included hearing from survivors, looking at documentary material such as books, maps and videos, and punishment exercises that simulated the concentration camp conditions. The actors also performed testimonies from survivors. Sher states: “It’s good to be sharing my basic problems – how to deliver this kind of material – with other actors. I learn from watching them, from their mistakes (over-demonstrative, over-emotive and their successes (stillness, conviction)” (70). Listening to the first person narratives Sher gained an outside perspective: “I see it happening in the others - it’s riveting” (94). The ensemble workshop can create tangible opportunities for the exploratory work of solo performance. Hearing the text delivered by other actors was insightful for the dramaturgy and dramatisation of *PocaHAUNTus*.

**Imagined Reality**

We made good progress toward the goal of audience engagement through another rehearsal experiment, working in an imagined reality. Imagined reality provided a way of engaging with and participating in Billington’s world on stage, by concentrating on creating characters and action on stage. This exercise comes from a description of the improvisation work of the Indian Ink Theatre Company. As part of their process of creating characters and script, director Justin Lewis interacts with an ‘imagined reality’, talking in character to each of the characters that is being portrayed by solo actor Jacob Rajan and generating further material through these interactions. In this exercise Billington and I role-played, improvising a scene together. For example, when young Phyllis is delivering an epic poem I took on the role of her mother, Willie Anne, and critiqued her

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56 *The Shooting of Dan McGrew* (1907) by Robert Service
performance – “I can’t hear you Phyllis, speak up girl! Stand still Phyllis. You’re fidgeting like a squirrel!” (see Fig. 29) Billington found the immediacy both confronting and helpful:

The imagined reality exercise with Sally playing Willie Anne struck a nerve in me. I wasn’t quite expecting it the first time and so my reactions were just that, reactions, and not thought-out responses. Sally/Willie Anne actively ignited that adolescent response in me of being told what to do - rebellion! It was, to use a Sally word that became a Phyllis word, provocative, and was therefore effective in arousing within me a new set of colors with which to paint Phyllis's character. ("Personal Interview", 3 March 2014)

We explored different ways the poem could be delivered and the range of possible responses elicited from the characters. We discovered that the poem, delivered by a teenager, could have many variations in its delivery. This exercise directly informed the performance where we divided the poem into stanzas and Billington played each stanza differently – nervous, with drama, sullen and ultimately with anger. These emotional states dictated the rhythm of delivery and also assisted in developing Phyllis’ teenage demeanour.

The director’s participation in an imagined reality during rehearsals is a good example of PaR in action. The director is participant but is also leading and shaping the collaborative exercise, applying criticality in the moment and documenting the process. The exercise was insightful. I could purposefully play or be another actor for Billington to work with in rehearsal. Her challenge of not having another actor to bounce ideas off and to react to could be overcome by my being a mobile and participative director. I discovered that improvisation exercises between solo performer and director were useful in focusing our attention on staging, action, character and the audience experience by simulating the interactions that would normally occur within an ensemble.
Solo performance often necessitates renegotiating the roles of engagement between the director and the performer. This occurs on a project-by-project basis with some projects requiring greater renegotiation, often in the case of devised and autobiographical work. It is also dependent on the individuals involved and their desire for leadership and/or collaboration. In addition, different phases of the rehearsal process will require different approaches to leadership. This is evidenced throughout this thesis in discussions with many practitioners in the field. Part of the director’s job is to evaluate the type of approach needed at a particular time. As discussed earlier there are some directors who retain leadership in the devising process and some devising that does not employ a director at all. However, in the case of new, devised solo performance I am advocating for the leadership of a director. In the absence of the support and contributions of a large devising ensemble, the director can be an important collaborator and provide guidance. And the
director is even more crucial in the realm of autobiographical material that can fall victim to obstructive subjectivity.

Solo autobiographical performance can strongly challenge leadership when the performer is pursuing creative control to get their story told and the director has an artistic agenda to make a theatrical impact. Tensions may arise between the conflicting ideals of collaboration and autonomy. In order to accommodate and sustain the shifting parameters of leadership, there needs to be a commitment to open communication that does not stall the process but motivates it. This commitment can include a shared directorial perspective but also some understanding of how and where critiquing will occur.

Within the context of my PaR, the following questions were considered: What did Billington need from me in my leadership role as a director? Did Billington require me to be stronger and more authoritative? Less, or more of a stroker? How did she benefit from the leadership of a director? In order to pursue these questions, in week two of our four-week rehearsal period, I requested Billington to lead a rehearsal. This task sought to highlight the performer’s needs – what she would choose to do in the rehearsal would reflect what she felt needed directorial attention. It would also offer an insight into how the power balance was functioning between us. On the day scheduled for the exercise, Billington admitted she had not planned anything in particular, which was a decision in itself. She first devoted time to general discussion and then, after prompting from me, decided that we should continue from where we left off the day before, marking through the text where she was to move on stage. She requested that I continue to direct her, offer suggestions and provide feedback.

When we debriefed at the end of that rehearsal Billington concluded that she needed me to lead rehearsals and she was uncomfortable in that particular role. This was a positive outcome and I felt it clarified what are roles were. However as rehearsals progressed over the weeks, it seemed to me that Billington actually desired control, even if she was not leading. Post-production she revealed: “I felt I was carried along … from everybody else’s view I imagine it looked like I was leading but for me on the inside it felt like I was simply the vehicle for something” (Billington, “Personal Interview”, 3 March 2014). However, Billington sought to have aesthetic control of many aspects of the work, for example she had been adamant about the inclusion of numerous projected images that I felt were superfluous and distracting for the audience. At times I had to exert control, like the reduction of projected images, and insist on trying things my way so that we could evaluate the results of a different choice. Billington needed me, as the director, to evaluate the whole picture
and take leadership but she was also convinced about what she wanted to achieve in the performance. In this scenario, as researcher and director, I attempted to accommodate these competing positions by getting Billington to view the work from my directorial perspective. This was achieved through some of the above exercises; body doubling, video recording, ensemble workshop, but in retrospect there may have been greater success in negotiating leadership with a stronger emphasis on primary dramaturgical decisions and the consistent involvement of a dramaturg.

**Self Reflection: Mirror Work**

Most practitioners, both directors and performers, that I interviewed or investigated, eschewed a literal mirror in favour of the director as a metaphorical, critical and bidirectional mirror. Rajan, as discussed in Chapter Five, is a clear example of this response. In contrast, Billington exhibited positive engagement with the literal mirror. This is not surprising given her background in dance and movement but could also be attributed to the autobiographical content of the work – she was literally looking for herself in the mirror. Indeed the ‘self-referential semantics’, identified in the Edinburgh report discussed in Chapter Five, suggests that the actor’s own representation in the mirror will supersede that of an imagined character. Billington bestows her mirror with magical and enlightening powers:

> I use a mirror occasionally to get feedback on my yoga/dance sense—to see myself from the outside, particularly while engaged in something so inwardly focused. It is illuminating and humbling. So it seemed natural when you suggested it as a provocation/play/work in our rehearsal process … Initially it was more humbling and then what humbled me became illuminating and then as it was all more embodied, I could watch it more keenly and externally. (“Personal Interview”, 21 June 2014)

There were some unconscious ‘betrayals’ of nervousness that I had observed in Billington’s acting – fidgeting, half gestures and a lack of stillness. I had not observed them in our previous work together and consider them a reflection of autobiographical new material and the revelatory nature of *PocaHAUNTus*. I suggested that we use a real mirror and that under my guidance it could provide useful feedback to Billington. Initially, the approach was not particularly insightful for Billington, as she did not see the unconscious physical habits. When I directed her movement, focus and stance it was a more productive exercise. I asked Billington to deliver her opening address of the play to the mirror and observe herself. Then I asked her to do it again but in a more grounded
way and to consciously address an imagined audience in the mirror. Billington could observe the difference in what she was seeing and this insight led to more stillness and for us to start to develop truthful, grounded mode and motif for Billington when she performed as herself in the play. After this exercise Billington used the mirror in some of her preparatory work outside of our rehearsals. Billington’s observations was focused on self-viewing, enlightenment and self-knowledge that contributed to a greater sense of physical herself on stage, but perhaps she gave less thought to how the audience might receive her narrative, or the theatrical impact of her chosen actions.

The literal mirror is useful to the mask wearer, the mime artist and the dancer working in the realm of non-realist theatre, affording a visual assessment of their physical work. As rehearsals progressed I could see that Billington was more aware of her physicality when she was playing herself, being Billington. She was correcting the self-conscious habits, such as playing with her hair and dropping her breath and energy. However, the process of creating an engaging performance needed to go well beyond the physical apparatus and provide a functioning dramaturgy to communicate a complex narrative to the audience, achieve precision and fluidity in the portrayal of her own self, and in the transitions to other characters. The reflection in the literal mirror needed the further interpretation and analysis of the director. The director as proxy audience can evaluate the overall aesthetic, the trajectory of time and crucially a sense of how character, dramatic action and story is being conveyed. The mirror offered by the director, when engaged with by the solo performer, can offer critical feedback beyond the physicality and interpretation of actions.

**Trial Audiences**

Spectatorship for Lepage’s theatre does not come from one geographical location or intended cultural group; it comes, rather, from a matrix of cultures that he exposes the performance mise en scène to during months and years of touring … exploiting the audience, not as a bunch of passive consumers, but as a group of collaborators and, indeed, mediators between the work and its creators” (Dundjerović 147).

Like Lepage and Indian Ink I pursued the use of trial ‘real’ audiences for PocaHAUNTus. For Lepage, open rehearsals acknowledged that “the audience is a necessary partner … to test the performance narrative” (Dundjerović x). The purpose of having a trial audience is to observe their reactions and make adjustments before the real audience sees the work. Billington had initially agreed to the purposefulness of doing this but as the time came she expressed great vulnerability
and became reluctant to present her work in progress. However, we orchestrated two small trial audiences. I had asked them to focus on the audience interaction and narrative. They were not seeing a finished product and were aware of this. I observed the audience interaction and received feedback from them. Some reported a lack of surety in the function of the audience participation and a sense of awkwardness for those involved. Other observers noted a lack of pace and variation, particularly in the long passages of text (Audience feedback, January 2014). Billington and I discussed these observations but they were not resolved before opening night.

In retrospect Billington realised the importance of this exercise: “The trial audiences were torture, but much-needed torture as they helped me to step forward tentatively. You were like the tough mother, the dura mater which protects the brain and central nervous system, yet you also, necessarily, had to help me brave the world with my thin skin” (“Personal Interview”, 21st June 2014). The solo performer, particularly when engaged in creating new work, requires support in the transition from private to public engagement. Regular showings throughout the development process, facilitated by the director, are one tested tool for achieving this. Assuming the performer and director can embrace feedback from trial audiences, the production will benefit from this regular testing over long periods of time, similar to Robert Lepage’s adaptation of Halprin’s RSVP cycles (Dundjerović 22). 57

All of these exercises changed and developed our rehearsal process and the final outcome in performance. The exercises served to present the work from a variety of views. They proved invaluable in providing Billington with a directorial perspective, allowed her insight into her performance, the production as a whole and our work together. I discovered new ways to relate to her and to the work, by being more mobile and participative and by facilitating Billington’s directorial perspective. The importance of these exercises support the idea that the solo performer is not always able to self-evaluate their performance, especially when the material is held so close, as is the case with autobiographical material. The examples in the previous chapters suggest that many solo actors working with extant text struggle to self-evaluate without a director. However, the director is even more necessary in autobiographical performance because the actor is closer to or more self-conscious about the material than in a text-based performance.

57 RSVP cycles are also discussed in Chapter Three in the devising process of Porcelain Grin.
Post-partum

Post-partum, there is value in considering how audiences received *PocaHAUNTu*s. In addition to providing a context for my research the show was also created for an audience. All of my research questions were, in part, endeavouring to find ways that the director could assist in bringing these personal stories to a public forum. Whilst my primary concern in relation to the PaR was with practice in the rehearsal room, the efficacy of the performance was also of interest and importance to the project.

*PocaHAUNTu*s was performed at Studio 77, Victoria University in Wellington on February 12 – 15, 2014 as part of the New Zealand Fringe Festival. Approximately 150 people attended over five performances. Deborah Eve Rea reviewed the performance on the 13th February for *Theatreview – The New Zealand Performing Arts Review and Directory*. Rea notes the vulnerability and risks inherent in *PocaHAUNTu*s: “This is an incredibly personal story and at times Billington is left a little too exposed; we feel her nerves”. Despite this, the complex narratives have been successfully unravelled as Rea clearly deciphers the stories:

Billington begins by inviting us into discussion: Who was Pocahontas? What do we know of her? Billington weaves her own life story with that of Pocahontas (who was described as “savage”) and other descendants, particularly her great-grandmother Phyllis (remembered as “provocative”). Through the use of poetry, storytelling, physical score, dance, song and re-enactment, Billington searches for meaning and truth in world history, and the effect her whakapapa has had on her own journey.

Rea’s review also suggests that the scenographic and staging decisions helped the audience to access the layers of meaning through the complexity of the stories:

Billington both teaches and challenges us to look at the history. The sharing of 400+ years is made possible through the use of projected timelines and imagery (designed by Callum Ross and Nicole Hutchinson) and through use of the mapped floor. Throughout the show Billington carries out delightful transformation of props; suitcases become a stage, a hat becomes a boat, which sails around the map.
Echoing my impression that the work was not quite ready for opening night, Rea concludes that “Part history lecture, part discussion, part storytelling, PocaHAUNTus is a very interesting piece of theatre which will become even stronger as it finds its ground throughout the season”.

Two post-show feedback forums were held and audience members also contributed by responding by email. Below is a sample of the written and oral audience feedback offering a general indication of how PocaHAUNTus was received by audiences.

It’s how I imagine theatre really should be, not just entertainment, but a tool for understanding, transforming and for healing.

You told a difficult story with passion and love. It was a confrontational subject yet you told it with compassion and love.

I loved the show. It was such a rich exploration of lineage, history, her story, and full of invention and engaging devices. A truly memorable piece. I felt richer for having experienced it.

I just wanted to say thank you for sharing your beautiful story. You opened my eyes and took me into a trance.

I found it very powerful and moving ... very sad in places but ultimately uplifting (I loved the ending, it was so strong ... and it was so much fun that the whole audience joined you in the dancing afterwards). My mother said that she found the combination of historical and personal to be a very interesting approach.

It's more than a show. It's a happening. I think we have all been transformed by it in one way or another ... even more committed to living truthfully and authentically and joyfully and honouring ... and just inspired by the amazingness of it all revealed through the sacred act of story.

We might surmise that Billington had achieved her goals. Audience members did feel transformed and found PocaHAUNTus highly fulfilling and different from their normal experience of theatre. These audience members report a transformative experience that was liminoid and possibly liminal. However, the form was hardly mentioned – the acting, set, audio-visual elements
are not referred to in these comments. In contrast, the following responses highlight how the solo performer’s creative partnership with the director could have been stronger, especially in solving the dramaturgical issues:

My overwhelming memory is that as a work it was far too long, too wordy and too self-indulgent – the phrase “less is more” comes to mind. The pluses - the greeting and cleansing felt right (we’re entering her world), the world depicted in chalk on the floor worked for me, Melissa’s physicality was mesmerising and the long red train was visually stunning.

The weaving of personal narrative into a wider historical and ancestral context is a genre of theatre and literature that I love. At times it was almost too dense and it could have been a trimmed a bit. I also had moments were I questioned the veracity of events, although I am quite happy to go with truth being stranger than fiction. It was a big, epic piece of solo theatre and I loved the staging of it, however I think what it also effectively did was highlight Melissa’s shortcomings as an actor, especially her inability to move from beat to beat without dropping out. So for me, I guess, the contract was not clear, do I respond to her as a performer inside the work? Or is she asking me to relate to her as a person in that moment? It felt that like even though she was surrounded with a giant, mythical, story she wanted the audience to relate to her as a person and not as part of her historical narrative.

These comments highlight some of the weaknesses and deficiencies in the performance. They express concern over the density of the show, “too wordy”, and confusion about the stories being told, that the “contract” between performer and audience was unclear, particularly Billington’s status as a performer in relation to the fictional material she was portraying. The staging is commended but the actor’s craft is perceived as lacking, unable to carry the variation, pace and rhythm required. They also express some of the expectations that audiences typically have when they come to a solo performance - a clear contract with the audience and a performer that is able to engage and hold an audience for the duration of the performance. These are fundamental issues and highlight the importance of the director in occupying the position of proxy audience, in considering the audience’s expectations and accurately reporting back to the performer during rehearsal. I had been aware of these concerns throughout rehearsal but unable to resolve them productively with Billington. The feedback also echoes the two opposing objectives in PocaHAUNTus – one for transformation of the self (Billington’s goal), and the other for a dramatic realisation of story and mise en scène (my own expectation). The latter required a much stronger dramaturgy for the solo
performer and director to work with. Whilst *PocaHAUNTus* achieved success in its transformative goals, in my view the complex herstories/histories could have had greater theatrical impact.

While audience feedback was mostly positive, my response was more tempered. As the director, sitting in the audience of the actual performance I questioned whether I could be truly representative of the general audience at this point. I had a different agenda, a bias that was both positive and negative in its inclination. I was no longer the proxy audience in rehearsal; I was accountable to the actual audience members sitting next to me. I was hyper-aware of all the technical aspects, where a line was dropped and where a move went wrong. In contrast, I relished moments where we had shared a discovery in rehearsal that was realised in performance. Meanwhile, the audience is experiencing it for the first time, without this critical lens and far more experientially. I am the expert, critical eye. I have been focused entirely on Billington’s narrative and performance for a long time. As Pinney considers “What kind of attention is necessary, since it all comes from one person? If Bogart is correct, that ‘Attention is a tension over time’, then am I creating uncomfortable tension” (186). Like Pinney I wondered if I was over-critiquing what I saw in performance, a common trait in directors as artists viewing their own work. However, I am advocating for my expertise as proxy audience in the rehearsal room, that this is where I am most effective and critical – evaluating and adjusting the emerging work. This contribution is not undercut by the fact that my hyperawareness during performances meant my perspective was different to other members of the actual audience.

Billington, some weeks post-production, was still struggling to evaluate the performance for herself but had absorbed feedback from the audiences regarding the success of it being both transformative and performative. Post-production Billington explains that the show was “inevitable” and that she was being pulled along by the power of the experience (“Personal Interview, 21 June 2014”). The rehearsal process had been heavily modified to accommodate this journey. She could not imagine the show eventuating without my intervention and yet it was inevitable to her, along with her staunch ownership, a measure of her commitment to the project. I was like the midwife in the last weeks prior to a birth, the baby was coming whether Billington liked it or not, ready or not.

**Research Outcomes**

During rehearsals of *PocaHAUNTus* I tested innovative ways of approaching the directing of solo performance. Beyond the documentation of those rehearsal exercises, I analyse how the
research, rehearsals and the performance provide insight into the function of the director of new, autobiographical solo performance. My research outcomes are based on the whole rehearsal process, including testing specific approaches, my journal documentation and interviews and comments from Billington and audiences.

Whilst I was able successfully to trial new directing approaches, the PaR model I had developed prior to working on PocaHAUNTus was challenged in numerous ways. The methodology was disrupted by dramaturgical weaknesses, by both personal and artistic conflicts and by the inexperience of the performer and our process together. However, the PaR counter-acted those challenges in that it required me to document and analyse the emerging situations and adapt the methodology accordingly. Whilst compromises in the performance product were evident, the results from my rehearsal research in this project are critical, relevant and purposeful. The PaR methodology enhanced my critical understanding of the terrain of this thesis by requiring me to dissect the roles of researcher and practitioner and strengthening the work between these two positions. The PaR model validated the documenting and analysis that is part of my daily practice in both fields. The research conducted in PocaHAUNTus also highlighted an important caveat in my general assertion that a solo performer needs a director. The material needs to be dramaturgically sound and the relationship between the director and solo performer needs to be compatible, determined by an agreed vision and process.

Directing in the Context of Autobiographical Performance

Following the research I undertook during PocaHAUNTus, I would put the directing of new autobiographical solo performance into a category all of its own in regards to the challenges to leadership and creative control. The challenges in this form of performance are very particular to working with new material and with personal stories. Engaging with new, devised solo autobiographical work heightens every directing challenge that already exists with solo performance. Within this context specific directing approaches could assist in overcoming those challenges. Most approaches, like body doubling, warm-up exercises that include the director and imagined reality could be helpful with all solo performance, but particularly helpful to new, devised autobiographical solos. In addition, the director as mirror becomes crucial in providing active, feedback to the performer, above and beyond the purely physical representation provided by the literal mirror. With autobiographical material this feedback from the director can provide a critical assessment of the theatrical quality of the presentation.
As actor Sam Bunkall declares in Chapter Three: “It is all you. And this is a challenge. It can be terrifying knowing you are alone and no one can save you. If you pay too much attention to such thoughts it can have a crippling effect”. Many of the practitioners interviewed concur that one of the greatest acting challenges is to successfully hold an audience as a solo performer. However, the stakes can be raised even higher. When that performer pens their own story, from their own life, then they are not only judged on their performance but also on their dramaturgical prowess, and even more profoundly on their life, their very existence. The rewards might be deeply cathartic for performers. For example, for Billington the endeavour had been “cathartic, epic, some sort of shamanic journey, life-shifting experience” (“Personal Interview”, 3 March 2014). In addition to the therapeutic benefits, for many performers going solo means aesthetic control over their performance work, for audiences it means an opportunity for a marginalised voice to be heard.

Billington had a strong motivation to bring her outsider’s story to an audience. As an American in New Zealand, she identified as an outsider. She also wanted to challenge the perception of Pocahontas as an interloper – betraying her Native American culture and embracing the West. *PocahAUNTus* served two main purposes: it facilitated my research, providing a new, practical context to work in, and it was an opportunity for Billington to create a much-wanted solo show. Working with autobiographical material was new ground for both of us and provided fresh perspectives, and challenges to our existing relationship as performer and director. For Billington and I, the journey produced much insight into how to adapt the actor/director relationship to the particular circumstances of telling the solo performer’s story.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Schechner suggests that the lack of scholarship on directing solo performance might be attributed to the fact that the solo performer also frequently takes the roles of author and director in order to maintain autonomous creative control. Much autobiographical performance in the USA of the 70s and 80s was developed without the involvement of a director. For example, Tim Miller’s exploration of gay identity is penned, directed and performed by himself. Conceptual artist Karen Finley self-directs almost all of her solo work. In Chapter Four of this thesis William Yang and Henri Szeps both argue that their self-knowledge of their work and their audiences makes the director obsolete and even a hindrance. That these artists choose to self-direct their performances may be attributed in part to the way their work crosses over with performance art and comedy, two genres that have not traditionally employed directors.
Other performers have elected for the involvement of an outside director. For example, Holly Hughes often combined the roles of writer and performer but also works with directors: Hughes was directed by Lois Weaver for *Preaching to the Perverted* (2000), by Dan Hurlin for *Clit Notes* (1996) and by Kate Stafford for *World Without End* (1989). Indeed many highly successful autobiographers have close relationships with directors. Some of these relationships are marriages: Eric Bogosian’s comedic monologues and social commentary are directed by his wife, theatre director and author Jo Bonney. Spalding Gray collaborated with several of his romantic partners as documented in *The Journals of Spalding Gray* (2011). Perhaps having a director that is intimately acquainted with the autobiographer’s life is beneficial since such a person is able to critically challenge the work and offer an evaluation in a personal and forthright manner. If not a partner, a trusted confidant is often sought by the performer to direct autobiographical work. As discussed in Chapter Four Lyndee-Jane Rutherford’s work with Jason Chasland on the autobiographical musical *ImpoSTAR* was founded on an existing, trusting relationship. Or alternatively a director is sought that has particular qualities. New Zealand writer Lynda Chanwai-Earle wanted a strong director for *Ka-Shue*, her semi-autobiographical work, who would focus on the quality of her performance and perhaps not let her over-indulge the personal. While Billington and I came to this project with an existing relationship that had involved both making theatre and a friendship, our previous work together had been all text-based and the shift to new autobiographical material presented new challenges to us both.

Amy Pinney’s work had alerted me to the complexities that might lay ahead, firstly by challenging the possible reasons behind why there is much analysis of solo performance but so little interrogation of the directing of solo performance. Pinney’s essay is focused on her work with autobiographical solo work and states “Most of the claims I make can be put to use in directing a non-autobiographical solo show as well” (184). She asserts that what works with autobiographical material will most likely work in other contexts, but does not claim that what works in other circumstances will work with autobiographical material. My research demonstrates that the autobiographical content was a powerful factor in the process of creating *PocaHAUNTus* and challenged many of my previous ways of working with non-autobiographical solo performance. Many performers and practitioners in this research advocate that for both non-autobiographical and autobiographical solo performance a director is crucial. As Chanwai-Earle says: “Without their outside eye looking in at me on stage I wouldn’t have been able to do it. I would not have known” (“Personal Interview”). Throughout this thesis I argue that all forms of solo performance can benefit from a director, but particularly autobiographical solos where the actor is so close to the material they have difficulty articulating the work in a way that audiences can access.
Another marked difference in working with new autobiographical material was the combination of Billington’s attachment to the work and the personal nature of our relationship as we navigated a rehearsal process that was becoming even more intimate and delicate due to Billington's personal connections to the material. In addition, as I note in Chapter Three, I was more forthcoming with my critiquing when the material did not have direct personal content, as in Falling in Like. Similarly, Lynda Chanwai Earle, discussed in Chapter Four, found it difficult to edit the interviews with her mother that served as resource material for Ka-Shue because she felt every detail was important. Hornung describes the tensions that arise in the rehearsal room when engaging with autobiographical material:

It is often deeply personal accounts or stories; therefore the actor can be more ‘precious’ with the work. This in turn can make them more vulnerable and more resistant to direction … when the director needs to make changes, and with such a close and equal relationship this can be a precarious and time-consuming negotiation.

Solo autobiographical performance has often been categorised as confessional and the director must consider the particular conventions associated with that mode of performance. For example, American academic John Schmor identifies conflicts in the relationship between the solo performer and their autobiographical material: “Whatever autobiographical tension exists in traditional dramatic confessions is always submerged in the conventions of theatrical distance and objectification” (161). The director’s role is to critically assess what the performer presents, finding the theatrical means to navigate the distance “between public self-disclosure and private self-definition” (Schmor 161). After viewing the performance of PocaHAUNTus, John Downie points to a necessary engagement of theatrical conventions to facilitate both the performer’s story and audience’s experience. Downie questions the director’s responsibility to “engender the confession as performance, or control the performance” and to find an agreeable aesthetic result that defines the ‘performance’. The director of autobiographical solo performance must find the most effective way to balance the input of the performer and the output of performance. What are the options to “best dramatise oneself”? The dramaturgy of a new work and its theatrical qualities are at the heart of this question. Downie suggests that the performer’s agenda, to tell her story, also effects the theatrical aspirations:

How the idea of public confessional misplaces or displaces the audience once it enters the pretension of aesthetic performance. How much the self-regarding pursuit of confession can
confuse the aspiration of theatrical collaboration, which typically looks for satisfactory aesthetic outcomes to help define 'performance' for its production collaborators.

Downie suggests that ideally a further step should be made by the performer/writer, a step away from their own story that allows for another interpretation, facilitated firmly in the hands of the director:

The central term here is therefore deciding which actor to perform the work; the 'confessing' actor, or another technical actor able to make original performance decisions based on dialogue with the director on the basis of scripted scenarios however originated, etcetera.

However, for this first incarnation *PocaHAUNTus*, and for my PaR, we pursued Billington as both writer and performer, to assess the director/performer relationship in this particular working environment. Experienced actors/writers such as Spalding Gray, Karen Finley and Peggy Shaw have moved successfully between these modes of writer/actor and found an effective balance. Another alternative is the dramaturgical construct of an alter ego, as employed by Robert Lepage - “To connect with the material while remaining distant from it and observing it from outside, you have to invent an alternative character … alter egos that allow him to project his personal anxieties and psychological questions into the work” (Dundjerović 53). Hornung pushes strongly for her actor/writer to move beyond her own perspective, to find a critical position in the narration of her stories. In my view, Billington was less agile shifting between performance modes. Whilst my research here is focused on approaches to directing solo performance, this comment raises issues that go right back to the original working contract between the director and performer. In solo performance, especially with autobiographical text, a clear negotiation of how the collaboration should proceed is crucial, right from the project’s conception.

The public confessional mode of autobiographical performance implies that the rehearsal process might be less collaborative, because it is performer driven. One of the major discoveries in this PaR component was the director’s conflict between serving the performer’s agenda of telling her story, and an obligation to the audience with a ‘satisfactory aesthetic outcome’. The performance that premiered and was viewed by the public was in part a compromise between Billington’s need to tell her stories, her way, and my desire to create a theatrical experience for the audience.
As discussed in Chapter Two, Pinney considers how she might view each solo performer’s work in a responsible and ethical manner (184). Billington and I had worked together previously on numerous occasions, however I was learning to see this particular actor anew in the context of the autobiographical content and new work. All performers share vulnerability but Billington’s was multiplied by the exposing nature of solo work, the autobiographical content and her debut as playwright. One of the primary challenges of this project was to overcome Billington’s self-consciousness in presenting this emerging work. As Anne Bogart articulates “Artists are individuals willing to articulate in the face of flux and transformation. And the successful artist finds new shapes for our present ambiguities and uncertainties” (2). At times, Billington and I struggled to articulate those uncertainties, or had conflicting ideas about what shape they might be. The quest for finding new shapes was curtailed by the flux and instability of the new script. Similar tensions had arisen with Williams when developing *Porcelain Grin*, however the material was far less weighted with the performer/writer’s personal narrative. The new and autobiographical content of *PocaHAUNTus* impacted on the action in the rehearsal room and the presentation to the public. We both had to view the work from new perspectives, a shift from our usual delegated position as director and performer.

**Directing in the Context of New Work – Dramaturgical Pressure**

In addition to the autobiographical material, of equal impact on the process for both the performer and myself, was the fact that *PocaHAUNTus* was a new work premiering in the 2014 New Zealand Fringe Festival with a fixed opening date. This would be the first time that the script would be performed in front of an audience. It was not a tried and tested dramatic script. We would be navigating a new script, a work-in-progress, which would challenge the previous ways I had approached the directing of existing solo performance texts, and the methodology of the PaR that I had developed to this point in the project.

In Chapter Three I analysed the creating of a new solo work *Porcelain Grin* (2007) with performer Brooke Williams. *PocaHAUNTus* shared many of the challenges and creative freedom/chaos that I had encountered in the rehearsal room for *Porcelain Grin*. In both circumstances I was concerned about how the audience would ‘read’ the complexity of the work and how we might ensure they would engage. On both occasions I felt that my role as the director had to be reappraised and adapted to a more collaborative process. Both performers, Williams and Billington, were protective of their scripts, however from her recent work at drama school Williams was familiar with the process of discarding creative ideas and familiar with the necessity for
Billington was less willing to abandon material because of her inexperience with the devising process, and perhaps because of the contribution of autobiographical material.

Another significant difference was that Williams and myself, and designers Megan Peacock-Coyle (lighting), Gil Eva Craig (sound) and Robyn Yee (set), had a shared vision about the theatricality of Porcelain Grin. Our focus was strongly on creating a theatrical experience, in taking our audience on a journey to a surreal world of dentist fantasy – the changes were occurring to the characters on stage. On the other hand, Billington expressed a desire to transform the audience – that the audience might consider their whakapapa and their very existence, that there might be a shift in spiritual and philosophical perspective. Whilst Williams was involved with the design decisions her main focus was on creating character and delivering the stories. Billington was also concerned with character and story but the autobiographical material and her political, spiritual objectives also needed to be accommodated. For example, having the audience understand her complex genealogy was an important element for Billington, but this was difficult to translate into a theatrical narrative. This created an additional layer of complexity in PocaHAUNTus that impacted on the dramaturgy and the production and performance decisions.

Indian Ink’s process with new work relies on director Justin Lewis making it clear to actor Jacob Rajan when and where the script is working, or not, and using improvisation and imagined reality to encourage character development that informed Rajan’s text. In addition, their dramaturg Murray Edmond is central to their scriptwriting process:

What do you do when you are drowning in your own complexity? When you’re lost in the wilderness and you haven’t seen your story for days? When cheap laughs are all you can afford and clichés start to seem strangely attractive? You call Murray… Murray asks lots of questions. (Rajan and Lewis, Indian Ink 13)

Pinney limits her discussion to situations in which the solo performer has a finished script – the performer can drive script changes but Pinney has a bias for a carefully crafted text ready at the beginning of rehearsals (188). Australian director L’hibou Hornung has worked on a long-term autobiographical project about adoption with an accomplished writer/actor. She warns that the potential of the script can be threatened by the solo performer/writer’s attachment to content that does not lend itself to theatricality – for example, reported action (Hornung). Before we reached rehearsals I encouraged Billington to seek out potential theatrical action in early drafts of her script:

58 Whakapapa is the Māori term for genealogy and an important concept in Māoridom.
How do you move from reported action to here and now - relive those moments rather than reporting them. Separate out ideas. Your writing is very 'full'. Make the stories more easily digestible by the audience. Do you want it to be realistic/naturalistic or abstract, or symbolic, non-naturalistic? (Richards)

I offered a critical evaluation of the new work, assessing from the outside as proxy audience, the effectiveness of her dramaturgical decisions and their theatrical potential. However, Billington struggled to follow my guidance, and, lacking the dramaturgical skills much of the script remained in reported action. We were, in retrospect, imagining PocaHAUNTus in quite different ways: “I have seen this as more performance art than pure theatre with script” (Billington, “Personal Email”, 3 Sept. 2013). Billington chose to incorporate disparate styles and forms in the script, including personal narrative, song, movement, lecture, projected images, historical reenactment and audience participation. In my opinion, PocaHAUNTus needed a stronger dramaturgical structure and a consistent style that helped the audience to receive the complexity of the multiple stories. Some of these issues were addressed in the workshops with Sinclaire as dramaturg, and in rehearsals, but ultimately were not resolved in the performance.

Many of the issues that arose from working with this new autobiographical work were related to the dramaturgical structure and theatrical choices. What became evident to me, during both the devising and rehearsal processes, was that the consistent involvement of an experienced dramaturg was crucial in this particular environment. To critically assess the relationship between solo performer and director, within the context of PaR, then the issue of dramaturgy needed far greater attention in this particular project, beyond the limited dramaturgical contributions of Sinclaire during the writing phase of PocaHAUNTus. I am not a dramaturg and could only partially fulfil that role. Steve Matthews, New Zealand actor and writer, now living in Australia, created a solo autobiographical show as part of his practice-led doctoral research at Sydney University. He chose to work with director Elaine Paton who was also an experienced dramaturg. Matthews’ solo show, about his problematic relationship with his father, Can I Come Home Now (2013), was directed and dramaturged by Paton. She comments on the autobiographical material and identifies that the genre of solo performance presents its own particular challenges: “The main pitfall is not to end up with a therapeutic performance. The audience have come to be entertained not play the role of counsellor” (Paton). Billington’s aspirations included some therapeutic aspects for the audience of PocaHAUNTus and this was sometimes in conflict with my objectives as the director to find the dramatic action of the work. Paton identifies: “It was challenging to remain objective and to
encourage Steve to start seeing the piece from an audience’s point of view. Naturally, this was extremely difficult as each story within the chronology of Steve’s life, was important to him.” Paton’s mantra was “What is the audience to enjoy?” In PocaHAUNTuS the complexity of multiple narratives, for example, the potted history of the Spanish colonisation of the Americas, went well beyond Billington’s own story. This meant that my own mantra was more along the lines of “As proxy audience, what do I understand from the performance?” As Downie suggests: “The question for the director is whether the 'real' work is in helping to engender the confession as performance, or control the performance through aesthetic judgments in relation to a public audience”. How might Billington and I honour the confessional content but present a performance sufficiently clear and entertaining enough to be worthy of an audience’s attention?

A major challenge for the director of autobiographical solo performance is to uphold the theatrical potential of the work with as little artistic compromise as possible. Pinney explains the potentially complex triangular relationship between the performer, the director and the script:

This negotiation gets tricky when the actor has written the script - a challenge not typically found in multicast shows. Though I’m protecting the writer half of the writer / performer persona, it’s difficult to tell the playwright that he is saying the wrong words. To what degree must an actor, who is onstage alone, and who has written the text - most of which is based on actual lived experience - uphold fidelity to that text? (188)

Much of our time in developing PocaHAUNTuS was spent in this negotiation – editing a scene became a convoluted exchange because of the possessiveness Billington felt for these stories. She had an intense attachment to the female characters, despite great distances in lineage. Billington needed my support as both director and dramaturg. Pinney recognises the unease of this:

The result of this dialogic relationship is that the director must find a place from which she can offer both critique and support for both writing and acting. In turn, the actor must find a place in which he can both accept critique and find support. This negotiation is not a matter of jumping from one role to another. (189)

Pinney is suggesting that the negotiation is occurring simultaneously – critiquing and supporting at the same time, both the acting and the writing. I would suggest that the analysis of the new writing is a difficult undertaking for a director, in the context of all the other pressures of directing solo performance. A dramaturg can offer assistance in this circumstance. While we did have that support
for a brief period early in the development of *PocaHAUNtus*, more extended input from a
dramaturg might have helped achieve a better balance between critique and support for Billington's
writing and performing. Pinney also alludes to the importance of the actor’s acceptance of the
director’s critique and support. This is a crucial point in my directorial relationship with Billington
in this project. Billington often rejected my guidance in her writing, in the dramaturgical construct
of the script, but sought more input from me into her acting and support for her personal journey.
However, for me to critique the quality of Billington’s acting, I needed to evaluate her work across
the whole performance. In hindsight, the process could have been aided by an awareness that we
both needed to work with both acting and writing. Realising that this was our task, we could have
been better resourced to achieve this interaction successfully in the rehearsal room.

The challenges of a new script and of autobiographical content meant Billington and I
needed to renegotiate the methodology and practice that had served us well in our previous work
together. We sought to resolve issues of creative control and acknowledge the insecurities and
vulnerabilities involved in developing a new autobiographical piece. Rather than using a model of
conventional artistic leadership where the director is the primary decision maker, my approach
required sharing the directorial perspective with the solo performer. A more collaborative approach
can help the solo performer to self-evaluate their performance, providing a bidirectional, critical
mirror in the form of the director.

If I could renegotiate the original creative contract for *PocaHAUNtus*, I would seek a
mutual commitment to a rigorous process that acknowledges the challenges of making
autobiographical material theatrical, engaging and entertaining. The contract would acknowledge
how, and why, dramatic action needs to occur in theatrical storytelling and require a timeline that
accommodates the dramaturgical evaluation of the text throughout. There would be a schedule of
regular showings of the work-in-progress and extensive opportunities for the performer to share the
directorial perspective. There would be consistent support from a stage manager and dramaturg. In
this way the mother and midwife are better prepared for birth.

**Conclusion**

**Her Story, Her Way – Challenges of Creative Control and Discovering Theatricality**

In my work on *PocaHAUNtus*, numerous challenges arose and needed a new directorial
approach that was based on negotiating creative control. The PaR model accommodated these
changing parameters, which were documented and critiqued as we moved forward. A good example of the sort of creative challenges that we experienced concerns the authenticity of the characters (including Billington herself) and the crafting of the script. I suggested that shortening sentences throughout the script would assist the clarity and rhythm of the work and be easier for the audience to digest. For instance, changing this long, single sentence structure from the beginning scene from *PocaHAUNTus*:

> We dined royally in Paris, overlooking Notre Dame’s famous rose window and then toured south through the countryside in his Lexus, he driving and me navigating, my paltry French fooling him to the extent that he tried to get me a job with a Canadian bank owner while we were staying at the Ritz when we had returned to Paris … (Billington, *PocaHAUNTus* 7)

I suggested:

> My great uncle and I dined royally in Paris. Overlooking Notre Dame’s famous rose window. Later, we toured south through the French countryside in his Lexus. My uncle was driving and I was navigating. Etcetera.

However, Billington resisted these suggestions of economy of dialogue and situation, a tried and true dramaturgical principle, and explained that this was how she spoke and she wanted to be authentic. She believed that if people tuned out then this would be reflective of the way Western society does not listen to the truth. This is in contrast to the autobiographical subject matter in *ImpoSTAR*, discussed in Chapter Four, where Chasland was less rigid in how characters, and himself, might be portrayed: “If it worked for the piece and was entertaining, we used it” (Rutherford). Billington’s goals and her attachment to “authenticity” were central to the tensions that arose between her autobiographical writings and my own theatrical aspirations. Guy Masterton notes that the performer needs to allow the director to shape the work:

> Where a director is most valuable in solo performance is in helping shape performance and text in the rehearsal room, tailoring the script to the individual performer and that performer to the script, making adjustments to the structure to streamline the whole into a perfect working machine. This is not always possible when you have performers who want to "impose" elements onto a piece or a writer who refuses to alter the text as needed!
Billington had fixed ideas about the telling of her story, particularly the portrayal of known, familial characters. It is interesting to consider the parameters of Verbatim Theatre here, where the words of real people are precisely recorded and used in this form of documentary drama. Anna Deavere Smith’s solo play *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Other Identities* used personal accounts of the racial tensions that occurred in August 1991. Whilst retaining authenticity, Smith made significant choices about the delivery of these characters that she felt best served the telling of the story. Drama is distinct from a straight narrative in that the action is re-enacted/imitated. In the imitative portrayal there is an unavoidable degree of distortion. In fact, this distortion might be highly effective in gaining an audience’s attention. In *Fires*, Smith presents the character of physicist Aaron M. Bernstein who embraces the complexity of reflection and theorises about the distortive nature of mirrors in literature and in science – “So everybody understood that mirrors don’t distort, so that was a play not on words, but a concept” (23). Bernstein tells us that there is a ‘real’ scientific distortion and this causes a “circle of confusion” where the mirror’s construction is flawed. (Deavere Smith 24). The flaws in the mirror distort the image, the mirror is not always accurate. This analogy and analysis serves the mirror paradigm of the director and the solo performer where the director can assist the performer to see these distortions in a helpful manner. The bidirectional mirror is also able to provide feedback to the director, that the director’s flaws and successes will be evident in the solo performer’s response to her directives. The director will be challenged to be precise, articulate and engaging.

In addition, the distortive mirror is also a useful idea for the autobiographer or biographer whose challenge is to present a reality, enacted dramatically and to lead the audience out of any “circle of confusion” (Deavere Smith 24). Smith added information about where and when the interviews occurred that aided the immediacy and truthfulness. Whilst the audience does not directly access these stage directions, the performance is informed by these parameters – they form a strong distinction between character, time and place. The *Fires in the Mirror* script is written in verse and the punctuation emulates the exact delivery of the interviewees. Billington had also hoped to this sort of mimesis in her character portrayals but lacked continuity, depth and distinction in doing this. Smith kept props and staging simple as she moved seamlessly between twenty-six characters, changing gender, race and age as required (Shepherd-Barr 110). Importantly, there was a consistency of style and form in playing the characters that aided the audiences’ reception of the material. The autobiographical and familial content in *PocaHAUNTus* created conflict between my tasks as a director and Billington’s ownership of the work. Billington observed, post-production:
Because it was autobiographical material then it called into question how much interpretive right you actually had - how much you could actually interpret the text because there was the sense of ownership on my part. And some things I was fine with and some things I was much more protective around. ("Personal Interview", 21 June 2014)

I was not always able to convince Billington of the theatrical needs of an audience – to be entertained, engaged, transported. For example, I had often suggested that the opening twenty minutes introducing her stories, delivered as herself, would be difficult for the audience to digest – too much information that was difficult to connect to. In this opening segment Billington took us from country to country describing her extensive travel, introducing multiple places, experiences, relatives, partners and feelings. When I raised my concerns about the opening in response to a draft script, Billington replied:

In response to the confounded feeling at the start - yes, that's somewhat intentional, though it should ultimately be clear but come across as confounding, if that makes sense. And one general flow in my mind is to go from more words at the start to none at the end - to entirely movement to express, as a way of indicating the different paradigms/cultures. ("Personal Email", 29th October 2013)

This level of complexity of metaphor, that the structure of the dramaturgy would reflect a cultural shift, were indicative of Billington’s multifaceted ideas about what she wanted to achieve and its desired effect. However, her ability to evaluate the audience’s response and understand these complexities were restricted by her position as performer. I considered the progression from many words to few words to be a legitimate concept but not an idea that would necessarily be helpful to the audience. How could I assist the performer to hear and experience her own performance from the perspective of the audience?

The majority of our rehearsal time was spent working on these dramaturgical issues, the lengthy passages and how they might be communicated, or figuring out how costumes and personal props would be incorporated into the action. We experienced some conflict when I pushed for quicker progress. I wanted to make some directorial decisions from having seen the complete trajectory of the work. Billington wanted to work slowly because this was a new process for her. Billington made “glacial” progress (her often repeated description). Her process, her pace and rhythm slowed as she attended to all the elements, particularly the technological demands. I felt a responsibility to Billington, to enable her vision to come alive and to nurture her creative and
personal journey. However, this was in conflict with my primary responsibility to deliver a performance that the audience could engage with. How could I communicate these concerns in a sensitive yet motivating manner? I was wary of becoming a “stroker” (as described by Jacob Rajan in Chapter Five), rather than being honest.

For Billington and I to have a shared vision of what *PocaHAUNTus* was to become was fundamental, but often difficult to achieve as the work evolved. Billington had a vision of what it looked like but I did not necessarily know or understand her vision. Billington included extensive stage directions whilst writing the script, in order to organise the logistics of the complex entwining of stories. This mode of operation, with Billington recording every movement in the script, persisted through rehearsals. It was time consuming for her to document every changing move, a by-product of her taking on the dual roles of writer and performer.

When compared to most of my previous work directing non-autobiographical material and existing texts, there was a marked difference in how rehearsals were structured. Rehearsals of *PocaHAUNTus* were affected by a combination of the autobiographical content and its status as a new work-in-progress. The autobiographical content meant that the performer had a particularly strong attachment to authenticity and felt vulnerable in revealing herself and her past. Working with a new script meant that I was less able to prepare to rehearse a section because the text was in flux. This inhibited my ability to find the organic movement of the performer on stage and to listen to the rhythms of the text as it was delivered. The continual editing of the new script compromised the fundamental work of character delineation and stage geography. In previous projects, when working with an existing text I would normally discourage too much discussion, in favour of working physically on the rehearsal room floor. In rehearsals for *PocaHAUNTus* there was a much higher percentage of talking as we struggled to respond to issues with the script. I was able to accommodate this editing within the PaR methodology I was using, and create opportunities to understand how important a sound dramaturgical structure is, and how essential the contribution of the director is in shaping character(s) and action on stage.

It became clear to me that in order to meet our deadline of opening night with a completed show, I needed to limit my focus to directorial decisions that supported dramatic structure and created moments of theatrical engagement. In my journal on February 11th 2014, I identify the following priorities: transitions, simplifying movement, stillness, maintaining vocal energy and breath, fluidity in costume changes and connection with audience. In Chapter One I discuss Robert Cohen’s proposal for a utopian ideal for all directing practice that is collaborative but also leading
with some authority. In preparing for the transition from our rehearsal room to an audience, my focus and leadership needed to return to directing the theatrical experience for the audience. As Pinney acknowledges:

[I]n a solo show, the actor and director live as collaborators, yes, but also as other. We dance through and around attempts to know, understand, and appreciate the other. But by virtue of the very nature of theatre, we would soon have others with whom to interact—the audience. While we dance our pas de deux through rehearsals, the show ultimately has to dance with others. (189)

As Billington finally began to run the play we restored some of that balance, once we were negotiating less and had returned to a more simplified relationship with clearly defined roles as director and performer. Unfortunately, due to the pressures of time, and perhaps the exposing nature of this autobiographical work, Billington was not completely conversant with the script so that recalling her movements and lines sometimes absorbed her energy. As discussed in previous chapters, the solo actor has no recourse to fellow actors when he or she drops a line, thus the memorisation of lines must be even more solid than in the case of an ensemble production. Some experienced solo performers might perform in an improvisational mode but it will be in knowing their material and the audience responses with great familiarity that will allow this freedom. However, in PocaHAUNTus, in order to navigate a complex narrative and her own inexperience, Billington needed to achieve ownership of every word, every emotion and motion, and every detail needed to be meticulous and deliberate in its delivery.

On the opening night performance of PocaHAUNTus, in my opinion, Billington was not ready for a public audience and was still too self-conscious. However, I could see where my PaR methodology and specific directing approaches has served certain aspects of the performance and as a result I could offer further assistance. As the show proceeded through its short season I was able to more effectively supply direction and Billington was able to accept and retain the advice, now that the script was more complete. As she developed more distance from herself as writer and settled into sole focus on her role as performer, the performance itself became more confident, more fluid, and more energetic. It confirmed that the directing approaches I had tested were purposeful, but of greater benefit when the script was dramaturgically competent. Hornung had observed similar challenges in her experience of directing autobiographical solos:
When the performer lacks ‘distance’ from the work, they may also be unaware of what it needs to translate as performance. This lack of insight can diminish the potential of solo autobiographical work. The process of bringing the work to a performance arena requires enough ‘stepping away’ from the work to give the opportunity for the viewer to ‘step in’ and relate to it. If it is too personalised it becomes the actors own private party.

*PocaHAUNTus* had further potential. As a new autobiographical performance it needed greater dramaturgical rigour before entering into rehearsal. *PocaHAUNTus* would have benefitted from a timeline that could have accommodated more attention to dramaturgical structure in the early phases and time for both Billington and I to step away and consider the strengths and weaknesses of the script from a more critical, perspective.

**A Solo Show is a Misnomer**

Towards the end of rehearsals, Billington made a script change to her final speech, adding the following: “A solo show is a misnomer. This is a tribal show. The talent, skill and care of countless humans is here tonight” (*PocaHAUNTus* 32). She goes on to acknowledge the director, designers, technicians and the audience. Billington had expressed a similar view in an email some months prior:

[I]t is never really a solo…It may be, ultimately, me onstage alone, however there's you and the tech guys and the audience themselves and all the people along the way I've been bouncing ideas off of. And that sense of it being a collaborative effort feels to me more like the native paradigm where separatism is an illusion. (“Personal Email”, 27 July 2013)

There is nearly always the contribution of others in a theatre show as Lepage and Chanwai-Earle acknowledge, discussed in Chapter Four. While the term ‘solo’ encapsulates the image of the lone actor on stage, it does not do justice to the reality that most solo shows are a collaborative venture involving the contributions from designers, technicians, director and audience. Ideally, the director brings these individuals together, thus attending to both the performance and the performer, and ensures audience comprehension and engagement. In the context of a new solo autobiographical performance, the director shares the directorial perspective with the performer whilst ideally retaining a critical position as proxy audience. In addition, the director should exert leadership that serves the perspective of an audience. The relationship of the director and solo performer can be
highly collaborative but still needs the director to drive the project, to oversee the process from a
critical viewpoint that takes account of audience experience.

The criticality of the director can be obscured by the intimacy of the working relationship.
In the context of new, autobiographical solo material this partnership is more personal and intense
than any other solo performance. Whilst my relationship with Billington was long-term, dialogic
and open, it may well have been too close. Pinney, Hornung and Lepage all seek ways to assist the
performer to gain distance on their work. As Hornung observes about directing autobiographical
solo performance “Sometimes this intimate relationship can feel too co-dependent, and at times too
combative”. The solo performer’s attachment to their own story can become an obstacle to
theatrical engagement. On the other hand, when the director-solo performer partnership results in a
high level of artistic interrogation, it can create authentic and powerful theatre.

In the following concluding chapter I examine how the research outcomes of
PocaHAUNTus, in the specific field of new autobiographical solo performance, relate to and inform
the insights found in my analysis of the work of other practitioners, including Indian Ink, and my
own directing practice.
Conclusion

The negotiation that occurs between these two artists, alone together, is where we might build a directing aesthetic for the solo show. Being alone together makes the relationship between a director and a cast of one unique. Creativity happens differently between two people from the way it does when one is in charge of many. Certainly collaboration occurs in other genres, but in the solo show the collaborative gesture is exchanged between two people (Pinney 190).

As this thesis has shown, solo performance is a popular and prolific form of theatrical practice, both in New Zealand and internationally. Through case studies, interviews, archival research and practice-as-research, this thesis has examined the question, in what ways can the director best serve the solo performer to create a theatrical experience that can hold the audience's attention, imagination and memory, and how might the relationship between the two collaborators be negotiated? In this conclusion I provide a summary of my findings, an assessment of the PaR methodology and key challenges, an evaluation of the mirror paradigm, and consider the value of the unique relationship between solo performer and director.

Discoveries

A Working Model

An effective model for directing solo performance must account for the genre’s particular theatrical purpose and qualities, and the individuals involved. The example of Indian Ink’s solo performance demonstrated how a vibrant and supportive relationship could produce outstanding results. Lewis and Rajan’s success is based on a long-term creative partnership that values both provocation and trust. In particular Rajan and Lewis support the idea of a participative director, as described in their use of improvisation in an imagined reality. Indian Ink’s use of masks provides a useful example of how the solo performer requires feedback on what they themselves cannot assess. For a seasoned performer like Rajan, this might be the tiny angle difference of a mask tilt. For a less experienced performer like Billington, the feedback might need to relate to broader/bigger issues of character delineation. As with all solo performance, the process is specific to the nature of the dramatic material and the individuals involved.
The main claims of my thesis are that an effective model for the directing of solo performance requires:

1. An understanding of solo performance’s particular theatrical purpose, and its emphasis on storytelling and audience interaction.

2. Addressing the implications for directing, particularly the rehearsal process, inter-relationships and theatrical staging choices – including the fundamental challenges of character delineation, stage geography and relationship to audience.

3. Modification of rehearsal schedules and structure, and roles, to accommodate the intensity of working one-on-one.

4. Greater physical participation by the director in the performer’s rehearsal explorations, including serving as proxy audience, fellow actor, sharing warm-ups and as a bidirectional, critical mirror.

5. An understanding of how specific characteristics of the project can impact the rehearsal room, most importantly the creative origins of the work, whether biographical, autobiographical, fictional/extant, verbatim, etc. In addition, a consideration of the dramaturgical impact on rehearsals when the script is a new work in development or one already tested in a previous production.

- Finally, and one of the strongest findings from my PaR, the director needs to create opportunities to share the directorial perspective with the solo performer by using specific approaches such as body doubling, imagined reality and ensemble workshops, in order to strengthen the solo performer’s limited ability to self-evaluate their performance.

These findings have enhanced my own practice of directing solos, and multi-cast performances, and these approaches will aid the work of other directors and performers in this field. They provide an original contribution to existing knowledge about directing solo performance, particularly in offering practical ways to overcome the significant challenges of working in the intimate space of the solo performance rehearsal room. Beyond these tangible approaches to directing solo performance there were further discoveries with theoretical significance that support the appropriateness and robustness of the PaR methodology.

**An Effective PaR Methodology**

In examining both the theory and practice of directing solo performance I have drawn on numerous sources. I employed a PaR methodology that valued my own critical experiences as a director of solo performance and the creation of a new solo show where I was able to trial new
approaches to directing. I interviewed a diverse array of practitioners in the field (directors, performers, dramaturgs and writers), observed in the rehearsal room and conducted archival research and analysis of my extensive documentation completed before beginning the current project. Bringing all these components together, I have created an original approach to research that accommodates theory and practice.

In another version of this project, I might have substantiated my arguments with more attention to performance theory. However, I have chosen to situate the project within the framework of PaR, that situates theory in practice – “Theory, that is to say is not prior to practice, functioning to inform it, but theory and practice are rather ‘imbricated within each other’ in praxis” (Nelson 62). I have taken a critical approach, developing my methodology based on an extensive survey of existing literature and substantially strengthened that foundation through original interviews with a wide spectrum of professional theatre practitioners, within New Zealand and beyond. This research cannot be comprehensive, nor is it best served by a single-dimensional research design. Its strength is in its multi-mode critical approaches of PaR.

The PaR methodology enabled, most importantly, for new directing approaches to be successfully trialed in the rehearsal room. However, the PaR was concurrently creating/contributing to a piece of research-relevant theatre. This duality was challenging in numerous ways. And while our process compromised the theatrical output, I argue that it did not compromise the PaR. Our process was affected by dramaturgical difficulties, by challenges to and renegotiation of our artistic relationship and by our inexperience in this specific genre of new autobiographical work. My documentation and analysis of the ongoing modifications to the methodology produced original and substantial contributions to new knowledge as judged by the standards of PaR. Inadequacies in the performance product were apparent, however the outcomes from the rehearsal research in this project are critical, relevant and purposeful. The multi-mode paradigm of PaR enriched my critical analysis throughout this doctoral study encouraging me to scrutinise the roles of researcher and practitioner and articulate the particular mode of expertise they bring together. The PaR endorsed my daily practice of documenting and analysing process in progress. As Pinney suggests the process ideally, “preserves agency for both participants, acknowledges the unique aspect of each new one to one relationship and remains malleable” (189). By employing a PaR methodology I was able to evaluate how the relationship of the performer and director to the material and to each other are critical factors in determining how the director proceeds. It is important for directors of solo performance to assess and establish whether the particular relationship, process and objectives are
compatible. Whilst this is an assessment that is important to all directing experiences, in solo performance it is critical to achieve productive functioning of the principal partnership between two creatives working closely together.

**A Flexible, Critical Mirror Paradigm**

Throughout my research I considered the metaphorical mirror in analysing the director’s role in solo performance. This flexible mirror paradigm is a helpful device in considering the complexity of the exchange between the solo performer and director. The practitioners in this thesis consider the mirror in various ways – from a simple reflection of the performer’s work in a literal mirror to a more complex interaction of bidirectional mirroring, where performer and director meet and exchange critical perspectives on the creative work. The director within a mirror paradigm can help to evaluate the transformation of the performer, encouraging, challenging the performer to be more precise, engaging, energetic. In addition the director is also receiving feedback from the solo performer on her directing – the director’s ability to communicate a critical analysis of performance, her precision and level of engagement. In contrast, the Gare St Lazare Players question the mirror metaphor, considering it to be too staid, preferring other descriptions for the director’s work with the solo performer such as sculpting. Yang and Szeps also query the mirror idea, along with declining the services of a director. Their confidence and experience in evaluating their own performance by looking to the audience for feedback, perhaps make the director-as-mirror unnecessary. However, the idea of the mirror was recognised as useful by many of those interviewed for this research, including Wassenaar, Harcourt, Hornung, Bunkall, Brigden, Chanwai-Earle, Lepage, Lewis, Rajan and Rutherford, and paralleled the desirable qualities sought in the director. The bidirectional, critical mirror was kindly, supportive and yet was robust and honest too. The mirror/director was present in the moment and interactive – acknowledging the look between performer and director, as with Boal’s co-performer, discussed in Chapter Two. The mirror highlighted the director’s experience and criticality. The independent perspective achieved by attention to the idea of director as mirror reminds both performer and director that the audience’s encounter with the theatrical experience of the solo show should be paramount.

My use of mirror techniques in *PocaHAUNTus* was compromised and less robust than it might have been, but still contributed productively to our work. The metaphor of director as mirror, in the context of *PocaHAUNTus*, was useful in acknowledging the impact of the autobiographical content and the new script. The mirror reflected the changing roles in the rehearsal room, the
vulnerability of the looking between Billington and myself, and helped us achieve a degree of sharing the perspective of the future audience. In addition, a literal mirror was utilised by Billington to evaluate her physicality in performance and was of personal importance in revealing Billington to herself. The critiquing that occurred as I reflected back what I observed challenged Billington’s own evaluation of her performance. In this particular creative engagement, between Billington and myself, the mirror paradigm brought a limited level of evaluation and guidance. However, I argue that the paradigm was a useful consideration here in that it highlighted a scenario where the performer might be beyond external direction. The director and performer need to vigorously assess whether their relationship is a beneficial collaboration, and if not, continue to work to realign their roles to achieve productivity. They might also consider the importance of the dramaturgy of a complete script and of a shared vision. This analysis is an advantage of the PaR methodology – through practice we see what relationships, methods and actions are effective and can advocate for new ways forward. The literal mirror could provide visual feedback to the performer about their physical work but the performer still benefitted from the critique of the director. Of greater assistance was the director as a bidirectional, critical mirror that was actively responding to the emerging solo performance.

An Important Field and Unique Relationship

This thesis highlights the scope and popularity of solo performance, its theatrical potency and objectives. It is a powerful theatrical genre, intensified by the particular immediacy of the audience/performer encounter. Solo performance offers multiple styles and forms, and has infinite possibilities, and this is reflected in the academic discourse and polarity on the subject. Solo performance can operate as a successful vehicle for personal stories, both biographical and autobiographical. Solo performance is particularly effective at embodying themes of isolation and allowing marginalised voices to be heard, engendering politics and social commentary. Solo performance does this with an aesthetic that often embraces minimalism and produces a microcosm of the essence of theatrical experience – of storyteller and audience. The genre can offer great economy and autonomy. Understanding solo performance, from all these angles, is essential groundwork for the directing of this genre.

Similarly, identifying the specific requirements of directing the genre of solo performance is crucial. There is, of course, no single approach to the directing of theatre, each new piece of work presents unique challenges. But there are also common elements in the directing of all theatre – the creating of a piece of theatre demands a space, an audience and a performance. However, I have
argued that the relationship between the director and the performers in a multi-cast play differs significantly from the working partnership between director and solo performer. The most important aspects of directing that are relevant to solo performance are the staging and delineation of multiple characters, establishing a relationship to audience and scenographic and spatial decisions that support the performer. In addition to these performance elements, the other key function of the director is establishing a supportive working relationship that can share the directorial perspective with the solo performer in rehearsal, especially in the absence of feedback from co-performers. Almost all aspects of the director/performer relationship are heightened in the solo rehearsal room, by the intimacy of a one-on-one interaction in the creation of work. This collaborative partnership is characterised by an intense engagement in responding critically to each other. This thesis highlights the limited academic research in this area and discloses a lack of specific training for this directorial work, in New Zealand at least, despite the particular understanding and skills required to direct solo performance.

**Key Challenges and Responses**

The analysis of my in-process documentation of the five previous solo projects identified a number of key challenges. I discovered a methodology to address the fundamental demands of solo performance: delineation of multiple characters through physical and vocal motif, establishing the relationship to audience and scenographic decision-making that helped guide the audience through an imagined reality. I found that the performer and I were kept motivated by a variety of tasks and a daily rehearsal structure that was modified to accommodate the intensity of working one-on-one. I worked in greater detail and realised how necessary this was when every detail is scrutinised by the audience, with their focus being on the single performer. In the absence of other actors, I took a more participatory role, in warm-up exercises and improvisation. The relationship between the solo performer and me was much more intimate and democratic than in my work on multi-cast projects. As a result, communication was efficient, especially when a shared theatrical language was established through sharing similar training or previous work together. Creative origins of the dramatic material were important and impacted on the process. Importantly, there was a marked difference between directing solo performance from an existing text as compared with working with a new, devised work; the latter demands a renegotiation of roles as the performer is more invested in the content of the work. Throughout my research, the director as a bidirectional, critical mirror was a helpful metaphor in the rehearsal room, able to critique and engage in the moment with the solo performer. All of these observations began to build towards an effective directing model for solo performance.
In the interviews with practitioners in the field I discovered some commonalities and differences in approaches both theoretical and practical, to directing solo performance. Whilst this was a necessarily limited set of examples, the broader conclusions can be considered, as mentioned above, in the context of existing literature and the multi-mode approach of PaR. Methodology in directing solo performance is determined by each individual project, its starting point and the people involved, but patterns emerged in the discussions that point to a more productive approach. One of the benefits of this research was to be able to interview leading professionals in the field and garner such a diverse range of opinions and approaches to directing solo performance. Their observations about time frames, relationships, negotiation of process and the desirable qualities sought in a director help inform my understanding of the practice of directing solo performance. The interviewees supported many of the discoveries that I had made in analysing my own previous solo directing. They agreed that the fundamental challenges of directing solo performance - character delineation, audience interaction, scenography and stage geography - must be prioritised. They concurred that a restructure of the rehearsal day can better accommodate the intensity of working one-on-one in solo performance. They found that the time that is afforded to building positive working relationships across and between a multi-cast ensemble, when working with a lone actor, could be dedicated to the detail and scrutiny that solo performance demands. All of the practitioners valued a long term working relationship between director and solo performer because it has many benefits and affords a shorthand in theatrical communication, expediting the process. It supported the intimacy of the one-on-one encounter.

However, the interviewees provided me with new discoveries and some polarised opinions. The role of the director in solo performance was discussed in detail with practitioners. Most of the interviewees supported the necessity for a director as proxy audience, to assist where self-evaluation falls short. The director serves to bridge the divide in the rehearsal room between solo performer and the not-yet-present audience. In the case of Robert Lepage, he self-directs using body doubles and other collaborators to pursue his artistic vision in rehearsals. Some, like Henri Szeps and William Yang, are seasoned professionals, garnering feedback from their actual audiences instead and developing their work that way. The autobiographical content of their work translates to a perceived need for artistic autonomy that would be impinged by collaboration with a director.

A director’s methodology in the solo rehearsal room involves finding effective ways to share a narrative through one person. The interviewed practitioners have a bag of theatrical tricks to make this occur but principally the solo performance is dependent on a relationship directly with the
audience. The practitioners found solo performance an opportunity for insight, informing their theatre practice by reminding them of the very purpose of theatre, of the exchange between performer and audience. Some answers are revealed in the devising or the writing of the script, and other solutions emerge in the rehearsal process. The director’s task is to find precision and aesthetic potency in those choices, discovering the theatrical elements that engage the beholder. Of note, many solo performers such as Lepage and Indian Ink use a collaborative process, incorporating many artists, including dramaturgs, to find the theatricality of solo performance. Increasing these kinds of ensemble practices could have brought more theatrical engagement to PocaHAUNTus.

**Disrupting Factors and New Approaches**

In Chapter Six, I discuss how the research questions that arose from previous chapters informed the objectives for my dedicated PaR project. The impact of new work and autobiographical content on the process and performance of PocaHAUNTus was clearly evident. The content and context of PocaHAUNTus necessitated a more participative directing approach that would facilitate a greater outside perspective to the solo performer – allowing her to see the work critically from outside. Whilst rehearsal exercises such as games for one, body doubling, ensemble workshop and imagined reality would be helpful in all forms of solo performance, in the case of a new autobiographical work they are particularly useful in sharing the directorial perspective with the performer. These exercises assisted me to uphold my responsibility to Billington, to report back, support and encourage but also ensure that the audience receives a theatrical experience worthy of their presence and interest. The exercises encourage ‘play’ between director and performer, in the absence of other actors, and are effective in supporting an intimate ensemble between two. The exercises facilitate productive exchanges that turn the intimacy/intensity of the one-on-one engagement to a creative advantage.

Sharing the directorial perspective with Billington challenged the power dynamic between us, often necessitating that the relationship be renegotiated. Billington’s attachment to her personal stories was resistant to conventional directing techniques where the leadership comes from the director and the existing text. As a consequence of this shift in conventional roles and ways of viewing, there was a shared vulnerability, where both Billington and I were exposed by the revealing nature of the process. The vulnerability created a more personal relationship, challenging professional boundaries and needed to be managed so that the work could proceed in a productive manner. This intimacy occurred most strongly in the autobiographical mode of PocaHAUNTus.
where Billington was navigating personal terrain, though it can be apparent in other forms of solo performance because of the democratic nature of a partnership.

In this thesis I have focused primarily on what the solo performer needs from a director. There is a further question here that focuses on what the director requires from the performer. My requirements from the solo performer include commitment, honesty, good communication, hard work, creativity, professionalism, tenacity, willingness, bravery and an understanding of the relationship that solo performance has with its audience. I want the performer to contribute to the process, to challenge any uncertainties but also to relinquish sufficient creative control for a productive exchange. These desirable qualities also describe the successful working relationships of Indian Ink, Gare St. Lazare and many other practitioners discussed. Unfortunately, it was on the crucial qualities of trust and control that Billington and I were working to different agendas.

An effective model for directing practice, as outlined above, provides guidance to both director and performer working in this genre of solo performance. In this thesis I argue that the solo performer and the performance genuinely benefit from the input of a director. This is evidenced in the interviews with both directors and performers throughout this thesis, regardless of the style of solo performance they engage with, but particularly in the context of new, autobiographical performance. In the absence of a director, the performer must attempt to ‘be’ the director too, and take the perspective of the audience. In the context of confessional, self-revelatory, autobiographical performance, the director may follow the lead of the performer during rehearsals but must always come back to the question of how the future audience will receive the work. The director seeks to protect and liberate the solo performer through effective leadership, but must always keep theatricality to the fore – delivering to the audience the full potential of the experience of solo performance.

**Effective Directing of Solo Performance - a Specialised, Desirable Skill.**

I discuss the options for vocational training for directors throughout this thesis. When reflecting on my own training, I suggest that working one-on-one is a fertile ground for making discoveries about the craft of directing generally. Solo performance is a popular and accessible theatrical genre and requires specialised skills. Directing solo performance has become a sought after and highly regarded skill. Many practitioners in New Zealand, including educators and academics, agree on this point, such as Miranda Harcourt, Bronwyn Tweddle and Anya Tate-Manning. Solo performance is an important part of actor training at Toi Whakaari, now for first and
final year students. The omission of this aspect in director training may be rooted in a perception of the actor as the primary artist in this medium. However, the process of solo performance is always seeking the outside perspective. I would like to see further investigation into the incorporation of solo performance in the training of directors. Whilst the trainee director is put under pressure by the intensity of being one-on-one, they also experience all the fundamental challenges of theatre production and staging in microcosm. Navigating the relationships and negotiation that occurs in the rehearsal room of solo performance promotes both collaboration and effective leadership skills. Solo performance can inform theatre practice for both directors and actors, providing insight into the necessary elements and conveyance of story to an audience. As Lepage notes: “A solo piece makes you more conscious of all the aspects of the production, all the aspects of the story you are trying to convey, you have to make decisions on absolutely every level, you have to deal with every department”. It is an excellent environment for directors to test their mettle – a hothouse of learning about stagecraft and artistic relationships.

**Contribution to the Field and Further Questions to Pursue**

This thesis challenges the intuitive assumption that solo performance can progress without a director - an easy undertaking, requiring only a single performer, self-contained, autonomous. I present the counter-intuitive idea, that there is a greater than ever need for a director of solo performance. This need for the director is two-fold. As discussed earlier, the genre of solo performance is increasingly popular for its economy of means on many levels. However, with greater proliferation comes more scope for inconsistency in quality of performance, meanwhile audiences are becoming more experienced in responding to solo performance and are demanding higher standards from the performer. Solo performance can be susceptible to egocentricity, inwardness and can result in tedium, characterised by lack of theatrical variety, as seen in the critical reviews of Lepage’s *Elsinore* in the introduction to this thesis and Ben Brantley’s dismissal of the genre in Chapter One. The director, particularly when serving a mirror function, can identify any apparent self-indulgence and monotony that the performer has overlooked, as Indian Ink’s Jacob Rajan says “the director is there as the architect of it all, saying ‘more of that, less of that, that’s boring, do that faster”.

The research focus of this thesis is located in the rehearsal room rather than in front of an audience. The language of engagement in the rehearsal room is under-theorised – it remains practice based, with a different language to the more established field of performance theory. One
of the greatest challenges was to examine an area of scholarship that has little prior investigation and where the experience is so much contingent on context of bodies, time, space and text. There can be no single guide for performer and director working in solo performance but I assert that there is still great validity in the documentation and analysis of this unique relationship.

Another challenge is how to position the practitioner in this research in a place that benefits the inquiry. This is not a cultural theory thesis – this thesis is about the cultural practice of an unusual rehearsal room, one inhabited by only two artists. Tension arose from how the language, interaction, evaluation of that culture could be translated into an academic framework that validated the examination. These tensions were addressed productively through implementation of a PaR approach. This PhD presents considerable challenges to the intellectual understanding of what directors, or other theatre practitioners, as researchers achieve in the field. Practitioners do something that is active, practiced, shifting but also overtly engage in conceptual debate that is necessary to the practice and/or research. Similar to the shifting focus of PaR, my research methodology was intentionally fluid – “An artistic researcher transforms his/her artistic medium into a medium of research” (Arlander 160). This medium was the rehearsal room, the theatrical laboratory. I am interested in further analysing PaR methodology and how the balance between the dual roles of director/researcher might be pursued with greater scope for insight into both practice and theory.

My research makes an original contribution to the field of directing by identifying and assessing the particular qualities found in directing solo performance and evaluating specific approaches in the rehearsal room. The research points to relevant models of working with solo performance. These models demonstrate the difficulties of accurate self-evaluation on the part of the solo performer and make it clear that a director is often needed to fulfill the function of proxy audience. The director’s approach must be tailored to the specific style and form of the solo performance and the needs of the audience and the performer.

I hope that understanding the various forms and styles of solo performance, can help reshape the directing approach to accommodate the intimate encounter between two artists, director and performer, more productively. This thesis demonstrates that an effective model for directing solo performance is valuable and can contribute to producing theatrical experiences that hold the audience's attention, imagination and memory. The director can become a living, moving, ‘mirror’ for the performer that is encouraging, bidirectional and critical.


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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview questions
Appendix 2: List of interviewees
Appendix 3: DVD of support material for PaR component
Appendix 1: Interview Questions for Theatre Practitioners

1. What is your involvement in solo performance?
2. How would you describe your particular way of working (methodology) in the solo rehearsal room? How might your methodology differ when working on solo performance, in comparison to working with larger casts?
3. In what way, if any, might specific theatre practitioners, philosophies and/or theories inform your methodology?
4. How was the project(s) initiated? Why was the solo performance form chosen?
5. Was the project(s) biographical, autobiographical, text-based or devised? Can you talk about how this impacted on the process of making?
6. Can you describe the particular rehearsal room dynamic between the director and solo performer? How is this relationship negotiated? How might communication differ in the rehearsal room of solo performance?
7. How does the director respond to, or witness what he/she sees? How might the director be a mirror to the performer?
8. How might that dynamic differ when there are other people in the rehearsal room?
9. To whom is the performer/character talking? Were there multiple voices/characters? How were these questions navigated in the rehearsal room?
10. What was the relationship to the text and language with solo performance? How might it differ to working with a multi-cast play?
11. What role does the audience take in solo performance? In what way might you consider the audience in a different way to a multi-cast play?
12. In what way might there be more opportunity to work in greater detail with solo performance?
13. What are the challenges of solo performance?
14. What do you think the making of solo performance can teach us about directing and theatre practice?
Appendix 2: List of interviewees

Wendy Beauchamp
Melissa Billington
Andrea Brigden
Sam Bunkall
Lynda Chanwai-Earle
Miranda Harcourt
Judy Hegarty Lovett
L’hibou Hornung
Robert Lepage
Justin Lewis
Conor Lovett
Jacob Rajan
Lyndee Jane Rutherford
Henri Szeps
William Wassenaar
Brooke Williams
William Yang