NEGOTIATING THE ALTERNATIVE IN A POSTMODERN THEATRE: O BANDO, KNEEHIGH, FOURSIGHT AND ESCOLA DE MULHERES

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VANESSA SILVA PEREIRA

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ACE Arts Council England

AGIT Associação de Grupos Independentes de Teatro (Portuguese Association of Independent Theatre Groups)

EM Escola de Mulheres

MFA Movimento das Forças Armadas (Armed Forces Movement)

MTS Mobile Touring Structure

PCP Partido Comunista Português (Communist Portuguese Party)

PREC Processo Revolucionário em Curso (Ongoing Revolutionary Process)

PSD Partido Social Democrata (Social Democrat Party)

PS Partido Socialista (Socialist Party)

*TCS The Corner Shop*
The University of Manchester
Vanessa Silva Pereira
PhD in Drama
NEGOTIATING THE ALTERNATIVE IN A POSTMODERN THEATRE: O BANDO, KNEEHIGH, FOURSIGHT AND ESCOLA DE MULHERES
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Abstract

This thesis seeks to examine the nature of political theatre within the postmodern context. I distinguish between the historical alternative theatre and the paradoxical alternative theatre in my work. The historical alternative coincides with the alternative theatre movement developed in Britain between the late 1960s and late 1970s, while in Portugal this movement was mainly designated as independent theatre between 1974 and the 1980s. I start by analysing the narratives of birth and death of the historical alternative theatre movement in the British and Portuguese contexts from the establishment of the movement in the late 1960s to the present. I go on to propose that beyond the historical alternative and within a post-ideology framework, contemporary theatre may still engage with politics by exercising a localised and temporary paradoxical alternative. For my research I selected four long-running and state-funded theatre companies, o bando, Kneehigh, Foursight and Escola de Mulheres, chosen according to two of the categories prominent during the historical alternative movement, community theatre and women’s theatre. Through detailed analysis of productions of the four theatre companies, I assess the characteristics of a postmodern political oppositional theatre. My methodological approach covers the longitudinal context of the companies and productions by looking at past productions, funding statements, reviews, practitioners’ interviews, theatre programmes and the rehearsal, performance and reception stages of the theatrical process. I start by analysing each company’s history and their own mythologies of the alternative, before focusing on two of the central traits of the theatre developed during the historical alternative theatre movement, non-traditional spaces and non-traditional audiences. Each of the four companies has, out of necessity or choice, positioned itself outside of traditional theatre and entertainment circuits for some of its productions, negotiating symbolical and ideological independence side by side with large productions in repertory and/or commercial theatres. Each of the companies fosters, in addition, in their non-traditional places mechanisms that subvert circumstantially the hierarchical values imbued by neoliberal thought. The oppressed take centre-stage. Exposed to the vagaries of the weather, to exiguous or improvised audience spaces, expected to, forced by circumstances or incentivised to interact with fellow spectators and actors, audiences rediscover in the moment of the performance their shared humanity and form fleeting and secular communities of faith.
Declaration

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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It is the Imagination, above all, that powers all the processes of rational and creative action that make up social living, and the transforming power of the imagination that makes change possible.

(Coult 1997: 13)

To Viv

and my parents

with love

I hope you enjoy the view.
I. Introduction

It may be that every single doctoral thesis is a journey through the life, and not just the intellect, of the researcher; mine certainly and unashamedly is. A fourth-generation emigrant, my dual citizenship and American passport have often stood out in the only country I recognise as my own, Portugal. An undergraduate of Portuguese and English Literature, I have been an English teacher in Portugal and a Portuguese teacher in Britain. When teaching at Manchester University, my own adopted Portuguese identity was significantly capitalised upon. Only as a result of my teaching and Masters’ experience at Manchester was I able to leave my comfort zone, literature studies and language teaching, for performance research, a leap into the unknown. A professional linguist, an amateur thespian and a first-generation undergraduate, academic and theatre-goer, it seems that all my life, like so many others no doubt, I have negotiated borders, margins and cultures.

This short biography may help to explain why I chose to compare such different theatrical contexts in this thesis. From the Portuguese side, more obvious, easy and perhaps necessary comparisons could be made with Spain, and, if considering the exile of Portuguese theatrical practitioners and artists during the Estado Novo dictatorship, with France and Belgium. On the British side, comparisons are most commonly made with North American performance. Choosing Britain’s oldest ally (or longest colony, depending on one’s perspective), Portugal, for a comparative study certainly runs a number of risks. Comparing a country with such deeply entrenched (and extensively researched) theatrical traditions to one where ‘virtual theatre’ and
under-research have been the rule rather than the exception may
unavoidably result in rough edges. However, as Kneehigh often and
cheerfully declares: ‘there is no beauty in perfection’ (Rice and
Shepherd 2010: [81]).

_Negotiating the Alternative in a Postmodern Theatre_ is the title of this
thesis, conveying as it does the necessarily conflicted aim of looking for
a political agenda within the present work of long-running revenue-
funded companies such as those covered by the research. In particular, I
am interested in exploring the ways in which what I designate the
‘historical alternative’ has survived and/or has been transformed within
a postmodern paradigm in contemporary theatre practices and theories.
Using seminal studies such as Sandy Craig’s _Dreams and
Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in England_ (1980) and Catherine
Itzin’s _Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968_ (1980)
as my model, I consider the ‘historical alternative’ to be the period of
theatre that in Britain runs from the late 1960s to the mid/late 1970s.
Carlos Porto’s study on ten years of Portuguese theatre following the 25
April 1974 Carnation Revolution (1985) is used for situating the
Portuguese alternative from the mid 1970s to the end of that decade.
Following this era, the death of the alternative has been repeatedly
proclaimed by theatre scholars, and rightly so, as wider debates in
society have emphasised the death of politics and ideology as we had
previously known them, and the paradigm of postmodernity took
strength.

For the purposes of this thesis postmodernism is understood to be a
contested paradigm which affects the aesthetic and ethical frameworks
of art production. Stylistically, a postmodern piece of theatre
emphasises rather than disguises the ‘artifitiality’ of performance (it invests in rather than suspends disbelief). Story and narrative are often rejected. The impossibility of viewing everything is heightened as a show may last several hours or days, and it may purposefully prevent the spectator from witnessing its ‘totality’ through paralleled events. The line dividing spectators from actors can be eroded or becomes crossable, while the audience will watch (un)willingly previously unthinkable combinations, such as when high art is mixed with porn, or popular culture permeates the classics. According to this categorisation, stylistically none of the productions analysed in this thesis is inherently postmodern. This is nevertheless an analysis of a postmodern theatre as all four companies dismiss the ideological ‘purity’ characteristic of so much modernist theatre practice. Their non-essentialist position is reflected in the paradoxical ways their oppositional strategies to neoliberalism are carried out, simultaneously questioning and retaining a stake in some form of capitalism.

Under postmodernism, overtly political and oppositional theatre work was replaced by pluralism and allegory. Fragmentation and historical and stylistic relativism characterised postmodern art from the 1980s. While offering a release from the ideological supremacy typical of modernism, postmodernism, as noted by its critics, nevertheless risked engulfing artists and audiences in the paralysis of relativism or (inadvertently) in hegemonic culture. Baz Kershaw and Philip Auslander conceive, however, of a radical/oppositional postmodern performance. Both Kershaw, in The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard (1999b), and Auslander, in Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary Performance (1992), argue for the possibility of radical theatre practices within the
postmodern paradigm, ones that engage with politics in performance in paradoxical ways. These studies posit the analysis of specific radical/resistant performances in their particular contexts rather than proposing an overall essentialist classification as political theatre (see Kershaw (1999b: 17) and Auslander (1992: 4). Using Kershaw’s and Auslander’s studies, I will propose that the ‘alternative’, in its specific manifestation as political theatre practice, can be found, albeit in paradoxical ways, in companies currently working in Portugal and Britain.

Within my own research, I am not proposing the resurgence of a second (if one considers the ‘historical alternative’ the first) alternative theatre movement in Europe. In fact, readings of oppositional theatre practices during the twentieth century vary significantly in their periodisation. Auslander (1992), for example, understands the avant-garde to include both the workers and agit-prop theatres of the 1920s and 1930s, and the communitarian radical theatre of the 1960s. Kershaw (1999b), however, is critical of Auslander’s chronologically broad avant-gardism and stresses the differences between what he understands as two separate cycles of oppositional theatre: the avant-garde, early in the twentieth century, and the later alternative theatre movement. In this respect, in The Routledge Drama Anthology and Sourcebook: from Modernism to Contemporary performance (2010), Maggie B. Gale and John F. Deeney’s categorisation of twentieth and twenty-first century drama as, among other things, ‘historical avant-garde’, ‘early political theatres’, and
ideology-dominated performance is interesting to note here, even if the authors themselves acknowledge the cross-over in their categorisation.¹

I follow Kershaw (2004) in my periodisation of the ‘historical alternative’, using it to categorise the modern alternative theatre movement of the late 1960s onwards up until postmodernism and the claims of the death of ideology. The ‘historical alternative’ does not cover either early twentieth century oppositional art forms or later forms of political theatre, such as those of the 1990s in-yer-face generation.² When trying to frame politics in the postmodern context, I consider the ‘paradoxical alternative’ a more useful category, even if it does not signal a unified movement or a recognisably consistent form of oppositional theatre, as with the ‘historical alternative’. The ‘paradoxical alternative’ will be used here to categorise postmodern theatre practices that engage with the political agendas characterising the historical alternative theatre movement, but which cannot be identified exclusively with one movement or set of politics, positing instead their ideologies both as an alternative to, and in negotiation with, late capitalist globalised culture.

¹ Early twentieth century theatre is subdivided in Gale and Deeney (2010) into ‘historical avant-garde’ and ‘early political theatres’. The historical alternative is included in the chapter pertaining to ‘ideology and performance’, which extends into 2009 and therefore covers other more recent forms of political theatre besides the socialist/leftist-inspired work of the 1960s and 1970s, while also criticising the unified political framework within which the 1960s and 1970s generations are mostly read. The last chapter, while acknowledging the theoretical framework of postmodernity, is entitled ‘Contemporary Performance’, and covers an aesthetically constructed definition of postmodern performance. ‘Contemporary performance’ is used to describe the work of such companies as the Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment, which privilege fragmentation over storyline, the use of multiple artistic influences and multi-media in their shows.

² Aleks Sierz defines in-yer-face theatre as ‘a theatre of sensation: it jolts both actors and spectators out of conventional responses, touching nerves and provoking alarm. Often such drama employs shock tactics, or is shocking because it is new in tone or structure, or because it is bolder or more experimental than what audiences are used to’ (Sierz 2001: 4).
‘Alternative’ as a category is often associated with related concepts such as margins, boundaries and borders. In this thesis, margins and boundaries will be used to describe geographical and cultural borders. For example, in Chapter Four, Place, I discuss how all of the theatre companies analysed have engaged with marginal places. Kneehigh has based itself at some distance from London, in a county which is geographically marginal because so far from the capital, and bounded on three sides by the sea, and culturally through its assertion of a separate identity. O bando locates its performance in an area which borders but is outside Greater Lisbon though it remains within easy reach of the capital. Unlike o bando’s conscious choice of a ‘certain’ margin, EM occupied Clube Estefânia as it was the only performance space available to them, placing the company in a residential (as opposed to cultural) sector of Lisbon. These marginal performance spaces, which are located outside theatre districts, have added advantages for practitioners - as Kneehigh have so often claimed for its Gorran Haven Barns - (partially) placing the hub of theatrical creativity beyond the economic pressures, health and safety regulations and rigid timetables associated with more traditional building-based companies. These marginal spaces can, however, by their informality both attract and deter potential audiences. Different audiences may find themselves renegotiating their own cultural and personal boundaries in these spaces. Creative marginality will be also discussed in a number of ways: how devised performance finds its way into established repertoire theatres with some of Foursight’s productions, how stories of

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3 Clube Estefânia will be referred to from now on as Estefânia.
marginalised communities take centre stage, and how women’s theatre still holds for theatre companies the likelihood of their work being read as marginal.

The four companies which form the basis of this study tap either directly or indirectly into the historical alternative, with the longest running company, o bando, having been formed in 1974, at the height of the Portuguese alternative movement, and having gone through many transformations, from popular to community theatre, from being centred on children to performing mainly to urban audiences. In contrast, Escola de Mulheres (EM) in Portugal and Foursight in Britain encapsulate one of the fundamental strands of the alternative theatre movement as it developed in Britain, women’s theatre. Foursight present themselves mainly as inheritors of the feminist theatre movement, which took off in Britain in the early 1970s. EM can be said to have introduced second wave feminist politics into Portuguese theatre, without assuming a full feminist agenda, thereby also manifesting a ‘postfeminist’ consciousness. Finally, Kneehigh, by choice and necessity, have ensured that their theatre remains accessible to all.

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4 I have used o bando rather than the capitalised O Bando, as this has been the company’s preference in its manifestos, published books, programmes and old logo (for the logo see Dionísio 1994: 90). It also reflects better I believe the company’s name and its emphasis on the collective as ‘o bando’ means either a group of people or a flock of birds in Portuguese. O bando’s full name is Cooperativa de Produção Artística Teatro de Animação o bando, shortened henceforth to o bando. Some critics have privileged the upper case in their referencing (see, for example, Porto 1992; Valentim 1998; Abreu 1992). The use of the lower case in the company’s own documents is relevant, I would claim, as it can be read as an embodiment of o bando’s desire to produce popular and accessible theatre. As the company has referred to itself in its books, reports and programmes as both ‘o bando’ and ‘Teatro o bando’, I have, furthermore, chosen to use the shortest designation ‘o bando’ in all bibliographical references for the sake of consistency and readability. This same reasoning has also been applied to Kneehigh, Foursight and Escola de Mulheres.

5 Escola de Mulheres will henceforth be referred to as EM, aside from in titles and bibliographical references.
Using site-specific performances and performing in small village halls as part of their inclusiveness programme, Kneehigh has engaged continuously with the ideals of popular community theatre.

It should be acknowledged that four different companies could have been selected as case studies for this research, as the companies examined by this thesis are not the only ones that ‘fit’ with the paradoxical alternative proposed here. Other companies were initially shortlisted. To give but one example, Sphinx constituted an ideal choice as a long-running company that played a seminal role in the development of women’s theatre during the historical alternative theatre movement in Britain. First established in 1973 as the Women’s Theatre Group, the company was renamed Sphinx in 1990 at the beginning of Sue Parrish’s artistic directorship, in an effort to move away from the perceived agit-prop nature of their early work. Established almost simultaneously with o bando, Sphinx would have been, in the British context, an example of a company that crossed over from the historical to the paradoxical alternative. There were additional reasons why Sphinx would have fit particularly well with my research. On the Portuguese side, my research included EM, Portugal’s first ever women’s company (albeit established in the mid 1990s), which, like Sphinx, is a text-based company working in the country’s capital.

However, my early discussions with Sphinx’s artistic director, Sue Parrish, made it clear that, as Sphinx had had its funding withdrawn in 2008, it would no longer produce work as regularly as it had before, and its administrative structures were considerably reduced as a result. Sphinx has, since 2008, essentially limited its activities to the organisation of a yearly feminist conference, continuing from the 1990s
the tradition of the Glass Ceiling lectures initiated by Parrish when she
moved to the company. With Sphinx thus excluded from my research, I
searched the website of the Arts Council of England for revenue-funded
companies that specifically mentioned ‘gender issues’, ‘women’ or
‘female’ in their summary statement and description. Discounting
those companies focusing on women’s theatre alongside other agendas,
such as ethnicity, health or prison rehabilitation, Women and Theatre
and Foursight were the strongest contenders for inclusion in my
research. In the end, I decided on Foursight based on their profile, past
productions and their very receptive response to my initial contact.
Ironically, Foursight would also by the end of this study in 2011, see its
funding totally cut by the ACE, raising many questions about its
future.

The four companies ultimately selected, o bando, Kneehigh, EM and
Foursight, are all long-running revenue-funded companies chosen for
their associations with feminist and/or community theatre. While this
embodies the main reason for their selection, there are other
connections between the two women-centred and the two community
theatre companies chosen. The women’s companies are urban-based,
while the mixed companies are known for their performances in rural
centres. O bando and Kneehigh touring companies play predominantly
in medium- and large-scale venues, while Foursight and EM play in
small- to medium-scale venues. Their latest funding figures can be used
to attest to the difference in scale between the two women’s companies

\footnote{Arts Council England will henceforth be referred to as ACE.}

\footnote{In June 2011, Foursight published on its website a statement declaring that the
Foursight Theatre Company would cease to exist in May 2012, but that it was their
intention to carry on with their work in Theatre in Education, and to have completed
their archival work on the company for the Exeter Performance Archive in the near
future.}
and the two mixed companies, with o bando and Kneehigh working regularly with teams several times larger than those of EM and Foursight. All four companies, coincidently and conveniently, were established at intervals of six to eight years across a twenty-year period. All the performances analysed in detail by this study were (re)created between 2008 and 2010. Additionally, all the performances were selected for analysis based on their alternative/radical/political potential, and productions based on repertory and commercial theatre were correspondingly excluded.

The four companies chosen constitute, I believe, if not the only manifestation of the paradoxical alternative in both countries, a particularly cohesive and relevant selection, although a degree of inconsistency is unavoidable in a study of this nature. The discrepancies between the individual contributions of o bando, Kneehigh, Foursight and EM to the aesthetic and experimental innovations of the theatre histories of both countries is perhaps the most obvious objection that could be raised to this varied group. The crucial artistic role played by the more economically grounded mixed theatre companies, o bando and Kneehigh, in such histories seems far less contentious than the role of EM and Foursight. In recent years, the extent to which the artistic strength of o bando’s and Kneehigh’s work has been dependent on substantial and continuous governmental support is, of course, another difficult question to answer. However, there are many traits shared by o bando and Kneehigh, aside from their broad categorisation as examples

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8 O bando was awarded €505,622.25 for 2010 and €529,699.25 for 2011. For the same period, EM was granted €86,567.26 and €89,907.25 respectively (DGArtes 2009, DGArtes 2011). For the financial years 2010/11 and 2011/12 Kneehigh was granted £378,763.00 and £352,628.00, and Foursight £174,153.00 and £162,136.00 (ACE 2011). Similar to Kneehigh, o bando has more than twenty company associates. EM and Foursight each count only four permanent full-time members of the company.
of community theatre. Both value and practice extensive touring; both have their roots in children’s theatre; both advocate a collaborative approach to theatre production; spectacular, large walkabout outdoor theatre has been a defining element in both companies’ profiles; and each has been credited by reviewers with a particularly idiosyncratic creativity.

Unlike the straightforward similarities between obando and Kneehigh, EM and Foursight are very different in their approaches to the creative process. EM is a text-based company that has shown a preference for performing Anglophone plays and the work of such internationally recognised women playwrights as Paula Vogel, Caryl Churchill and Timberlake Wertenbaker. Foursight is at its core a devising company, creating a considerable number of its theatre productions from original texts developed during rehearsals with ‘words springing from the action’ (Cooke 2001: 16) rather than vice-versa, and, of late, pieces that are based on the real stories of local individuals and communities.

Interesting as listing such similarities and differences may be, this is not a genre study, nor a detailed analysis of the creative processes fostered within each company. What I am interested in here is the ways in which these companies ‘negotiate their alternative’ in contemporary theatre. That is, I will look into the ways in which these companies put forward in their work identifiably alternative ideologies and practices, which are

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9 Alison Oddey, in *Devising Theatre: a Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, defines ‘devised theatrical performance’ as originating ‘with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted’ (1994: 1). Later, Oddey adds that ‘[d]evising is a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing, and reshaping individuals’ contradictory experiences of the world’ (1994: 1).
simultaneously balanced by other, (more) mainstream policies and productions.

The category ‘alternative theatre’ has been used to designate multiple and varied forms of theatre. Any study that seeks to explore contemporary meanings of alternative theatre in Portugal and Britain must acknowledge the history and implications of using such a term to describe current practices in both countries. In order to situate my own use of ‘alternative’ in relation to each of the theatre companies’ present work, I will first, in Chapter Two, look at the traits and stages identifiable with the historical alternative in the British and Portuguese contexts. In this thesis, I have favoured the designation ‘alternative’, as used by Craig (1980) in his study of the English theatre movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, to the category ‘independent’, dominant in Portuguese theatre historiography, and borrowed from the Spanish experience, in order to highlight the shared traits within the political theatre movements that spread through the West during this period. In the historical alternative movement, theatre is regarded by practitioners in both Britain and Portugal as inseparable from political and social interventionist objectives and influenced by the civil movements in Europe at the end of the 1960s. This is particularly important in the Portuguese case, as alternative Portuguese theatre practitioners, unlike British practitioners, were directly and personally involved in the dramatic changes that occurred in Portuguese society as a result of the Carnation Revolution, which brought to an end nearly fifty years of dictatorial government in the country. As will be discussed, the emphasis on politics within the alternative theatre movement in Portugal, while having traits in common with Britain and other Western European countries, must, as in the case of Spanish and Greek theatres,
bear the imprint of repressive state politics, censorship and underground resistance, which were present, albeit differently manifested, under all three dictatorships.

As in Chapter Two, the subsequent chapters embed my literature review. Chapter Three covers the companies’ histories and the differences between Portuguese and British feminisms; in Chapter Four, issues of space and colonisation are particularly important; and in Chapter Five I address community and cosmopolitanism. Chapters Four and Five, dealing with space and community, are intrinsically related to each other, implying as a result occasional overlapping of contents, or a somewhat artificial differentiation. The four companies chosen for my contextual, spatial and reception analysis, included in Chapters Three, Four and Five, cover a broad period of time. The oldest company, o bando, was formed in 1974, and the youngest one, EM, in 1995, with the British companies being formed at opposite ends of the 1980s, Kneehigh in 1980 and Foursight in 1987. Targeting as case-studies for the paradoxical alternative large, long-running, and state-endorsed structures (albeit to different degrees), such as these four theatre companies, allows me to address the changing emphasis on politics by cultural practices such as theatre, through claims of the ‘death’ of the alternative and beyond. The companies’ profiles and productions will be analysed in chronological order of establishment, which has as an added advantage the successive analysis of the community-centred and women-centred companies in both countries. It should be acknowledged, however, that such long-running companies necessarily encompass in their histories many changes, contradictions and setbacks. For example, of the ‘older’ companies, o bando and Kneehigh, the artistic directors João Brites and Mike Shepherd,
respectively, are the only ‘surviving’ members of the original founding groups. It would be beyond the scope of this study to address in detail all the performances the companies have created over the years, more so because this is not a historical study per se. Furthermore, while the concept of a theatre company is inseparable from the people who establish it and are part of it at any given time, this is not a thesis examining directorial approaches, aesthetic languages, individual practitioners or acting methods, but exploring instead the ideological framework that runs through the ever-changing company structures. I fully acknowledge here, reflecting Ric Knowles’ problematisation of the theatre historian’s role (1992), that I have ‘no pretensions to proper scholarly detachment’, as I privilege a particular insight into that ‘site of struggle of de- and re-contextualized documents contesting for discursive sovereignty’ that constitutes any description of a company’s history. The shortened history of each company presented in Chapter Three can thus be taken as the unavoidably selective account required by a study of the historical and paradoxical alternatives.

Starting with an exploration of the historical alternative, in Chapter Two, entitled “‘They give birth astride of a grave”: narratives on the alternative’, I focus on the cycles of birth, death and rebirth of the alternative. The historical alternative theatre movement in Britain is defined as an oppositional form of theatre that spread from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. Influenced by the wave of national and international social protests at this time, Britain witnessed a boom in alternative theatre companies, writers and new forms of experimentation with theatre. In comparison, an analysis of Portuguese independent theatre during the twentieth century will reveal a different pattern of development. The history of the Portuguese alternative
theatre movement must necessarily take into consideration the particularly dramatic events that affected Portuguese society and politics before and after the end of the Estado Novo dictatorship, which considerably limited the role played by theatre as one of the country’s cultural practices.

The history of Portuguese independent theatre (or alternative/experimental theatre, as it has also been designated) is one clearly marked by a high level of censorship and an overall lack of governmental funding imposed on theatre practices under the Estado Novo dictatorship. Following the end of the regime on 25 April 1974, this history reflects the competing desires of theatre practitioners for the establishment of a communist, socialist or democratic Portuguese society. It must be acknowledged, nevertheless, that the history of Portuguese alternative theatre also establishes connections with wider international trends, which explains why definitions of Portuguese alternative theatre are not dissimilar to British definitions. Furthermore, in both countries (though to a lesser extent in Portugal), narratives of the decline of the alternative have permeated the discourses of academics and practitioners. This is the case, I would claim, because increasingly globalised contexts – experienced differently in each country, admittedly – put socialist-orientated forms of theatre to the test. In Chapter Two, I highlight the adverse conditions that have

10 In this thesis and in the context of Portuguese alternative theatre, when referring to the oppositional theatre practices carried out during the Estado Novo regime and the following stage of politically committed art that accompanied the ‘revolutionary crisis’ that succeeded the Carnation revolution, I will prefer the term independent to alternative to emphasise the idiosyncrasies of alternative theatre practices which are developed in response to and in the immediacy of a dictatorial regime (for more on this distinction between ‘alternative’ and ‘independent’ see section 2, The Portuguese Independent Theatre Movement).
plagued the oppositional historical theatre movement over the last two decades, focusing on two particular aspects. Material reasons, connected to changes in funding and their consequences, are cited in Andrew Davies’ *Other Theatres: the Development of Alternative and Experimental Theatre in Britain* (1987) and Kershaw’s ‘Alternative Theatres, 1946-2000’ (2004) as the basis for the transformations experienced by the movement. Kershaw (2004), in particular, emphasises the role played by postmodernity in questioning the existence of a separate, politically defined alternative theatre movement.

In the assessment of the validity of an alternative in contemporary postmodern theatre, in the section of this thesis entitled ‘Negotiating the Alternative’, it will be pointed out that not all authors have systematically privileged the one-sided ‘funerary eulogy’ of alternative theatre. With differences in degree and approach, it is possible to find authors, Kershaw among them, who propose reworkings of the definition of ‘alternative’. These definitions of alternative theatre attempt to encompass some of its most criticised changes during the twentieth century, such as its increased commodification and institutionalisation. The newfound ideological ambiguity in the postmodern context is embraced here, not as a sign of the demise of political theatre, but as a testimony to its adaptation to changing economic and political circumstances. The studies of alternative theatres in the late 1990s and in the third millennium recognise the need for a resurgence of the political/ideological, but posit this in terms of

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11 I define as ‘institutionalised’ those companies that have been working for a considerable number of years and have benefited from long-term funding, in addition to putting on medium- or large-scale performances, co-productions with institutional or repertory theatres and/or reviews in the mainstream national press.
negotiation with the mainstream, rather than a dichotomised opposition to the mainstream.

Following Chapter Two, which addresses the multiple narratives of alternative theatre, in Chapter Three, entitled “The future is history”: Context’, I use the companies’ own histories, their statements of intentions and outside critics’ perceptions in order to categorise each company’s paradoxical alternative theatre practices. O bando and Kneehigh both express a desire for ideological separation and voluntary exclusion from a corporate interest-dominated society, which, in the case of Kneehigh, is considered adjacent to their core and repeatedly professed commitment to Cornwall. Both o bando and Kneehigh are, furthermore, willing to assert their own understandings of community theatre, ones that, unlike standard community theatre practices, may not entail the participation of a well-defined community. They appeal instead to a broader sense of communality, which is designated by each of the companies using very similar phrases, o bando’s ‘social island’ (Brites 2009: 198) and Kneehigh’s ‘oasis of human engagement’ (Rice and Mike Shepherd 2010: [165]). Both theatre companies’ alterity has been financially rooted. O bando and Kneehigh have in the past been liable to the type of institutional neglect EM has consistently denounced. Poorly funded at one stage or another of their development, but deeply loved from early on by their audiences and critics, Conde’s coinage of o bando’s ‘charismatic marginality’ (Conde 1994: 80) is easily comparable with Kneehigh’s extended and heterogeneous following, which has, on its own terms, facilitated the company’s ‘short hop from barn to Broadway’ (Cavendish 2010).
As a result of the different times and contexts in which they were established, both o bando and Kneehigh have developed their own brand of ‘alternativeness’ and a different understanding of political commitment. O bando’s ‘singularidade’ early in its career has been taken to refer to the ideological and aesthetic uniqueness of its work.\(^\text{12}\) As the company has developed and changed, singularidade has come to exemplify the company’s frequent adaptations of Portuguese contemporary novels, its large-scale outdoor and walkabout performances, the incorporation of legends and art and craft work into its pieces, its non-naturalist method of acting and its impressive sets, known as stage machines. Kneehigh’s ‘band of gypsies’ has developed a physical style of storytelling, and, until the mid 2000s, staged large outdoor devised productions dubbed by the company ‘landscape theatre’, and often made with the collaboration of the local community or Cornish artists, and/or being based on local history and folk stories.

Both Kneehigh and o bando have linked the uniqueness of their work to their collective and ensemble philosophies. In the case of o bando, unlike Kneehigh, the company has always shown an interest in and promoted a dialogue with the artistic and research communities, to which their multiple and retrospective manifestos attest. However, the individuality of artistic director Brites’ creativity has dominated the company’s profile, as the artist who has been, more often than not, the director of the company’s productions, as well as being a dramaturge, set designer and company spokesperson. In the twenty-first century, Emma Rice’s extraordinarily successful adaptations to the stage of

\(^{12}\) *Singularidade* is the abstract noun formed from the adjective ‘singular’ in Portuguese. It is translatable into English as ‘singularity’ or ‘uniqueness’, relating therefore to the quality of being singular or unique. I will use the Portuguese word throughout. This concept is further discussed in Chapters Three and Five.
iconic films and universally recognisable tales and folk stories have signalled a new phase in Kneehigh’s work and marketability, one more deeply imprinted by individual authorship, mainly that of Rice.

O bando and Kneehigh have been very willing to declare themselves outsiders to society and the theatrical establishment. However, when considering the history of alternativeness in each of the women-centred companies, a fundamental difference is observable between Foursight and EM on one side and the mixed community companies on the other. The concept of a women’s theatre has, since the mid 1970s, raised discussions and disagreement about separatism and integration. Unlike ethnic and LGBT theatre groups, women’s companies have been far less consensual in their differential status. Early in the women’s movement in Britain, some women’s companies assumed a separatist agenda, declaring themselves female in spheres of both creativity and audience. Others, while feminist, worked with male and female artists, and sought to attract wider audiences. In the mid 1980s, divisions in feminist debates and feminist ideology complicated issues still further in the British context. Within the more timid history of Portuguese feminism, any company like EM defining itself as women’s theatre in the mid-1990s had to engage paradoxically with the national anti-feminist discourse while simultaneously involving itself with international postfeminist trends. To be alternative, or separate, or other is never a choice for companies defining themselves as, or sympathetic with, women’s theatre, as any categorisation as ‘female’ already entails a wealth of debate (and disagreement) on assumptions of difference and inclusiveness.
Oddey’s warning in ‘Devising (Women’s) Theatre as Meeting the Needs of Changing Times’ (1998) that women’s theatre companies in the late 1990s no longer wished to cater for female-only audiences or female-centred theatre, confirms that, regardless of the potential mainstreaming of women in the artistic professions, any mention of women and theatre still brings separatist debates to the forefront. Not surprisingly, both EM and Foursight are uncomfortable with defining themselves as women-centred or feminist, and are far less willing than the mixed theatre companies to seek out the status of otherness or outsideness. Fernanda Lapa, EM’s artistic director, rejects any association with the margins while fully acknowledging the traditional creative processes behind the company’s work; that is, a text-centred and director-led theatre company. Even so, Lapa is also the first to point to the poor financial health of the company and to explain this as a sabotaging strategy by an unnerved and anti-feminist theatre establishment. Contrary to the adversarial context in which EM was established, Foursight has argued that the company went along with women’s theatre as that was what was expected of an all-women company working in theatre in Britain in the late 1980s. Foursight’s blasé response to its feminist links may seem, however, rather ironic, as, from its second production, the company has concentrated almost exclusively on women’s lives, and has created almost exclusively all-women or women-dominated productions. Rather than identifying with women’s theatre, ‘accessible’ and ‘experimental’ have been the attributes Foursight has felt more suitably characterise its work, emphasising the physical, devised and collaborative nature of much of its theatre. *Six Dead Queens* and *Thatcher the Musical* are the two devised productions that, with their unprecedented success in the company’s
history, best embody Oddey’s description of Foursight’s work in the late 1990s as ‘mainstreaming the alternative’ (Oddey 1998: 121).

If Chapter Three addresses history, in Chapters Four and Five, space and community, two of the most important concerns of the historical alternative, are considered. ‘[T]he non-theatre places and the non-theatre audiences which most political theatre aimed to reach’ (Itzin 1980: xiv) are covered in the postmodern context, using a detailed study of contemporary theatre productions and present working conditions, i.e. rehearsal and performance spaces. The productions selected for detailed analysis in these chapters were performed between 2008 and 2010 outside mainstream, repertory or commercial theatres. These shows have been chosen for their engagement with communities, audiences and spaces, their clear and outspoken ideological commitment and their significance in the companies’ histories.

Chapter Four, entitled ‘“A room of one’s own”’, deals with theatre space. Arguably all spaces are ‘haunted’, to borrow Marvin Carlson’s term, by other meanings, as they evoke in their visitors other associations and (dis)likings. In relation to theatre, Carlson (1989) has emphasised the intimidating potential of grand theatres, while Ric Knowles (2004) and Gay McAuley (2003) have looked at different factors that might influence the spectators’ experience of both traditional and non-traditional spaces. The non-traditional theatre places analysed in Chapter Four include one ‘non-place’, as Marc Augé (1995) defines it in ‘From Places to Non-places’, the Mander Centre where Foursight’s The Corner Shop production is based. 13 Contrary to

13 The Corner Shop will be referred to from now on as TCS.
the non-place’s emphasis on anonymity, the *Plano do Centenário* primary school where *Nós Matámos o Cão Tinhoso! (We Killed the Mangy Dog!)* is performed fits with ideas of discipline and control.\textsuperscript{14} Other spaces, in contrast, evoke positive associations: Kneehigh’s new tent, the Asylum, conveys the idea of light entertainment and travelling, while the newly-refurbished traditional theatre space, Cine-Teatro Constantino Nery, is tightly bound to its roots in community entertainment.\textsuperscript{15} All of the performances that are studied as part of Chapter Four engage paradoxically with space. The non-traditional theatre locations described both ground the audiences in the particular physical space they occupy while simultaneously proposing differently-located sites. The fictional space represented in the production may add another complex layer of meaning to the physical performance space, inviting ironic distancing, overlapping associations or straightforward identification. Furthermore, when space is perceived as essential for identity construction, as with Kneehigh’s Cornish-rooted production, *Blast!*, by interweaving local with global references, this production paradoxically questions such place-based identities.

EM, TAob and Kneehigh all acquired their own performance spaces from the 2000s onwards, that is, rather late in their histories, and they all invested their own money to do so. While o bando and Kneehigh own their own performance spaces and have been co-financed, EM had to pay all of Estefânia’s refurbishment and leasing costs. Unlike o bando and Kneehigh, EM does not have exclusive use of Estefânia and, because of this, rehearsals and performances of their first production in

\textsuperscript{14} *Nós Matámos o Cão Tinhoso!* will henceforth be referred to as *Tinhoso!*.  
\textsuperscript{15} Referred to from now on as Constantino Nery.
Estefânia, *Com o Bebé Somos Sete*, Paula Vogel’s *And Baby Makes Seven*, were conditioned by the Clube’s other activities.  

All four companies have their bases and/or performance spaces in locations that have become, or were planned as integral to the companies’ identities. O bando’s Vale de Barris, on the southern bank of the River Tagus, is a borderline place. It is at the heart of a small agricultural community in Palmela but an hour’s drive from Lisbon, and thus reminiscent of o bando’s early years in Sintra. Vale de Barris allows the company to look at the city from afar, being remote in its rural location, but is close in its relative physical proximity and easy access to the country’s capital, and thus open to the wider community. Kneehigh’s Gorran Haven Barns, in their seclusion and exclusivity, have since 1990 been essential to the Kneehigh imagination. Inaugurated in 2010, the Asylum performance space, a hybrid between a tent and a theatre, promises to be an integral part of the Kneehigh theatre experience for years to come. Estefânia’s refurbishment and lease has, at least temporarily, put an end to EM’s fifteen-year quest for a theatre space. Foursight has never owned its own performance space, but the Newhampton Arts Centre, where the company has its base is, like Estefânia, an interesting mix between a community centre and a theatre. The centre provides leisure activities and classes for the wider community while simultaneously being used by professional companies such as Foursight for rehearsals and performances. The multi-ethnic Newhampton Arts Centre exemplifies in many ways Wolverhampton’s diverse communities, as portrayed in Foursight’s recent community theatre productions.

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16 *Com o Bebé Somos Sete* is referred to henceforth as *Bebé*. *And Baby Makes Seven* is referred to henceforth as *Baby.*
All the pieces studied, except *Tinhoso!*, are revivals of previous productions performed in very different spaces the first time around. Furthermore, two of the productions analysed in detail in the chapter on ‘place’ were performed in ‘found spaces’, *Tinhoso! in the playground of a Estado Novo-built primary school, and TCS in the Mander Centre, a shopping centre located at the heart of Wolverhampton. These two spaces establish both dependent and contrasting relations with the content of each production, but as found spaces they are also quite important for the restrictions they impose both on the creative process and on the spectators. A tent and a theatre are often seen as being located at opposite ends of the entertainment business. Theatres are traditionally associated with high-brow culture, and tents with the experience of a circus coming to town. *Sétimo Céu* and *Blast!* constitute in their performance spaces exceptional examples with regard to these habitual connotations. Constantino Nery will be shown to have more in common with a community club than with a repertory theatre, at least during its season of preview performances, while the elaborate and costly Asylum not only prides itself on its unique design but is similar in its regulations and running to a bricks and mortar theatre.

Aside from the central issue of space, new audiences and the democratisation of the theatrical experience were the backbone of the historical alternative. Two of the companies analysed in this study readily define themselves as community theatres, even though these definitions are far removed from the traditional classifications of community theatre practices. In Chapter Five, entitled ‘All together now: Community’, I tackle several definitions of community theatre before focusing on each of the companies’ own characterisations of community. Each of the companies has an interest in community, with
varying degrees of direct address, specific location and time, generally depending on the stage of the company’s history.

The Cornish community, according to Kneehigh, permeates its entire project. The company’s increased touring outside of the county, and its more traditional theatre performances of late, have called this commitment into question, though the company’s Cornish following has recently found some relief in Kneehigh’s Cornish-based opening season at the Asylum. O bando’s community theatre arose originally from taxonomic concerns in the late 1980s. Some community projects have now, however, become cyclical events (such as the yearly outdoor celebration of the height of summer, *Pino do Verão*) in the company’s repertoire. Foursight is the company that has engaged with the most traditionally defined community theatre practice. Even so, while each of Foursight’s community-centred productions relates to specific groups based in the Wolverhampton area, each production always also evokes other communities and places. Finally, EM has affirmed its commitment to the LGBT community with its timely 2009 production of *Bebê* which coincided on stage with the approval of the same-sex marriage law in Portugal, a law publicly supported by EM’s artistic director.

Each of the productions analysed in Chapter Five posits an idea of community that is influenced, directly or indirectly, by cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitan cultural theory professes a citizen’s identity as twofold, comprising a local and a global commitment. In my analysis of each production, the ‘local’ communities portrayed on stage, whether corner shop owners or clients, Cornish nationalists or English tourists, Portuguese homosexual couples or school children and adults,
are complicated in performance by references from further afield that disrupt and interfere with notions of locality. By the particular circumstances of performance, the specificities of place and/or the company’s own initiative, the diversely-composed audiences and casts often constitute temporary communities in their (un)intentional requirements to share space, food or life experiences and finally, simply, in the shared joy of the performance.

Temporary communities, it has been said, can be spontaneously formed during a theatre production. While companies such as obando, Kneehigh and Foursight use several strategies to bring about the feeling of a shared community in their audiences, a degree of communality is intrinsic to all theatre performances. Performance joins actors and spectators in a unique present moment of creation. Simultaneously, performance (transposing the Lacanian concept of joissance here into the theatre context) is immediately dead; it ceases to exist at the very moment it is, like the very life it so stubbornly emulates on stage.

It is precisely the unique and non-reproductive nature of any theatre performance that is used by Peggy Phelan (1993) to justify the impossibility of performance analysis in the ‘The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction’. Phelan argues for the impossibility of documenting or recording a performance when she writes that: ‘[a] [p]erformance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance’ (1993: 146). Conversely, Helen Freshwater in ‘The Allure of the Archive’ believes that archival research has value, but it ‘cannot offer direct access to the past, any
reading of its contents will necessarily be a reinterpretation’ (2003: 738). Freshwater further claims that writing the history of the dead ‘is a potentially violent act’ (2003: 738). What, then, might be the implications in researching the present work of contemporary theatre companies? Bill McDonnell, in ‘The Politics of Historiography – Towards an Ethics of Representation’, warns that ‘those who are written about rarely, if ever, have power over how they are represented in theatre history, sometimes with critical consequences for the “oppressed”’ (2005: 129). Thus, while the present may become the past during the research process, one cannot ignore the future repercussions that fixing the present in history can bring. McDonnell asks how ‘can academic research be divorced from active commitment, from praxis: can we will the end without committing ourselves to the means?’ (2005: 127). Since these problems are central to my research, I had to look for a balanced methodology. Like many other performance researchers I turned to anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s (1973) ‘thick description’.

The concept of thick description was developed by Geertz (1973) in his seminal essay ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, where he proposes three essential ideas. The first is that the study of culture cannot exist without constant acts of (re)interpretation, since ‘what we call data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to’ (1973: 9), and ‘right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating: and worse, explicating explications’ (1973: 9). The second idea, related to the first, is that what is being studied is of a complex and thick nature: ‘a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once
strange, irregular, and inexplicit’ (1973: 10). Finally, Geertz focuses on the method of analysis to be used in the interpretation of complex facts. Thick description is detailed or ‘microscopic’ (1973: 21), and ‘the aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them [the broad assertions] exactly with complex specifics’ (1973: 28).

The concept of thick description is also applied in contemporary theatre research to problematise the role of the researcher within the creative process. McDonnell defines thick description as ‘a full and multi-voice account’ (2005: 130). Later, McDonnell underlines the important role thick description may play in the rebalancing of power relations established between the worlds of academically-validated research and artistic practice. “Thick” description, McDonnell asserts, ‘involves problematising the outsider/insider relationship. “Thick” description means the laying bare of power relations, a transparency about the necessities, personal and political, which are being met in these encounters’ (2005: 134). When analysing a performance, and especially when regarding practice from a broader perspective, to also include process one has to acknowledge whose story we are telling: is it the actors’, the director’s, or is it following the narrative structures of the text and/or the performance? Such considerations are taken up by Gay McAuley (1998) in her article ‘Towards an Ethnography of Rehearsal: Dilemmas in Documenting and Videotaping the Rehearsal Process’, from which one can collect a list of questions that are very useful for the researcher trying to develop his or her own methodology: what means should be used in order to document a performance? Is the research product-orientated or process-orientated? When and where to begin,
and what to include? What is the point of view or narrative structure framing the analysis? What is the role of the observer in the creative process?

All these approaches presuppose the researcher’s presence in the process, which also needs addressing. On the role of the observer in the creative process Maria DiCenzo (1996), in *The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain, 1968-1990: The Case of 7:84 (Scotland)*, gives two very distinct examples of observation and archival activities. In Gillian Hanna’s study of Monstrous Regiment, *The Monstrous Regiment Book: Four Plays and a Collective Celebration*, Hanna acknowledged her own role in what she calls a ‘personal’ history of the company (1991: ix); conversely, Rob Richie designates himself as the invited ‘outsider’ recording Joint Stock’s activities (1987: [7]). In addition to these two very distinct positions, the observer can also find a middle ground. Vera Borges, in *Todos ao Palco!* (2001), fosters her own in-betweeness in her sociological study of the rehearsal process of three companies: Artistas Unidos, Pogo Teatro and Teatro Nacional D. Maria II.\(^\text{17}\) Starting as ‘an informed observer’ (2001: 42), Borges became progressively more involved in the creative process, performing tasks such as those expected of a stage assistant, and becoming increasingly accepted as part of the group.\(^\text{18}\)

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17 All translations from Portuguese are my own, unless stated otherwise.
18 ‘After some time during the fieldwork period, I started to be “within their contexts”, as I shared their routines (helping actors memorise their parts, helping out with the stage props and set) and I witnessed their developments (knowing the text, choosing the costumes). I was an interested party in their obstacles (finding a sound-table, advertising the production, settling on co-productions) and in the high or low humoured team discussions’ (2001: 46).
In my own research of practice I am more indebted, however, to such works as Geraldine Cousin’s *Recording Women: A Documentation of Six Theatre Productions* (2000), Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris’ *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary (Women) Practitioners* (2008) and Gay McAuley’s ‘Not Magic but Work: Rehearsal and the Production of Meaning’ (2008). All of these studies examine performance from different perspectives. In Cousin (2000), the analysis of six theatre productions staged by three different women’s companies concentrates mainly on the performances, including in addition some practitioners’ testimonies about rehearsals and audience reactions. Unlike Cousin’s work, Aston and Harris’ is pre- rather than post-performance research, involving a number of artists and types of performance. McAuley also concentrates on the rehearsal stage, but of a particular production, focusing on a detailed analysis of a moment in the rehearsal process, then connecting it to an overview of the production. Like Cousin, I also concentrate on a limited number of productions by a different number of theatre companies, which have been chosen for their association with a particular type of theatre. My approach combines McAuley’s detailed analysis and contextual overview, while paying significant attention, like Aston and Harris, to the here and now, and similarly weaving the practitioners’ responses together with my rehearsal notes into my overall analysis.

To elaborate, and starting with Cousin (2000), it should be noted that Cousin’s selection of companies for study is based on the author’s own preference and on the perceived experimental nature of the companies’ work. Cousin chooses to analyse each production separately, providing only a very brief comparison between the companies and productions in the ‘afterword’. Her study of the productions is broken down into
subsections: the different parts of the text or the different characters. Hers is a narrative approach to production, focusing on a performance from beginning to end. Cousin privileges performance aesthetics (for example, ‘Her ability to transform herself from one character to another is extraordinary, almost eerie’ (2000: 137), as well as concerning herself with describing the emotions and psychological profiles of the characters (for example, ‘He is quiet, confident’ (2000: 140). Process is referred to in her study, but only through interviews with practitioners, directors, composers, choreographers and writers, which she quotes at length in a separate section at the end of each chapter. Both stages (performance and process) are clearly separated in Cousin’s text between the academic analysis of the performance and the retracing of rehearsals through the words of those involved in the creative process.

Aston and Harris’ (2008) approach is significantly different from Cousin’s (2000). In their introduction, Aston and Harris highlight how their research was ‘a unique opportunity to explore these artists’ work from the inside: to be with them at work rather than as is customary, to comment from a position of post-performance analysis and reflection’ (2008: 1). The work is based on practitioner-led workshops and covers a variety of performance events, including performance art, live art, performance poetry, play writing, performance storytelling, radio drama, stand-up comedy and site-specific performance. Aston and Harris’ research also takes into account (and quotes) the practitioners’ words, but as Aston and Harris admit when explaining their project, these considerations are woven into the research.

McAuley (2008), like Aston and Harris, also focuses on practice as process. In her article, McAuley considers the production of meaning in
relation to the rehearsal process, drawing on her own observations of the work process of the 2004 production of Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* by Brink Productions. She makes use of ethnographic theory, and more specifically Geertz’s ‘thick description’, in order to explore the ‘traces’ the rehearsal process leaves behind. McAuley asserts that ‘[t]he task of the rehearsal analyst, like that of the ethnographer in the field, involves careful observation of the minutiae that constitute the life and work processes of the group being studied and an attempt to understand what the details observed mean to the people involved and in the broader cultural context’ (2008: 286). In order to do this, McAuley approaches Brink Productions’ rehearsals in two different ways, providing a detailed account of a particularly important work session, and giving an overview of the process that led to the set design. For McAuley, it was necessary to provide the context of the work process side by side with the detailed analysis of a particular moment in the process. Kershaw (1996) also argues in favour of the importance of context, especially when analysing politics in performance. For Kershaw, ‘if we wish to discriminate the “political” in performance more precisely, then, I think we cannot ignore the specific conditions of the performative, particularly the kinds of people who, we hope, enjoy it, and the places in which it occurs’ (1996: 144).

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19 It should be noted that Tracy C. Davies (2004) in ‘The Context Problem’ raises important questions regarding the contextualisation of live performances. Davies claims that “‘context’ is instrumental to convey the immediacy of performances in the past, compensating for their perishability, and emphasising their relevance to past and present. A problem with ‘context’ is that, though it is provided for the sake of ‘completeness’, one scholar’s criterion for gestalt may be another’s idea of irrelevance’ (2004: 204). Given the inescapable nature of the context problem, but its centrality to performance analysis, Davies invites researchers to approach context in new ways.
Issues surrounding the ‘kinds of people who (...) enjoy it’ and ‘the places in which it occurs’ have been core to my own study of practice. I should start by emphasising that I have watched live all the productions analysed in detail, and have further accessed the original play or adapted text (if existent), as well as the play-text used in rehearsals and any live recordings of the productions. I was granted some access to rehearsals of two of the productions, but these functioned more as an informative starting point for the production research, and my notated observations are not included separately in this study but have instead contributed to my overall understanding of the company’s work methodology. My access to the different companies was the result of a process of acquaintance with the companies themselves, which was for obvious reasons heterogeneous. Practitioners from o bando, EM and Foursight were all available to (in)formally discuss the company and the productions viewed. As is unavoidable in such cases, the amount of information available concerning the companies’ productions and funding histories and the access granted to these varied significantly, for such reasons as less interest from reviewers or more published academic articles, but also on account of the straightforward logistical nature of the access granted to each company’s archive. It will be clear from my research, for example, that o bando has been the most academically researched company, while EM has been the least reviewed, and personal interviews were particularly important here.

While I was not fortunate enough to participate in the creative process of the productions analysed, I share with Aston and Harris a concern for ‘the local’ and ‘the specific’. Privileging what Geertz has characterised as a microscopic approach (1973: 21), I have provided
significantly detailed descriptions of certain moments in the productions, while simultaneously attempting an overview of the rehearsal, performance and reception stages in their particular contexts. In order to do this, I have adopted a relational focus on the companies’ histories and prior productions, rehearsal and presentational spaces and specific audience and community relationships. I have used personal interviews with practitioners and/or interviews included in theatre programmes, video recordings, written reviews and, in the case of Foursight, their own diary of rehearsals, made available on the company’s website. The fact that context and the companies’ past profiles are taken into consideration when analysing specific productions allows, I believe, for the disclosure of aspects of the creation of work that would otherwise remain invisible.

My own methodology, developed for analysing each of the productions selected, examines, in the case of EM, the differences between the production and the original play on which the production was based. For o bando, the production is contrasted with the short story *Tinhoso!*, and in the case of Kneehigh, the 2007 and 2010 *Blast!* play-texts are compared. With Foursight, the comparison with the previous production did not apply to the text, which remained the same, but the very different spaces in which the two productions of TCS took place were analysed. I studied the stated intentions of the director and/or artistic director of the companies, resorting to funding applications, theatre programmes, published interviews and/or personal interviews and conversations. I watched some rehearsals of Foursight, o bando and EM’s productions, and recorded my impressions of these in note form, which aided my understanding of the companies’ working methods. The rehearsal process informed in particular my analysis of
TCS and Bebé, by referring to the company’s published information in the first case, and to the information directly provided by practitioners and my own notes in the second.

The response to each production was gauged through published criticism and audience feedback either volunteered to the company or witnessed by practitioners, front-of-house staff and/or by myself. The particular production was always placed in the context of the company’s history and working statements. In my analysis of place, all spaces were viewed in relation to their usage by the productions, but also in terms of their significance for each company, in particular, and for the community at large. In the case of adaptations of pre-existing published texts, background information was provided regarding the texts themselves. In the case of TCS, Reans Girls and Blast!, however, as these were the companies’ own original texts, wider contextual knowledge was provided through the analysis of other productions based in shopping centres for Foursight’s TCS, and a comparison of Reans Girls to Foursight’s other community projects. Regarding Blast!, I established a parallel reading with other fictional and non-fictional theatrical responses to terrorism in Britain.

The extended time spent with the companies (o bando, Foursight and EM) and the extensive number of interviews undertaken, were key principles in what I saw as the necessity of creating a ‘multi-voice’ account when analysing contemporary performance and practitioners. In his article, McDonnell (2005) warns the academic against the potential unbalancing of power relationships between researcher and practitioners, the latter becoming the subordinate party, and the resultant emergence of a univocal narrative. I found, however, that
rather than having to guard against my own political and personal agenda, as the result of the many hours shared, made me, like Borges, ‘an interested party in their [the practitioners’] obstacles’ (2001: 46). I realised early on that I could not will the end without committing myself to the means. The companies finally selected were also those ones with whom I discovered I had shared values. Finally, a materialist-based methodology enabled me to avoid the thorny issue of the aesthetic and artistic value of the productions analysed here.

By analysing (in all the chapters of this thesis and within each company’s history) the dialogue established between the alternative and the institutional, by looking at particular performances, performance contexts and spaces, by quoting practitioners’ words, manifestos, artistic policies, funding applications and reports, theatre programmes, critics’ reviews and clues to the productions’ reception in the wider community, I wish to gauge the ideologies and mythologies of alternativeness that arise from contemporary companies’ work as a manifestation of cultural practice. To do this, first of all I need to place the concept of ‘alternative theatre’ in all its lexical and chronological complexity. In the following chapter, Chapter Two, regarding the cyclical nature of alternative theatre, I will look closely at the historical alternative, which provides my framework of comparison for the ways in which contemporary postmodern theatre companies negotiate their own radicalisation. By engaging with the philosophies central to the historical alternative, such as non-traditional audiences, appropriated spaces and disempowered communities, and by simultaneously taking

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20 Non-traditional audiences would be those not found in most repertoire and National theatres in the UK and Portugal, where white, middle-aged and middle-income and above spectators form the majority.
part in and benefiting from the same mechanisms intrinsic to
globalisation and the market economy that they wish to critique, each
of the four theatre companies rebels through negotiation, fostering their
own paradoxical alternative.
II. ‘They give birth astride of a grave’: narratives on the alternative

‘They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams
an instant, then it’s night once more’ (Beckett 1965: 89).

1. The British alternative theatre movement

The title of the final chapter in Peter Ansorge’s (1975) study of the
British alternative theatre movement poses the question: ‘[f]ive years
on: the end of the fringe?’ (1975: 76). It is rather ironic that the first
book-length study of British alternative theatre, and one that has been
of fundamental importance in establishing the alternative as a subject
for theatre historians, is also the book that begins the process of its
negation. It is therefore hard to dismiss Melissa Dana Gibson’s
observation that ‘the Fringe is always dying’ (2006: 33). In this chapter I
will analyse some of these narratives of birth and death of the
alternative theatre.

When discussing the alternative theatre movement many issues come to
the fore, not least the choice of the word ‘alternative’, its definition and
periodisation. For parallel periods and characterisations of the
‘underground’ and ‘radical’ have all been used. ‘Fringe’, for example, is
preferred by recent studies such as Gibson’s, and by early studies like
Ansorge’s (together with ‘experimental’ and ‘underground’ in the latter
case). In 1980, ‘political’ was used by Catherine Itzin, and ‘alternative’
by Sandy Craig to describe similar theatre practices. Later, Andrew
Davies (1987) chose ‘other theatres’, while Baz Kershaw’s study (1992)
focuses on the concept of ‘radical theatre’. The nuances, historical
associations and contextual uses of each of these terms can be found in studies such as Kershaw’s (1992) and, more recently, in Sara Freeman’s (2006a), which give a good insight into the richness of the terminology available to the researcher or practitioner.

While any term applied to describe the object of this study could potentially be deemed as a mere preference, some consensus has been achieved in the British theatre context in the use of ‘alternative’ as a broad designation for oppositional theatre practices. For Kershaw, ‘alternative’ has been the preferred concept of the movement’s ‘partisan critics and historians’, in order to ‘indicate broad opposition to the ideological mainstream in theatre and politics’ (2004: 350). In Freeman’s article (2006a), the alternative is used as an ‘umbrella term’ for any type of ‘other’ theatre: “‘alternative” points to an “otherness” from commercial theatre or from the establishment theatre of the subsidized nationals, but it leaves the details of that otherness open to a broad range of possibilities’ (2006a: 374). For Freeman, ‘the “otherness” of alternative theatre retains the challenge of “political” theatre, but the phrase does not legislate how that challenge must be played out’ (2006a: 374).

Even if the terminology used to characterise the movement varies among theorists, books such as Ansorge’s Disrupting the Spectacle (1975), Itzin’s Stages in a Revolution (1980) and Craig’s Dreams and Deconstructions (1980) all focus on a similar period of British theatre history. Accounts of the alternative do differ when considering major influences, legacies and taxonomic subdivisions. There is some agreement, however, on the years 1968 and 1979 as marking the beginning and the end (or at least the transformation) of the movement.
Gibson (2006) asserts that British theatre’s post-war history relied on three years as markers of revolutions or breaks: 1956 (The Angry Young Men generation), 1968 (fringe theatre) and 1979 (the start of Thatcherism and the end of the fringe). In more recent works, Gibson finds that this periodisation has been revised. For Gibson, 1968 has now lost its unquestionable status as a marker of the start of the fringe (2006: 40-2), and 1956 has consistently been questioned as the revolutionary year that marks the start of post-war theatre, but 1979 has persisted as the year that marks the destruction of fringe theatre (see in particular 2006: 45-47). The earlier writers on the British alternative theatre movement all underline the importance of 1968, making a direct connection with the international social protest movements, but earlier productions, playwrights and events are quoted in all three books as influencing the movement.

Looking at alternative theatre practices over a five year period (1968 – 1973), Ansorge (1975) links the appearance in the 1970s of what he designates as ‘fringe’ or ‘underground’ theatre to the specific contemporary political and social events of the time (the Vietnam War, students’ protests and sexual revolution), and points to 1968 as a watershed year in the history of British theatre. Preceding 1968, Ansorge (1975) traces the foundational work and influences of North American companies and individuals on the British underground. As Ansorge puts it, ‘the English underground it appeared to many had been nudged into existence by a trio of energetic impresarios’ (1975: 22). Those impresarios were Jim Hayne and his London-based Arts Lab in Drury Lane, Charlez Marowitz and his Open Space, and Ed Berman’s ‘Inter Action’ tours. Besides these three individuals, Ansorge also quotes the 1967 visits of the Open Theatre Space and Café La Mama,
organised by the Transverse Theatre, Edinburgh. Ansorge is rather limited in his references to precursory British practitioners, but highlights the role of the People Show (founded in 1965), a company influenced by American experimentalism.

Ansorge’s (1975) study of the British alternative theatre movement relies on the characterisation of the experimental processes shared by different groups and writers. Companies such as CAST, Portable Theatre, Freehold, The People Show, the Pip Simmons Group and Welfare State are all contextualised as part of this movement, with Ansorge also paying individual attention to plays by such writers as Howard Brenton, David Hare, John McGrath and Trevor Griffiths. For Ansorge, these new approaches were related to exposing ‘the society of the spectacle’ (1975: 78). In Ansorge’s words:

[There is] the idea of a tribal or collective existence being pioneered on stage [...]. There is a sense in many of the groups that characters can become interchangeable, that personalities are made up of many different minds and images. [...] In this sense it is possible to speak of a genuinely alternative theatre which the groups have created over the past five years bringing the concerns of a new generation into the open and up on to a stage. (1975: 79-80, my emphasis.)

Ansorge’s (1975) book was mainly concerned with processes of theatrical experimentation. Other works, like Itzin’s (1980), shift the focus on the alternative theatre movement from form to content.

Itzin’s (1980) study of the alternative takes further the link, briefly discussed by Ansorge (1975:1 and 22-3), between the appearance of the British alternative theatre movement of the 1960s and 1970s and its
political context, considering important (inter)national events. British events highlighted by Itzin include the Abortion Law Reform Act, British troops in Northern Ireland and the economic crisis of 1967. Theatre-related facts listed include the abolition of theatre censorship (Lord Chamberlain’s office) and the birth of Time Out magazine.

Rather than the analytical thematic approach preferred by Ansorge, Itzin’s study covers what ‘they thought as well as what they did’ (1980: xi). Itzin provides multiple listings (companies, places and productions), separated by year, from 1968 to 1978, with individual companies listed according to their ‘point of greatest interest’ rather than when they were established (Itzin 1980: xi). This particular structure may have led Gibson to reductively assert: ‘[t]hat Catherine Itzin grounds her history in the year 1968 is obvious from her book’s subtitle’ (Gibson 2006: 38). 1968 is considered a landmark year in Itzin’s study, but pre-1968 influences (such as Arnold Wesker, John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy) are included, although the individual entry for each playwright is listed under the subsection ‘1970’ for Wesker and ‘1968’ for Arden and D’Arcy. Itzin’s book title, Stages in the Revolution, foregrounds the question of ideology central to her study. Itzin prefers the term ‘political’ to ‘fringe’, ‘underground’, ‘experimental’ or ‘alternative’ theatre. For Itzin, political theatre is a committed theatre, grounding its opposition to capitalism in socialist ideologies and Marxist theories, and ultimately demanding a revolution in society and the class system. In Itzin’s words, ‘they would almost unanimously regard their work as part of the struggle towards a socialist society – as a contribution, however small, to the revolutionary process’ (1980: x). The alternative theatre movement, in Itzin’s view, had the desire for a move towards greater equality in the British class system.
Sandy Craig proposes a taxonomy for alternative theatre where political theatre is only one of the possible forms of alternative theatre available to practitioners. Craig, when attempting to classify what is, for him, ‘uncategorizable’ (1980: 20) nevertheless proposes a subcategorisation of the alternative. Taking into consideration the aims and objectives of several companies integral to the 1960s and 1970s movement, Craig offers the following subdivisions for alternative theatre groups: political theatre (progressively separated into the sections of socialist, feminist and gay theatres); community theatre; theatre and education; performance art; and companies presenting plays (Craig 1980: 20-7). In Craig’s work, separate chapters are written by different specialists focusing on each type of alternative theatre (with the exception of gay theatre). Among the companies listed by Craig in his categorisation are: CAST and Belt and Braces (as examples of political theatre); Combination and Inter Action (community theatre); Bill Martin’s Contemporary Theatre (theatre and education); the People Show and Welfare State (performance art groups); and The Freehold, the Pip Simmons Group and Portable Theatre (play-centred companies, subdivided into actor-based companies and writer-based companies). Despite this separate categorisation, alternative theatre companies’ work is either directly or implicitly linked to political intervention. This emphasis on the political is also reflected in Craig’s definition of alternative theatre. For Craig (1980), alternative theatre leads the audience to deconstruct reality and aim for change. As Craig puts it, ‘[e]ither it projects dreams or fantasies onto the audience, or it deconstructs the world and in this process shows the audience that the world can be changed’ (1980: 28).
The same studies that propose fringe, alternative, or political theatre as a new movement in the British theatre context are also the ones that identify its end. In the last chapter of his book, Ansorge claimed that by 1973 ‘[t]here was a general feeling around that the fringe was experiencing a momentary lapse in strength and will, that complacency and predictability had set into the different ways of working’ (Ansorge 1975: 9). Itzin (1980) and Craig (1980) also believe the alternative movement had reached its end before the seventies came to a close. Itzin quotes Brenton’s remarks on the ‘failure of the alternative’ by the mid-1970s (quoted in Itzin 1980: 188). Itzin emphatically stresses, however, that if alternative theatre is considered but a stage in the revolution, then it had an important political role to play. What is for Itzin problematic is the principle of an oppositional, but state-funded, theatre. Itzin’s study traces the stages in the ACE’s recognition of the alternative movement during the 1970s, pointing out the paradoxical ideological implications in having an anti-establishment theatre that is nevertheless financially dependent on the state. As Itzin claims, ‘a contradiction it might be: taking money from precisely the state that the left would, in revolutionary circumstances, do away with, but a contradiction that had to be lived with’ (Itzin 1980: 20).1 For Itzin, however, there was no other way the alternative could survive. Her book can be read as a protest document against the funding difficulties

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1 The exception of Centre 42 should be noted here. Established in 1960, Centre 42 was Wesker’s pioneering attempt to free theatre from the ‘hand that feeds’. It took its name from Resolution 42 approved by the 1960 Trade Union Congress, and by Wesker’s initiative, by which the unions would provide financial support to the arts. During its ten-year history, many were critical of the Centre, its apparent bourgeois ideology and its ineffective funding system – by rich individuals rather than workers. As Itzin has pointed out, nevertheless, by 1970 the Centre had accomplished an extensive nationwide coverage of local theatre spaces, paving the way for the touring companies that multiplied during the late 1960s and 1970s (see Itzin 1980: 109-112).
continuously felt by alternative theatre companies, and which Itzin feared might be instrumental in their demise.

Craig (1980) also addresses funding matters through ACE’s history, from its foundation to its policies in the late-1970s, detailing in particular the changes that benefited the alternative theatre movement. Craig is far more positive than Itzin in his analysis, emphasising how the improved funding conditions had allowed alternative theatre companies to multiply. It is the cross-over of artists and writers between non-mainstream and mainstream theatres that Craig sees as a sign ‘that alternative theatre is perhaps no longer so different from mainstream theatre’ (Craig 1980: 177-8). In the conclusion to his book *Other Theatres*, written during Margaret Thatcher’s premiership, Andrew Davies focuses on the influence of the funding process on the ‘demise’ of alternative theatre. By 1987, Davies claims that alternative theatre had no future, and links the death of the alternative to several factors: in particular, the middle-class origin of most theatre spectators leading to mainstream theatre (the West End) being favoured over alternative theatre, and changes in funding and increasing running costs leading to restrictions for alternative theatre (1987: 207-209).

Like Itzin, Craig and Davies before him, Kershaw also considers funding relevant when discussing the survival or death of the alternative. In his long list of writings on alternative theatre, Kershaw addresses alternative or radical theatre from multiple, and not always absolutely cohesive perspectives. In *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, Kershaw’s emphasis regarding alternative theatre is mainly on its potential for political intervention, or what he designates as ‘political efficacy’. Kershaw defines political
efficacy as ‘the potential theatre may have to make the immediate effects of performance influence, however minutely, the general historical evolution of wider social and political realities’ (1992: 1). He identifies four categories of alternative theatre: two concerning mainly aesthetic experimentation, and two focusing on ideological opposition. Alternative theatre divides itself according to particular techniques or processes, styles or aesthetics, meanings and contexts (see Kershaw 1992: 57-8). Regarding ‘political’ theatre, for Kershaw, ‘radical’ takes over from ‘political’ to characterise a theatre that has political efficacy at its core. The distinction between ‘radical’ and ‘political’ is further developed in Kershaw’s later book, *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*, where the label of ‘political’ is rejected altogether. For Kershaw, political theatre is a historically and ideologically restrictive category, which relates mainly to the leftist movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. By using the term ‘radical’, Kershaw claims that this term is liable to fit a wider spectrum of ideological practices, including performance practices that do not fit into the alternative movement. Kershaw claims ‘the radical has no necessary ideological tendency; hence it may be claimed (as indeed has been) by both Left and Right factions in contemporary politics’ (1999b: 18).

As early as 1992, Kershaw reflects on the increasing pressures of populism upon alternative theatre companies. Kershaw is sceptical about the growth of alternative theatre and its popularity, and how this growth impacts upon (and potentially undermines) its socio-political efficacy (Kershaw 1992: 59). Aside from the loss of ideological coherence, in a later article, ‘Building an Unstable Pyramid’ (1993a), Kershaw addresses how the bricks and mortar policy promoted under the Conservative government further endangered the cohesion and
survival of the alternative theatre movement. According to Kershaw, three main changes resulted from the new funding system: the discouragement of touring to locations outside traditional theatre spaces; the reduced accessibility and availability of theatre practices to ‘non-theatre’ audiences; and the formation of a hierarchy of alternative theatre groups. Kershaw argues that these changes were instrumental in the creation of ‘an unstable pyramid’ of alternative theatre groups: ‘a kind of “alternative elite” of companies emerged at the top of an industrial pyramid built on ideological foundations that were in complete contradiction to the egalitarian principles of the progressive cultural formations which had spawned them in the first place’ (Kershaw 1993a: 344).

In ‘Discouraging Democracy: British Theatres and Economics, 1979-1999’, Kershaw analyses the impact of Thatcherite monetarist conservative politics on theatre practices across Britain, during and beyond Thatcher’s premiership. Kershaw believes that British theatre became increasingly subjected to the pressures of marketisation and commodification as a direct result of reduced state intervention and decreased funding during the Conservative governments of Thatcher and John Major (Kershaw 1999a: 269). The new policies, and this market-orientated ideology, favoured West End commercial ventures such as the mega-musical. While state investment, now dependent on building infrastructures and audience attendance, had a productive impact on commercial theatre, regional theatres deteriorated as a direct result of the new policies. In particular, the new building-centred approach to funding implied additional cumulative costs for these spaces, which were not matched in the smaller theatres either by extra-funding or box-office revenue. As observed by Kershaw, the
refurbishment schemes of subsidised theatre outside London had ‘further worsened the financial performances of these theatres, as the increased costs of running updated buildings, coupled with falling grant revenue simply inflated their cumulative deficits’ (1999a: 281). Thatcherite policies proclaimed reduced state intervention as a way of democratically shifting the power from producers to consumers. By making theatres more dependent on spectators’ approval (‘bums on seats’), control of theatrical productions would move to the audience (client), as theatres would be forced to undertake increasingly populist strategies. As Kershaw ironically remarks, ‘theatre attendance became more “accessible” provided you could afford the ticket’ (1999a: 276).

As has been noted, Kershaw (1999a) investigates the global effects of Thatcherite policies on British theatre. In ‘Writing the History of an Alternative-Theatre Company’, Freeman (2006a) privileges a microscopic approach to these changes. Through Freeman’s research of Joint Stock’s final years it is possible to evaluate the impact of the monetarist funding policies promoted by Thatcher in relation to a specific (and particularly emblematic) alternative group. Freeman (1999a) analyses Joint Stock’s final years (post-Max Stafford Clark) and highlights how a collective-based company such as this (with its actor-centred policies promoted more actively from the mid-1980s) faced concrete difficulties in adapting itself to the new managerial structures demanded by the ACE. Interviewed by Freeman, Proctor, one of the last actors/members of the company, recalls Joint Stock during those troubled times and recognises the company’s own responsibility in failing to adapt to the new realities that impacted on alternative companies: “what we hadn’t done”, he acknowledged, “was what all the other companies had done if they’d survived”’ (Freeman 2006b: 67).
According to Proctor, those other companies were ‘“doing co-productions with theatres, they had permanent relationships with repertory theatres, you know, they were looking at it like a business”’ (Freeman 2006b: 67). Proctor’s words are emblematic of how the changes in the funding system had promoted inequalities not only beyond, but within, the movement of the alternative itself.

In ‘Alternative Theatres, 1946-2000’ (2004), Kershaw returns to the term ‘alternative’ in two distinct ways. His first approach refers to the oppositional theatre movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Kershaw justifies his use of ‘alternative’ here in the context of previous studies. The ‘alternative’ is used to identify the same form of chronologically-bound theatre practices as studied by Ansorge (1975), Itzin (1980) and Craig (1980). In fact, in his taxonomic study of the alternative theatre movement, Kershaw revisits some of the categories defined by Craig (1980), adding new ones, such as ‘popular’ and ‘black’ (rather than Khan’s (1980) ‘ethnic’) theatres. Aside from popular and black theatres, alternative theatre groups are classified as performance art, physical, community, political, women and gay theatre companies (Kershaw 2004: 362-363). Kershaw’s (2004) second use of ‘alternative’ is a broader chronological concept, as is pre-empted by the timeline included in the title (1946-2000). Covering an extensive period of time, ‘alternative’ is used here to describe the oppositional theatre practices of half a century. Kershaw chooses the plural, ‘alternative theatres’, as a way in which to better characterise the differences between alternative theatre practices over time. For example, Kershaw qualifies the alternative theatre of the 1950s as ‘popular’ or ‘people’s’ theatre (Kershaw 2004:...
350), while in the early 1960s, Kershaw uses the concept of ‘experimental’. The companies and individuals mentioned coincide broadly with the influences on the alternative movement identified by Itzin (1980) and Craig (1980), and include Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop, Wesker’s Centre 42 project and two 1965-founded companies, CAST and the People Show (Kershaw 2004: 356-360). The proper ‘alternative’ takes place as a movement from the mid 1960s to the later 1970s (Kershaw 2004: 356-360).

As alternative and fringe performance increasingly spills over into the mainstream, such distinctions are no longer necessary. In Kershaw’s words, ‘[b]y mid-decade claims for a cohesive alternative theatre movement in the 1970s were beginning to look like nostalgic myth-making, as experimental practitioners increasingly embraced the pluralism of post-modern theory and culture, often under the banner of “independent theatre”’ (Kershaw 2004: 371). Kershaw believes that it was Thatcherite policies’ emphasis on ‘value for money’, together with Labour policies’ focus on the welfare potential of the arts that reshaped alternative theatre. As a result of monetarist and market-orientated policies, independent theatre, as Kershaw now classifies it, can no longer proclaim itself a separate form of alternative theatre. For Kershaw, nevertheless, the former ‘alternative’ theatre was in some cases ‘well suited to the newly harsh economic environment’ (Kershaw 2004: 365), as some alternative companies successfully adapted their practices to fulfil the requirements of liberalist criteria. Aside from the

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2 Popular theatre refers here to a form of accessible theatre that wishes to engage with the people. ‘Popular’, as pointed out by Raymond Williams, has accumulated many and sometimes contradictory meanings throughout history. For Williams, popular culture can be read as ‘the culture actually made by people for themselves’, can mean ‘inferior kinds of work’ and ‘work deliberately setting out to win favour’, as well as works ‘well-liked by many people’ (1988: 237).
increasing commodification of alternative theatre, the dissolution of identity politics in the context of postmodern culture is raised as the other main factor in the demise of the alternative.

David Savran, in ‘The Death of the Avantgarde’, looks at the context of North American alternative theatre at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, from a similar point of view as Kershaw’s understanding of the evolution of alternative theatre in Britain. Savran points out the arguments for the death of the alternative (avant-garde) in the USA, quoting articles twenty years apart from Richard Schechner and Arnold Aronson, which justify the death of the avant-garde through such reasons as the end of activist culture, the lack of financial support and the institutionalisation of the avant-garde. Savran agrees with both Schechner and Aranson and adds, as arguments of his own, the hegemony of poststructuralism and the increased interest of commercial producers in non-profit theatres. For Savran, by 2005 ‘the avant-garde is effectively dead’ (2005: 12).

Using terms such as ‘engaged’ and ‘negotiation’, Sara Freeman (2006a) proposes to rescue the alternative from those narratives, like Kershaw’s and Savran’s, that have proclaimed its disappearance from contemporary theatre practice. Freeman, in her taxonomic study of the alternative, distinguishes two tendencies (using Barker’s terminology): a form-orientated categorisation (alternative designated as ‘experimental’ or ‘fringe’) and a content-orientated categorisation (alternative used for political forms of theatre such as feminist, etc.). The content-orientated alternative, using Holderness’s distinction between ‘symptomatic political theatre’ and ‘true political theatre’, is subdivided by Freeman into ‘committed’, ‘radical’ and ‘engaged’, all
used as replacements for the more problematic term ‘political’ (2006a: 371-374). For Freeman, ‘committed political theatre’ is in line with Graham Holderness’s ‘true political theatre’; that is, theatre that mainly focuses on the efficacious value of art. The activities of the theatre groups working during the 1960s and 1970s would be best described as committed political theatre. ‘Radical’ and ‘engaged’ could best be used to describe alternative theatre after the 1970s. ‘Engaged’ becomes, for Freeman, a middle-ground term reflecting radical performances within an institutional framework. Engaged theatre refers to those theatre groups that ‘produce plays that ask the audience to reckon with injustice and possibility of social change despite the negotiations with institutional settings’ (2006a: 373-4, my emphasis).

2. The Portuguese independent theatre movement

At the time when oppositional theatre was at its strongest in Britain (and thriving as a result of the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain’s office in 1968, among other things), Portuguese oppositional theatre was struggling to survive under a regime that controlled and conditioned theatre practitioners over a period of almost fifty years. In one of the multiple letters and articles concerning the nature of political theatre that characterised the heated debate between Arnold Wesker and John McGrath, it is possible to find the key difference that separates British alternative theatre from its Portuguese counterpart. Responding to McGrath’s increasingly accusatory remarks referring to Centre 42’s work as ‘bourgeois art’, Wesker highlights: ‘[w]e are not in a revolutionary situation in this country, however unfair is the distribution of wealth (...) There is injustice in Britain but no oppression – we cannot borrow “other people’s urgency”. (...) There’s no dire
circumstance to force us into the excitement of taking to arms, secret plottings or threats of violence’ (quoted in Itzin 1980: 108-9). For Wesker, the aspirations to direct action by political theatre practitioners resulted from a misguided reading of the British contemporary political (peaceful) context when compared to other sites of real (rather than just ideological) struggle. Portuguese practitioners’ circumstances, on the other hand, did fit with a revolutionary situation. Portugal was a country where, in the immediacy of the Estado Novo dictatorship, oppositional artists (and political dissidents in general) effectively faced ‘dire circumstances’ and ‘threats of violence’.

The origins of what has been in Portugal mainly designated as independent theatre are linked to acts of resistance (some of them leading to practitioners being arrested or forced into exile) to the Estado Novo dictatorship. It is a well-accepted fact that, due to its very public nature, theatre is considered a particularly threatening form of artistic expression by oppressive regimes. The regimes of first António de Oliveira Salazar (1932-1968) and then Marcelo Caetano (1968-1974) were no exception to this. If Portuguese theatre had already been historically afflicted by difficult development and an irregular existence, the dictatorial regime under which the country was ruled for almost fifty years (1926-1974), with first a Military Dictatorship (1926-1933), followed by the Estado Novo dictatorship (1933-1974) aggravated this situation even further. Luiz Francisco Rebello in *Combate por um*  

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3 Wesker’s response concerns McGrath’s central criticism of Centre 42 as having a ‘bourgeois concept of culture’ (quoted in Itzin 1980: 104). For more details on the dispute between the two practitioners see Itzin (1980: 103-110).

4 The renowned literary critic António José Saraiva has called the history of Portuguese theatre ‘a wasteland where two great rocks can be seen standing side by side: Gil Vicente and Garrett’ (quoted in Barata 1991: 50). Writers such as Almeida Garrett, Eça de Queirós, Ramalho de Ortigão and Fialho de Almeida have all
Teatro de Combate describes the overall state of pre-1974 Portuguese theatre as precarious, owing to the censorship mechanisms imposed on play-text and performance. For Rebello, Portuguese audiences had been transformed into ‘virtual spectators’, as the tight control exercised over the stage and the difficult working conditions of theatre practitioners strangled theatre performances almost into non-existence (1977: 19). In the words of Carlos Wallenstein, ‘[t]he asphyxiation of theatre was accomplished in three ways: what was not done, what was not allowed to be done and what was done’ (quoted in Santos 2004: 271). Writers continued to write for the theatre during the dictatorship (and some managed to publish their plays), but the majority of new Portuguese plays were only staged once the Estado Novo regime was over. In the early 1970s, according to the Society of Portuguese Authors a progressively smaller number of new plays hit the stage: ‘five in 1970, four in 1971 (three of which had been published for over ten years) and none in 1973’ (quoted in Rebello 1977: 35-6). Major international influences on the theatre and thinking of the time, such as Bertolt Brecht, Peter Weiss and Jean Paul Sartre, were also strictly prohibited on the Portuguese stage.

remarked on the feebleness of Portuguese theatre in comparison to other European theatrical traditions. See Rebello (2000:11-15) and Barata (1991:45-54) for details on individual writers’ comments.  

Despite their prohibition on stage, Brecht’s texts were free to be published during this period, and some of his plays were clandestinely staged by university theatre companies in the 1960s (Santos 2004: 276-7). In ‘The Historical Parable in Contemporary Portuguese Drama’, José Oliveira Barata refers to the ‘Brechtian boom’ that happened in Portuguese theatre, identifying approximately the year of 1960 as the starting point from when Brecht’s texts – later highly influential – arrived in Portugal (Barata 1997: 118). For Barata, Luís Sttau Monteiro’s ‘paradigmatic’ Felizmente Há Luar! (Fortunately There Is Moonlight), first published in 1961 but only staged after the Carnation Revolution, ‘may be considered a magnificent example of a reconciliation between the nationalistic didactic goals of a text and the techniques
Beyond the censors’ index list of proscribed texts and authors, any theatre company was forced to have its play-text and a dress-rehearsal, informally designated as ‘the censorship rehearsal’ (Santos 2004: 265), screened by governmental committees. Censors could (and would), nevertheless, still interrupt a run at any point even after the provisional performance approval had been granted. Graça dos Santos, in *O Espectáculo Desvirtuado*, comments that ‘the legislation regulating performance stands out for the number of decrees, rulings and texts that surfaced between 1927 and 1971’ (2004: 263). For Santos, such detailed regulation seemed to rule, control and forecast everything through its cyclical updating. Theatre productions were additionally complicated by geographical and economic restrictions. Touring outside Lisbon was not allowed, no state funding was allocated to independent theatre companies and there was a scarcity of performance spaces in the capital, as these were privately owned by a few individuals, such as Vasco Morgado, who managed his theatre venues as commercial enterprises. As Rebello puts it, ‘[f]or almost half a century, between 28th May 1926 and 25th of April 1974, a triple censorship – ideological, economic and geographical – repressed, conditioned and restricted the development of theatre in Portugal’ (1977: 25). It is during the particularly repressive period of the Estado

drawn from French and English translations of Brecht’s writings on theater’ (Barata 1997: 114).

* As well as texts and productions, practitioners were also censored. Some actors were prevented from performing and it was prohibited to quote their names in the press (Santos 2004: 278). Foreign directors, such as Ricardo Salvat, Rugero Jaccobi, Juan Carlos Oviedo, Adolfo Gutkin and Luis de Lima, working with university theatre groups were forced to leave the country (Rebello 1988: 66). For detailed testimonies on how censorship affected the work of playwrights and/or practitioners such as José Régio, Luzia Maria Martins and Rebello see Azevedo (1999: 186-210). For details on university theatre and censorship see Barata (2009: 318-328).
Novo dictatorship that Rebello locates the birth of the alternative theatre movement in Portugal.

The designation of experimental or independent theatre was chosen by Rebello (1977: 65 and 74) to describe theatre practices that opposed the Portuguese dictatorial regime, which had forced the country into colonial war and international isolation. The control over what was written and produced on the Portuguese stage during the Estado Novo regime included short intervals of brief freedom, usually coinciding with periods of wider social unrest, such as the period following the Second World War, when Rebello locates the emergence of Portuguese experimental or independent theatre (1977: 27-9). A workshop space, Teatro-Estúdio do Salitre, established by Gino Saviotti in 1946, was for Rebello a decisive influence on the subsequent establishment of seminal Portuguese alternative theatre companies, such as Teatro Experimental do Porto in the 1950s, and, later, Os Bonecreiros, Comuna, Teatro da Cornucópia, Grupo 4 and Teatro-Estúdio de Lisboa. In his history of Portuguese Theatre, Rebello describes Teatro do Salitre ‘as the first consequential and thoughtful attempt for the renovation of Portuguese theatre’ (2000: 140), in the wake of which other experimental or independent theatre groups were established and developed, sometimes accomplishing ‘true acts of resistance’ (2000: 146). Rebello makes a convincing case for the importance of Teatro do Salitre (where his own plays were performed) in the development of alternative theatre in Portugal. Other authors, however, such as Carlos Porto (1985) in ‘10 Anos de Teatro em Portugal’, and Duarte Ivo Cruz (2001) in História do Teatro Português, propose other major influences on the Portuguese alternative, which is mainly designated as ‘independent’ by Porto and ‘experimental’ by Cruz.
Cruz attributed to António Pedro and Teatro Experimental do Porto (also known as TEP), established by Pedro in 1953, an even greater role than Teatro do Salitre, in revitalising Portuguese theatre. Cruz recognises that ‘from the Second World War until today, Portuguese theatre defines a coherent trajectory [...] with great emphasis on experimentalism [... and] with a clear transposition from commercial theatre, good or bad to experimental or culturally demanding theatre’ (2001: 303). Teatro da Cornucópia’s co-founder, Jorge de Silva Melo, gives yet another account of the main influences on the aesthetic innovations and working methods of the latter independent theatre movement. Melo identifies 1971/1972 as a decisive period for the rejuvenation of existing companies and for the establishment of new ones due to several factors: Peter Brook’s visit to Portugal, invited by the Gulbenkian’s cultural manager Madalena Perdigão; the publication of international theatre texts by Estampa/Seara Nova; and the precursory work of such companies as Teatro Experimental de Cascais, Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa and Teatro Moderno de Lisboa (Machado 1999: 61-62). The short-lived Teatro Moderno de Lisboa, in particular, a collective entirely formed by actors, is highlighted by Melo for its unusual working practices and schedules. Fernando Gusmão, one of the company’s co-founders, in his personal memoir stresses the major role played by this company as an ‘embryo’ for the later independent movement (quoted in Machado 1999: 67). Many researchers have, in addition, recognised the fundamental role played by university and amateur theatre companies in the formation of independent theatre in Portugal, with many of its practitioners and new techniques originating in these spheres (Porto 1985: 6-7; Porto 1988: 34-36; Porto 1994: 14; Rebello 2010). Luís Miguel Cintra and Jorge Silva Melo, two of the founders of one of the most influential independent theatre companies,
Teatro da Cornucópia, were former members of Grupo de Letras, the theatre group of the Faculty of Arts in the University of Lisbon. University theatre was further important for having foreign directors, mostly Argentinian, such as Víctor García and Adolfo Gutkin, who played an essential role in the rejuvenation of the stifled Portuguese theatre.\footnote{CITAC, Círculo de Iniciação Teatral da Academia de Coimbra, had as its directors Luís de Lima, Víctor García, Ricardo Salvat and Juan Carlos Oviedo. Adolfo Gutkin worked with Grupo Cénico da Associação de Estudantes da Faculdade de Direito da Universidade de Lisboa. For a history of Portuguese university theatre before 1974 see Barata (2010).} In addition, there were many cross-overs between amateur and professional theatre in the 1970s. Teatro do Campolide, for example, was an amateur theatre company prior to 1977. Moreover, in 1976/1977 it was mainly amateur companies that directed plays by contemporary Portuguese authors such as Bernardo Santareno, Luís Sttau Monteiro and Miguel Torga, prohibited by censorship during the Estado Novo regime (Dionísio 1993: 257).

In the first full-length study of Portuguese alternative theatre, Porto (1985) establishes a more detailed chronological framework for the Portuguese alternative (independent) theatre movement, subdividing it into four main stages. The first stage of the Portuguese alternative, as proposed by Porto, took place between 1953 and 1964 with the establishment of Teatro Experimental do Porto in 1953, Casa da Comédia at the beginning of the 1960s, Teatro Estúdio de Lisboa in 1963 and Teatro Experimental de Cascais in 1965. These four companies formed ‘the first nucleus that can be placed in the field of independent theatre, and from which new branches would be created’ (Porto 1985: 22). During the second stage of alternative theatre, the pre-1974 phase, Bonecreiros (1971), Comuna (1972), Seiva Trupe and Teatro da
Cornucópia (both 1973, the first in Oporto) were established. These companies brought about ‘a decisive qualitative leap in the development of the movement’ (Porto 1985: 24). With the Carnation Revolution, Porto identifies a transition from an anti-fascist theatre to a revolutionary one. This is the third and most obviously political phase after 1974, when new companies, such as o bando (1974) and A Barraca (1975), were formed. The fourth phase covers the independent theatre that was produced from the end of the 1970s until the mid-1980s when the book was published, during which the political disillusionment of practitioners and the dissolution of projects was on the increase.

For Porto, independent theatre in Portugal is characterised by ‘a new understanding of organisational structures, and a preference for collectives; politics of equality are promoted among members of a company regarding salary and roles in the creative process; new theatre spaces are used instead of traditional proscenium arch theatres; there is a promotion of new types of practice influenced by the latest international experimentalism; and the recognition of the rebellious and/or cultural potential of theatre’ (1985: 20). Porto’s definition of independent theatre, like Rebello’s, combines an emphasis on oppositional politics, aesthetic experimentation and the desire for economic independence, common to other countries’ traditions of alternative theatre. Porto nevertheless admits to only tacitly agreeing with the category of ‘independent’, as this is not ‘entirely correct’. For Porto, independent theatre is often taken as signifying theatre that is financially independent from the state or commercial enterprises. Contrary to these common understandings of the word, Porto believes that Portuguese ‘independent groups, in the past and present, are [independent] because rather than accepting, they demand financial
support [...], proclaiming and practicing theatre that *opposes* that same power’ (1985: 19-20, my emphasis).

The term ‘independent’ is maintained by Porto, as it has been used since the early 1970s to refer to such companies as Grupo 4, Bonecreiros, Comuna and Teatro da Cornucópia. For Porto, the word ‘independent’ came into use with regard to Portuguese theatre under the influence of the Spanish theatre journal *Primer Acto*. *Primer Acto* was highly regarded by Portuguese practitioners, who looked to it to find ways to release Portuguese theatre from its ‘backwardness’. In fact, Portuguese independent theatre companies’ closeness to the Spanish context extended to visits to and collaborations with independent Spanish theatre companies in the years preceding and succeeding the Carnation Revolution. Facilitating these interchanges and the coinciding use of terminology would presumably have been the bonds forged through parallel experiences of repressive states. José Monleón, co-founder of the Spanish magazine *Primer Acto* in 1957, testified in the book marking Comuna’s 25th year to Comuna’s participation in festivals or weeks of Spanish independent theatre when still under Francoism. In the early 1970s Comuna also participated alongside Spanish independent theatre groups in the Colombian Festival of Manizales where, according to Monleón, ‘we felt part of a struggle for popular dignity that so resembled our own’ (Monleón: 144). Portuguese practitioners set the term ‘independent’ in stone when, in February of 1976, they officially subscribed to the category by founding AGIT, the Associação de Grupos Independentes de Teatro (Association for Independent Theatre Companies).
The landmark year of 1968 in British alternative theatre movement historiography (see Itzin, 1980) therefore becomes 1974 in Portugal. Porto emphasises that independent theatre practitioners’ relationship to theatre ‘had to do with our hope in a revolution, or in a revolutionary movement, that seemed unavoidable at least in our subconscious. Theatre did not limit itself to criticising a regime – it led the way to transformation in society’ (Porto 1994: 7). For Hél der Costa, founding member of a Barraca, independent theatre was committed to the struggle against censorship, the colonial war, the political police (PIDE) and the fascist dictatorship. Costa argues that the name ‘independent’ was chosen ‘in opposition to what was official, bourgeois or simply conformist’ (Costa 2005: 5, my emphasis). In their historiographies, major independent theatre companies established prior to 25 April 1974, such as Comuna (1972) and Teatro da Cornucópia (1973), talk about “before” as meaning prior to 25 April’ (Mota 1994: 52), or identify the revolution as bringing about a different stage of the company’s development (Cintra 2002: 6). In this way, in 1974 Comuna staged an uncensored version of Ceia (Dinner) for the first time, and Teatro da Cornucópia suspended its tournée and rehearsals for the planned Lope de Vega production in order for ‘all efforts to be made available to preview in the least amount of time possible a new production based on Bertolt Brecht’s Fear and Misery of the Third Reich’ (Cintra 2002: 20). While anti-fascist sentiments were a uniting factor for Portuguese artists in the period leading up to the end of the Estado Novo regime, as such examples testify, in the two years that followed the Carnation Revolution, ‘contrary to what happened only very seldom in the past, not everyone is now on the same side’ (Dionísio 1993: 260). The ‘ambiguous resolution of the revolutionary crisis’ in Portugal, which ‘opened up a long and tortuous process towards a
social-democratic welfare state’ (Santos 1997: 34), must therefore be acknowledged here.

On 25 April 1974, in a bloodless coup, known afterwards as the Carnation Revolution due to the spontaneous use of these flowers by the crowds on the streets, the soldiers of the Movimento das Forças Armadas (MFA) (Armed Forces Movement), fuelled by their discontent regarding the colonial war, overthrew the Estado Novo regime without resistance. The head of state Marcelo Caetano, who had taken refuge in the headquarters of the National Republican Guard, surrendered to General Spínola, marking the end of the Estado Novo regime. The anti-fascist opposition that had united the military and the people and led to the uprising was, however, divided shortly afterwards. The leftist Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) aimed for centralised socialism, controlled by the state. Other leftists wanted to give the power to the people and were aligned with the popular movement that germinated shortly after the Revolution; still others were more moderate, such as the Partido Socialista (PS), which desired to establish a parliamentary democracy. While the colonies were ‘decolonised’ early on, the year and a half that followed the Carnation Revolution was a period of particular political turmoil in Portugal. On 11 March 1975, General

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8 For the differences of opinion separating PCP and PS supporters in the theatre context, particularly regarding the proposed nationalisation of theatre spaces, see Dionísio (1993: 198-9; 250-252).
9 The regime’s will to end the colonial war was one of the central motives behind the military coup. The expression ‘colonial war’ refers in fact to three wars: in Angola between 1961 and 1974, in Guinea-Bissau between 1963 and 1974, and in Mozambique between 1964 and 1974. Independence was granted to the Portuguese colonies (except for Timor and Macau) of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe shortly after the Carnation Revolution. The rushed process of Portuguese ‘decolonisation’ was ‘the most shameful moment’ of Portuguese history, according to the historian Veríssimo Serrão, and was characterised by the abandonment of the former colonies, which was particularly damaging to Angola and
António de Spínola organised a failed coup, which led to a quick response from the left, setting in motion the Processo Revolucionário em Curso (Ongoing Revolutionary Process), known as PREC. PREC organised the agrarian reform, the occupation of factories, industries and banks and dynamisation campaigns.

The period that followed 11 March 1975 is the period that, for sociologist Boaventura Sousa Santos, marks ‘the true beginning of the revolutionary crisis’, from which point ‘the qualitative changes in the political process took place’:

- extensive nationalization of industry;
- total nationalization of the banking and insurance system;
- land seizures in Alentejo;
- house occupations in large cities;
- workers’ councils;
- self-management in industrial and commercial enterprises abandoned by their former owners;
- cooperatives in industry, commerce and agriculture;
- neighborhood associations;
- people’s clinics;
- and cultural dynamization in the most backward parts of the country. (Santos 1997: 41 my emphasis)

During 1974 and 1975, during which period citizens were occupying empty properties for housing the poor, workers were mobilised into occupying the factories in the cities and labourers were occupying the lands in the South with the support of the agrarian reform process, artists were being mobilised by the cultural dynamisation campaigns.10

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10 Some theatre companies benefited from the popular movement of housing occupations happening at the time. Comuna established its base by occupying an abandoned house, Casarão Cor-de-Rosa, a former girls’ school (Vasques 1998b: 23). O bando for six months until the end of 1976 used a house in Quinta da Boavista, in Meleças, which had been occupied by the local population (Dionísio 1994: 112). Teatro Experimental de Cascais occupied one of the headquarters of political party Cristãos Democratas Socialistas (CDS), turning it into a Cultural Centre (Dionísio 1993: 191).
Both the cultural dynamisation campaigns and the agrarian reform movement are particularly important for understanding the development of the revolutionary crisis in Portugal. Through the dynamisation campaigns it is possible to identify the political and active role played by art and artists in some of the most rural and poorest parts of the country. The agrarian reform was at the heart of the sometimes violent opposition to the more leftist parties which endorsed the reform, and whose influence had collapsed by the end of 1975.

On 25 October 1974, MFA created a Commission for Cultural Dynamisation, which hoped to spread cultural and political information nationwide and, in this way, ‘lead the country on the way to Democracy, increased productivity and social justice’ (MFA 1974: 2). The MFA officials recruited collaborators from different cultural areas, including literature, performance, music, visual arts and cinema, who, together with officials from the armed forces, doctors, veterinary doctors, agronomists and others, targeted the most ‘underdeveloped’ areas of the north and centre of the country between October 1974 and November 1975. In her article on cultural dynamisation, Sónia Vespeira de Almeida describes how the category povo (the people) was identified by the MFA and their collaborators as the main victim of fascist oppression, and characterised as illiterate, extremely poor, overworked and lacking in hygiene and medical care (2002: 53-55). Despite this, the revolutionary potential of the people was valorised by the MFA, together with their local forms of culture such as popular games and songs. Almeida clarifies: ‘the people are seen as the historical agent for and the spiritual origin of democracy’ (2002: 55). During the dynamisation campaigns, theatre practitioners and visual artists, in particular, promoted a concept of ‘culture with others’, as Dionísio (1993:
168) calls it. These were collective and participatory works of art, fighting elitism as they ‘made the process of artistic creation accessible to the people (and not just the consumption of art)’ (Dionísio 1993: 168). It was a time when theatre was performed for free in non-traditional spaces such as schools, community associations and in the open air, for non-traditional audiences that numbered several thousands.11

During the First Conference of Portuguese Writers, organised on 10-11 May 1975, many writers reflected in their papers the concept of the people, as defined by the MFA and the objectives central to the dynamisation campaigns. Mário Cesariny proposed the formation of ‘brigades’ of writers who would travel the country searching for the language as spoken by the people in order for the writers to feel able to transfer this style to their own texts (Cesariny 1975). António Modesto Navarro advised writers to concentrate on topics of interest to the common people, such as the farmers’ plight (Navarro 1975). In the face of Portugal’s high illiteracy rates, Maria Alzira Seixo urged writers to facilitate and incentivise reading and writing activities among the grassroots (Seixo 1975). Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, while rejecting a bourgeois concept of culture that divided and separated, was more moderate than most writers, opposing those who suggested that using a simplistic language was the ideal way to get closer to the people (Andresen 1975). In the agreement that established AGIT, the Association of Independent Theatre Companies, nearly a year after the First Conference in 1975, it is possible to identify many of the principles

11 Seiva Trupe with its Catarina na Luta do Povo (Catarina in the People’s Struggle), mostly performed in villages, counted by March 1975 a total of 50,000 spectators. Brecht’s Fear and Misery, produced by Cornucópia, toured the countryside attracting 5,000 spectators, and o bando’s productions during the last months of 1974 and all of 1975 attracted almost 30,000 spectators (Dionísio 1993: 229).
behind the dynamisation campaigns. AGIT proposed ‘expressing the historical interests of the proletariat’, privileging ‘non-capitalist forms of organisation such as cooperatives’, in order to strive for ‘equal working conditions’ and ‘for the theatre practices that best served the working classes’ (AGIT 1976: 222).

Alongside the dynamisation campaigns, the agrarian reform process was a central part of the political process during the revolutionary crises. The agrarian reform was fundamental, furthermore, in setting in motion subsequent political events. It was a project to carry out land redistribution, by which large agrarian properties (*latifúndios*) were occupied by rural workers with the support of the PCP, expropriated, and later reorganised into Cooperative Units of Production. The agrarian reform happened mainly in the south, in the area between the river Tagus and the Algarve, as this was where large farms were mostly located, unlike the model of small property ownership typical in the rest of the country. Moreover, in the south a very low percentage of workers were permanently employed or worked their own land (Estrela 1977: 225-229; 239-240). It was discontentment with the agrarian reform legislation that was behind the sometimes violent reactions and protests that took place in the summer of 1975, known in Portuguese history as the ‘hot summer’. The ‘hot summer’ had as one of its starting points the reaction of the small land-owners from Rio Maior who, motivated by the fear of losing their properties due to the agrarian reform legislation, destroyed the PCP and the Popular Socialist Front headquarters. Other violent attacks during that summer would target parties and personalities identified with the left, and would lay the ground for the events on 25 November 1975. On 25 November, the moderate faction in the MFA, led by General Ramalho Eanes (the future
president of the country) and Coronel Jaime Neves, took over the Military Police Headquarters, marking the beginning of the end of the PREC, or what some would call the defeat of the revolution (Hammond 1988: 19). Discontentment with the PREC had already been visible in the results of the first democratic elections, on 25 April 1975, a year after the revolution, when PS came first, followed by PPD (Partido Popular Democrático, later Partido Socialista Democrático or PSD), with PCP coming only third. The triumph of the moderates pointed the way to what would become Portugal’s political future.

After a succession of six provisional governments in the two years that followed the revolution, and nine short-lived constitutional governments following the approval of the constitution in 1976, the tenth constitutional government, formed in 1985, initiated a period of stability in Portuguese politics. During the following ten years, PSD led the government, headed by the Prime Minister Aníbal de Cavaco Silva, preparing Portugal for integration into the European Economic Community) (EEC) in 1986 and carrying out in the 1980s and the following decade a number of privatisations of formerly nationalised industries. The country was on a steady course moving closer to Western Europe and not, as some had once dreamed, joining the Eastern Bloc. The move into the European Union and the privatisation policies also had their effects on the independent theatre movement. In her characterisation of independent theatre in the 1980s and early 1990s, Vasques points to the increased dependence of some independent companies on the market economy, not least as a result of inefficient or non-existent governmental policies. As Vasques maintains: ‘the state and certain companies moved away from “decentralisation” and “theatre as a public service” as they had existed in the 1970s, and
cultural references changed their horizons radically’ (1994a: 28). As well as differences in political ideology, like the British alternative companies working under Thatcherite policies in the 1980s, in Portugal the independent companies that managed to survive ‘were forced to adapt to the impositions of the contemporary free market’ (Vasques 1994a: 28). Ana Cristina Baptista has also observed that for the companies being funded, the amount of money received depended on criteria taken from the market economy, such as the number of spectators (1994: 43). The changes in funding policies have, in addition privileged a concentration of funding in a smaller number of companies (1994: 45-6).

Dionísio (1993) marks another important shift in independent theatre companies in the 1990s. Several independent companies benefited from a number of commissions related to the state-endorsed (inter)national festivals in which the Portuguese government took part (Europalia in Brussels in 1991, Expo92 in Seville, Lisbon Capital of Culture in 1994, and Expo98 in Lisbon). According to Dionísio, large amounts of money were spent by the government on cultural activities, more so than ever before. In addition, private companies were also encouraged by a fiscal incentive to sponsor cultural activities, and the law for patronage was approved in 1986 (1993: 103). This increased funding of culture is not, however, all-encompassing, privileging enduring and ‘spectacular’ manifestations of culture (1993: 98). For Dionísio, this increased investment is explained by the fact that culture was taken as an instrument of propaganda for the PSD government in order to establish Portuguese identity in Europe. This objective was simultaneously made urgent by Portugal’s admission into the EEC in 1986, and made possible by the European investment funds that would be channelled into the
country. Dionísio believes that the state investment in cultural activities was in response to the overall objective of ‘building an “image of the country” for internal and external use’ (1993: 104). This aim to improve the visibility of the country explains the high levels of investment in festivals and exhibitions, in the restoration of buildings and monuments, and finally in the construction of the new and gigantic Centro Cultural de Belém and Caixa Geral de Depósitos/Culturgest, the latter housing in the same building a bank and two performance spaces. These two buildings represent a massive state investment, amounting to almost eight times the total amount of money allocated to the entire cultural sector in a single year (1993: 195).

Aside from selective large-scale state investment, analysing the funding of theatre in Portugal in the 1990s, Dionísio concludes that ‘no [new] theatre after 1980 seems to have existed’ (1993: 127). The institutionalisation of independent theatre, in the form of long-running funding and the ownership of theatre spaces, is one of the main complaints of the younger generation of theatre practitioners. In the late 1980s and during the 1990s, this younger generation had extreme difficulty in finding funding and performance spaces for their projects. In the written report of a debate session on the subject of alternatives to contemporary Portuguese theatre led by Eugénia Vasques in the early 1990s, in which both independent theatre practitioners and younger practitioners participated, the adjective ‘new’ appears for the first time as a category in Portuguese theatre. ‘New’ is used to identify projects centred on young actors that take in a different approach to theatre performance and production from the ‘institutionalised’ independent theatres (Vasques 1991: 6-17). The debate does not elucidate the qualitative differences that distinguish the ‘new’ theatre practitioners
from independent theatre. For Vasques, from the second half of the 1980s a number of changes in Portuguese theatre signalled an overall shift. According to Vasques, such changes comprised: the establishment of a new theatre magazine, *Actor*; the establishment of the first private production companies for the arts, Cassefaz in 1987 and the short-lived Protea in 1988; and in the organisation in 1992 of FITOFF (Internal Festival for Art Off) (Vasques 1998a: 7-8). Running simultaneously with the International Festival of Lisbon, FITOFF was a media initiative, not a festival, that, with the collaboration of the written press, radio and television, wished to support and promote the ‘New Theatre Promises’, ‘independent from the independents’ (Abreu 1992: 36; Peres 1992: 38).

In his evaluation of fifty years of Portuguese theatre between 1945 and 1995, Jorge Listopad also recognises a new form of theatre practice, off-off theatre, identifying it as local performances staged in the suburbs and appealing mainly to younger audiences (Listopad 1998: 183).

In her article ‘Márgenes. Alternativos o no tanto’, Levina Valentim (1997) highlights how the concept ‘off theatre’ has been frequently used to cover Portuguese theatre projects born in the 1990s, vaguely defined as oppositional and often covering very divergent practices. Valentim proposes in her article to define off theatre by researching the new companies formed in Lisbon between 1989 and 1995. She identifies two major tendencies. Companies such as Teatro Meridional have attempted to fit in with the system and pursue regular funding, and could therefore be called the ‘new independents’. The truly alternative companies, such as Pogo Teatro, have sought to intercalate different artistic languages. Alternative companies are not, in the main, state-funded, and were preferred by younger audiences (1997: 80-1). In her article, Valentim addresses independent theatre companies in a single
footnote alone. She defines independent theatre companies as institutionalised companies benefiting from regular funding and their own performance spaces. Nothing is mentioned regarding their previous or current ideology/ies. Dionísio also refers to the institutionalisation process of the ‘badly-behaved’ independent theatre companies of the 1980s and 1990s, explaining that ‘some had ceased their activities while others had become well-behaved’ (1993: 76). For the director of Teatro do Noroeste, one of the new theatre groups created in the 1980s, by March 1993 independent theatre was burnt out (Dionísio 1993: 37). João Mota, director of Comuna, in 1994, believed that independent theatre no longer existed: ‘[t]he twenty years of independent theatre that have passed since April [1974] are just the prologue to something else’ (Mota 1994: 56).

I opened this section on Portuguese independent theatre by quoting the theoretical dispute between Wesker and McGrath surrounding a different understanding of the revolutionary role of political theatre. I end with two conflicting opinions on the role played by revolutionary independent theatre in Portugal. In his reassessment in hindsight, 30 years on, of the independent theatre produced by o bando, Listopad says: ‘if there was once the desire to overcome the dream and to live in a utopia, to use theatre for a revolution in thinking, that desire never came to be. It is perhaps that there is deception or nostalgia felt by those who once dreamed of being revolutionaries’ (Listopad 2005: 17). Listopad’s association of contemporary Portuguese independent theatre with loss or defeat shares a belief in the death of the alternative with common interpretations of European alternative theatre in the 1980s and 1990s. The feelings of ‘nostalgia’ expressed, however, may be said to evoke the particularities of the Portuguese revolutionary situation
when, for a brief period of time in the immediacy of the Carnation Revolution, popular power (and class revolution) may have seemed unstoppable. João Mota’s characterisation in 2010 of o bando and other independent theatre practitioners as ‘militants of the everyday’ (o bando 2010: 243) reflects, unlike Listopad’s retrospective formulation, a desire for redirecting the future role of political theatre in the context of ideology breakdown. In the late 1980s, Mota explained what he meant by the phrase ‘militants of the everyday’: ‘[we should aim for] transgression in a society that is conceived to deceive us and create a sacred time and space where we are able to face one another’ (Mota 1988: 15). Mota’s is a formulation of alterity that no longer proposes the replacement of a system with another, instead emphasising the local role of companies and practitioners in promoting separateness from the dominant ideology but also commonality and encounter between different people. This disparity of opinion between Listopad and Mota on the role of political theatre is not unlike Kershaw’s, Davies’ and Freeman’s different understandings of the British alternative theatre in the context of postmodernity.

3. Negotiating the alternative

Kershaw believes, as does Davies, that during the 1980s the alternative theatre movement had its scope significantly reduced, becoming a sector now designated as fringe (Kershaw 2004: 365-370). In the 1990s, with live art in particular, and in the guise of the postmodern paradigm of culture, Kershaw announced the end of the alternative, claiming that non-mainstream groups should now be categorised as independent (Kershaw 2004: 370-376). Freeman (2006a) takes issue with both Davies’ and Kershaw’s claims of the death of the alternative, and sets out to
recover this concept. Freeman opines: ‘critical works of the 1980s and 1990s often proceed on the assumption that alternative theatre has been marginalised until it ceased to exist or else has been completely consumed by mainstream; but a full consideration of the work of alternative theatres in the 1980s and 1990s demands a definition that does not model only its defeat or marginalisation, but instead negotiation, inheritance and struggle’ (2006a: 365, my emphasis). Freeman proposes that contemporary alternative theatre should be viewed as a ‘third space’, characterised by ‘shifting betweeness’, as it combines ‘manifestations of alterity and institutionality’ (Freeman 2006a: 376-377, my emphasis).

Amelia Howe Kritzer, in Political theatre in post-Thatcher Britain (2008), believes in a resurgence of political theatre in the late 1990s, despite a clear breakdown of political discourse. Kritzer concentrates on ‘in-yer-face’ theatre as a form of political theatre that, in her view, breaks away from both Thatcherite politics and the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In-yr-face political theatre, unlike the previous generation of alternative theatre, nevertheless does give in to Thatcher’s famous dictum: ‘there is no such thing as society’. Other types of political theatre suggested by Kritzer include theatre work influenced by ethnic, race, class and to an extent gender politics, but which also differ from alternative political theatre. For Kritzer, post-Thatcher political theatre has had to adapt itself to a new reality by highlighting its ‘in-betweeness’: ‘[e]ffective political theatre today must acknowledge the current mood without succumbing to it’ (Kritzer 2008: 26). For Kritzer, it is not simply a manner of negating the contradictions at the core of political theatre, but of finding ways of engaging with them. She states: ‘[w]orks with overtly political messages may fail to attract individuals
or groups not already sympathetic to their point of view. Plays with political messages that are subtle, covert or implicit may not be clearly understood. [...] Producing organizations and dramatic works most often attempt to *negotiate* this set of *contradictions* [...] (Kritzer 2008: 14-5, my emphasis).

As early as ‘Poaching in Thatcher Land’ in 1993, Kershaw makes use of ‘performative contradiction’ to explain why, under Thatcher’s premiership, alternative theatre practices evolved styles of performance ‘shot through with ideological ambivalence’ (Kershaw 1993b: 121). For Kershaw, performative contradictions ‘emerge when an oppositional cultural formation struggles to muster a coherent response to intensified hegemonic domination’ (1993b: 121). In light of increasingly strenuous funding conditions, higher dependence on the marketplace and the changing face of contemporary politics in the postmodern context, alternative theatre groups’ opposition is forced to become a more ambiguous or even ‘contradictory exercise’, as designated by Kershaw. As Kershaw sees it, ‘many oppositional groups’ theatrical codes became more ambivalent and strategies for organisational survival became more compromised. In a sense, sheer survival was a contradictory exercise which produced ideologically ambiguous outcomes in virtually every aspect of subversive practice’ (Kershaw 1993a: 355). For Kershaw, the Midlands-based community theatre group EMMA produced an ambiguous production, *The Poacher*, by presenting a veiled socialist agenda to a mainly right-wing village. Joint Stock (during Max Stafford Clark’s time) and Old Times also constituted, for Kershaw, good examples of ‘contradictory exercises’.
In *Engineers of the Imagination* (Coult and Kershaw 1997), Kershaw addresses once again these ‘contradictory exercises’. According to Kershaw, Welfare State wilfully embraces several contradictions in their practice as a way of dealing with the new economic and political pressures within postmodernity: ‘[a]s the company moved into the 1980s it had to engage increasingly with the contradictions of neoconservative capitalism in order to survive: one of its techniques of survival, I will argue, is to turn those contradictions into paradoxes which illuminate the context of the work and allow the company to avoid the ideological paralysis of postmodernism by suggesting positive alternatives’ (Coult and Kershaw 1997: 207). For Kershaw, these paradoxes are exemplified by Welfare State’s new status as an ‘anti-institutional institution’: ‘the company so famous for its resistance to permanence, its embrace of change, its opposition to institutionalisation, had now got a mortgage and taken up residence in a former institution’ (Coult and Kershaw 1997: 202).¹² This and other paradoxes within this company, for Kershaw, could be understood as part of ‘a new style of negotiation between the company and its socio-political context’ (Coult and Kershaw 1997: 202, my emphasis).

The idea of negotiation between alternative and mainstream in the postmodern context is further developed in Kershaw’s *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (1999b). In this book, Kershaw re-examines the argument he defended in previous studies that ‘radical’ should replace ‘political’ when referring to the potentially efficacious nature of theatre. Kershaw claims that in the postmodern context one is forced to accept that politics are everywhere, and using

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¹² A comparable expression is ‘alternative institutions’, later used by Freeman (2006b), also as a supporting argument for the existence of a contemporary alternative.
‘political theatre’ for oppositional performance is no longer useful. Kershaw states that: ‘within the post-modern, all art, including theatre and performance, loses its claim to universal significance, to stand, as it were, outside the ideological, and becomes always already implicated in the particular power struggles of the social’ (Kershaw 1999: 63). Unlike in ‘Alternative Theatres’ (2004), Kershaw positioned in 1999 the relativism associated with the postmodern paradigm as undesirable. Kershaw claims that postmodernism may be a release from the essentialist positions defended by modernism, but that it also risks subsiding political efforts to a nihilist stance.

In order to respond to the challenge of holding on to democracy and postmodernism without succumbing to ethical relativism, the theoretical framework proposed by Kershaw posits itself as on the cusp of a paradigm shift; that is, between Brecht and Baudrillard. Kershaw refuses to accept fully the postmodern context, as ‘while there is no doubt that we are experiencing enormous changes in human cultures, it is appropriate to be cautious about granting full paradigmatic status to contemporary post-modernity’ (Kershaw 1999b: 22). Kershaw proposes, then, a distinction between postmodern, postmodernism and postmodernity that posits the paradigm shift ‘yet as fictional’, even if its consequences may be felt as real (Kershaw 1999b: 20-2). On the cusp of a paradigm shift, Kershaw claims the radical potential of certain performances, which had change as a core objective. He clarifies, ‘[m]y overall aim is not to deny that “all performance is political”, but to encourage discrimination between the different ways in which, and degrees to which, particular kinds of performance may become more or less radically efficacious in post-modernity, particularly for the ways in which they may promote democracy’ (Kershaw 1999b: 63). Kershaw
Furthermore makes a fundamental distinction between theatre and performance. For Kershaw, only performance can fully claim a radical potential. He further justifies this position with the claim that traditional theatre spaces are bound by commodification and discipline. Only performances outside traditional theatres (and through their reflexive potential) would fully allow for the transformation of contradictions into paradoxes.

As an example of his theory in practice, Kershaw analyses Welfare State’s *Raising the Titanic*. *Raising the Titanic* is described as being situated between the modern and postmodern paradigms. For Kershaw, this show is riddled with contradictions, but Welfare State ‘transformed these contradictions into paradoxes through a sustained reflexive irony that was produced through its double dealing across paradigms: even as the allegory assumed the possibility of stable meaning it was undermined by the incommensurability of its signs’ (Kershaw 1999b: 12). Thus, it is the reflexive irony of this production that allows it to be radically efficacious. This theory, fundamental in recovering the alternative in contemporary performance, remains, I would argue, prescriptive of a certain kind of context. Kershaw develops a dichotomised system, classifying performance within traditional theatre spaces as commodified and conservative, while performances in other non-purpose built spaces may retain their radical efficacious nature.

Philip Auslander’s (1992) theory of the political potential of some postmodernist art is a good counterbalance to Kershaw’s reticence regarding traditional theatre spaces. In his book *Presence and Resistance*, Auslander (1992) envisages the possibility of political (resistant) art
within the postmodernist context. Auslander equates the notion of what he designates as a ‘postmodernist art of resistance’, where all criticism must be accomplished from within, using the same means of representation with a (slight) difference. Within this postmodernist art of resistance there is a clear recognition that the political and economic are no longer dissociable, and it is impossible to mount a critique from outside the late-capitalist system. According to Auslander, one of the chief characteristics that separates 1960s political art from contemporary political (resistant) postmodernism is its reluctance to engage with commodity culture. For Auslander, ‘[t]he problems of defining a new social function for performance and of reconciling aesthetic and political values within a commodity culture were ones the experimental theater community of the 1960s never addressed properly’ (1992: 38-9). Auslander argues, contrary to Kershaw, that the commodification of art cannot be taken as an argument for its apolitical nature. He asserts: ‘I would insist that there are artists, avant-gardists and popular entertainers alike, who have accepted the reality that all cultural performance in our society takes place within a commodity economy and have negotiated ways of maintaining a position within that economy that enables them to critique it’ (Auslander 1992: 173 my emphasis). In order to assess whether art is political or not, it is not the commodity-value that takes precedence for Auslander, but the specific context.

Auslander’s notion of a postmodern art of resistance, one could argue, is not dissimilar to Kershaw’s theory of the radical in performance, if one takes into consideration that Auslander’s interpretation of the postmodern paradigm is also one that stays away from its relativist emphasis. Auslander positions himself within the postmodern, but
without abandoning completely the modernist political concepts reminiscent of the arts in the 1960s and 1970s. Auslander, like Kershaw, recognises a contradictory nature in art that claims to be political in the postmodern context. According to Auslander, ‘there is a danger, then, that critical postmodernist art practices can turn into their own opposites by reifying the very representations they supposedly deconstruct or by providing co-optable representations’ (Auslander 1992: 27). Still, he insists, this ‘is, of necessity, an elusive and fragile discourse that is always forced to walk a tightrope between complicity and critique’ (Auslander 1992: 31), or, as Kershaw claimed in the same year, ‘to aim to be both oppositional and popular places performance on a knife edge between resistance to, and incorporation into, the status quo’ (1992: 8). Auslander and Kershaw can offer complementary theories with which to analyse the notion of a contemporary alternative. Kershaw’s theory on the cusp of paradigm overrides the inbuilt relativism within the postmodern context, and Auslander’s gradual insights on the nature of commodification allow us to avoid Kershaw’s dichotomous system and engage more fully with the material implications for individual companies of surviving in a world where economics, as Max Stafford Clark believes, ‘affects everything’ (quoted in Delgado and Sivc 2002: 7).

In this thesis I will propose that negotiating the alternative is possible in contemporary performance if one accepts the temporary and contextual specificity of the paradoxical alternative. That is, different postmodern theatre practices may prove oppositional to neoliberal ideology when considering the particular circumstances of performance. Using an analogy taken from a recent study on subversion and art, Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization, the paradoxical alternative points to
‘subversivity’, while the historical alternative can be associated with ‘subversion’. ‘Subversivity’ desires to cause disruption to a dominant system but, unlike subversion, it does not aim to overthrow it. Subversivity, in Lieven De Cauter’s words, ‘consists in temporary disruptions of states of affairs – generally not the system in its totality. It aims to create space for alterity, for deviance and drifting’ (Cauter et al 2011: 9). And so the alternative is (re)born.
III. ‘The future is history’: Context

In the previous chapter I analysed the changing emphasis of the concept of the alternative in British and Portuguese theatre. In that analysis, I highlighted how authors use different terms in order to refer to phenomena with comparable characteristics. In my study of the uses of these concepts, I showed how the alternative in British theatre has been classified as a movement and then deemed ‘extinct’ in the postmodern context. I moved on to propose that a recovery of the alternative is possible if seen in relation to a particular background and theoretical framework. When thinking specifically about the four companies covered by this study and considering the concept of the ‘alternative’ in its broadest sense, one must start by asking what ‘alternative’ means in relation to each company and what their work is alternative to.

The definition of alternative used in the scope of this study – theatre practices that engage with forms of political theatre and social intervention, looking back at the historical alternative theatre movement – encompasses a different position in each of the companies, and varies according to the place of the work analysed in each company’s history. However, the four companies have all engaged in forms of institutionalisation by creating a number of mainstream theatre performances, theatre events performed in national and/or repertory theatres, performances integrated into massive festivals and/or medium or large-scale box-office successes. A research project like this one does not wish to deny the place of institutionalisation among the companies selected for study. What it does is focus its analysis on those productions that have particular democratic
objectives, and which are ideal examples of the ‘paradoxical alternative’ in a postmodern theatre. The future is history here, to quote Terry Gilliam’s film *Twelve Monkeys*.¹ That is, the recent work that is analysed in the following chapters, together with the companies’ own and others’ constructed definitions of alternative theatre, can only be understood by looking at each company’s history through its earlier productions, grant applications, appraisals, reviews, published manifestos, theatre programmes, academic readings and interviews with practitioners – the longitudinal context of the companies.

1. o bando

O bando is the longest-running company covered by this study. It has a lengthy and complex history, which can be used to illustrate the changes within the construction of the alternative as a movement and as a concept, starting from the historical alternative right through to the company’s more recent engagement with the paradoxical alternative. O bando, of the four companies, is the only one that taps directly into the historical alternative movement. Established in 1974, at the height of the politicisation of the arts and theatre in Portugal, its objectives and practices illustrate the political commitment of a generation. Surviving the post-revolution years and undergoing many changes in location, aesthetics, membership and funding, the company has been associated with political theatre but also qualifies as having ‘outsider’ status in the Portuguese theatrical context. To place the word ‘alternative’ in the

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¹ Incidentally, this is also the title of a recent book on Cornish identity, John Angarrack’s (2002) *Our Future is History: Identity, Law and the Cornish Question* (Bodmin: Independent Academic Press).
context of this company’s work and long history is to delve into different understandings of the word.

In the context of alternative theatre, o bando will be placed in relation to the historical political theatre movements that constituted independent theatre in Portugal post-1974, and the alternative theatre movement post-1968 in Britain. However, as I will analyse later with regard to Kneehigh, the word ‘alternative’ has gained a currency of its own in o bando’s history, welcomed both from within and outside the company, to mean separate, marginal or singular. Unlike EM’s reluctant marginality, which will be explored further on, o bando’s charismatic separate status is very much part of the company’s founding philosophy. ‘Charismatic marginality’ (Conde 1994: 80) has been applied to (and taken on by) o bando to explain the company’s success among audiences and critics despite non-existent or reduced governmental funding. More recently, the company has adopted singularismo as a way of appropriating singularidade, a characteristic used by many critics to refer to the company’s work. In this study, to talk about the historical and paradoxical alternatives in relation to o bando is, first and foremost, to address the subject of the alternative from the perspective of an overarching characterisation within the history of theatre, but also to engage with the company’s own mythology of alternativeness and separation, further illuminating our initial understanding of the concept.

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2 The new word proposed by o bando in 2009, singularismo, does not exist in the Portuguese language. Presumably, o bando prefers this new word, formed by adding the suffix -ismo to the adjective singular, in order to establish a new concept as o bando’s own school of thought rather than just a qualifier of its work. For more on this see Chapter Five, Community.
The separation that pervades o bando’s image relates not only to their geographical distance, for the majority of their working years, from Lisbon’s centrally-located independent theatre movement, but also to the specific material conditions that have framed their creative process. These include funding withdrawal and recurrent state commissioning of large street events, which have also contributed to the ‘outsider’ feel of the company. In addition to o bando’s self-defined separate identity and distinctive working conditions, the company’s uniqueness has also been pointed out by critics from early in its career. ‘Singular’ has been the adjective most often used by reviewers to describe the company and its work (Conde 1994: 38). Over a period of 30 years of theatre productions, o bando has been considered singular for different reasons, specifically in relation to its political agenda, its collective and devising processes, its love of contemporary Portuguese narrative texts and folk-culture, and its particular aesthetic vision, including Brites’ *máquinas de cena* (stage machines) and his processes of character construction/actor training, all of which are still trademarks of the company’s work today.³

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³ *Máquinas de Cena* are, for Eugénia Vasques, either the sculptures or other objects used on stage created by Brites (Vasques 2009: 126-127). Ricardo Pais (1994: 188) defines ‘stage machines’ as ‘autonomous producers of elementary effects, sometimes sound effects, sometimes musical’. António P’into Ribeiro goes further and claims that ‘these machines, with their anthropomorphic configuration and by virtue of their many functions, constitute in themselves fictional characters’ (Ribeiro 1994: 195). The designation *máquinas de cena* was first used by the organisers of the first exhibition of o bando’s stage devices in Coimbra Capital of Theatre in 1992 (Ribeiro 1994: 193; Pais 1994: 188). Ribeiro (1994: 193) identifies the landmark year of 1982 in o bando’s history as the date of Afonso Henriques’ first stage machine. In Conde (1994: 40), an earlier reference can be found. Conde points out that, in his review of *Omsikzaf*, (1980) Porto uses the term ‘stage machine’. Stage machines have been primarily identified with Brites, but Rui Francisco’s stage devices, in *Ensaio Sobre a Cegueira* (*Blindness*) for example, have become important in o bando’s recent history.
O bando’s characterisation as an alternative theatre company incorporates different meanings. O bando’s work is singular/peripheral/marginal in its aesthetic and political objectives and its working methods and conditions, when one considers the specific context of the Portuguese arts world and its theatre productions. O bando can also be viewed as alternative taking into account its repeatedly-stated opposition to individualism, that is, the broad belief system ruling contemporary western societies. João Brites asserts: ‘all of us disagree with the society that surrounds us; we have tried, therefore, to build a small social island ruled by the principles we establish in our own general assemblies’ (Brites 2009: 198). In its adopted separateness, o bando’s ‘small social island’ echoes Kneehigh’s ideal of the travelling circus. O bando believes that it is both different and self-sufficient, and is particularly receptive of those who choose to join them and to share their values. Unlike Kneehigh, however, o bando’s political commitment has been central to the project from the very beginning as a result of the particular context in which the company was established.

O bando was formed on 15 October 1974, shortly after the 25 April Carnation Revolution, by a group of Portuguese artists returning from exile: Cândido Ferreira, Carmen Marques, José Janeiro, João Brites and Jorge Barbosa, together with the Belgian Jacqueline Tison. O bando’s foundation corresponds with Porto’s (1984) classification of the

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4 The first change in the group dates from 1977, when Cândido Ferreira, Carmen Marques and Jacqueline Tison left the company. Many others would follow. Currently, the artistic directorship of the company is in the hands of João Brites, Rui Francisco, Jorge Salgueiro, Teresa Lima, Luca Aprea and Clara Bento. The cooperative is directed by João Brites, Raúl Atalaia and Rui Francisco. The members of the cooperative are Adelaide João, Ana Brandão, Antónia Terrinha, Bibi Gomes, Clara Bento, Fátima Santos, Gonçalo Amorim, Horácio Manuel, Isabel Atalaia, João Brites, Jorge Salgueiro, Lima Ramos, Miguel Moreira, Nicolas Brites, Paula Só, Pedro Gil, Raúl Atalaia, Rui Francisco, Sara de Castro and Suzana Branco.
Portuguese independent theatre movement, as part of the third, and most obviously political, stage of independent theatre in Portugal, during which many new theatre companies were established, some of them integrating returning exiled artists, such as A Barraca founded in 1975 and joined by former expatriate Hélder Costa in 1976.\textsuperscript{5} The majority of companies central to the Portuguese independent theatre movement, however, had been working for a number of years prior to the revolution, but changed their projects significantly after the revolution, responding to the newfound freedom of expression and state funding.

During this period, as in all the arts, politics was at the core of the theatre produced by the Portuguese independent theatre companies. In *After the Revolution: Twenty Years of Portuguese Literature, 1974-1994*, Helena Kaufman and Anna Klobucka state:

\begin{quote}
[p]olitical commitment, collective participation and immediacy of impact may thus be considered defining features of Portuguese cultural life during the early revolutionary period. The seventies should still be viewed, regardless of the political turmoil, as a time when the leftist ideals of a new civic society, shared by a majority of those who made the revolution, were very much alive. (Kaufman and Klobucka 1997: 16)
\end{quote}

Following the Carnation Revolution, the Portuguese independent theatre companies were overtly political, and prioritised a didactic approach to theatre. In *Títulos, Acções, Obrigações: Sobre a Cultura em Portugal 1974-1994*, Eduarda Dionísio emphasises that in post-1974 Portugal, ‘a “cultural revolution” was indeed a lasting desire among

\textsuperscript{5} For more details on Portuguese theatre companies established shortly after the Carnation Revolution by practitioners returning from exile see Serôdio (1996).
many artists and intellectuals’ (Dionísio 1993: 186). For Dionísio, during 1974/1975, ‘culture is action’ (1993: 182), that is, artists privileged direct interaction with the local communities mainly through the dynamisation campaigns. O bando was one of the independent theatre companies taking part in these campaigns. Its early work reflects, according to Maria Helena Serôdio, ‘a political militancy, radically orientated (that at the time encountered a particularly favourable historical period […]’ (Serôdio 1994a: 142). Dionísio (1994) also talks about ‘radicalism’ in relation to o bando’s early projects, which, for Dionísio, went hand-in-hand with the radicalism that characterised the post-revolution period in Portugal (Dionísio 1994: 91).

In o bando’s first manifesto, written in 1980 (o bando 1980), the overarching principles of the work produced by the company during the 1970s can be found. Between 1974 and 1980, o bando staged a number of productions that can be directly mapped onto the revolutionary stage of the Portuguese independent theatre movement and the British alternative movement. Among the different companies of the English alternative movement, political (socialist) groups, community theatre and actor-based companies (Craig 1980: 20-7) are included, all of which share characteristics with o bando in its early years. In the beginning, o bando devised its productions collectively and travelled extensively to small villages, where children and adults could have an input into their work, as could local traditions and

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6 O bando’s manifestos work more as company’s histories rather than manifestos. The first manifesto draws on collective methods of working but is produced when the company was moving away from collective devising. The second manifesto emphasises community theatre but precedes a stage in the company’s work of increased engagement with traditional performance spaces and institutionalised events. Plans to write a third manifesto (o bando 2009a) did not come to fruition. The four-day conference meeting organized in Vale de Barris to mark o bando’s thirty years in 2004 resulted in another retrospective book (o bando 2009b).
festivities, as happened in 1977 with *Os Primeiros Jogos Populares Transmontanos (The First People’s Games in Trás-os-Montes)*.

In their first manifesto, o bando defines its work as ‘popular theatre’; that is, a theatre accessible to all, in particular to children. Highly critical of ‘decorative’, ‘illustrative’ and ‘commercial’ theatres, o bando proposes a ‘theatre to serve the people [povo] and their struggle for emancipation, against both the oppression and exploration that victimise them. (o bando 1980: 9/1). O bando focuses in its manifesto on one of the core ideals of the British independent theatre movement: the notion of theatre as political intervention. O bando believes that popular theatre will assist ‘the audience in recognising its ability to change its daily life’ (o bando 1980: 3/8).

Characterising the English alternative, Craig claims: ‘[e]ither it projects dreams or fantasies onto the audience, or it deconstructs the world and in this process shows the audience that the world can be changed’ (Craig 1980: 28). As addressed in Chapter One, however, one of the fundamental differences between the British and Portuguese alternative theatres is that theatre practitioners in Portugal, alongside other intellectuals, actively and personally participated in the political changes that would affect the country for the years to come. O bando’s 1975 production *O Ovo (The Egg)* is important when considering the political emphasis of o bando’s early history, but also for understanding the overall political focus of the independent theatre movement in post-1974 Portugal. Collectively written by the company’s members, *O Ovo* addresses one of the key

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7 O bando claims no political affiliation in its first manifesto, published in 1980. However, in an earlier text written by Brites in 1976, the aim to contribute to the implementation of socialism is expressed: ‘we understand that animation is a long trajectory with the objective of developing a participative and creative consciousness among the population from the perspective of building socialism [...]. At core it is an attempt to make communities themselves agents for change’ (Brites 1976).
issues in the country after the dictatorship, and one that separated the
country along the north/south divide: land ownership and the agrarian
reform promoted by PREC. O bando wrote two versions of O Ovo, which
presented two different solutions for land distribution and
organisation, depending on where the production was presented: one
intended for the north and centre of Portugal, focusing on small
properties; and another for the south, focusing on the lands occupied by
rural workers with the support of the PCP, and on cooperative units of
political focus, O Ovo is important in o bando’s history for another
reason.

According to Idalina Conde (1994: 38) o bando’s singular nature was
identified for the first time in Fernando Midões’ 1976 review of O Ovo.
Singularidade (singularity) has been used from then onwards to convey
o bando’s ‘exceptional’ nature. Within the Portuguese independent
theatre context of the 1970s, o bando’s early work is distinguished by
two important traits: working for children and young adults; and
working outside Lisbon and touring extensively. Referring both to its
visits to rural locations and its work with children, Serôdio (1994a)
characterises the company’s early work as ‘an approach through the
“margins”’ (Serôdio 1994a: 142), a description that fits in with Porto’s
classification of Portuguese children’s theatre as marginal (Porto 1985:
123). Unlike other isolated initiatives, o bando put together a theatre
project with children at its core from the very beginning, and was the
first company to do so in the Portuguese independent theatre
movement (Porto 1985: 124).8 Another difference demonstrated in o

8 In Portugal during the 1970s, a few independent companies worked with children
and/or targeted younger audiences. A Casa da Comédia showed a particular interest
bando’s early work was the extensive geographical coverage of its touring productions. For Dionísio, o bando is possibly the company that has travelled most extensively in Portugal (1994: 94). Furthermore, among all the companies that form the core of the Portuguese independent theatre movement, o bando is also the exception for having chosen to first be located in the area of Greater Lisbon, Sintra, rather than central Lisbon (Dionísio 1994: 92). During the 1980s, however, o bando embarked on many changes, through which the defining features of its current artistic identity were established.

In the 1980s, o bando moved away from its collective devising processes, and Brites consolidated artistic ownership of the company’s work through his set devices and dramaturgy. Abandoning the company’s collectively authored texts, o bando started adapting for the stage texts by contemporary Portuguese writers. Furthermore, its earlier focus on non-traditional places for performance developed into an artistic element of its productions, and many successful promenade performances were staged. For Porto, 1979/1980 was the year when o bando abandoned its didactic and politically-orientated projects as, in the following decade, its work came to show considerable artistic development, ‘a creative richness’ unparalleled in its early history (o bando 1988: 63-4). Vasques, concentrating on the issue of text authorship, identifies three stages in o bando’s history between the

in children’s theatre and puppet theatre in the late 1960s and early 1970s, visiting schools in Lisbon between 1971 and 1974, and travelling around the country with puppet theatre shows and workshops (Coelho 2006: 145-147). Comuna ran a Casa da Criança (Children’s Home), a day centre for young people living in the areas surrounding Casarão Cor-de-Rosa (see Pais 1998). A Cornucópia staged a production addressed to children, As Músicas Mágicas (Magical Music) by Catherine Dasté, for the first time in 1976 (see Cintra 2002: 36-7).
1970s and 1980s. During the first stage, in the 1970s, the company used its collective texts for direct political intervention. In the second stage, up until 1986, the group created texts for performance using multiple sources, including folk culture, traditional tales and legends. In the third stage, from 1986 on, o bando has adapted mainly Portuguese narrative texts to the stage (Vasques 1994b: 137). The 1980s therefore mark a fundamental development in o bando’s work. O bando moved away from the popular and straightforwardly political work described in its first manifesto, and abandoned, with a few exceptions, collectively-devised productions. O bando’s changes sat well with the developments of the Portuguese independent theatre movement and society at the time. According to Dionísio, the ten-year anniversary of the Carnation Revolution in 1984 helped to lock the revolutionary ideals into history. From the mid-1980s, a ‘mistrust towards words like “social”, ideology and collective’ developed in parallel to a strengthened ‘belief in institutions, the market and the individual’ (Dionísio 1993: 346).

The second manifesto put together by o bando in 1988 acknowledged significant differences in the work produced during the 1980s and in the ethos behind it. In its second manifesto, o bando rejected its previous claim of accessibility, and replaced the former categorisation of their work, ‘popular theatre’, with ‘community theatre’. The company identified a development in their work from the political to the aesthetic, acknowledging a change in the audiences targeted, which from then onwards were mainly urban and from a wider age range:

44. We went from simpler, more agit-prop, linear and straightforward shows to more elaborate, dialectic and
ambiguous ones, allowing multiple interpretations […].

Times have changed. 45. Also audiences have changed: from a more socially diverse audience we now perform to spectators with culturally homogeneous backgrounds. But our age-range is wider in Lisbon: we have conquered the adults. If o bando started its focus on the rural regions, it is now mainly urban (o bando 1988: 21).

The two points (children’s theatre in Portuguese rural regions) that once accounted for the company’s singularity or marginality were, by 1988, if not lost, much diluted in the company’s work. The rhetoric justifying the company’s singularity had nevertheless been adjusted accordingly, concentrating on o bando’s aesthetic developments during the 1980s rather than its past organisational, material, geographical or political foci. In addition to this new understanding of the word ‘singularity’ by critics and practitioners in the context of the company’s changes during the 1980s, however, there is a parallel characterisation that arises.

Taking into consideration the company’s wide recognition by both audiences and critics, Conde comes up with the telling formulation, ‘charismatic marginality of a “central periphery” or “peripheral centre”’, reworked from an original remark by theatre critic and practitioner Jorge Listopad (Conde 1994: 80). For Conde, there is a core paradox to be found in o bando’s history, the ‘paradox of institutional abandonment and concomitant (inter)national popular recognition’, or simply, a ‘charismatic marginality’ (Conde 1994: 39). ‘Institutional

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9 Referring to the 1990 production of Os Bichos, Listopad claims that ‘when one watches o bando’s last production, one realises without a shadow of a doubt that the new centre of Portuguese theatre has a strong outsider’ (quoted in Conde 1994: 65).
abandonment’ is explained as the material difficulties that have affected the company over the years. Most notoriously, in 1977 o bando’s funding was cut as a result of its refusal to compromise with David Mourão Ferreira’s polemical restructuring of theatre funding in Portugal (o bando 1988: 99). Unusually in the context of independent theatre, o bando took 25 years to establish its own permanent rehearsal and performance space. However, the company’s performances have been hugely popular from early on (o bando 1988: 145), and o bando strengthened its theatrical reputation in the 1980s, accumulating a number of prizes from 1984 onwards and participating in several international festivals.\(^\text{10}\) In the programmes for its productions developed during this period, o bando makes reference both to its poor economic situation and to its successes. In its programmes for *Duelo* (*Duel*) and *Nós de um Segredo* (*Knots of a Secret*), the company highlights its reduction in funding and its economic difficulties (o bando 1986a; o bando 1986b). In the following year, as well as mentioning o bando’s straitened economic situation (o bando 1987b), the company stresses the triumph of *Nós de um Segredo* and actor Paula Só, who was awarded the prize for best actor by the Portuguese Association of Theatre Critics (o bando 1987a). In its programme for *Bichos* (*Creatures*), o bando once again addresses the company’s financial problems, resulting in no salaries being paid to its members in August. Despite this, *Bichos* achieved unanimous critical acclaim (Conde 1994: 62-65).

\(^{10}\) Prize for the best theatre production for children and young people by the Portuguese Association of Theatre Critics for *Afonso Henriques* in 1984, *Os Cágados* (*Tortoises*) in 1986, *Nós de um Segredo* (*Knots of a Secret*) in 1987 (also awarded the prize Garrett/86) and *Viagem* (*Voyage*) in 1988. Montedemo has been awarded the following prizes: best set (Schauspiele Festival Munich 1988); best theatre production (‘women’s’ prize, awarded by the magazine *Mulheres* (*Women*), 1987); best new production and play (Portuguese Association of Theatre Critics, 1988); and best theatre play/director for João Brites (Radio One, 1987). For details of prizes and participation in international festivals in the 1980s see o bando (1988: 124-5; 135; 138-143).
Used to describe o bando’s earlier work, Conde’s ‘charismatic marginality’ remains essential in the company’s profile (and o bando has used both qualifiers – ‘charismatic’ and ‘marginal’ – in recent funding applications). There are other paradoxes, however, to be accounted for in o bando’s history and working methods, as well as the assertion of the contradiction of poor material support versus popular demand, more accurately applicable if addressing the company’s earlier stages of development. Following o bando’s artistic development in the 1980s, another paradox could be identified in its work: the difficulties of negotiating artistic and political independence while retaining the objective of remaining popular and accessible became obvious, as conceded by Brites. Regarding *Tanta Praia Para Fitas (Such a Wide Beach to Mess About)*, developed in 1984, Brites declares: ‘[we are] always looking to join two almost irreconcilable strands…raising the artistic level and increasing the promotional potential. We want to have an audience without it becoming easy. [...] We aim to sell productions without commercialising the theatrical object’ (Brites 1984: 14). In o bando’s second manifesto, institutionalisation is one of the key issues discussed, and one that markedly separates the second manifesto from the first.

In the second manifesto, the testimonies of two theatre practitioners from outside the company, the founder of the Tondela-based theatre company Trigo Limpo – Teatro Acert, José Rui and the influential Portuguese actor Mário Viegas, focus on the dangers of

11 Their funding application for 2005 declares that ‘o bando has always been made subaltern by the state, both in its recognition and funding’ (o bando 2004). Further on, o bando underlines ‘the particular and charismatic success the company has achieved in Europe’ (o bando 2004, my emphasis), despite this marginalisation.
institutionalisation. Brites had enquired of Rui whether ‘there [is] such a thing as an alternative institution? Or can an institution never be alternative?’ (o bando 1988: 60). For Rui, institutionalisation is never accidental; it happens because creators and companies wilfully pursue it and its multiple advantages (o bando 1988: 60). Rui believes that ‘a project like o bando’s, once institutionalised, would undo a beautiful dream’ (o bando 1988: 61). Viegas admires o bando’s work for creating ‘Portuguese productions watched by Portuguese people’ (o bando 1988: 70). Like Rui, Viegas believes that ‘if o bando loses that, if it wants to be institutionalised, either formally or for money, it may become an anti-Bando’ (o bando 1988: 70). Both Viegas and Rui see institutionalisation as a threat to o bando’s singular nature. Brites’ question to Rui about alternative institutions, however, was left largely unanswered. Brites’ query contains an underlying suggestion of a paradoxical third way for political oppositional theatre. The second manifesto, which quotes an earlier paper written by Brites, proposes ‘in-betweenness’ as an artist’s ideal role:

Theatre workers should avoid integration and its opposite – marginalisation. Artists integrated into an institution cannot create an emancipating art (…). On the other hand, productions by marginal artists are often limited in their distribution. What we should do is know how to live in our society, not allowing ourselves to be isolated, and from an informed position more effectively contribute to its transformation. (quoted in o bando 1988: 115)

This definition of an artist’s responsibility (to ‘avoid integration and its opposite – marginalisation’) is very like Itzin’s characterisation of political theatre as just another stage in the revolution (Itzin 1980: x). Instead of rejecting political commitment altogether, a desire for social
transformation remains for o bando, but in this desire there is no single political response proposed as a replacement for the contemporary dominant ideology.

This balance between integration and marginalisation would prove difficult, however, in the light of o bando’s increasing success and recognition throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. When o bando accepted its first commission in 1994, Luigi Pirandello’s *Tonight We Improvise*, both Conde (1994) and Dionísio (1994) believed that the company’s profile made an important shift. Moving its performance into a traditional theatre precluded the singularity of its site-specific performances and its direct contact with audiences. According to Conde:

> [t]he year of 1994 symbolically corresponds for o bando to a *double historical entry*. It represents o bando’s entry through the ‘door’ of history of the theatre that, as a rule, it did not produce. And, in addition, [it represents] its passage through the ‘door’ of the emblematic building of a new regime of cultural consumption (with its fair share of palatial sociability), which o bando had not, as a rule, experienced. (Conde 1994: 80-1)

In her evaluation of the company, Dionísio underlines how some of the traits that had made o bando unique were questioned in *Tonight We Improvise*. Its work with children, the collective nature of the company, its use of non-orthodox theatre spaces and its focus on rural audiences, all of which had previously been essential characteristics of o bando’s work, were now nowhere to be found.

> [I]n 1994, o bando is *less different* from other professional theatre groups, even if the specificity of its productions is
still very visible. For the first time, it produces a play from the international and universal repertoire (Pirandello’s *Tonight We Improvise*) [...]. It performs in the newest, state-of-the-art playhouse in the country (Culturgest) [...]. (Dionisio 1994: 94)

Both Conde and Dionísio do temper later on their criticism of o bando, and Conde clarifies that this shift is more ‘equivocal’ than real (Conde 1994: 81). O bando’s staging of Pirandello’s text in ‘the newest state-of-the-art playhouse’, Culturgest, however, makes the company’s productions of large state-endorsed events throughout the 1990s less at odds with o bando’s profile.

In 1990, o bando took part for the first time in a large state-endorsed event, Europalia. At Expo92 in Seville, the company presented *Borda d’Água* (*On the Edge of Water*), which was also performed in the lake in the Gulbenkian Gardens and at the mouth of the river Dão in Tondela. In 1994, o bando participated in the Lisbon Capital of Culture Festival. In 1998, o bando was commissioned the street parade *Peregrinação* (*Pilgrimage*), taking place daily at Expo98. A year later, o bando was commissioned to provide the street parade *Madrugada* (*Early Morning*) for the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Carnation Revolution. More recently, in 2010, o bando produced *Os Bigodes na Res Pública* (*Moustaches in the Res Publica*) as part of the official commemoration of the centenary of the Portuguese republic. The considerable mainstreaming implied by government commissioning and the profusion of state-endorsed events in the 1990s resulted in a period of considerable expansion for Portuguese independent theatre
overall, and not only for o bando (Serôdio 2000). Big events and street performances were also increasingly produced by British alternative companies from the end of the 1990s. For Kershaw, this was a key sign of the commodification of alternative theatre companies, as ‘the entrepreneurial energy that had created an “oppositional movement” ironically adapted well, in the hands of some, to the new environment of competition and “value for money”’ (Kershaw 2004: 365). In a similar way, Dionísio believes that o bando in the 1990s was progressively run more and more like a business and guided by market rules, even if its primary objective was not profit-making but to ensure its survival as a theatre company (Dionísio 1994: 102). Other European alternative companies, such as La Fura dels Baus, had resorted to similar strategies as o bando in order to secure work for its members. In the context of Portuguese theatre, Dionísio, however, expresses wariness about the governmental agenda behind such large-scale events, as for Dionísio the Cavaco Silva-led government used art events as a key instrument of its right-wing propaganda.

While admittedly part of the government’s propaganda machine, what Dionísio has in fact failed to recognise in her criticism of such state-endorsed street performances is their enormous potential for attracting non-theatre going audiences. I would argue that o bando’s involvement in large festivals and commemorative events, such as Expo98, has fostered an overlapping of traditional and non-traditional theatre practices, and traditional and non-traditional theatre audiences. Rather than institutionalisation or commodification, Brites is careful to emphasise the role that o bando’s participation in Expo98 played in the development of a new approach to street theatre in Portugal. For Brites, it was the success of Peregrinação that fostered a significantly positive
change in the artistic and financial interest raised by street performances in the country (Gomes 1999: 5). O bando’s move to its permanent base in Palmela in the following year did in fact go hand-in-hand with the establishment of the International Festival of Street Theatre in the town (o bando 2009: 72). While Brites’ remarks about o bando’s positive impact on street theatre in Portugal may be questionable if based on empirical evidence alone, there is something to be said about the accessibility of such mega-events. Beyond the perils of institutionalisation, o bando’s street performances can be seen as feeding into the company’s historical concerns about accessibility, as, since its foundation, o bando has been interested in taking theatre to all. This interest in outdoor theatre is just one of the many possible connections that can be identified between the profiles of o bando and Kneehigh. Kneehigh’s outdoor performances and their non-traditional theatre spectatorship, much like o bando’s, have been crucial to the company’s development, and have varied significantly over Kneehigh’s history.

2. Kneehigh

Kneehigh’s thirty-year history, like o bando’s had its inception in ensemble work and children’s theatre. The company produced a number of school plays and educational workshops during the 1980s, before gradually moving into spectacular site-specific performances, referred to as landscape theatre, under the leadership of Bill Mitchell and initially in collaboration with David Kemp in the 1990s and early 2000s. From 2005, Kneehigh has performed largely traditional theatre-based performances, under the leadership of Emma Rice. Close parallels can moreover be drawn between o bando and Kneehigh in
terms of Kneehigh’s self-defined marginality in the paradoxical context of large spectatorship and institutional abandonment. In its development of a recognisable (and well-marketed) brand of aesthetics, and in its purposeful engagement with broad theatre spectatorship and local traditions such as carnivals, Kneehigh shares o bando’s critical and popular recognition, frequently securing private sources of funding and attracting campaigns of public support when ACE intervention has been either non-existent or insufficient. Unlike o bando, however, Kneehigh’s often-claimed alternative status was built in relation to its Cornish identity rather than as a result of a particular political and ideological association. Talking about Kneehigh and Cornwall, Rice asserts: ‘[i]t’s to do with being an outsider […]. Being here is a radical choice’ (Shifting Scenery 2004).

Formed in the British ‘post-alternative theatre’ context, rather than at the dawn of a newly democratised country, Kneehigh’s identification as political and/or community theatre is inherently different from o bando’s. Kneehigh has often rejected claims of political intervention, clearly so in the publication of a manifesto that playfully pays allegiance to ‘the church of the lost cause’ (Kneehigh 2002b: 2). Unlike o bando’s imprecise definitions of community theatre, however, Kneehigh has always affirmed its identity as Cornish, even when the company’s increased repertoire of international stories has taken them as far as New York, Beijing and Sydney. The company claims that ‘Cornwall is our physical and spiritual home. We draw inspiration from its landscapes, history, people and culture’ (Kneehigh 1996b: 4). In addition to its Cornishness, Kneehigh identifies its work as anarchic and positioned outside the establishment, despite its increased international touring and its performances in large-scale venues.
The idea of being alternative, independent and anarchic has, through the years, pervaded Kneehigh’s public image, not least through the words of its founder, Mike Shepherd, when he claims in his own personal history, included in his autobiographical account of the company’s trajectory, that ‘I grew up an outsider’ (Shepherd 2002a; see also Kent 2010: 23). This outsider nature extends to the company’s history, as Kneehigh proudly recalls in its commemorative book: ‘[y]ou could say Kneehigh was born out of adversity rather than any kind of nurturing or encouragement’ (Rice and Shepherd 2010: [29]). In 2009, Rice explained what first attracted her to join Kneehigh was the mythology of separateness cultivated by the company: ‘Kneehigh was this band of gipsies to my eyes, not like actors you’d meet in London’ (Rubin 2009: 9).

Kneehigh ‘are not “establishment”’ (Kneehigh 1998a: 6), so they claim, and this is reflected in several aspects of the company’s work. First and foremost, Kneehigh is a geographical outsider due to producing most of its theatre outside London, and in a county particularly starved of theatrical performance spaces given that the first (and only) medium-scale venue, the Hall for Cornwall, only opened in Truro in 1997.12 This lack of performance spaces was overcome by several of the county’s theatre companies taking advantage of one of Cornwall’s greatest resources, its landscape, making outdoor site-specific theatre common for Cornish performers and spectators (Shifting Scenery 2004).

12 For a list of the small-scale performance spaces available to theatre companies performing today in Cornwall see Kent (2010: 769-773). The list includes: the Acorn Arts centre in Penzance; the Falmouth Arts Centre; the Sterts Centre near Liskeard; and the The Keay Theatre in St. Austell. Other particularly relevant performance sites for theatre companies include the outdoors Minack Theatre and the Eden Project.
Kneehigh has performed, according to Shepherd, ‘[h]alf way up a cliff, down a hole...wherever...whenever...’ (Shepherd 2002b). Kent identifies the third reworking of Tregeagle in 1989 as the first Kneehigh show purposefully created to tour outdoors, and also the first one in which Bill Mitchell was involved as a set designer (2010: 748). It was essentially during the Bill Mitchell years, from the 1990s, the decade that, for Kent, marks the start of Kneehigh’s golden age (2010: 750), until 2005, that Kneehigh developed its particular form of landscape theatre.

Landscape theatre is a concept developed by Kneehigh, and published in Kneehigh’s project application form Hevva!, meaning loosely ‘the pilchards are back’ in Cornish (Kneehigh 1998a: 4). For Kneehigh:

Landscape theatre mixes theatrical disciplines and turns theatrical conventions upside down. We tell powerful resonant stories in unconventional ways. The form is an unusual hybrid of film grammar, operatic scale and sculptural skills, moving objects and people through a land and seascape to unfold a narrative. The audience, too, is mobile and participates in the story. (Kneehigh 1998a: 8)

Kneehigh’s first collaboration with sculptor David Kemp on Wild Works (1995), involving performances in disused industrial units, is credited with directly influencing the development of site-specific landscape theatre (Kneehigh 1996b: 6). Ghost Nets (1996) is identified by the company as the moment when the shift was made ‘from site-specific installations featuring performances for small audiences to site-specific shows for bigger audiences’ (Shepherd 2002a). Kneehigh’s landscape theatre has included performances on the cliffs at Battalack, St Just, near Penzance with The Woman who Threw the Day Away (1997), also in
collaboration with David Kemp; at the mouth of Red River, Godrevy, with *Ghost Nets 2* (2000); at Carn Marth Quarry with *Jack and Jenny* (2000); in Hendra Pit, Nanpean, with *Hell’s Mouth* (2000); and in Geevor Tin Mine with *Salmon Cornish Detective* (2001).

Beyond site-specific performance, ‘Cornwall’s National Theatre’ (Rice and Shepherd 2010: [17]), as Kneehigh had been designated by Charles Causley, has used its Cornish identification and its interaction with Cornish landscape and culture as a central focus for the company’s creative energy. Rice claims that ‘[t]he way we work affects the shows we produce. The air we breathe gives us a freedom and a wildness which I think are essentially Cornish’ (Sierz 2006: 30). For their productions, Kneehigh has often used work by artists known for their special relationship to Cornwall, such as the sculptor David Kemp, the poet Charles Causley and the playwright Nick Darke, as well as drawing on Cornish myths such as Tregeagle and Tristan and Yseult, and Cornish historic characters such as the ‘King of Prussia’. Crucial aspects of later Cornish history and culture were the basis of the company’s successes in the 1990s such as Darke’s *Ting Tang Mine* and *The Riot*, the first focusing on the rise and fall of the Cornish mining industry and the second, a co-production with the National Theatre, loosely based on the Newlyn Fish Riot in May 1896. Cornish language and Cornish slang have played an important part in some projects, as with Kneehigh’s adaptation of Causley’s *Figgie Hobbin* (1994), where the programme (Kneehigh 1994a) included a glossary of Cornish

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13 Proving that Kneehigh can still hold the title of ‘Cornwall’s National Theatre’, Kent (2010) in his overview of Cornish theatre history, gives Kneehigh more attention and space than any other theatre company that has worked or is presently working in Cornwall. Furthermore, Kneehigh’s founder, Shepherd, authors the preface to the book.
expressions such as *starry gazy Pie, figgie hobbin, crowst, Daniel gumb and backsyvore*, for the benefit of their out-of-county audiences. Kent has emphasised that Causley’s dramatic work, ‘although notionally English […] came across as being told in a Cornish way’ (Kent 2010: 723). During Kneehigh’s three-year long community project, *Hevva!*, running between 1999 and 2001, Kneehigh also created performances from stories from, and with the collaboration of, the local community, using local slang. An example is *Jack and Jenny* (a colloquialism in Cornwall for man and woman), which focuses on Cornish miners who emigrated to South America, and their families back home.

Kneehigh has adapted foreign texts to the Cornish context, such as the *Arabian Nights* (1997), for which the company chose to evoke, in costumes and in set, ‘a busy port, which could be Pondicherry, Port au Prince, or Porthleven’ rather than the Middle East (Kneehigh 1997). Similarly, in their last large-scale community project in 2005, Kneehigh intertwined Gabriel García Márquez’s short story ‘A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings’ with the problems affecting the harbour of South Quay in Hayle, where the production took place, and which is home to a particularly deprived Cornish fishing community. Moreover, Kneehigh often draws on fictional figures who may or may not be from Cornwall, but who have in common the fact they are portrayed as outsiders, rebels or outcasts, rejected by (and rejecting of) their family, lovers and/or society. As well as the real story of the Cornish outlaw, the ‘King of Prussia’, Kneehigh adapted Causley’s poem ‘Fish Boy’, about a boy who becomes a fish because he cannot meet his family’s expectations. Kneehigh also adapted the children’s story of Wagstaffe (*Wagstaffe the Wind-up Boy*) in 2004, the child whose outrageous behaviour leads to his being abandoned by his parents and joining the
circus, and reworked the character of the Cornish Faust, Tregeagle, in several of their performances, Tregeagle being a man who pays a price for his allegiance with the devil in order to change his unrequited love’s heart. In its adaptation of Tristan and Yseult, Cornwall’s ‘oldest love story’ (Croall 2005) or ‘greatest ongoing “tragedy”’ (Kent 2010: 705), Kneehigh purposefully added a new collective character to the story, the club of the unloved ones, whose love-spotters enviously spy on happy amorous couples, longing for what they will never have. Even in their adaptations of widely-known stories forming a part of the universal and/or British imagination, Kneehigh’s heroes often rebel against a parent or authoritative figure (as in The Wooden Frock, Red Riding Hood and The Red Shoes, for example) and, like Robert Frost, choose the road ‘less traveled’. Still on the subject of rebellious characters, Rice has introduced a gender subversion in the company’s work by directing stories that have female protagonists, but also by casting actors against gender and social role expectations. In Bacchae (2004) the chorus was male rather than female. In Pandora’s Box (2002) Lulu was not, as would have been expected of her, a classic beauty. Rice emphasises: ‘Lulu should epitomise a male ideal, an irresistible temptress. What I offered was something much more attainable. A very touching, very real, very flawed woman, in control of herself and her life’ (Rice 2003).

Beyond its literary and folk inspirations, part of Kneehigh’s claim to a Cornish (and an outsider) identity is related to the physical traits of the company’s rehearsal space. Since 1990, Kneehigh has created a number of its productions in the Lamledra Barns, located in Gorran Haven. Described as a place where mobile phones do not work and where there are no restaurants in the nearby small Megavissey village, it favours a
sense of community around and beyond the meals the company cooks

together (Rice 2006: 18; Croall 2005: 11; Radosavljević 2010: 90-1). Just as
with o bando’s base in Vale de Barris, the Barns allow Kneehigh to have
complete flexibility in its work schedules, for company members to stay
overnight if need be, and to have enough space to store sets, props and
costumes. The Barns include a big kitchen, rehearsal and storage spaces,
a music room, workshops and living space, often used by the company
when making a show (Rubin 2009). In such a space, Kneehigh’s claim to
separateness is supported by the remoteness of the geographical
location and by the company’s total control of the rehearsal space,
regardless of timetables, working schedules and/or noise restrictions:

They [the Barns] are the opposite of the all too common
‘black box’ bleak and characterless rehearsal rooms of many
theatres. The Barns let in sunlight and the wind (in fact, most
weather!), are filled with colour, music, food, warmth,
oddities, eccentricities and delights – a Molotov cocktail of
inspiration. The Barns inspire a sense of glee; a world which
mixes delight with naughtiness (Rice and Shepherd 2010:
[149]).

The Barns as a creative space are free from the pressures of external
regulation, and are described by Rice as a marginal location.

[W]e sit outside the capital, which really makes a difference
to us all: we are not part of the business. We are our own
world that we create and inhabit. […] It’s freedom from the
fear of being accepted. We do what we do. We’re not
constantly judging ourselves based on what other people
think or, indeed, where our next job will be. (Rubin 2009: 9)
'Not being part of the business' is, of course, only partially true for any of the companies covered by this study. Contrasting with Kneehigh’s rhetoric in favour of independence, and with the Barns’ wild appeal for their stunning surrounding landscape and basic accommodation, Kneehigh’s ‘short hop from old barn to Broadway’ (Cavendish 2010) is testimony to the company’s current status as a highflyer, recognised by and capitalised on by some of the most prominent and profitable world stages.

Leaving behind its particular strand of site-specific work in 2005, when Bill Mitchell split from the company, taking landscape theatre performances with him, Kneehigh may be seen as heading for increased levels of commercialism and institutionalisation, contrary to Rice’s formulation quoted above. Kneehigh has gone from thinking of ways of drawing to its performances Cornwall’s summer influx of tourists (Critchley 1998: 31) to becoming nominated as one of Cornwall’s attractions and purposefully marketed as Cornish by official tourist publicity (Kneehigh 2003: 35). Its entrepreneurial success has been recognised with the Prudential Award for Innovation in 1997 and being shortlisted for the Arts & Business Awards for its work with the Eden Project in 2002 (Kneehigh 2002a), in addition to featuring in the Pursuit of Excellence Cornwall magazine, alongside other Cornish businesses and recreational establishments, such as the Eden Project. Kneehigh’s institutionalisation was further reinforced when in 2006, the same year in which Kneehigh’s audiences almost doubled in comparison to the previous three years (Sierz 2006), Kneehigh took part in the prestigious

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14 Mitchell defines his new company project, WildWorks, as follows: ‘[t]his company will be based in Cornwall and will make adventurous accessible theatre events in a variety of landscapes, home and abroad. I want to make this work inside communities but outside conventional theatre buildings’ (Mitchell 2005: 66).
Royal Shakespeare Company’s ‘The Complete Works’ season in Stratford-upon-Avon, albeit with a lesser-known Shakespearean work, *Cymbeline*, and despite treating Shakespeare as just another one of its ‘collaborators’ (Rice 2006: 18). In 2005 and 2007, *Tristan and Yseult* and *A Matter of Life and Death* were both the results of collaborations with the National Theatre; *Don John* (2008-9) was produced in collaboration with the RSC and the Bristol Old Vic, and *Hansel and Gretel* (2010) with the Bristol Old Vic. Kneehigh’s changed public profile is nevertheless traceable back to the company’s development in the late 1990s and Rice’s particular influence.

While in 1997 Kneehigh was still defined as a small-scale devising theatre company (Mackey 1997: 117), many important events in the latter half of the 1990s would affect the company. Kneehigh went to the West End for the first time in 1996 with *The King of Prussia*, a co-production with the Plymouth Theatre Royal, remembered by Shepherd as a ‘[f]irst time for comprehensive national reviews and seen by theatre world’s glitterati. Felt like we had arrived’ (Shepherd 2002a). In 1997, Kneehigh produced the opening event for the Hall for Cornwall (The Kneehigh Plan 1996b: 7), Cornwall’s first medium-scale performance space, and in 1998, through the South West Arts franchise system, Kneehigh became the largest touring company in the region (Critchley 1998: 29). In the same year, Kneehigh’s first co-production with the National Theatre, *The Riot*, took place, and Shepherd believes its subsequent national tour ‘open[ed] door – a crack – to bigger fees, [and] larger scale venues’ (Shepherd 2002a). But it was Rice’s influence, and *The Red Shoes* in particular, which swept Kneehigh to larger

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15 For how Kneehigh’s reading of *Cymbeline* has been identified as a radical popular appropriation of the Bard’s work, see Purcel (2009: 125-132).

The potential for Rice’s *The Red Shoes* was recognised early on by the company. In the 2002 ACE application, Kneehigh claimed that ‘[t]his show has contributed enormously to the company’s high national profile and the company will continue to look at the opportunities this presents’ (Kneehigh 2002a). While Mitchell testifies that ‘[h]aving seen the show in Budapest it’s clear *The Red Shoes* still has a future – the piece gets stronger and stronger. We must nurture it and keep it in rep’ (Mitchell 2002). For *The Red Shoes*, Rice was awarded the Barclays TMA Theatre Award for Best Director in 2002, and is currently considered, side by side with Dames Judi Dench and Helen Mirren, as one of the twenty most powerful women working in British theatre (Bingham 2009). Since *The Red Shoes*, Rice has added other national and international successes to Kneehigh’s repertoire, such as *The Wooden Frock* (2003), *The Bacchae* (2004; TMA Award for Best Touring Production in 2005), *Tristan and Yseult* (2005), and more recently *Brief Encounter* (2007), also showing on Broadway in 2010.

In the post-*The Red Shoes* period, for the (inter)nationally successful Kneehigh, treading the tightrope of financial, artistic and geographical independence alongside its allegiance to Cornwall became an almost impossible task. As Shepherd testified in 2002: ‘[a]t home we are regarded fondly and with pride and a perception that we play mostly away from home. There is a danger here and a predicament’ (Shepherd
For years, Kneehigh subsidised its financial losses when performing in Cornish village halls through its national and international co-productions, securing in the same way its Cornish site-specific and/or community projects. Kneehigh declared: ‘[w]e currently subsidise this small scale touring within Cornwall through charging lower than cost fees within the county and slightly higher fees outside the county. However, this position is not sustainable in the long term and there needs to be growth in Cornish funding fees in order to continue touring the high quality product expected from Kneehigh’ (Kneehigh 2002b: 9). Such was the case, for example, with the 2003 summer show in Restormel Castle, funded through a co-production with the Nottingham Playhouse (Mitchell 2003), the co-production with the Nottingham Playhouse of Arabian Nights (1997), an ‘indoor show that goes outdoors’ (Shepherd 2002a), the 2002 village hall production of Quick Silver, which was also a co-production with the Nottingham Playhouse, and the European-funded co-production between Malta, Cyprus and Cornwall, A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings, performed in Cornwall in 2005.

As far back as 1986, the company admitted: ‘[w]e are lucky because we get a lot of money from box office, but the only way we can support ourselves is by touring out of the county’ (Gardiner 1986). In 1991, Kneehigh’s box-office revenue amounted to 60% of the company’s total income; Kneehigh confessed, nevertheless, in the same year to the

16 In the 1980s, a parallel situation had driven Footsbarn, the Cornish company whose footsteps Kneehigh followed, away from Cornwall. Footsbarn’s theatre work during the 1970s in Cornwall, like Kneehigh’s some ten years later, had a strong community basis, using masks, circus skills and live music in performance, as well as a strong link to Theatre in Education. Footsbarn left Britain in 1984, settling in central France by 1991, having found that ‘its work was increasingly being recognised overseas, and that given the economic circumstances of the period, Cornwall simply did not have a big enough audience to keep them there’ (Kent 2010: 722).
exploitation of its members by paying salaries below Equity rates (South West Arts 1991: 3). Shepherd sums up such hardships: ‘[s]ometimes it feels like a lost cause […] the challenge which often brings us to the brink of defeat is securing commitment from the infrastructure which is in place to support and frame the art’ (Shepherd 2002b). Roughly ten years later, with West End and Broadway runs under its belt, and a new tent costing just short of a million pounds, Kneehigh’s financial situation is significantly different, but no less paradoxical when considering its Cornish commitment. Rice is outspoken when describing the company’s economic objectives: ‘I’m fearsomely ambitious for the work. I do want it to be seen by lots of people. I want it to make money – I’m Thatcher’s child, in that respect’ (Rice 2006: 18). Rather than reflecting financial shrewdness, however, one might consider that ‘building a 20-ton, 12m high travelling theatre at the height of the worst recession for decades is pure madness’ (Lee Trewhela 2010).

The tent, the Asylum, was inaugurated at Tywarnhayle Farm, Blackwater village, Truro in the summer of 2010, to coincide with the company’s thirty-year anniversary. But the Asylum had in fact been in the Kneehigh sketchbook for almost fifteen years. In 1997, Kneehigh was awarded an ACE National Lottery award of £45,000 to carry out a feasibility study on acquiring a Mobile Touring Structure (Atlantic Consultants 1997).\footnote{Mobile Touring Structure referred from now on as MTS.} Once the research was complete, Kneehigh submitted an application to the ACE to fund the construction of the MTS. The application was rejected on the grounds that the MTS would have represented a ‘quantum leap’ for the company (quoted in
After investigating alternative funding possibilities, such as private sponsorship and sharing the use of the tent as a venue for mega-concerts (with the support of The Who’s Pete Townshend) alongside theatre performance, the MTS nevertheless remained in the pipeline until it became a reality in 2010, through investment from the ACE, Cornwall Council, foundations and individual donations, alongside the company’s reinvestment of profits from international touring (Kneehigh 2010a).

Talking about the Asylum, Shepherd says ‘[w]e’re recognised as an independent theatre company so it feels right to be building our own nomadic venue for events and performance that we can play in, in addition to our regular touring venues’ (This is Cornwall 2010, my emphasis). The 1997 project had as an objective to embody the Kneehigh experience in its physical space, aiming moreover to be ‘visually exciting’ (Atlantic Consultants 1997: 44) and evocative of ‘the circus coming to town’ experience (Kneehigh 2006c: 11). The idea of a nomadic tent is suggestive of ‘gypsies’, a metaphor used by Rice for the Kneehigh troupe. The company has often described itself (and been characterised by others) as a ‘troupe of travelling players’ (Kneehigh 1993), and has confessed admiring Federico García Lorca’s travelling company (Kneehigh 2001). A tent embodies the company’s desire to be accessible to non-theatre going audiences. For Kneehigh, the MTS offered, in 1997, the opportunity to develop ‘its own middle scale “popular theatre” audience, as it has done over the years for the outdoor touring’ (Critchley 1998: 30), and to escape the destiny of much popular theatre in Britain as ‘ghetto-ised overall smaller scale’ performances (Critchley 1998: 40). Kneehigh’s desire to be popular and accessible is comparable to o bando’s belief that independent theatre
work should neither be marginalised – limited to a familiar audience – nor engulfed by institutionalised practices.

Kneehigh’s accessibility claims may have initially been necessary due to Kneehigh’s geographical home, the lowest-income region in the UK, and the company’s original target audience. However, the company’s aims to be popular and accessible are also reflected in its choice of a tent as the ideal performance space, and in the company’s composition for a significant period of its history. Unlike the assumed middle-class background of most of those in the acting profession (Lichtenfels and Hunter 2002: 43), in Kneehigh there were, up to a point in its history, no trained actors, only a ‘farmer, the sign writer from Tesco, several students, a thrash guitarist from a local band, an electrician’ (Kneehigh 1996b: 7). The 2010 Asylum project must nevertheless be evaluated in light of the company’s current profile. That is, the now-successful ‘middle- to large-scale performance company’ (British Council 2010) would have been justified in dropping their original tent project. This did not happen, I would argue, because Kneehigh’s claim to popular theatre (and a Cornish allegiance) could not be accomplished through its increasing (inter)national performances in traditional theatres, even if the theatre produced under Rice’s leadership seems arguably equally as invested in such democratising artistic qualities as entertainment and emotion as it was in its early days.¹⁸

¹⁸ Very similar remarks regarding the entertainment value of Kneehigh’s performances have been made twenty years apart. ‘I am only interested in work that is uncynical’, says Rice. ‘I don’t want any barrier of intellect coming between the performance and the audience. I want to laugh and I want to cry, and I want to feel. And I want my audience to experience that too’ (Sierz 2006: 30). In Kneehigh’s Statement of Intent in the mid-1980s, the company expressed its belief that ‘theatre should be accessible, both in content and form, to as broad an audience as possible
In conclusion, in August 2010, with its painfully uncomfortable seating in a disturbingly cold performance venue, permanently at risk of flooding, beside its muddy car park and rather dirty portable loos, the Kneehigh Asylum, inaugurated in a remote Cornish location, is literally and metaphorically miles away from London’s Sofitel Hotel. It was at that Waterloo Place-based London hotel that the glittery, champagne-on-hand and invited-guests-only preview of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, the Kneehigh creation which followed the Asylum season with West End theatre producer Daniel Sparrow’s investment, took place in October 2010 (Newsonstage 2010). Neither the Asylum nor the West End’s Gielgud Theatre, where the *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* had most of its run are, however, as I hope my introduction to Kneehigh’s history has shown, out of step with the company’s profile, especially when considering Kneehigh’s past (inter)national successes alongside its long-running commitment to the community of Cornwall. Both spaces testify that, fifteen years later, Shepherd’s words still ring true when describing the paradoxical company that Kneehigh has become: ‘[t]he struggle for survival has, quite rightly, been of secondary importance to the realisation of our dreams’ (Kneehigh 1994b).

3. Foursight

Foursight’s career as a theatre company signals far less extreme examples of performance space differentiation than Kneehigh’s West End and Asylum-based productions. In 1998, nevertheless, roughly ten years after Foursight was first established by Mary Strong, Jill Dowse, Naomi Cooke and Kate Hale, four drama graduates from the University

and to achieve this we aim to produce work which is visual, imaginative and, above all, entertaining’ (Kneehigh 1985).
of Exeter, Alison Oddey claimed ‘Foursight wants to contribute to the
mainstream (in terms of the alternative circuit)’ (Oddey 1998: 121).
Oddey’s comment on Foursight is included in a short chapter, ‘Devising
(Women’s) Theatre as Meeting the Needs of Changing Times’, in which
Oddey states that by 1998 ‘gender is, for many companies and
individual artists, no longer the main issue or theme’ (Oddey 1998: 120).
Oddey uses Foursight as an example of a company that has ‘no desire
to be separatist or marginalised’ despite having women as ‘the
controlling force and focus of the organization’ (Oddey 1998: 121). But
Oddey does not explain why she considers Foursight to be within the
alternative circuit, if it is not for its gender composition. Oddey’s
chapter starts by pointing out how devised theatre remains in the
minority of the work funded by the ACE, even if there are currently no
longer any other reasons for it to be deemed marginal.19 By focusing on
the devised and actor-centric nature of Foursight’s work, one could
presume that this is where Oddey’s argument in favour of Foursight’s
alternative nature lies.

While rather sparse in its characterisation, Oddey’s conception of
Foursight’s work as ‘alternativeness within the mainstream’ is core to
this study, but for different reasons to those that, presumably, are
behind Oddey’s classification. If Foursight can be considered alternative
within the mainstream, Foursight could be seen to relate to both o
bando’s ‘alternative institutional’ and Kneehigh’s ‘popular accessible’
theatre. Nevertheless, unlike these two companies, but like EM,
separatism in the context of a women’s theatre company may still carry,

19 On this issue, Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling question: ‘[a]s processes of devising are now so firmly embedded in our training and educational institutions, can we really continue to claim for devising any “marginal” or “alternative” status? And why should we wish to do so?’ (Heddon and Milling 2006: 6).
as Oddey admits, the assumption of marginalisation, as opposed to O
bando’s chosen singularity or Kneehigh’s romantic attachment to
outsiderness. However, if, as Oddey believes, feminism is no longer a
contentious issue or, better yet, barely remains on the agenda, it might
be puzzling to many that the looming phantasm of discrimination,
long-associated with the feminist cause, has not yet been exorcised.  
This brings us back to the question: why, exactly, is Foursight
alternative? And, conversely, why could it be said to be simultaneously
working as part of the alternative and the mainstream cultural circuits?

Oddey’s remarks have to be put into the context of the reframing of the
feminist ideologies associated with third wave feminism and
postfeminism and, related to this, the progressive rebranding and/or
demise of long-running women’s companies in the 2000s in Britain.
Oddey seems ready to dismiss Foursight’s agenda as feminist, but she
simultaneously highlights how few women’s companies remain active
in the late 1990s. In the late 1990s and after, in contrast with the late
1980s when Foursight was established, women’s companies were the
exception. Moreover, of the three women’s companies recorded by
Cousin in 2000, in a piece of research into six productions staged from
the mid to late 1990s, only Foursight is currently a regular working
professional theatre company, with the Scarlet Theatre Company and

20 The subject of separation/marginalisation in women’s groups has been a contentious
one. Christopher Innes in ‘Present Tense – Feminist Theatre’ considers political theatre
to foster inclusiveness in its productions due to its strong community focus, while
feminist/black/homosexual theatre is for Innes sectarian, implicitly and sometimes
explicitly promoting exclusiveness (such as when male spectators are prohibited from
attending feminist performances) (Innes 1992: 448-9). In ‘The impact of Feminism on
the Theatre’, Micheline Wandor argues, however, that the identification of feminist
theatre as ghetto theatre is a ploy used by the male-dominated theatre establishment
to question women’s groups. Wandor is also a stronger advocate of all-women
projects, such as the Women’s Theatre Group, than mixed groups such as Monstrous
Regiment (Wandor 1984: 81).
Sphynx no longer functioning. Scarlet Harlots and the Women’s Theatre Company are, in addition, two examples of well-established women’s companies that were renamed in the 1990s as Scarlet Letters and Sphinx, in an effort to appeal to wider sections of theatre spectatorship (Cousin 2000: 104; Goodman 1994: 68; Oddey 1998: 121). Such shifts in women’s theatre in Britain relate to broader changes in the political context and in feminist ideology, when the second wave feminist push for a unified feminist activist front seemed to have run its course.

Rather than a unified movement with shared objectives, by the mid 1990s, studies on feminism and theatre highlight the complexity and multiplicity of ideas contained by such an association. Lizbeth Goodman in *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: to Each her Own* justifies her use of the pluralised ‘feminist theatres’, explaining that ‘if there was once some agreement on the definition of “feminist theatre” there is no such agreement in the 1990s’ (1994: 3). Writing in 1996, Helene Keyssar in *Feminist Theatre and Theory* also lists several possible definitions of feminist theatre (1996: 1) in contrast to her 1982 book, in which she proposed a univocal characterisation of feminism and theatre (Kruger 1996: 49). The diversity in the definitions of feminist theatre in the 1990s reflects the diversity of currents that had influenced it through the 1980s and 1990s (radical feminism, material feminism, etc), and, related to these, the differences between the British, US and French feminist movements and their criticisms. However, first and foremost, the current diversity reflects the acknowledgement that the initial feminist movement spoke mainly to/for middle-class white women, disregarding, for the most part, crucial differences of class, race and sexual preference. By the late 1990s it was not only that the scope of feminism had been reassessed to reflect a greater diversity and
inclusiveness, but words like ‘femininity’, ‘woman’ and ‘feminists’ had become ‘contested and unstable categories, not givens’ (Harris 1999: 7). The viability of a separate category such as women’s theatre was also being questioned.

In 1998, Oddey claimed that Foursight did not straightforwardly identify with women’s theatre: ‘Foursight do not want special treatment as women, particularly in relation to restrictions of audience or subject matter’ (Oddey 1998: 121). However, in their 1998 ACE funding application, Foursight did, in fact, engage with the discussion on women’s groups: ‘Foursight is run by women. This is an attempt to exploit the group’s composition not as “separatist” but as a means of questioning assumptions – a “women’s group”, certainly, but at the same time capable of expanding beyond so-called “women’s issues” and constricting labels’ (Foursight 1998: A). In the late 1990s the use of “women’s group” in inverted commas seemed almost unavoidable, given the wealth of meanings the concept had accumulated in light of the fast-paced history of the second feminist wave.21 As a long-running women’s theatre company, Foursight’s history covers the uncertainty and loss of confidence surrounding more recent postfeminist debates (Aston and Harris 2006), but also refers back to a peak of feminist optimism, when women’s theatre companies multiplied as the result of

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21 Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris face a similar dilemma in their book *Performance Practice and Process: Contemporary [Women] Practitioners*. Aston and Harris explain in the introduction they had put ‘women’ in the title between square brackets as a ‘delicate balancing act’: ‘all of these practitioners are “ground breaking” regardless of gender’, but as Aston and Harris also admit, ‘to omit the term “women” altogether might support the “postfeminist” fantasy that sometimes seems to circulate within the academy that gender and its attendant inequalities have been abolished by deconstruction and are no longer worth our attention’ (2008: 2). They are careful to highlight, however, that ‘to use this term in a title is to risk having the ideas, and more importantly the practice under discussion, being categorised of interest only to a minority’ (2008: 2).
successful demands for recognition made by women theatre practitioners in the 1970s. As a result of the changed perceptions of feminist ideology and women’s theatre, the ‘provocation of being an all female group’, engendered and experienced by the first female theatre companies in the 1970s (Wandor 1980: 54), was long gone by the time Foursight was established in 1987. Formed by four women, the company encountered a different situation, as described by Hale: ‘we had to think of ourselves as a women’s theatre company by virtue of the fact that was how we were treated. Given the political situation of Britain at that time a group of four women working together was inevitably perceived as a women’s company’ (Cousin 2000: 76).

Sue-Ellen Case’s *Feminism and Theatre*, first published a year after Foursight was founded, and referring mainly to the American context, claims that by the mid 1980s feminism had been absorbed into mainstream academic and philosophical thinking (1988: 112). For Case, ‘[t]he feminist critic or practitioner need no longer adopt a polemic posture in this art, but can rely on the established feminist tradition in the theatre’ (1988: 4). Referring only to Britain, Micheline Wandor’s *Carry on, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* identifies the proliferation of feminist topics by the mid-1980s (1986: 16). Wandor registers the increasing number of women active in British theatre (1984: 76), as well as pointing to the ‘post feminist’ position of some younger women and playwrights (1984: 86). Lizbeth Goodman, in ‘Feminist Theatre in Britain: a Survey and a Prospect’, identifies the impressive number of 223 companies and organisations active between 1987 and 1990 as relevant for her Feminist Theatre Survey in Britain
Keyssar argues, furthermore, that much feminist theatre is in the mainstream (1996: 1), while Loren Kruger in ‘The Dis-Play’s the Thing: Gender and Public Sphere in Contemporary British Theatre’ cites Caryl Churchill as an ‘exemplary case of the power of institutional legitimation’ (1996: 54). This particular period of women’s theatre history in Britain may have favoured a positive identification of Foursight’s work as being a women’s theatre group, unlike EM’s more challenging encounter with feminist ideology in Portugal. To limit Foursight’s feminism to a contextual circumstance is, however, simplistic. Hale does admit that ‘[l]ooking back, I don’t think it was an accident that the original four people who formed Foursight Theatre were women, given who we were. I think that actually we wanted to work with women, but we didn’t make a conscious decision to do this’ (Cousin 2000: 76).

Foursight has engaged since its establishment with two of the most recognisable traits of the women’s theatre groups formed during the historical alternative in Britain: women’s history and devising. From the beginning, and for over twenty years, Foursight has used devised performance to recover women’s history from patriarchal discourse. On the company’s website, Foursight quotes ‘the empowerment of women’ as one of its core values, and characterises its theatre practice as work that ‘reviews history through the eyes of women: unknown, famous and infamous’ (Foursight Theatre). History was one of the ways in which women’s companies working during and beyond the alternative

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22 Such a number, Goodman emphasises, corresponds to feminist theatre ‘defined liberally to include non-political women’s groups and mixed groups with some degree of pro-feminist politics’ (1993: 70). The number of specifically all-women and feminist groups listed by Goodman is approximately half of that, 112, and Foursight is not included (1993: 71).
theatre movement attempted to reclaim their past ‘hidden from history’ for their contemporaries. History was used by such influential playwrights as Caryl Churchill and Pam Gems; Monstrous Regiment became famous for its staging of historic plays focusing on women, including Churchill’s *Vinegar Tom* in 1976; while Mrs Worthington’s Daughters staged plays authored by women from the past. In *Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama*, D. Keith Peacock has argued that often radical (or alternative) theatre has used historical drama to focus on the dispossessed in particular by presenting alternative historical perspectives to those recorded in official history. For Peacock, in the alternative theatre movement, ‘[t]he interpretation of the past became implicitly and often explicitly a revolutionary act, a rejection of the stultifying views of those who would maintain the status quo in politics, sexual relationships or gender stereotypes’ (Peacock 1991: 179).23 Examples quoted by Peacock of the reappropriation of history by women in the 1970s and 1980s include Pam Gems and Liz Lochhead, who focused on personal accounts of individual historical women such as Queen Christina and Mary Shelley respectively. Monstrous Regiment’s productions and Caryl Churchill’s plays are also mentioned by Peacock as examples of historical portrayals of the lives of ordinary women.

Speaking about one of its earlier productions, Naomi Cooke describes Foursight’s objectives when looking into the biographies of famous and mythical women in a similar way to Peacock’s comments on the appropriation of history by radical theatre. Addressing Foursight’s preference for women’s history, Cooke claims: ‘we feel there’s some

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23 On this see also Innes (1992: 452).
redressing of balance to do. Women have been left out of history or written down by a male point of view. It’s a question of going back and having another look’ (Grimley 1991). In the company’s first ten years, Foursight’s ‘another look’ concentrated on recording the histories of (in)famous women, including Mae West (Mae West – Goodness Had Nothing To Do With It in 1988), Pope Joan (Pink Smoke in the Vatican in 1991), Elizabeth and Mary (Bloody Mary and the Virgin Queen in 1993), Boadicea (Boadicea in 1995) and Henry VIII’s six wives (Six Dead Queens and an Inflatable Henry in 1998). Considering why they chose to stage the life of Mae West, Cooke clarifies: ‘[b]ecause we were trying to find common ground between ourselves over what we thought about the issues, while at the same time avoiding outright condemnation or affirmation, because the situation couldn’t have been as black or white as that’ (Evans [1988]). More than ten years later, a similar argument is used to justify the approach Foursight developed in retelling Thatcher’s life: ‘I never wanted the play to be a hatchet job – I couldn’t see the point in that. Neither did I want the play to glorify or celebrate the woman’ (Foursight c2006). Foursight’s choice of women shows a preference for the individual narratives of controversial women, rather than focusing on class-based, social or gender relations, as had been the premise behind much historical alternative women’s theatre. However, Foursight’s work does reflect the wish to revisit history and bring female characters to centre stage.

The devised collaborative manner in which most of Foursight’s productions were developed was also a preferred working method for women’s theatre groups from the 1970s (Goodman 1994: 88-114). Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling highlight that, during the 1960s and 1970s, devising became ‘a desirable mode of expression’ (Heddon and
Milling 2006: 17), used in particular by women’s, gay and lesbian theatre. Collaborative devising is here considered ‘an appropriate model of agency for self-representation, and a process by which to make visible that which had been previously unseen and unspoken’ (Heddon and Milling 2006: 17). Foursight characterises its work as being process-led, actor-centric and essentially collaborative in nature: ‘using a collective non-hierarchical process which challenges the director/writer power-base of mainstream theatre and fully integrates the actor into the creative process’ (Foursight 2000). Referring to their collaborative devising method and their ‘total theatre’ approach, the word ‘experimental’ comes up in the company’s funding applications, linking with Oddey’s vision of devised theatre work as alternative, or to the very early definition of alternative (fringe) theatre by Peter Ansorge (1975) as experimentation with form, process and space.24

A closer look at the company’s history reveals a number of approaches to performance practice that include: ‘complete’ devising and equal sharing of responsibilities in very early productions; devising alongside facilitating and directing by one or two members of the company (in the majority of productions); commissioning a poem as a motor for the devising process, as in Boadicea, or a music score, as with Thatcher The Musical (2006/7); adapting a narrative text such as Can Any Mother Help Me? (2008); staging the classic plays Medea (2001), Agamemnon (2002) and Hecuba (2004); and staging new texts with Home Sweet Home and Welcome to my World (2005). Hale (2009) explores in minute (and often biographical) detail the difference in ownership of the creative process between Foursight’s early and later productions. Hale tells how the

24 ‘Total theatre’ is defined by Foursight as a form of practice that integrates all aspects of performance: the textual, musical, visual and physical (Foursight 2000).
company has gone from being a collective of actors to becoming a Joint Artistic Directors’ company, supported by administrative staff and with different actors participating in different projects.

At first the founder member actors were the driving force in setting up projects, within eight years the majority of actors were increasingly appointed on a project by project basis and brought in once the idea had been born, the concept conceived of, the funding put in place, the set design decided and the songs/music commissioned. (Hale 2009: 63)

While Hale’s view of a progressively smaller amount of actor participation in the decision-making of the creative process of the company as it has expanded is tenable, it should be noted that only Foursight’s first two productions were created without a facilitator/director. Furthermore, it is an interesting paradox in the company’s history that it was one of its devised/experimental performances, *Six Dead Queens and an Inflatable Henry*, that took the company for the first time into the middle-scale circuit.

*Six Dead Queens* is, for Foursight, the production that has allowed them to bring the alternative into the mainstream: ‘*Six Dead Queens* increased our audience base to include those who might not normally attend alternative theatre’ (Foursight 2000). *Six Dead Queens* enjoyed several runs (in 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2005) and an adaptation by director Erin Riley in the USA (Howard 2008). Foursight’s return to devised and women’s biographical theatre after several years, with *Thatcher the Musical*, resulted in the company’s greatest success in terms of box-office revenue and press-coverage. The popularity of *Six Dead Queens*

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25 Aside from reviews in national newspapers, the company’s archive holds an impressive number of clippings, including a newspaper feature in Santiago do Chile’s
benefited from strategic promotional decisions taken by Foursight (Foursight 1999: 3), and the popularity of *Thatcher the Musical* from the level of interest generated by Mrs Thatcher (Land 2008). Both *Six Dead Queens* and *Thatcher the Musical* contradict the association between devised performance and alternative theatre favoured by Oddey (1998), as these productions attracted widespread acclaim on the medium-scale circuit. The (political) alternative negotiated in Foursight’s work, I would claim, is to be found instead in its community-focused productions, none of which, however, could have taken place without the success of *Six Dead Queens* or *Thatcher the Musical*.

One of the most important aspects of Foursight’s shift into community theatre is its different emphasis on history. Foursight’s portrayal of women’s history favours the privileged, even if as part of *Hitler’s Women* (1989) and *The Trout Sisters* (1996) ordinary women are also represented. With community-inspired, community-centred and/or community-performed projects, Foursight makes a transition from the recording of narratives of famous individual (and individualistic) women to recording the histories of unknown people, mainly women, with a connection to Wolverhampton, the city where Foursight has been based since 1989. Such a shift implies an engagement with the local community, a change in performance schedules and logistics, and a suspension of national touring, but could also be seen as a democratising move by the company. With its community theatre, such as *Reans Girls* (2002/3), *Apna Ghar* (2006) and *TCS* (2008/9), Foursight reinforces its ‘accessibility’ agenda through the subject-matter of its productions and through the community’s participation as (non-

press, coverage on North Korean, Indian, Dutch, Australian and French websites, details of national television coverage and of an interview with CNN.
traditional) theatre audiences, but also as artists and researchers in/for the productions. Collecting and archiving stories that would not normally be kept by official accounts also reflects a different evaluation of history. Foursight’s productions about famous individual women had as a central objective the recovery of the past into the present (very much like some productions by the women’s theatre groups of the historical alternative movement). To record the stories of anonymous individuals from the local community encapsulates a different objective, the desire to record the present for future generations, or, as co-director Stephen Johnstone has poetically put it, the creation of a ‘living museum’ (quoted in Logan 2008). TCS project is a living museum because the shops and people mentioned in the production, and whose histories were recorded and saved in the Swindon and the Sandwell Community History and Archive, will keep changing beyond the archival process. It is a museum, nonetheless, because these narratives once saved by a government archive acquire heritage status.

In conclusion, TCS and Thatcher the Musical have contributed in different ways to Foursight’s ambition to bring the alternative into the mainstream. The more mainstream yet devised performance of Thatcher’s life – ironically, the woman who believed there was no such thing as society – was fundamental in the creation of the more alternative (political) community-based TCS. Thatcher the Musical projected Foursight into the (inter)national media and contributed to the expansion of the company and to the viability of the TCS. One could argue that it was the company’s restructuring, in creating a number of permanent posts in October 2007, such as a full-time general manager and an educational and outreach coordinator, that greatly aided TCS’s National Lottery funding application. Contrasting with the very early
(and unstructured) days, when the bid for *Hitler’s Women* was left to Jill Dowse because ‘it was felt that she was particularly good at articulating mood and style in a succinct and evocative manner’ (Hale 2009: 73), Foursight has benefited from the added skills and specialisation of roles enabled by the company’s expansion. The National Lottery bid was successful and so was the production; TCS won (as part of the Arts at the Centre event) the Arts & Business Community Award in 2010, and attracted a considerable amount of attention from non/traditional theatre audiences and the local community.

4. **Escola de Mulheres**

In comparison with the other three companies’ commitment to devising, collectives and community theatre, EM’s connection to the alternative may seem harder to argue. New writing (whether adaptations of Portuguese (un)published texts, commissions or as a result of the devising process) and community work have played a much smaller role in this company’s history. As Fernanda Lapa has recently recognised, ‘we are not a theatre of the avant-garde, we are a text-based theatre’ (Lapa 2008). EM was, nevertheless, the only one of the four companies that was established through the presentation of a manifesto at a public event, indicating in this way a radicalised political commitment from its outset. On 8 March 1995 in Sociedade Portuguesa de Autores (the Portuguese Society for Authors), EM’s founders (Fernanda Lapa, Cucha Carvalheiro, Isabel Medina, Cristina Carvalhal and Marta Lapa as the creative team, Conceição Cabrita as the producer and Aida Soutullo as the secretary) presented their jointly-written
manifesto, together with a selection of texts by women. Fernanda Lapa has explained the company’s beginnings: ‘the company resulted from the joint will of a group of women who had spent some time discussing our position in the theatre context. Effectively we concluded that we spent all our time being chosen or rejected, performing in other people’s projects, being invited but never having a say’ (Serôdio and Fadda 2006: 46). In order to assess the role of gender in Portuguese theatre, EM’s founders carried out a piece of research on gender differences in Portuguese revenue-funded theatre companies, and concluded that only a minority of actors, directors and playwrights were female. Their research played a fundamental role in EM’s establishment and the company’s aims and objectives, as stated in their manifesto.

In this document, EM establishes as a core company objective the improvement of working conditions for women in the Portuguese theatre professions. Parity between genders would be promoted by granting job opportunities to female practitioners, by staging female-authored and/or female-centred texts, and by organising meetings and discussion groups among female artists. EM also declares that it would prefer to perform unpublished texts. Texts written in Portuguese and/or jointly written through a devising creative process are also listed as priorities for the company. Finally, to the aim of the desired

26 Escola de Mulheres’ full name is Escola de Mulheres – Oficina de Teatro, Lda. Presently part of the company’s structure are Fernanda Lapa (Artistic Director), Isabel Medina (Literary Director), Marta Lapa (Associate director) and Manuela Jorge (producer).

27 The idea for this study was based on a feminist study of British theatre, Caroline Gardiner’s *What Share of the Cake?* (London: Women’s Theatre Trust, 1987). The research was based on available published data and direct enquiries to Portuguese theatre companies. This study concluded that the majority of texts performed on the Portuguese stage in 1993 were by male authors (42 out of 46), only 2 of the directors were female out of 37, and only 2 of the 37 casts analysed had a majority of female actors (Escola de Mulheres 1995: 2).
democratisation of the creative process, the objective of attracting and interacting with non-traditional theatre audiences, minorities and/or vulnerable groups and touring the country was added (Escola de Mulheres 1995: 4-5). Carvalhal declared in 1995: ‘I don’t like to call Escola de Mulheres a theatre company as for me it is much more than that. It is an open project, with other concerns. […] We want to contact other realities and absorb other sensibilities’ (Luzes Torres 1995: 152). Always run by women, EM is now a well-established theatre company. Vasques has addressed the company’s achievements over the years: ‘Escola de Mulheres has not only accomplished a theoretical project for effective intervention into the reality of Portuguese theatre, but from the start has privileged a rigorous and high-quality programming’ (Vasques 2001a: 158). Testimony to its ‘high quality programming’ has been EM’s inclusion by Serôdio in all but one of her yearly highlights of Portuguese theatre between 2001 and 2006. EM, nevertheless, has only marginally managed to accomplish its wider democratic agenda.

EM sets out in its founding manifesto its goal to intervene in the Portuguese theatre context, aiming in particular for a gender balancing of roles and opportunities, but also desiring to foster the talent of new writers and non-traditional audiences. When questioned about the fulfilment of the company’s objectives in relation to its manifesto, Fernanda Lapa in 2008 harshly claimed that ‘close to none’ of the objectives had been achieved (Lapa 2008). Vasques has also admitted that ‘the company never quite managed to totally fulfil the programme of activities it had announced’ (Vasques 2001a: 158). A closer look at the work produced by the company over the last fifteen years reveals an unwritten work ethos with much in common with (but also with significant differences from) its original manifesto. EM has succeeded
twice in joining female writers together to discuss the role of women in the theatre context, organising the first ever (and, to date, only) meeting of women writers and playwrights in Portugal in 2005. EM has also performed a few female texts for the first time in Portuguese theatre, but EM’s history has, overall, fallen short of their original objectives in relation to producing unpublished texts. Its involvement in the wider community has also been limited.

Original texts that have been produced by EM include texts written by the company’s own members. *Os Novos Confessionários* (*The New Confession Boxes*) (1996) was written and directed by Medina in collaboration with the actors Fernanda Lapa, Cucha Carvalheiro, Cristina Carvalhal and Marta Lapa, and the singer Luísa Brandão. *Coco Chanel: uma Mulher Fora do Tempo* (*A Woman Ahead of her Time*) (1999) was an original idea by Luísa Pinto and Fernanda Lapa, written and directed by Fernanda Lapa, who also acted Chanel’s character. *Mulheres ao Poder* (*Give Power to Women*) was an original text by Medina, inspired by Aristophanes’ *Women in Parliament* (*Ecclesiazousae*). Portuguese texts staged for the first time include *Lisboa Fala e Fá-lo* (*Lisbon Speaks and Does It*) in 1999, commissioned from writers Fina D’Armada, a Portuguese ‘historical feminist’ (Magalhães 1998: 3) and Alice Vieira, as part of the Lisbon Forever festival. In 2006, EM produced *Ódio* (*Hate*), written by a young male Portuguese writer, Jorge Humberto Pereira, about the traumas caused by the Portuguese colonial war. Examples of EM’s intervention work in the community include works on/by immigrants (*Fuera, Fora, Dehors*, (*Fuera, Out, Dehors*) a co-production in 2006, and *Diversas Pessoas, Raízes e Diálogos* (*Peoples, Roots and Dialogues*), a co-production in 2001), a devised text written and performed by prostitutes working in the Lisbon area (*Histórias de Vida* (*Life Stories*)) in
2003, in collaboration with o Ninho) and texts written based on their work with children (*A Escolinha (The Little School)* in 2004).

Exceptions aside, in EM’s repertoire, the production of devised and/or unpublished texts and its community work have been significantly overshadowed by their choice of internationally-acclaimed plays written in English, such as Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* (1997 and 2008/9), Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *New Anatomies* (2002), Paula Vogel’s *The Oldest Profession* (2005) and Tracy Letts’ *August in Osage* (2009). EM’s debt to Anglophone theatre is visible more recently in *Cabeças Falantes*, the name given to a festival of monologues performed in 2010 by several companies in Estefânia, and which translated into Portuguese the name given to Alan Bennett’s 1988 and 1998 television monologues, *Talking Heads*. EM’s insistence on English language texts was a conscious choice from the very beginning, justified by Carvalheiro as ‘in England, and in the USA, this movement of women’s writing is strong’ (Luzes Torres 1995: 150). The literary and political values of the English speaking world were used by EM to focus on gender issues in the specific Portuguese context. In the same year EM was in development and carrying out their research project on gender differences in the Portuguese theatre context, Vasques considered Fernanda Lapa’s staging in 1993 of Churchill’s *Top Girls* as the inauguration of ‘a militant feminist aesthetic’ in Portugal (2001a: 154).

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28 *Histórias de Vida* literally means *Life Stories*, but the word ‘life’ is used here with a double meaning, evoking the expression ‘andar na vida’, a Portuguese euphemism for prostitution. In this production, the stories of women that had been working as prostitutes in Lisbon were told by the women themselves. EM worked in collaboration with o Ninho, a Portuguese association for the protection of prostitutes.

29 Fernanda Lapa was the first director to bring Churchill to the Portuguese stage, directing *Top Girls* in 1993 (Novo Grupo/Teatro Aberto) and, with EM, *Sétimo Céu*
EM, a company with ‘clear feminist objectives’ according to Vasques, (2001a: 157), was the first to suggest connections between their work and feminist projects abroad, by referring favourably in its manifesto to the political objectives of the ‘mainly female companies’ that were established in Europe, the USA and Canada from the 1960s onwards (Escola de Mulheres 1994: 2). Positioning themselves in agreement with the paradigm of female-dominated companies and their outspokenly gender-centred policies, EM could be linked in its objectives and constitution to the women’s theatre companies that were formed in Britain in the 1970s as a result of the incorporation of feminist agendas into the theatrical context. By the time EM was formed, in the mid 1990s, however, most women’s theatre companies in Britain had abandoned their original projects, gone out of business or rebranded, as a result of both overarching changes in feminist theory and the legacies of the cultural policies brought about by the Thatcher years. In the 1990s in Portugal, EM’s founding context was considerably different, not only due to the specificity of the country’s political and theatrical history but in particular due to the specificities of the Portuguese feminist movement.

From the mid 1980s and during the 1990s, in countries with a strong feminist tradition such as Britain, postfeminist theories were acquiring increased academic and social currency. During the same period, however, and in particular in the 1990s, Portugal was experiencing a reversed situation. Research on women and gender-centred inequality was raising new levels of awareness of feminist ideology, mainly in the

\(\text{(Cloud Nine)}\) in 1997 and 2008/9. She was also co-director of \(\text{Uma Boca Cheia de Passários (A Mouthful of Birds)}\) in 1998. In 2009, EM organised a rehearsed reading of Churchill’s controversial \(\text{Seven Jewish Children: a play for Gaza}\).
social sciences and history. In *Movimentos de Mulheres em Portugal: Décadas de 70 e 80*, Manuela Tavares, a founding member of the women’s association UMAR, claimed in 2000 that this is the reason why Portugal, unlike other European countries, has not entered a postfeminist stage: 30

Portuguese society has not lived through a profound change in gender relations. Therefore it could be said that postfeminism has not reached Portugal, and this is because feminism in this country is still far from reaching its desired critical and political goals. (2000: 123)

Writing in 1998 in *Movimento Feminista e Educação em Portugal, décadas de 70 e 80*, Maria José Magalhães found that it was in the 1990s that the country hit its fourth feminist stage, one that introduced Women Studies into Portuguese academia (1998: 67 and 74-75). Aided by a considerably favourable European framework, and with the direct endorsement of the Portuguese state, women’s studies was included for the first time in the curricula of Portuguese universities. In 1991, the Portuguese Association for Women’s Studies (APEM) was created by the governmental organisation, Comissão para a Igualdade e Direitos da Mulher (Commission for Women’s Legal Equality), and it is now based in the Social Studies Centre at the University of Coimbra. In 1995, the same year that EM was established, a Masters programme in Women’s Studies ran for the very first time at the Open University,

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30 UMAR, when it was originally established on 12 September 1976, stood for União de Mulheres Antifascistas e Revolucionárias (Antifascist and Revolutionary Women’s Union). The aims of the organisation from the beginning were to promote women’s rights and gender equality in Portuguese society. These aims still stand, but in the 1990s it kept its acronym but changed its meaning to its current designation of União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta (Women’s Union Alternative and Answer). For UMAR’s history see their website and Santos et. al. (2008). In 2008 UMAR organised the second ever feminist conference in Portuguese history, eighty years after the first one (Almeida 2008).
Lisbon, and gender research can now be found in other Portuguese universities, even if scope, availability and visibility of women’s studies are still considerably behind other European countries. During the same period, in the 1990s, the increased participation of women in Portuguese theatre was also recognised.

Serôdio in ‘La Dramaturgia Portuguesa Hoy’ refers to Fernanda Lapa and Isabel Medina when acknowledging the higher percentage of women practitioners, writers and directors working in the country’s theatre (1997: 66-67). Vasques has posited, as has Serôdio, a positive change in Portuguese theatre, signalling an increased visibility of women in all areas of theatre practice, citing EM as an example of this (1998: 15; 1999: 119; 2001a: 157-159). Neither Serôdio nor Vasques, however, put forward reasons that might explain this increased participation by women. I believe the upsurge of interest in feminist studies and European policies for the promotion of gender equality played an essential role in this situation. The favourable European framework was acknowledged by EM in the year of its foundation, 1995; the company hoped to benefit from and build on the equal opportunities policies promoted by the European Union (Escola de Mulheres 1995: 6; Luzes Torres 1995: 150; 152). The higher amount of funding available for Portuguese theatre overall in the 1990s also played an important part in the increased participation by women in

31 For Magalhães, state intervention was essential for the introduction of women’s studies into the rigid and conservative curricula of Portuguese universities (2001: 35 and 55-57). Still in 2001, regarding APEM’s work, Magalhães declared that ‘the general belief held [among APEM’s researchers] was that Portuguese academics did not see, let alone hear, the researchers and the association’ (Magalhães 2001: 55). For an explanation of why the development of women studies in Portugal has been difficult, see also Virginia Ferreira (1998: 184-6). For a history of Portuguese women’s studies, including a list of the most important seminars and conferences in the 1980s and 1990s see da Silva (1999).
theatre. In ‘Growing up and Gaining Visibility’, Serôdio argues that positive changes were produced in Portuguese theatre from the second half of the 1990s, namely ‘regional dissemination, diversity of projects, and accordance of some cultural visibility to the theatre’ (2000). For Serôdio (2000) the greater financial investment in Portuguese theatre was due to two main factors: the country’s political stability, and the cultural commitments assumed in the context of Expo98, which determined or influenced the construction of new venues and the commissioning of a number of theatre productions. Serôdio does not refer specifically to gender in her article, but in a revitalised context where more affluence determines more diversity, it is not surprising that new projects and new voices, of which EM would be only one example, came into existence.

The proliferation of work by women in the Portuguese theatre context did not however equate with an overt recognition of feminist ideology in the country. 32 EM has described the ‘suspicion’ (Escola de Mulheres 2007: 3) with which the company was faced in its early days. Fernanda Lapa explains EM ‘provoked a scandal when it was established because it was the first [company] that said it would produce theatre taking a female viewpoint. We do not produce marginal theatre but we were

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32 In the same year that EM was established, 1995, the first ever Portuguese theatre practitioners’ conference took place in Lisbon. During this conference, Portuguese practitioners discussed a wide range of issues considered to have a negative impact on Portuguese theatre, such as the lack of funding, the randomness of the funding process, the reduced number of performance spaces, the small number of Portuguese texts on stage and the reduced touring of productions (Serôdio 2003, see in particular 58-9, and on funding issues see 63-4). Gender differences were not on the agenda. More than ten years later, Vera Borges (2007) carried out a sociological study on the working conditions of contemporary Portuguese actors and companies. Factors addressed by Borges include the regularity of funding, the age of the companies and the practitioners, the availability of performance spaces and their geographical location, but again gender is not examined.
marginalised’ (Lapa 2008, my emphasis). Vasques has confirmed Lapa’s depiction of the Portuguese theatre establishment as unfavourable to EM’s formation, using ‘painful’ and ‘hard’ to describe the company’s trajectory (Vasques 2001b: 9 and 41). Vasques furthermore accuses the Portuguese Arts Council of showing from the very beginning a ‘militant dislike of and lack of interest in the “ideology” and practices promoted by Escola de Mulheres’ (Vasques 2001b: 158).

EM’s “ideology”, a word Vasques carefully places in inverted commas, reflecting her awareness of its disputed value, has been recently summed up by Lapa as producing ‘theatre taking a female viewpoint’ (Lapa 2008). For all its gender-centred policies and discourse, EM has in fact been reticent to use the word ‘feminist’ to describe its project, preferring instead to characterise the company as focused on female work or on women. Shortly after the company was formed, the four founding members were questioned in an interview about their feminist agenda and whether or not it was old-fashioned to talk about feminism in Portugal in 1995. Both Carvalheiro and Lapa avoided addressing the feminist issue and emphasised that the company was mostly interested in promoting equality between men and women in Portuguese theatre. Carvalhal was the only one to claim the usefulness of feminist ideology, but did so without explaining what her feminist stance was (Quico 1995: 14-15).

More recently, however, the company has publically and unambiguously rejected any connection to the feminist movement.

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33 No evidence for this is quoted in Vasques’ article. An example of this could be found in their 2009 funding application when EM’s funding was slightly reduced despite the company’s lease and refurbishment of their first performance space, Estefânia. This was seen by Fernanda Lapa as an attempt to undermine EM’s work (Lapa 2010).
After receiving the medal for Cultural Merit in 2005, Fernanda Lapa declared that EM ‘is neither a feminist company nor a sexist one’ (Lapa 2005: 22). In another interview, Lapa once again underlined that ‘[w]e have never claimed to be feminists, we just privilege women’s writing in order to compensate for its scarcity on the [Portuguese] stage’ (Lívio 2007: 67). Medina has also distanced herself and the company’s work from feminist politics. In an article by Ana Dias Ferreira covering the preview of Judy Upton’s Marcas de Sangue (Bruises) in 2005 for Diário de Notícias, Medina declared that this play was chosen ‘because it fits with the vision of the company which is not linked to feminism but to a female look at relationships and characters’ (Ferreira 2005, my emphasis). EM’s resistance to feminist ideology may seem rather contradictory when one considers that, in its manifesto, the company’s members had suggested from the very beginning a connection between their work and that developed by women’s groups rooted in countries such as the USA, where feminist research and studies are widespread. EM’s contradictory position, I would argue, relates to the problematic place feminist discourse has occupied in Portugal for a considerable part of the twentieth century. The second wave feminist movement was gaining full force at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s in the USA and most of Western Europe, securing the rights to birth control and abortion shortly afterwards. Conversely, during this same period, the Portuguese dictatorship of the Estado Novo was nearing its fourty-year anniversary, having reduced women’s rights in comparison to those under the First Republic by rewriting women’s inferiority into the civil law.

The affirmation of women’s rights was difficult during the Estado Novo regime, and in particular after Conselho Nacional das Mulheres.
Portuguesas (National Council for Portuguese Women), the closest Portugal had at the time to a feminist organisation, was forced to cease its activities in 1948 (Owen 2001: 5). The most notable ‘feminist’ upheaval in Portugal during the dictatorship was the publication in 1972 of *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* (*New Portuguese Letters*), jointly written by Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa, known in this context as the Three Marias (Magalhães 1998: 67-8; Ferreira 1998: 181-2; Owen 2001: 25-40; Tavares da Silva 1999: 20). With its fluid structure and succession of unrelated texts, *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* questioned gender roles in Portuguese society during the regime, focusing on women’s lives and criticising the Estado Novo’s politics. The title of the book evoked a French text, *Lettres Portugaises*, published anonymously in 1669 and supposedly a translation from the Portuguese of nun Maria Alcoforado’s narrative of lost love (Owen 2001: 25). For Hilary Owen, in *Portuguese Women’s Writing 1972 to 1986: Reincarnations of a Revolution*, *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* played a fundamental role in Portuguese history by making way for a new understanding and representation of women in Portuguese literature:

> Assuming the right to represent women in the act of representing, *Novas Cartas* signalled that women had decisively entered the business of redefining the intellectual and poetic codes. It is in this sense that *Novas Cartas* marks a theoretical as well as literary intervention. (Owen 2001: 20)

The Three Marias were taken to court and prosecuted for the ‘immoral’ content of their book. The politically-motivated court case against the Three Marias gave rise to a wave of international feminist protests that prevented the women’s imprisonment (Magalhães 1998: 68). *Novas Cartas Portuguesas* was translated into several languages and was
brought to the English stage in 1973 by the then recently formed Women’s Theatre Group (Itzin 1980: 231).

It is now acknowledged that Estado Novo’s objections to the book were on the grounds of its criticism of the regime, and in particular of the colonial war, rather than solely for its specific feminist content (Owen 2001: 11). As Virginia Ferreira has highlighted, in ‘Engendering Portugal: Social Change, State Politics and Women’s Social Mobilization’, the Three Marias were not on an equal footing when it came to discussing the feminist content of their text, and Maria Velho da Costa resented the association with feminism (Ferreira 1998: 181). For Ferreira, nevertheless, the Three Marias’ affair symbolically encapsulates the nature of the Portuguese feminist struggle during the 1970s: ‘the struggle was an antifascist struggle, not a struggle for equality of the sexes’ (Ferreira 1998: 181). 

That is, Ferreira believes that the few women’s organisations working in the country were dominated by other political and internal disputes, which overshadowed their feminist agenda (Ferreira 1998: 181-4 and 188). In her study, Tavares (2000) reaches much the same conclusion, and claims, in the post-revolution period, that feminist groups believed that:

female emancipation could be achieved alone through the new economic and social order. This dogmatic approach

34 A more localised incident is often credited with leading to the apprehension generated by the word ‘feminism’ in Portuguese society from the 1970s onwards. The first and only feminist public rally in Portuguese history was promoted in January 1975 in Parque Eduardo VII, in Lisbon, by a women’s organisation, Movimento de Libertaçao das Mulheres (Women’s Liberation Movement) (MLM), who defined itself as a radical feminist group. The rally was thwarted by the media, and generated a strong level of resistance in groups of men that came to watch it. As a result, some women were prevented from attending, or verbally and physically assaulted on site. MLM disbanded soon afterwards. (On this, see Magalhaes (1998: 70), Sadlier (1989: 124-5 and footnote 9), Ferreira (1998: 182), Owen (2001: 12) and Almeida (2010: 223-4).
when applying Marxist theory prevented a wider understanding of feminism and its strands. In addition, it overshadowed issues specifically related to women’s rights such as abortion. (Tavares 2000: 115)

The reforms in the legal system that instituted equality between the sexes under Portuguese law after 1974 were not, according to Ferreira, due to the mobilisation of particular women or women’s groups, but to the dominant leftist ideologies. This “top-down” nature of the legal reforms explains why formal equality did not equate to real equality in Portuguese society (Ferreira 1998: 171-181).

Magalhães (1998) is more positive than Ferreira on the subject of Portuguese feminism in the latter part of the twentieth century. Magalhães argues that there was a feminist movement working in Portugal during the 1970s and 1980s, albeit one characterised by its ‘specificity’, ‘restrained public visibility’ and ‘heterogeneity’, for much the same reasons as stated by Ferreira (1998). For Magalhães, the Portuguese feminist movement was expressed in the abortion campaigns between 1978 and 1984. She highlights that ‘at least in relation to the campaign for reproductive rights, there was a feminist movement, albeit heterogeneous, constituted by small groups, fragmented, with a reduced sphere of political influence, and covering diverse strategies and organisations’ (Magalhães 1998: 92). The unifying role that the abortion cause played across women organisations in Portugal has been agreed upon in all the studies on Portuguese feminism quoted above.\(^{35}\) Furthermore, a recent sociological study,

\(^{35}\) On this see also Tavares (2000: 46-7) and Ferreira (1998: 182 and 187). Studies centred on abortion in Portugal have also framed their discussions within the country’s contemporary feminist agendas: see Tavares (2003: 18-19) and Peniche (2007).
carried out after the liberalisation of abortion law in 2007, has claimed that the abortion movement encapsulated a heightened (and exceptional) example of civic participation in recent Portuguese history (Santana Pereira 2008: 197).36

In conclusion, it is fairly safe to say that Portuguese feminism in its strength and uniformity has been unlike its European counterparts, even when one takes into consideration countries with comparable histories of repression in the twentieth century, and with a geographical and cultural proximity to Portugal, such as Spain, or even when acknowledging the specific unifying role that the abortion campaign played in Portuguese society during the 1970s and 1980s. The fact that Magalhães and Tavares differ in their grouping of Portuguese women’s associations into separate feminist strands is testimony perhaps to the dangers of trying to impose models found in more defined histories of feminism onto Portuguese feminist history. In 2008, at the Feminist Conference organised by UMAR in Portugal, Tavares defined the following issues as part of the future challenges for feminism in the twentieth-first century: rights for prostitutes, same-sex marriage, the traffic of women and genital mutilation, alongside the old battle that still continues, fighting against female inequality in employment (Tavares 2008b: 2 my emphasis). Vale de Almeida, also in 2008,

36 Santana Pereira’s (2008) study statistically analyses Portuguese participation in different forms of civic actions (such as taking part in associations, elections, petitions, boycotts, rallies and volunteering) and concludes that there is significantly less participation in Portugal when compared to other countries of northern and central Europe. By analysing the differences in voting and in the strategies of the two abortion law campaigns, in 1998 and 2007, Santana Pereira proposes that the 2007 campaign is an effective example of Portuguese civic association, and reflects specifically on the factors that have influenced such differences in levels of civic participation (see on this issue Santana Pereira 2008: 188-197). For a detailed (and personal) account of actions promoted by the ‘Yes’ Movement in 2007, see Tavares (2008a).
declared that in Portugal ‘it might even be accurate to say that social and political debates around abortion constituted the main issue of gender and sexual politics in the 1974-2007 period – only to be replaced by same-sex marriage now’ (2008: 6-7). In the same year, Fernanda Lapa publically declared her support for same-sex marriage and the rights of same-sex couples to adopt, choosing for EM’s repertoire in 2010 a play based on both topics (discussed in Chapter Five), opening a new chapter in EM’s history as a gender-centred theatre company.

In chapter three I have ‘constructed’ each company’s history of ‘alternativeness’. O bando has been the company which has been keenest to present itself as separate from both the Portuguese theatre establishment and neoliberal ideology. Its emphasis on collaborative work and accessibility has been called ‘singular’ and ‘charismatic’. Kneehigh, like o bando, has cultivated its outsider status. Kneehigh has permanently affirmed its Cornish roots and has recently committed itself to an annual Cornish-based summer season. Foursight and EM have distanced themselves in their public statements from one of the most recognised forms of historic alternative theatre, women’s theatre. Their women-centred practices stumble over a rhetoric of multiple (post)feminisms with which they only very cautiously engage. Foursight’s devised theatre is alternative in as much it brings to the centre–stage traditionally ignored stories, as with *Reans Girls*, *Apna Ghar* and *TCS*. EM’s more ambiguous alternative stance is translated into its staging, often for the first time in Portugal, of contemporary classics by feminist writers such as Churchill and Vogel. Despite these differences, integral to all four companies’ alternative status is, as I will analyse in the next chapter, their engagement with non-traditional spaces.
IV. ‘A room of one’s own’: Place

So that when I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking you to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart it or not. (Woolf 2004: 128)

At the centre of each company’s histories is the issue of space, whether it is the creative stability that comes with owning ‘a room of one’s own’, or the tension between recognition, as represented by traditional theatres and entertainment circuits, and the desire to reach new audiences through new spaces. In this chapter I explore the history of each company’s relationship with space and place, then focusing on an example of a particular production to examine in detail the exploration of these concerns. For all of the companies analysed here, as with the historical alternative movement, non-traditional theatre spaces became (in)voluntarily a part of their identities. One of the defining characteristics of the companies working within the historical alternative theatre movement was their use of non-traditional theatre spaces.

The work of the new groups of the late sixties and early seventies was never designed to be played in conventional theatres. Whatever the difference in aims, ideology, methods of work and styles of performance between the groups, they were all actively concerned with seeking new audiences. And these audiences were not likely to be drawn from the regular theatre going public of the time. (Hay 1980: 153)

Many smaller theatres and venues appeared out of necessity, choice and entrepreneurism in the 1960s and 1970s in the British alternative theatre context. Peter Brook famously said in 1968: ‘I can take any
empty space and call it a bare stage’ (Brook 1996: 9). Even if no space is truly ‘empty’ for the associated meanings all spaces carry, the new spaces used by the alternative theatre movement privileged informality and anarchism. Buildings were not visibly identified as performance spaces, and the performances often had random schedules and were advertised by word-of-mouth.

This casualness, typical of the new alternative theatres, ascribed an ‘official invisibility’ (Carlson 1989: 125) to the performance spaces, favouring a sense of community among those who took part in them and/or a form of (elitist) seclusion. For Carlson, ‘the absence of external signs’ reinforces ‘feelings of intimacy, exclusiveness, and focus of the internal event’ (1989: 127). Ric Knowles claims that experimental venues could ‘in various ways position audiences as among the cognoscenti, the artistic élite, or the adventurous’ (2004: 72). A typical example of an alternative space running in London during the 1970s was the Drury Lane Arts Lab, housing, among others, the Portable Theatre, Freehold, the Pip Simmons Group and the People Show. Ansorge believes the Jim Haynes’ Arts Lab was the inspiration for many of the alternative theatre spaces and studios that were subsequently established across Britain: ‘[t]he casual life-style, the informal performances were as important to the development of the new theatres as the actual content of the first plays and experiments at Drury Lane’ (1975: 25). Itzin, however, considers that while many spaces where appropriated as alternative within the movement, only the ‘pubs and clubs and community centres up and down the country’ could be labelled as truly alternative theatres, as these represent the ‘non-theatre places and the non-theatre audiences which most political theatre aimed to reach’ (Itzin 1980: xiv). Escola de Mulheres’ Estefânia fits Itzin’s definition of non-theatre place.
The primary school in Palmela where *Tinhoso!* was staged or the shopping centre in the heart of Wolverhampton which held *TCS*, also analysed in this chapter, are alternative spaces of a different order and fall instead under the category of ‘found’ spaces.

In addition to new studio places such as the Arts Lab and the community club-based performances preferred by Itzin, ‘found’ spaces had been particularly dear to the historic alternative theatre practitioners looking for non-traditional theatre settings. The search for new performance spaces encouraged creative exploration of the spaces themselves in terms of performance, a core aspect first of environmental theatre and then of site-specific performances. By using found spaces, generally the outdoors or public buildings, Richard Schechner claims that ‘the given elements of any space – its architecture, textural qualities, acoustics, and so on – are to be explored, not disguised’ (Schechner 1968: 54). This goes further than simply highlighting the location of a performance; as with environmental theatre, site-specific art is only accomplished in dialogue with the site itself. For Nick Kaye, ‘site-specific’ refers to the ‘practices which, in one way or another, articulate exchanges between the work of art and the places in which its meanings are defined’ (Kaye 2000: 1). Using Wrights & Sites’ taxonomic diagram for found spaces, Fiona Wilkie has further specified as site-specific only those ‘performances in which a profound engagement with one site is absolutely central to both the *creation* and *execution* of the work’ (Wilkie 2002: 150, my emphasis).1

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The democratic “freeing” potential of non-traditional spaces, whether the experimental studio, the community club or the found space, has nevertheless been somewhat misread by the countercultural generation of alternative theatre practitioners. Arguably, as Carlson believes, ‘all performance is invariably matrixed’ (1989: 204). Just as with traditional theatre spaces, ideology is present in alternative spaces, even if its rhetoric is significantly different. For Knowles, ‘the architectural features of the community centers, union halls, and alternative spaces […] figure equally significant in the ideological coding of productions held within them, though in these cases such coding is more likely to be community-orientated, populist, or even overtly resistant to dominant ideologies’ (2004: 71). Regarding found space in particular, Iain Mackintosh, in Architecture, Actor and Audience: Theatre Concepts, contests the universal positive emphasis given to found spaces as opposed to traditional theatres, questioning if a found space works ‘as well for those other than the finder’ (1993: 161). Carlson (1989), McAuley (2003) and Knowles (2004) have claimed that audiences’ understanding of a performance event is always influenced by a range of factors, including the space’s location within a city, its interior and exterior decoration, the organisation, distribution and location of its actor and audience spaces, its accessibility by public transport and its public profile. In non-traditional settings, such as found spaces, such factors also include the buildings’ previous uses.

As long-running, regularly-funded groups, the four companies studied here have performed in mainstream theatres and traditional performance spaces, often as a result of one-off co-productions with and/or commissions by repertory theatres. Beyond their varied degrees of engagement with mainstream cultural circuits, each company’s use
of non-traditional settings (rehearsal, performance and/or administrative spaces), found spaces and/or site-specific performances has had a significant impact in their respective histories, public profiles and individual performances, as well as being a core element in their negotiation of an alternative in contemporary theatre. *TCS* and *Tinhoso!*, analysed in this chapter, could be classified as site-generic. ‘Site generic’ is, for Wilkie, the ‘performance generated by a series of like sites’ (Wilkie 2002: 150); these productions, rather than relating to one site alone, resonate with any working shopping centre or school respectively. Rather than relational, however, the relationship established with site by both *TCS* and *Tinhoso!* is oppositional, exemplifying directors Mike Pearson and Cliff McLucas’ distinction between host and ghost. That is, for Pearson and McLucas, a distinction can be found between the site itself and the site constructed by the performance. According to McLucas ‘[t]he host site is haunted for a time by a ghost that the theatre-makers create. Like all ghosts it is transparent and the host can be seen through the ghost’ (quoted in Turner 2004: 373-4).

In addition to the relationship between the ghost and host inherent to site-specific performances, in all performance spaces there ‘is the constant dual presence of the physical reality of the performance space and the fictional world or worlds created’ (2003: 27). For McAuley, ‘the space the spectator is watching during the performance [...] is always both stage and somewhere else’ (2003: 27-8). McAuley describes the relationship between physical space and fictional place using three categories: stage place (the physical characteristics of the stage); presentational space (including such elements as scenery, décor, furniture, props, the physical presence of the actors and the physical
The demarcation of entrances, exits and off-stage areas; and the fictional place (‘the place or places presented, represented or evoked onstage and off’) (2003: 29). Using McAuley’s (2003) characterisation of different types of space in production (physical, fictional and textual), I will analyse how the fictional place and textual space are subverted, enhanced, overridden or effaced by the production’s physical space in o bando’s Nós Matâmos o Cão Tinhoso (Tinhoso!), Kneehigh’s Blast!, Foursight’s TCS and EM’s Sétimo Céu, all of which are performed in alternative spaces.

With each alternative space, it is important to see not only how different spaces have allowed each company to access different types of audience but also to favour different types of interaction with those audiences. With o bando and Kneehigh, non-traditional spaces have been core to both companies’ work since their establishment. In contrast, EM is the company of the four most traditionally bound to text, and the only one that has not developed site-specific or found space work. More out of necessity than choice, EM has nevertheless recently established its base in an alternative space, Estefânia, a community centre. Conversely, in the Newhampton Arts Centre, Foursight’s own premises are limited to office space. Rehearsal and performance spaces are occasionally rented in the Centre, but the company has performed mainly in other venues. If not spatially, the Newhampton Arts Centre, as metonymically reflective of the multiethnic Wolverhampton context, has been integral to Foursight’s site-specific work, such as TCS, which will be analysed in this chapter. Considering their location in the ‘theatrical landscape’ (Knowles 2004: 85), the alternative spaces used by the four companies are situated outside ‘entertainment’ districts as defined by Carlson (1989: 11): o
bando’s Vale de Barris is one of several farms outside Palmela’s town centre; the Newhampton Arts Centre and Estefânia are in residential areas of Wolverhampton and Lisbon respectively, albeit fairly close to the city centre; and Kneehigh’s base, the Gorran Haven Barns, is known for its remoteness. Kneehigh’s recently-acquired mobile touring structure, the Asylum, was set up for its preview season in 2010 at a farm off Chilverton Cross, and away from Agnes village in Cornwall. Much like Kneehigh’s desire for the Asylum to become part of the Kneehigh experience, flexible enough to change with each performance (Atlantic Consultants 1997: 44; Kneehigh 1996c: 4), Brites considers site an essential aspect of o bando’s work. For Brites, ‘[i]deal[ly] each creative project would inscribe the creative process in variable dynamic spaces, allowing for variable movement options’ (Brites 1994: 28).

The rural setting of both Kneehigh and o bando’s performance spaces gives them many advantages in flexibility, in comparison to Foursight’s and EM’s urban spaces. However, their rural locations are hard to reach by public transport. Both companies attempt in their own ways to overcome such restrictions. O bando encourages its audiences to call o bando’s office in order to arrange a lift from the bus station to Vale de Barris, a solution only possible for afternoon performances as there is no late bus back to Lisbon. In summer 2011, Kneehigh helped to arrange a lift for at least one stranded audience member as, while buses run before and after performances, they stop at a considerable distance from the Asylum. In addition to their marginal geographical locations with regard to the arts circuit, the alternative spaces used by the performances analysed in this chapter endow the companies with a degree of ownership of the creative process not possible in the rigid scheduling typical of traditional theatres. That is, the use of alternative
spaces spares the directors and actors the ‘shock of moving from the rehearsal hall to the stage’, from the ‘intimate, homey, and safe rehearsal space’ to the ‘larger, public space’ (Knowles 2004: 62-63). For EM, suffering strained financial conditions, the control of its own rehearsal and performance spaces has proven to be a lifeline. During rehearsals of *Baby*, two of the actors had parallel professional commitments that restricted rehearsals to taking place outside normal working hours. A number of rehearsals took place between 9.00pm and midnight, and Saturdays and Sundays were always included on the rehearsal schedule. Such an idiosyncratic timetable was only possible because the rehearsal/performance space was not occupied by multiple theatre companies simultaneously, as was the rule with the other spaces previously used by EM.

From the audience’s point of view, in all the performances analysed there was no fixed seating, and the graduated pricing arrangements of some performances were meant to protect lower-income audiences without taking away any of their rights. This is a democratic strategy, according to Knowles, as in traditional theatres, graduated ticket prices and donor nominations reinforce the social power of the wealthier classes by inscribing hierarchy in the performance space (Knowles 2004: 64). Typically in traditional theatres, there is a rigid separation between actors and the audience at intermission and at the end of the show, when ‘each group retires to their own separate worlds’ (Knowles 2004: 70). Carlson characterises the separate worlds of audience and performance spaces as transitional or intermediate: ‘transitional’ because, according to Carlson, it is in these spaces actors and audiences separately ‘prepare themselves for their different “roles” in central confrontational space’ (1989: 133). If the audience ventures backstage, or
if an actor is found in the lobby and foyer, this act has ‘an aura of transgression and the breaking of normal cultural codes’ (Carlson 1989: 130-1). Either as a result of an intentional effort, as with o bando, or due to a genuine lack of alternative entrances and separate infrastructures, as with Estefânia, none of the performance spaces analysed in this chapter are conducive to this rigid ‘segregation’ between the actors and audience members.

1. O bando

O bando’s search for a room of their own has been a long one. O bando did not establish a permanent base until fairly late in its history, roughly twenty-five years after its foundation, after having moved many times. For Eduarda Dionísio, ‘[t]o tell the story of o bando’s bases is also to make its own history – a pilgrimage. Each base, or succession of bases, corresponds clearly to a stage in its life’ (Dionísio 1994: 94). As Brites recalls, o bando did help other companies to ‘occupy’ headquarters in the 1970s, but never attempted to do the same for themselves (Cintra 1987: 8). To acquire and refurbish its permanent home, Vale de Barris, which opened in 2000, exceptionally in the Portuguese independent theatre context, the company had to invest its own money and take out a bank loan, a similar process to that which EM would go through ten years later. In the 1990s, o bando was allocated some land by the city hall in Telheiras, for where its Community Drama Centre was initially planned to be located. However, without additional financial help for its Telheiras base, o bando chose not to go ahead, and it was not until 2000 that the company established its headquarters in a former dairy farm in Vale de Barris, Palmela.
While the geographical location had changed, a number of the ideas behind the original project for Telheiras were fulfilled in Vale de Barris. Vale de Barris, situated in a mainly rural area, is a multiple-building complex in which the company benefits from the luxury of space. The main building holds the kitchen, a sizeable dining area, toilets and showers and the company’s offices. A separate building to the main complex holds two performance spaces and lodgings for guests. The smaller and medium-sized spaces (with dressing rooms attached) allow for the simultaneous rehearsal of two productions, as happened with Tinhoso! and Quixote in 2010. The huge storage areas and workmen’s offices are used to store previous set structures, Brites’ máquinas de cena and past productions’ wardrobes, a particularly valuable function as o bando puts on frequent revivals, and has kept some productions, such as Afonso Henriques, constantly in repertoire. Although not properly insulated and lacking central heating and air-conditioning, the Vale de Barris complex is flexible enough to house a number of events and a large number of people. Aside from rehearsals and performances, it is suitable for the monthly community meals organised by o bando, for their practitioner workshops (estágios) and, since 2009, for Teatro aos Molhos (Theatre by the Bunch), when it houses productions from other professional and amateur theatre companies.

In Vale de Barris, o bando has found their desired ‘alternative space’ (Rodrigues 2000: 15), with one major difference from the Telheiras project. Key to Telheiras, located in the Lisbon area and on the metro line, was the idea of attracting what has been designated by Wilkie as ‘accidental audience’ (Wilkie 2002: 153). For Wilkie, in some site-specific performances ‘there maybe two separate audiences: the paying, knowing audience, and the unsuspecting, accidental audience’ (Wilkie
Planned as part of the Telheiras building was a glass wall, through which random passers-by could watch the actors work and rehearse (Lello 2007: 5). In their “see-through” Telheiras building, o bando would have been in a privileged position to attract non-traditional theatre spectatorship to the company’s events. Vale de Barris, on the south bank of the River Tagus, with no metro link or night-time public transport available, does not offer this level of unplanned direct interaction with potential audiences. Its rural location and community placement provide, however, a different type of opportunity. Known to Brites on a personal level, as he had resided in Palmela for a number of years, o bando has been able to consistently interact with a specific community, outside of the capital and traditional theatre spectatorship. The placement of o bando’s permanent base in a mainly rural community in the immediate surroundings of Lisbon is reminiscent of its earlier history. As Brites highlights, this move to Palmela ‘[w]as almost like starting once again, when we were twenty years younger’ (Brites 2000: 6).

Twenty-five years earlier, o bando’s first base was in the borough of Sintra, during the company’s first two years of activity, which were the two more politically radical years after the Carnation Revolution. Easily accessible from Lisbon, the borough is a place of contrasts, between the wealthy sea-side and its deprived inland rural areas. In 1975, Brites explained that Sintra was chosen because it was there that they found ‘villages similar to the interior’ (quoted in Dionísio 1994: 110). The aim to reach out to rural populations (which, o bando further accomplished through their extensive national touring) was a political objective of the time. Aside from allowing the company to interact with rural populations and non-traditional theatre spectatorship, the company
was still considerably close to the capital. As claimed by Dionísio, o bando was an exception to the Lisbon-located independent theatre movement by choosing to first situate its activity in the Greater Lisbon area (Dionísio 1994: 92). Regarding Sintra, Brites has declared: ‘[w]e thought we should not start in Lisbon. We had questioned a number of things aesthetically; we desired a space in a borderland area and we eventually looked for it in the municipalities surrounding Lisbon’ (Dionísio 1994: 109, my emphasis). Like Sintra, o bando’s base in Vale de Barris could also be identified as a borderland. Situated in Palmela, about fifty kilometres to the south of Lisbon in the protected area of the Parque Natural da Arrábida, it is a peaceful site surrounded by many farms, but close to the centre of the small historic town of Palmela.

Outside of the Greater Lisbon area, Palmela, like Sintra, is a border zone, distant from the capital but close enough for links to be perceived and effectively constructed. There is a local travelling workforce that goes into the capital daily, and neighbouring Pinhal Novo and Setúbal have significant industrial areas close to Lisbon. The town of Sintra, however, unlike Palmela, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a preferred location for tourists to visit, with the corresponding public transport infrastructure. Palmela, on the south bank of the Tagus, despite its historic centre, attracts considerably fewer visitors.

Explaining its move to Palmela, the company declares: ‘we did not escape to the countryside: we distanced ourselves from the city in order to better observe the swarm walking its streets’ (Brites and Francisco 2009: 16). The decision to live at a distance from the city was taken at a particular strategic time in the company’s history. In the late 1980s, o bando strived for an alternative institutional (or in-between) status (o bando 1988: 61 and 115), and was associated with a ‘charismatic
marginality’ (Conde 1994: 80). By the mid-1990s, however, the company had been accused of institutionalisation due to increasingly performing in traditional theatre spaces (Conde 1994: 80-1; Dionísio 1994: 94). Also during the 1990s, o bando staged its first large-scale productions as part of major state-endorsed events such as Europalia (1990), Expo 98, and Madrugada (Early Morning (1999). Paradoxically, the company’s singularity and its inventive use of site-specific and walkabout theatres, which had attracted non-traditional and traditional theatre spectatorships alike, came to be employed in noticeably expensive and lucrative mega-productions, which, in the case of Expo 98, worked as part of the state promotion machinery in an international event with a poorly-concealed neo-colonial focus. Beyond the disputable point of material gain, as a result of its participation in Expo 98 (Gomes 1999: 7; Rodrigues 2000: 15), the o bando reconsidered its aims and objectives. A more political and collective approach to theatre practices was sought after Expo 98, one that, ‘without being agit-prop’ (Gomes 1999: 7), would prevent o bando from ‘exiling itself in its interior world’ (Gomes 1999: 8). An essential part of this refocus was the move to Palmela and the perceived autonomy gained from Palmela’s marginal status on the country’s cultural map.

The geographical location and economic circumstances (with regard to the company’s own financial commitment) of the Palmela base would

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2 The theme for Expo 98, ‘Oceans – a patrimony for the future’, encompassed the new millennium’s politically correct concerns regarding the environment, but also unavoidably invoked the history of ‘Portuguese discoveries’ by taking place on one of the waterfront areas of Lisbon, the city from which the ‘Portuguese navigators’ sailed off on their world ‘discoveries’, as well as the date commemorating Vasco da Gama’s voyage to India. Dionísio has denounced the rhetoric of praise for Portuguese discoveries as a synonym of Portugal’s ‘greatness’, which resurfaced in the 1990s in association with the country’s participation in and organisation of several European and world-scale events, such as Expo 98 (1993: 122).
relieve o bando of the institutional pressures of being permanently located in Lisbon. Regarding the choice of Palmela, Brites remarked: ‘it makes more sense for us to live on a certain margin and be able to act autonomously from within that margin’ (Gomes 1999: 8, my emphasis). This was a ‘certain margin’, as Palmela’s geographical position allowed the company to carry on performing regularly in Lisbon after its move, alongside its national tours and international projects. In 2000, Vale de Barris was inaugurated with a site-specific performance that acknowledged and emphasised the marginal characteristics of the new space and its surrounding town. Using the building as a theatre-shelter, where previous connotations are exploited rather than disguised (McAuley 2003: 38), o bando directed a stage adaptation of Marie Darieuxsecq’s A Porca (Sow), in which actors and audiences were made to share the physical space with pigs. This use of the space proved very effective, attracting o bando’s aficionados of site-specific theatre, but also becoming a bridge to their prospective new audiences by immersing them in an element (live farm animals) that they were most likely familiar with, as well as requesting the much-needed collaboration from local farmers to access the animals for the production. The month’s performances were sold out, and according to the company’s questionnaire, the geographical spread of the attending public was equally distributed between ‘faithful audience’, local palmelenses and audience members from several surrounding locations (Bandadas 2000: 7). Tinhosol, ten years later, also establishes a particular relationship with the found space, but in this case, as will be argued, the physical space, a Plano do Centenário primary school, both reinforces and contradicts the fictional space portrayed in Honwana’s short story.
Written by Luís Bernardo Honwana, published in 1964 during the colonial period and translated into English shortly after, *Tinhoso!* is the short story that gives the title to a collection that, for its content, context and author, became a symbol for the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and, after Mozambique’s independence, became part of the Mozambican school curriculum as one of the landmarks of Mozambican literature. *Tinhoso!* is the story of how a group of school children in a small Mozambican village during the colonial period come to kill the harmless Cão Tinhoso. Cão Tinhoso is described as an old stray dog, covered in scabs, with blue eyes looking ‘like someone asking for something without wanting to say it’ (Honwana 1969: 75), despised by everyone in the village, except Isaura, a girl who is ostracised herself. Ginho, the black boy who narrates the killing, despite taking to both Isaura and Cão Tinhoso, tries to fit in with the group of children led by white Portuguese Quim, and goes along with the others when they are incited (and blackmailed) to kill Cão Tinhoso. It is the colonial administrator who makes Cão Tinhoso a scapegoat for his anger due to losing badly in a card game, ordering the killing to be executed by the vet; the vet passes on the decision to his assistant, Mr Duarte, who then manipulates the school’s children to carry out the killing.³ In the end, despite Ginho’s change of heart and Isaura’s attempts to intervene, Cão Tinhoso dies, shot many times by the other children.

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³ The vet and his assistant Mr Duarte have been taken to be the same person in some studies of *Tinhoso!* (Sabine 2004: 34; Afolabi 2001: 41). In correspondence with O bando, Honwana clarified that they were different characters. In addition, Honwana remarked that the title of the original short story included an exclamation mark, which was later removed by an editor. O bando restores the exclamation mark in the title of its play.
Touching upon the exploitative relations between politicians and ruled citizens, bosses and employees, adults and children, blacks and whites, colonisers and the colonised, the short story denounces the power relations at play in the colonial context of 1960s Mozambique as artificial and unfair. Published during Honwana’s imprisonment between 1963 and 1966 for being a member of the Mozambican liberation movement, Frelimo, the anti-colonialist element is a fundamental part of this text’s history and content, whether the personified mangy dog described in the story is taken to be a metaphor for colonised Africa, abused and destroyed by Western rule (Burness 1977: 103; Sabine 2004: 40) or, as others have argued, taken to conversely represent the dying Portuguese colonial regime (Santos Mata 1987: 115; Afolabi 2001: 44). Racial and social conflict are integral to all Honwana’s short stories included in the collection, each illustrating, with different degrees of violence, particularly extreme in ‘Dina’, the consequences of the exploitative Portuguese colonial regime in Mozambique.

In the summary used to introduce the play in o bando’s programme, written by Miguel Jesus, who was also responsible for suggesting this text to o bando, the emphasis is put on the multiplicity of power relations portrayed in the story, rather than on the specific context of Mozambican colonisation by the Portuguese.4

When we look at Cão Tinhoso, we see also the dog that we are, the dog of fear, the dog of war, the colonised dog, the colonising dog, the dog of courage, the dog of decay, the

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4 *Tinhoso!* was performed by Nuno Nunes, Rosinda Costa, Raúl Atalaia, Sara de Castro and Nicolas Brites. Nuno Pino Custódio was the director. It was first performed 20 May 2010 in *Escola Básica* 1-2, Palmela.
Neither the ‘colonised dog’ nor the ‘colonising dog’ are identified by concrete historical contextual markers in the play’s programme, and only in one of the actors’ remarks included in the programme is the Portuguese colonial regime made a central focus. Raúl Atalaia, who had lived in pre-independence Angola, claimed that: ‘through the writings of Luís Bernardo Honwana I was taken to remember the sounds of squealing with a closed mouth produced by Portuguese Colonialism and the Fascist Regime’ (o bando 2010b: programme).

The absence in the programme of the circumstances surrounding Tinhoso!’s publication is noticeable here as, unlike most of the works produced by o bando in the last twenty years (and in contrast to Tinhoso!’s reputation in Mozambique), neither text nor author would be known by the majority of the Portuguese audience, and had not previously been known by either cast or director. For Honwana, however, the displacement of the original short story’s context in o bando’s production is neither problematic nor surprising. Honwana was invited by o bando to attend the play’s preview, meet the company and cast, and give a talk in the local library as part of Conferências de Palmela, in which he claimed that, in o bando’s adaptation, ‘directors and actors understood the aspects worth being portrayed, beyond the circumstantial issues’ (M.L. Nunes 2010: 15). Honwana summed up his short story in a similar way to Jesus’ summary included in the play’s programme: ‘the narrator is a young man who is speaking of what he is afraid of. He talks about his interactions with his young friends but also his opinions on the society he lives in, on the power relations, on the
colonial context, on the echoes of war, when human feelings oscillate between the most positive and negative extremes’ (M.L. Nunes 2010: 15). As I contend below, in o bando’s adaptation of Tinhoso!, the (dis)placement of the original context is a key element of the contemporary (and localised) rereading of Honwana’s short story.

Rehearsed and performed in Palmela, after a year of productions mainly located in Lisbon (Soares 2009), Tinhoso! brings together two themes particularly dear to o bando’s work: theatre inclusive of all ages, from young children to adults, and theatre that is rooted in a specific location. It is easy to find the appeal of this short story to both younger and adult audiences, even if the strong language used in the play meant that the age certificate had to be renegotiated and was finally lowered from twelve to six, in harmony with o bando’s claim to produce theatre across the age spectrum. Tinhoso! also had the obvious advantage of its setting in a primary school, a particularly familiar space for the younger public. Located for most of its run in a school in Palmela’s historic town, and funded as a result of this by Palmela’s tourist development fund and European money, this production is nevertheless not site-specific in a strict sense.\(^5\) Tinhoso!, like Foursight’s TCS, could be classified as ‘site generic’, as both performances establish a particular relationship with shopping centres and schools. Both have, however, been additionally performed in different types of buildings. Tinhoso! was performed in the Vale de Barris performance space and in the open air as part of the yearly September communist festival, Festa do Avante, while TCS was performed in a new arts centre in West Bromwich. In

\(^5\) Co-produced with Palmela’s city hall and financed by two national development funds (PORLisboa and QREN) and the Regional European Development Fund (o bando 2010b).
Tinhoso!, as in Foursight’s TCS, the space is secondary to the production, used mainly as a part of the spectators’ area and as a backdrop to the seating and performance spaces. The play’s set, a circular wooden structure, was positioned at night in the open air in the school’s playground (together with the audience seating), but none of the school’s buildings (except for possibly the toilets) were used or visited by the spectators, although the actors used a classroom to prepare for the performance. Not strictly site-specific, like Foursight’s TCS, the found space of Escola Básica 1 –number 2 de Palmela did relate to Tinhoso!. The primary school haunted the performance through the imposition of its codings and restrictive regulations with regard to both the actors and the audience.

Honwana’s short story is mainly set in the school and playground areas of a rural Mozambican village. The physical performance place of o bando’s Tinhoso!, the schoolyard of a primary school built during the Estado Novo dictatorship, therefore resonates literally and ironically with the original text. There is a commonly-shared institutional weight in schools, whether in Mozambique or Portugal, past or present, but as a typical example of Estado Novo architecture, this school places the audience at the heart of the historic moment portrayed in Honwana’s short story. In the real setting of a clearly identifiable Plano do Centenário school, the spectator is forced to reengage with the past dictatorship through its surviving visible architectural markers, even if neither performance text nor set directly refer to the Portuguese regime.

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6 Plano do Centenário schools were schools built by the Estado Novo regime between 1941 and 1969. This project took its name from the official state celebrations of the centenary of the foundation of the nation (1140) and the restoration of independence (1640). Varying in size, all schools are identical in style and can be found all over the country (Carlos 2005: 5 -13).
Performed in a *Plano do Centenário* school, *Tinhoso!* potentially reactivates in the spectator the memory of a period of authoritarian history (whether lived first-hand or inherited) from which s/he, like the Portuguese Prime Minister, José Sócrates, might have preferred to ‘break free’. The PS Portuguese government had, from 2008, been carrying out a reform of Portuguese primary schools that deactivated or refurbished several *Plano do Centenário* schools. This project was described by the Prime Minister as a historic demarcation of the establishments built by the Estado Novo: ‘to break free from the schools of the Salazarist past which for decades have brought to the country uncountable costs. [...] This is a revolution happening in order to put an end once and for all to that educational blemish that compromises the future of our country’ (Lusa 2008).

By placing the performance in a working school, the spectator is furthermore made aware that schools are, with the exception perhaps of such libertarian models as Paulo Freire’s, places of authority and control. Jesus, when greeting the audience at the beginning of the outdoor performance, asks the spectators not to smoke or, if doing so, to remember to put the cigarette butts in the ashtrays provided, as the children and teachers would be in the next day for classes. Through the present and past examples of restriction of freedom and regulatory subjugation activated by *Tinhoso!*’s spatial circumstances, the audience

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7 Several studies have commented on the Portuguese ‘silence’ regarding such themes as the colonial war and the regime. José Gil has described this as the Portuguese non-inscription: ‘[t]oday, thirty years after the regime of fear has ended, we live with it still. Portuguese society, the Portuguese, has not lost its fear even if (or maybe because) the younger generations know little about the Salazarist past. One of the traits of this fear is that it does *apparently* not inscribe itself. Or if it does, it metamorphoses itself, becoming unrecognisable. For this has contributed the way in which 25 April (and the process that followed it) has erased from consciousness the former regime’ (Gil 2005: 78).
is better prepared to watch on stage the power struggle at the heart of Honwana’s short story.

While the audience’s first contact with found space may be one of recognition and possibly association through personal experience (as a significant number of primary schools in Portugal are *Plano do Centenário* schools), the set of o bando’s production of *Tinhoso!*, on the other hand, takes the spectator away from the familiar site of a Portuguese Estado Novo school, and through allusion and metaphor evokes the Mozambican village school in Honwana’s short story. In *Tinhoso!*, costumes and set are fundamental in taking the spectator on a journey in terms of location and site, using colours (red and orange) and materials (wood and sand) often associated with the African continent. More specifically, the set used in the play is a circular wooden structure higher than stage level and filled in the middle with sand, and the actors wear basic costumes similar in style, which include shorts, t-shirts and flip-flops in red, orange and green. On top of this base costume, the actors put on individual garments when they perform their individual characters (a hat for Mr Sousa, a skirt for Isaura, a coat for the administrator, a vest for Quim, a work coat for the teacher). Other extra-performance elements reinforce the geographical and temporal location of the original text. In the personal greeting Jesus offers to the spectators before each performance, and which is typical of o bando when at Vale de Barris, Jesus points out that this is an abridged version of a 1964 text written by a Mozambican author, Luís Bernardo Honwana. This information is then repeated in the prologue to the play. In *Tinhoso!*, the prologue varied slightly each night as the actors improvised the text to explain the context of the original short story.
Depending on which actor introduced the production, more or less weight was given to Portuguese colonial history.

*Tinhoso!* constitutes a production that challenges the spectator to symbolically travel through different times, spaces and countries. Alongside its emotional journey, however, the spectator is also exposed to the physical discomforts of watching an open-air performance, but also the pleasure of a space that disavows most of the rules and regulations of traditional theatres. As with o bando’s performances in Palmela, it is the freeing potential of the Asylum which for Kneehigh constitutes one of its most appealing traits.

2. Kneehigh

Kneehigh has described its new space, the Asylum, as the ‘beginning of a new adventure’, as ‘making a new phase’ and ‘a dream’ come true (Kneehigh 2010a: [1]). As Kneehigh prepared to pass its 30-year mark, its new phase recognisably encompasses more, however, than the construction of the company’s 13 year overdue mobile touring structure. Aside from owning its first performance space, the Asylum, Kneehigh is now also a company that has taken its repertoire to Broadway, that has had three shows, *Cymbeline, Brief Encounter* and *The Red Shoes* running simultaneously in Colombia, the West End and Off Broadway in New York, and that has showcased its latest West End production in an event full of glitz and glamour. With a six-month West End run initially planned, showing next door to the mega-musical *Les Misérables, The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* has been named by theatre impresario and West End investor Daniel Sparrow as ‘the new French musical on the block’ (CM 2011). The fact that a private investor invited
Kneehigh and Rice to conceive a West End production such as *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* unmistakably testifies to Kneehigh’s extremely successful building-based theatre career, even though *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* would prove to be a failed commercial investment.

Kneehigh’s mythology, put forward in the 2010 Asylum programme, is significantly different from the hit West End musical-producing company Sparrow wanted Kneehigh to be. No information is included in the programme about the company’s past and future (inter)national touring, and Shepherd questions if, 30 years after its establishment, Kneehigh has changed (Kneehigh 2010a: [1]). Paul Crewes, justifying the tent’s construction, puts the emphasis on Kneehigh’s past outdoor performances rather than on its present traditional theatre-based career, in remarking that through the Asylum ‘[w]e also wanted to get in from the rain’ (Kneehigh 2010a: [1]). It is certainly disputable, however, that the Kneehigh Asylum had been built in order for the company ‘to get in from the rain’, which was one of the main impulses behind the original project. In 1998, Tom Critcheley believed that a mobile structure could push Kneehigh’s popular theatre practice into the middle-scale and beyond the standard ghetto imposition on such performances in the British context (Critcheley 1998: 30; 38-40). Unlike in 1998, however, Kneehigh’s performances in 2010 are now well-established in middle-scale and even large-scale venues. The company’s large theatre spectatorship is no longer dependent as before on its landscape theatre projects (and by extension on the vagaries of the weather).

On Kneehigh’s decision to build at this point in the company’s history a 20 ton multiple dome tent, which is 12 metres high, 45 metres long and 30 metres wide (Kneehigh 2010a), Shepherd proudly points to
Kneehigh’s longstanding thoughtlessness: ‘[w]ell, never ones to be sensible – and passionately foolish – we’ve done it anyway!’ (Kneehigh 2010a). At this point in the company’s history and visibility, Shepherd’s argument regarding the ‘randomness’ of the Asylum seems appropriate. More than a stretch of the imagination is needed to classify the Asylum as a strategic financial decision or a particularly effective marketing strategy for a company like Kneehigh, already well-established in traditional performance venues and theatre circuits. While this project required Kneehigh to carry out years of campaigning, as well as huge investment from private, the company’s own revenues, it does not represent secure financial returns in the immediate future. When the Asylum opened, partnerships with the Bristol Old Vic and the RSC, and the context of the upcoming 2012 London Olympics, were mere possibilities (‘we intend…’; ‘we hope…’; ‘we are exploring many options…’; ‘we are in conversation with…’ (Kneehigh 2010a: [29]), and as such could not be considered the main reasons behind the project.

Unlike the uncertainty of future co-productions with ‘national’ institutions such as the Old Vic and the RSC, Kneehigh is firmly committed to bringing the Asylum back to its Cornish audiences: ‘[w]e start our journey in Cornwall and our planning for the next three years will see us return here. […] 2012 is no different to the first two years – we will return to Cornwall to show you what we’ve been up to’ (Kneehigh 2010a: [29], my emphasis). One of the main objectives behind Kneehigh’s original plans for the mobile touring structure in 1998 was accessing remote Cornish locations, a seemingly sensible aim for the largest, and largely rural, UK county, with just one middle-scale venue, the Hall for Cornwall, and this only from the late 1990s. In 1998, Critcheley fittingly pointed to ‘[t]he irony of developing a flexible
touring unit to enable longer runs in our own backyard’ (Critcheley 1998: 31). The MTS would allow for a desirably widespread location of performance sites, a diversity of locations that was instead accomplished through Kneehigh’s outdoor landscape theatre productions. Kneehigh’s landscape theatre productions took performances and audiences to such disparate sites as cliff-tops, beaches, dismantled industrial units and mines. As a result of Emma Rice more fully assuming the company’s artistic leadership in the early 2000s, and Bill Mitchell splitting from Kneehigh in 2005 in order to establish a large-scale outdoor theatre company, WildWorks, landscape theatre was no longer part of Kneehigh’s repertoire from 2005 onwards (Rubin 2009a: 10).

In addition to its large-scale productions, the other technique that Kneehigh has privileged in order to stay in touch with its Cornish audiences is its village hall productions. Kneehigh’s village hall performances, small productions devised purposefully by Kneehigh to be performed in village halls, featuring a maximum of three actors, were, along with its landscape theatre, particularly suited to overcoming Cornwall’s limitations in terms of performance spaces, even though village hall shows were economically disadvantageous for the company due to their restricted audience numbers. Taking Kneehigh’s latest successes into consideration, however, it is reasonable to expect that village hall shows, like landscape theatre before them, may soon be excluded from Kneehigh’s repertoire, becoming impractical for spatial, technological and/or financial reasons. If in the past the company purposefully devised village-hall shows, the increased running and logistic costs brought about by the overstretched touring of Kneehigh’s larger productions (different Kneehigh shows
have played on several continents simultaneously) make the sustainability of such small-scale events hard to foresee in the company’s future. To take just one example, the highly-successful Brief Encounter, in mixing live performance with film footage required large, state-of-the-art performance spaces. Neil Murray, the play’s scenic and costume designer, has testified to the difficulties of using a ‘screen made of elastic with slits in it allowing characters to emerge from and disappear into film’ (Rubin 2009b: 16). Murray confesses: ‘[i]t was a complete nightmare. […] I knew the process, but the making of it was a bit of a challenge’ (Rubin 2009b: 17).

The Asylum, with its flexible structure, seating up to a thousand and requiring only a few days and little manpower for its assembly (Kneehigh 2010a: [30]) may reactivate some of the advantages of Kneehigh’s landscape and village hall theatre productions for Cornish audiences. The Asylum offers Kneehigh the possibility of taking either a village hall or a large-sized performance to the most remote Cornish locations, benefiting from all the inbuilt amenities and suitable technology in the tent, as well as, obviously, protection from the rain. As stated in a fund-raising document for their 2010 Asylum season: ‘[t]he Asylum could be positioned at the bottom of the school field, a short journey for young people and teachers to work with artists in a controlled environment of their own creation’ (Shepherd 2005: 5). The company could, through the Asylum, overcome what has been described internally as a ‘Catch-22’ situation for the majority of its history (Shepherd 2002b); that is, Kneehigh’s need to tour out of Cornwall in order to keep performing. Shows such as The Riot, a 1999 co-production with the National Theatre, allowed Kneehigh to cater for both London-based and Cornish audiences. Most village hall
productions, however, have toured Cornwall alone, while larger co-productions have toured nationally and then played only in selected spaces in Cornwall, such as the Minack, the Eden Project or the Hall for Cornwall. Aside from increasing the potential of touring in Cornwall, the Asylum has the further advantage of serving very different (geographically and income-earning) audiences under the same ‘roof’.

In 2010, different audiences came together to attend the summer season of theatre events, a carefully-chosen list of Kneehigh ‘classics’: the revival of Darke’s successful text and Kneehigh’s first ever West End tour, *The King of Prussia*; Rice’s watershed *The Red Shoes*; and *Blast!*, authored by Kneehigh’s Carl Grose, a village hall hit and ‘possibly their funniest play’ (Trewhela 2010). Whether through the national publicity generated around the opening season or through the Kneehigh Connections programme that offered a thousand free or heavily subsidised tickets to targeted groups and individuals in Cornwall, faithful Cornish audiences and Cornish newcomers sat side-by-side with Kneehigh’s followers from further afield. Cornish-based productions such as *The King of Prussia* and *Blast!*, focusing on Cornish’s history with an address to contemporary Cornish politics and economics, were available to wider audiences than customary. The Kneehigh shows forming a part of the Asylum season would not all have been accessible to these different types of audience in their previous performance spaces, that is, village halls and traditional theatres. It is certainly a fact that in 2010 the repertoire chosen for the
Asylum, like other Kneehigh projects, forced some members of the public out of their intellectual and material comfort zones.\(^8\)

Control over its repertoire is but one of the freedoms owning a performance space has accrued to Kneehigh. In the plans for the 1998 structure it was expected that the MTS would ‘create a total environment in terms of image and atmosphere’ (Atlantic Consultants 1997: 44). Today, the Asylum’s peculiar design is not only visually striking but promises its visitors a well-rounded ‘Kneehigh experience’ all the way through. Rice believes that ‘the Asylum is driven by a passion to give ourselves and audiences a creative space in which everyone can feel free and inspired. A cross between a sanctuary and a madhouse – that’s what we’re after!’ (Cavendish 2010). Inside the Asylum, rather than the customary advertisement posters for upcoming shows by multiple companies that are found in traditional theatres, the spectators find testimonies to Kneehigh’s past: a miniature costume from *The Wooden Frock*; a video running extracts of Kneehigh’s performances; a boat featuring the names of ‘the people who put the wind in our sails’; and an exhibit of autographed fans (the object) by famous Kneehigh fans (enthusiasts), including signatories such as Kate Winslet. As Rice has stated, the audience is invited to ‘feel free and inspired’ as they visit Steve Tanner’s photo studio and Anna Marie Murphy’s Red Shoes stall. With Tanner, audience members can be photographed with a chalkboard answering the question ‘who I’d like

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\(^8\) Steve Purcell in *Popular Shakespeare* claims that Kneehigh’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* also pushed audience boundaries: ‘I overheard several audience members muttering angrily during the interval (‘It’s too far from the original Shakespeare’, said one) [...] A member of front of house staff told me afterwards that one outraged audience member had stormed out into the foyer during the show and physically threatened both the house manager and actor Mike Shepherd’ (Purcell 2009: 132).
to be’; the photographs are then projected in the box-office area. In the Red Shoes stall with Murphy, anyone can listen to poems featured in the collection ‘the road less travelled’, one of Kneehigh’s community projects to help single mothers, or can even have an impromptu, tailor-made story or poem created for them on the spot by Murphy. Entertainment acts featuring live music and dance pre- and post-performance, in addition to offering the spectators the opportunity to join in the singing and dancing, stretch the tent’s opening hours and the Asylum experience beyond the particular performance scheduled for the night.

Having total control over what happens and when it happens in the Asylum also means that Kneehigh can determine, unlike with their performances in traditional theatres, a democratisation of space. For its productions in the Asylum, Kneehigh decided that there should be no reserved seating, regardless of whether an audience member had paid 20 or ten pounds, got their ticket for free, got a complementary ticket as an invited artist or rich patron, or booked online months in advance. Everyone has to queue to then get to their seats and watch the performance; reserved seating is the exclusive privilege of the physically impaired. The free access to the tent provided by the company (tickets are collected only for the performance) may have increased the outreach potential of the whole event, even if ‘accidental spectators’ or random visitors were far less likely here, due to the Asylum’s out-of-the-way location, than in Foursight’s shopping centre-based performance, TCS.

Kneehigh may have organised the performance space and free events keeping in mind the equalising policy long-promoted by the company,
but it should be noted that Kneehigh’s total control of the space also applies to the framing of some aspects of the theatre experience as a consumer experience. Kershaw (2001) has observed the ways in which traditional and commercial theatres gear the audience’s experience as an act of consumption, often transforming spectators into customers. Kershaw claims: ‘[a]s a *customer* of the theatre, the audience member ironically had a growing number of performance-related commodities to attend to, as the 1980s witnessed a remarkable proliferation of theatre sales lines: T-shirts, badges, hats, posters, pennants, playscripts, cassettes of show music, videos of the making of the show’ (2001: 143).

The Asylum, like other traditional performance spaces, associates the theatre experience with other businesses. With its t-shirts, CDs and request forms for the company’s book, Kneehigh’s front of house merchandise stall offers to the spectators similar items to those sold in major theatre houses or at mega-musical performance events. Unlike the ‘performance plus meal’ deals offered in many traditional theatres, however, and in association with independent Cornish businesses, only locally-produced food can be purchased from the two food stalls in the Asylum, extending previous Kneehigh experiences, as with *Wild Jam* (2002) and the *Three Islands Project* (2005), in which the company promoted local food and drink as part of the performance event (Kneehigh 2002a; Kneehigh Theatre and Wildworks 2005: 7 and 12). The company has also successfully managed to keep the picnic habit built into their outdoor performances, as several people have brought their own food and drinks to share in the Asylum.

The multiple audience and staging possibilities offered by the Asylum, as discussed in this chapter, position the venue halfway between a traditional indoor space and an outdoor performance experience. Gil
Gilliam from The Dome Company, and the creator of the Asylum, describes his structure as a sort of hybrid between a traditional theatre building and a tent: ‘[t]his portable structure has been given the same depth of consideration as a bricks and mortar theatre. The big difference is that it’s more versatile, more flexible, than a fixed theatre. In essence, it’s a kit of demountable parts’ (Kneehigh 2010a: [31]). The Asylum’s major advantage is that it can adapt itself to each performance and make the relationship between actors and the public more fluid than in traditional theatre spaces. However, it also subjects the audience to the vagaries of weather when going to the toilet and parking. Even the performance can be affected, with shows having to be cancelled when repeated rain and the risk of flooding make the space unusable, as happened with some performances during the 2010 Asylum summer season.

More democratic overall than most traditional performance spaces, the Asylum was also considerably less accessible during its Cornish run. Reaching it by public transport was difficult and obliged commuters to walk a fair distance. Mackintosh (1993: 161) has warned that found space may not work as well for the finder as for the audience. Mackintosh further questions if placing a performance in a found space would not be like viewing it in a traditional theatre, but without its comforts. This could be said to have been the case with the 2010 Asylum season, during some members of the audience complained of being disappointed in their theatrical expectations by the uncomfortable amenities on offer. For all its so-called ‘madhouse’ experience, the distinct audience and performance areas are as separate, regulated and controlled as in traditional theatre spaces, with the audience only allowed into the performance area during the show, and
backstage access being altogether restricted, except for Steve Tanner’s photo studio.

In conclusion, the Asylum might well be rightly advertised as unique, even despite the existence of the famous *Spiegeltents*, which have been in use for almost a century for theatre and other performances around the world. The major attraction of using a tent for theatre performances may be that it holds none of the elitist weight described by Carlson as intrinsic to traditional theatres (Carlson 1989: 205). The ghosts superimposed on tents are most likely to be perceived as popular entertainment events, such as music concerts and circus performances. The Asylum’s democratic potential is perhaps indisputable, bringing Kneehigh significantly closer to the ‘non-elitist international theatre of the future’ desired by Shepherd (Kent 2010: 24). That is, at least while Kneehigh makes use of the Asylum in the county of Cornwall, runs its Connections scheme offering heavily subsidised or free tickets for deprived locals, and, in particular, if its future plans to run workshops for schools in Cornwall come into being. The tent’s significant overall cost, its weather and season restrictions and lacking acoustics, nevertheless, make the Asylum, as an effective travelling theatre performance venue, a lot harder to vouch for, especially when considering the multiple and well-resourced traditional theatre buildings spread out across the UK. If this is the case, does this alone not make the Asylum an expendable (albeit very expensive) structure in the contemporary British theatrical context? Disparate views on the Asylum (and a degree of criticism of the structure) constitute in fact one of the main changes to the 2010 revival of Grose’s *Blast!* in the Asylum opening season.
i) *Blast!* in the Asylum

The 2010 Asylum Summer Season revived a village hall play from 2007, *Blast!*, first directed by Shepherd, and directed in 2010 by Rice. The text had been written by Kneehigh’s Grose after a research and development period collecting ‘the kernel of the historical issues’, but during which ‘lots was swept away’ too, as Kneehigh only ‘wanted the interesting bits’ (Mitten 2009). Although *Blast!* is a highly selective account of Cornish history, lasting roughly 90 minutes, when he directed the play in 2007 Shepherd admitted his surprise on discovering how little he had known: ‘[w]hy did I not know about Cornish history? It was because I was taught the English version of events’ (Kneehigh 2010a: [8]). Even though Kneehigh playfully warns the audience in the 2007 leaflets for the production that *Blast!* is ‘a story told by three idiots’, presumably not to be taken seriously, the separate identities of coloniser and colonised are nevertheless very carefully established here. In Chapter Five, I will analyse in some detail how the English and the Cornish are differently characterised in this play, and how the Cornish community is set against English exploitation. To give one example only, in Grose’s play, Chough and Stuggs denounce how the well-off English when relocating to Cornwall push out the local population from their native land through a process of gentrification that makes the coastal, and progressively more affluent areas, largely unaffordable for the Cornish.

In this section, however, I am more interested in drawing on the differences between the 2007 and 2010 productions in order to assess
how the Asylum permeated Kneehigh’s latest adaptation. The basic plot and the historical events on which the story draws remain the same in the 2007 and 2010 productions. An Englishman, Colin Pickering, who has retired to Cornwall with his wife Janet, addresses the audience and welcomes them to his lecture. Before he can make too much progress, two Cornish terrorists hijack the stage and warn the audience and Pickering that they have a bomb on them, timed to explode in one minute. By mistake, however, the timer has been set for an hour, and left with time to kill, Pickering and the two Cornish terrorists role-play or simply narrate significant events and characters from Cornish history, while the audience simultaneously learns more about Pickering’s biography and those of the Cornish terrorists, one of whom, we will find out later is not so Cornish after all. In the end, there is no escape, and the play concludes with an elegiac cry for remarkable Cornish men and women, past and future, while blackout and the sound of an explosion close the story. Although the play’s structure and content remain generally the same in both productions, there are some noticeable changes in the 2010 production. In 2010, the intermission is removed, and two new characters are added, Roger and Roy, local councillors for housing. In 2007, the two terrorists, Trevor Stuggs and Tracy Chuff, are a heterosexual couple, but in 2010 the characters are Chough and Stuggs, both male, and the theme of unrequited homosexual love is introduced into the story. Additionally, and more importantly, the beginning of the play and the terrorists’ motive are presented differently in both productions, and in the 2010 adaptation there are constant references to the Asylum and to Kneehigh, making it meta-theatrical and self-referential.

9 Grose kindly provided access to both unpublished scripts from 2007 (Grose 2007) and 2010 (Grose 2010). I watched Blast! on 27 August 2010.
Performed two years after the London bombings, the 2007 production more directly references the real events of 7/7. In 2007, the play begins with Pickering welcoming the spectators to his lecture on ‘The Complete History of the Cornish Hedges of West Penwith’. Prior to this, however, Pickering had carefully surveyed the audience members with a beeping device, having nevertheless in the process failed to notice the ‘[t]wo highly suspicious characters with rucksacks’ (Grose 2007: 1), the Cornish terrorists. As he introduces his lecture, Pickering addresses the audience and apologises for the heightened security measures put in place, but adds that ‘in this day and age, one can never be too careful’ (Grose 2007: 1). Pickering’s surveillance at the beginning of the production alludes to the increased security checks and outspread public alarm that followed the US, Spanish and UK terrorist attacks.\(^\text{10}\) This is particularly noticeable in the 2007 production, in which Grose makes the Cornish terrorists pose as innocent conference attendees. In the 2010 production, however, Pickering is already on stage when the audience enters; no security checks are carried out, and Pickering’s line on the dangers facing people this day and age is omitted. In 2010, terrorists Chough and Stuggs make their entrance by coming from the outside of the performance space, rather than having posed as members of the public attending what is now Pickering’s ‘Thirty Years of the Kneehigh Players’ lecture. However, the terrorist plot, albeit differently formulated in the 2007 and 2010 productions, remains central to both productions.

\(^{10}\) The idea of ethnic separatist terrorists taking over a performance space could in addition bring to mind the tragic hostage takeover of a Moscow theatre on 23 October 2002 by Chechen separatists.
The 2010 audience is still able to detect and decode the terrorist trope and its similarities to the real, English born and bred bombers of 7/7. In *Blast!*, Chough and Stuggs are, just like the 7/7 bombers, English citizens who have become radicalised and who, out of personal desperation, resort to violence to make their voices heard. In this case, their cause is the oppression and overthrow of Cornish identity by the English who have, over the centuries, brought a particular, grim fate to the Cornish nation. As Stuggs puts it: ‘History. Literature. Language. All sentenced to Death’ (Grose 2007: 17; Grose 2010: 36).\(^{11}\) Even if one accepts, as Kent has claimed, that *Blast!* portrays ‘both cultural and political [Cornish] nationalism more than any other Kneehigh Theatre production’ (2010: 755), one is still left with unanswered questions regarding the differences between the 2007 and 2010 productions. Why has Grose insisted on a ‘suspension of belief’ (rather than disbelief) in his meta-theatrical 2010 revival while simultaneously taking the terrorist portrayal a step back from the real events in London? These questions become all the more relevant when considering that the 2010 audience is formed of people from all over the UK as well as US visitors, who would presumably have a deeper insight or interest in the issue of terrorism than the Cornwall-based village hall public from 2007.

Both productions, despite their comic register, can be seen as significantly provocative in their empathetic siding with the Cornish

\(^{11}\) In his book, Kent claims it were such factors as its early integration into the British state, the disappearance of the Cornish language, the non-existence of a separate church and its process of Anglicisation, that have contributed to Cornwall’s ‘unresolved status’ (is it a celtic nation or an English county?) (see 2010: 32-33). The marginal position occupied by Cornwall within Celtic studies and the Celtic political cause would therefore be explained by the fact that ‘the territory is always considered of minority interest compared to the nation-states (and definers of modern Celticity) of Ireland, Scotland and Wales’ (2010: 30).
terrorists against English oppression and exploitation. It can nevertheless be argued that the further Blast! presents its Cornish terrorists from the events in London, the more this production addresses the globalised threat of terrorism, rather than its particular British circumstances, thus becoming less uncomfortable for its audience. In her article, ‘Theatre, performance and the “war on terror”: ethical and political questions arising from British theatrical responses to war and terrorism’, this argument is used by Jenny Hughes to justify the differences in a number of theatrical productions exploring terrorism, prior to and post the London bombings. For Hughes, the closeness to home of the 7/7 attack prevented practitioners from that point to address terrorism, as they had done before, as a globalised, fabricated threat by corrupt or self-promoting politicians and fanatics:

The performance activities of the National Theatre and antiwar groups alike had an identifiable object to oppose, mock, critically or creatively engage with: George W. Bush, Tony Blair, greedy capitalists, Osama bin Laden, terrorists, the distorted perspectives of those who constructed a case for war. The ‘lads from Dewsbury and Leeds’ cannot be opposed in the same way, just as the fundamentalists resisting the US occupation of Iraq cannot be supported. This tension might explain the stark contrast between the surge of activity in London theatre in the lead-up to the war on Iraq and the relative silence after 7 July 2005. The proximity of the attack and attackers in this case, its apparent irrationality, its terrible destructivity, and the realisation that the perpetrator as well as target of this act was us, ourselves – are all debilitating, and highlight the need for a more complex, multilayered response exposing the limitations of existing theatre and performance forms and practices. (Hughes 2007: 161)

One could consider the changes made to the 2010 Blast! as either resulting from the desire to make the performance less ‘debilitating’ for
the differently-constituted Asylum audience, or, simply, as a response to the increased time-gap separating it from the 7/7 events in London. Rather than its portrayal of the terrorists, however, it is the self-referential streak introduced into the 2010 Blast! that makes it ‘a more complex, multilayered’ performance than the original in 2007.

Of the three plays produced by Kneehigh as part of the 2010 Asylum season, only Blast! focuses on where it is being staged. While in the 2007 production there is no mention of the performance space, in 2010, the Asylum is referred to several times, as well as the added comments on the mechanisms demanded by any theatrical performance and on Kneehigh’s history. The addition of self-referential lines to the 2010 production favours, I would claim, a problematisation of Kneehigh’s (and the Asylum’s) role in the dispute between English and Cornish cultures. In 2007, the Englishman Pickering is oblivious to Kneehigh’s existence, and so are the terrorists: there is not one mention of Kneehigh in the story. Despite not being a native to the region, in the 2007 production Pickering lectures to a Cornish audience on the Cornish landscape. His lecture is entitled ‘The Complete History of the Cornish Hedges of West Penwith’, but in 2010 Pickering’s field of Cornish ‘expertise’ is now Kneehigh. In this production of Blast!, unlike in 2007, there are multiple references to Kneehigh’s history and to the Asylum itself.

The spectators are led in the 2010 Blast! to identify the Asylum, in McAuley’s terminology, as the ‘physical space’ where the performance happens and the ‘fictional place’ in which the storyline develops. In Blast!, the stage space and the fictional place merge into one through the characters’ acknowledgement of their physical surroundings. The
Asylum is described in the production as ‘a geodesic dome’ by Pickering, a ‘wonderful new structure’ by Roy, and ‘a tent that looks like a giant bra’ by Stuggs. All characters use body language (pointing and looking around the tent), demonstrative adjectives (‘this’) and prepositions of place (‘here’) in order to actualise the spatial reference as an integral part of the fictional story. In addition to focusing on the Asylum as a performance space, there are references to Kneehigh’s history and to the fictional nature of theatrical performance. Pickering, showing off his ‘expertise’ to the audience, talks of his meeting with Shepherd and ‘Emma Nice’, and identifies the set on the stage as belonging to the ‘Red Socks’ show. The stage set of *The Red Shoes* is, despite Stuggs’s protests (‘who designed these?’) the one used by the terrorists and Pickering for their historical accounts and interactions on stage, while the red shoes themselves are actually found and discarded by Chough when looking for props for the terrorists’ history lesson.

The audience is encouraged to disbelieve, as *Blast!*’s characters identify the make-believe aspects of the presentation space of *The Red Shoes*, which, along with some additional props and costumes, integrates *Blast!*’s presentational space. This effect is also accomplished in the play through the constant interaction played out on stage between *Blast!*’s fictional characters and the Kneehigh sound technician, Andy from Liverpool. Chough and Stuggs verbalise the music cues, telling Andy when to put on a song and when to cut it, while Chough’s prearranged but unlikely romantic requests, much to the distress of Stuggs, add to the play’s comic effect. Such devices are used by the 2010 production as a means of emphasising the fictional nature of the event, and of enhancing the spectators’ consciousness of a theatre space in its technical elements but also in its regulatory systems. At one point in the
production, when the terrorists are looking for props to be used in their storytelling, Pickering tries to change their minds by warning them: ‘[y]ou can’t use those costumes! They belong to The Kneehigh Players!’ (Grose 2010: 12). On one of the performance nights, Pickering’s remark becomes even more prescriptive: ‘I was expressly told not to touch that’ (Kneehigh 2010b). However, the constant references to Kneehigh and the Asylum do more than bring about an increased awareness of the theatre event, with its binding logistics and regulations. The most important change brought about by the 2010 production is in its placing of Kneehigh’s theatre identity as ambiguous or in-between.

On a superficial level, *Blast!* draws on the divide between an impoverished and exploited native Cornish population and the rich and exploitative English. In the past invaders and colonisers, the English are now presented as taking over Cornwall, either by retiring there, like Pickering, or as one of the many tourists that visit the county every year, making it the ‘land of over-priced fish dishes’ (Grose 2010: 8). It is no accident, I would claim, that most references in the play to Kneehigh, called by Causley ‘Cornwall’s National Theatre’ (Rice and Shepherd 2010: [17]), come from Pickering, even though he often gets it comically wrong. While this could be read as just another example of England’s symbolic appropriation of Cornish culture and identity, Chough’s question to Pickering about whether Kneehigh ‘are still going’ complicates such a reading. The local Cornish character is presented as knowing nothing about Kneehigh’s current work, while the native Englishman has become, in the play, the company’s ‘official’ historian. One can see here Grose’s willing admission that Kneehigh’s claim to a Cornish identity can only be partially accepted, in view of the company’s current national and international touring profile.
Regarding the Asylum, Pickering, Roger and Roy are all very complimentary of the new structure. Stuggs, however, dismisses it as ‘a tent that looks like a giant bra’ (Grose 2010: 46). Rather than just a difference of opinion, this could further point to Kneehigh’s guilty admission to building a very expensive but expendable tent structure: a particularly important admission, considering that in the 2010 production a scene is added in which Chough questions Roger and Roy, local housing councillors, about how he could ever get enough money to put down a deposit for a house of his own. Roy replies that Chough should get his parents to contribute, like he, Roy, has done for his own daughter. Baffled, Chough tells him his parents are in much the same situation. Unlike Chough, his parents and most of the impoverished native population of Cornwall, Kneehigh has been able to acquire its own home, but this would have never been possible without ACE support and the generous contributions of its rich (inter)national supporters. This signifies a paradox in the company’s history that cannot be ignored, even when considering that Kneehigh’s Cornish audiences may in the future benefit considerably from the Asylum, its summer season and the Connections programme; no longer needing to ask, as does Stuggs, if Kneehigh is still going, they could potentially see it for themselves. As with Kneehigh’s concern for their local community and non-traditional theatre audiences, which were strong reasons behind the Asylum project, Foursight are experienced in promoting accessibility through their productions and a particular connection to site, and TCS is a particularly good example of this.
3. Foursight and TCS

*TCS* is defined on Foursight’s website as a site-specific project that encourages the participation of the local community (Foursight 2010). The spaces in which the performance is set in 2008 and 2009 are nevertheless significantly different: a disused shopping unit in West Bromwich and an empty shop at the heart of the city centre’s Mander Centre respectively. In fact, the meanings of *TCS* are changed, or become ‘something else’ (Kaye 2000: 2) when comparing the 2008 to the 2009 production. *TCS* sets itself up to be ‘a battle cry on behalf of the Black Country’s corner shop community and [to] give life to their stories’ (Foursight 2010). I will argue that *TCS’s* emphasis on community and place as ‘organically social’, quoting Augé’s definition of anthropological place (Augé 1995: 94), is used as a direct contrast or confrontation with the non-place that the site-specific production occupies, an empty chain store, one of the most powerful symbols of the current global recession.

Augé argues that non-places are places created with a particular purpose in mind, which he identifies as those associated with transport, transit, commerce and leisure. Augé sets in opposition anthropological places to non-places. He asserts: ‘[a]s anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality’ (Augé 1995: 94). By ‘organically social’, Augé means a place shaped by the individual and the local, ‘that is the unformulated rules of living know-

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how’ (Augé 1995: 101). In contrast, ‘non-places’ are shaped by anonymity, regulatory mechanisms and temporary identities. For Augé, the ‘non-place creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers’ (Augé 1995: 103), but as this shared identity is not based on relationships or connectivity, this heightens solitude and isolation.

Foursight and BCT’s TCS overlaps the idea of non-place with place. The corner shop is constructed in the production as an anthropological place, a meeting point for the local community, as a family establishment, where people are addressed by their names and where relationships overcome the economic sphere. When director Frances Land talks about TCS it is very much these aspects of interpersonal relations that she describes:

Corner shops will do everything from looking after your cat to staying open late if they know you’re coming in for something. People go in there when they’re lonely. They go in for advice. The shopkeeper will pop across the road because Mrs So-and-So’s ill and can’t get out of the house. It’s the hub of the whole community. (quoted in Logan 2008)

Land’s comment emphasises the sense of both individuality and relatedness associated with the corner shop. The relationships established at the corner shop are personal because the customers have a name that is known behind the till. The people that go into the corner shop and the people behind the counter establish personal interactions: someone is ill, someone is out, someone needs advice. Through this focus on the personal and communal, TCS perpetrates its attack on the neoliberal system and the non-places that are an integral part of it.
It is by contrast and opposition rather than direct address that TCS criticises neoliberalism. Land’s characterisation of the corner shop appears to have been situated as an oppositional response to the solitude and similitude the non-place evokes. Augé states:

The passenger through non-places retrieves his identity only at Customs, at the tollbooth, at the check-out counter. Meanwhile he obeys the same code as others, receives the same messages, responds to the same entreaties. The space of non-place creates *neither singular identity nor relations*; only solitude, and similitude. (Augé 1995: 103, my emphasis)

‘Singular identity and relations’ are constructed within TCS through communities’ involvement with the project and in direct contrast to the site: a large, disused retail store in West Bromwich, and an empty Sportsworld shop in the Mander (shopping) Centre in Wolverhampton.

In West Bromwich, the shopping unit taken for the production of TCS, although part of the Queen’s Square shopping centre was an autonomous shop, separated from the main shopping precinct. As the space was due to be demolished and was not attached to any surrounding shops, Foursight was able to use it without any restrictions whatsoever. In addition, acting as the meeting point (and box office) for the West Bromwich production was The Public, a building that although designating itself ‘as a venue in which to do business, hold community activities, host performances and events or just relax’ (The Public) is predominantly a cultural space. This also reinforces the idea that the audience to the site-specific West Bromwich production would be more of the ‘the paying, knowing audience’ (Wilkie 2002: 153).
The shop in the Mander Centre, situated at the heart of the shopping district and in the centre of Wolverhampton, on the other hand, offered Foursight the possibility of accessing an audience that would not intentionally have attended the production. Realising the potential of their new space, Foursight planned to make the pre-production stages of the performance accessible to the Mander Centre’s shoppers, as this would have been an effective way of attracting a new audience to the performance. However, this turned out not to be possible due to the rules and regulations imposed by the shopping centre. In its blog Foursight states:

[O]ur original intention was that the public would be able to come into the unit, to a viewing area, and see it as it gradually developed from an empty space to the newly created set. The noise restrictions make this unlikely now. Most of the building is being done downstairs to keep the noise limited, then the team will bring it upstairs and put it into place. (Johnstone 2009)

The noise levels were only one of the restrictions imposed on Foursight as a condition of using an empty shop inside the Mander Centre. The company was also restricted in terms of where they could exhibit promotional materials, only permitted to place flyers inside the shopping centre, and limited in terms of when and how they could get access to the space. They were only allowed to bring things in at certain times, and the production team members were required to always wear identification tags. The space was given to Foursight for free, but its use did come at a price:

No sound must escape and disturb the shoppers. It was one of the restrictions on using the space, that we only found out about quite late, but in a way, we should have realised it
earlier – you never see shop fitters at work in the normal run of things. When the shopping centre is open, you can’t be banging and crashing about and destroying the shopping experience of the public. (Johnstone 2009)

At the pre-production stages of TCS, the production team members were reminded of the limiting regulations that rule non-places. As Augé points out, ‘the user of the non-place is in contractual relations with it (or with the powers that govern it). He is reminded, when necessary, that the contract exists’ (Augé 1995: 101). Foursight was warned that they could not ‘destroy the shopping experience’. The company was also required to comply with other regulations of non-places, such as the constant identity checks. Land recalls:

the production team had to be much more careful. You always had to bear that in mind there are restrictions in terms of how you are to behave in a sense you are right in the centre of the shopping centre. Security wise we all had sort of tags and things like that so people could identify who we were, you know, these random strange people wandering round at night and things… (Land 2010)

Augé claims that the users of non-places are always required to prove their identity, but simultaneously non-places make social relations impossible, as, although named, the user remains anonymous and alone: ‘[i]n a way the user of the non-place is always required to prove his innocence. […] Here words hardly count any longer. There will be no individualization (no right to anonymity) without identity checks’ (Augé 1995: 102).

The restrictions imposed by the shopping unit impinged on Foursight’s original democratic intentions. Foursight’s production may seem to
have been compromised by the rules imposed by neoliberalism. It is my argument, nevertheless, that while TCS was limited by these regulations it still manages to highlight the negative aspects of non-places and consumer culture. Foursight’s production does this through the superimposition of the discourse of the local and the communal (presenting and concretising the corner shop as a meeting space) onto a non-place, like the Mander Centre. In this 2009 production, small corner shops were created in and partitioned the large area of the disused Sportsworld shop in the Mander Centre. The audience was divided into groups and took part in a promenade performance, visiting the small shops and lounges. The audience members were crammed into temporary seating, where physical contact was unavoidable and the spectator was made a part of the performance itself, either through direct participation (exceptionally) or by direct address (frequently). The intimate spaces and the familiar tone of story-telling contrast with the huge commercial spaces of the shopping centre, just feet away, spaces crowded with people, loud music and/or loudspeaker announcements, where ‘solitude [is] made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others’ (Augé 1995: 103).

There is an experience of contrast between the ‘host’ (the space where the production is set), the shopping centre (the non-place) and the ‘ghost’ (the fictional place the production constructs), the corner shop, portrayed as the centre of the community and an ethnographic place. Cathy Turner, building on the distinction between host and ghost used by the directors of Welsh performance company Brith Gof, Mike Pearson and Cliff McLucas, emphasises the tension ‘inbuilt in’ the rewriting of sites: ‘[t]he host’, including its other previous and current occupations, can offer resistance to this rewriting. It remains distinct
from the ‘ghost’ and cannot be ultimately identified with it. The ‘ghost’ is transgressive, defamiliarizing and incoherent’ (Turner: 374). In TCS, the transgressive aspects of the ghost (small space versus big, human contact versus recorded messages or till instructions, intimate group versus crowd) are fundamental parts of the performance that is experienced by the spectator on site, rather than inbuilt into the text of the performance.

When referring to the contrasting experiences of the spectator inside the shopping centre and as part of the performance of TCS, Land talks about an inbuilt resistance:

In the day, it was a hustle and bustle. They came into our space, the shutter went down and they were in a completely different world. And I think that was an exciting contrast [...]. At night time it was different because people came in into this really bizarre, surreal space… [...] [a] deserted kind of world [...] then they would go into this warm, lively, vibrant space. [...] People didn’t seem to want to go from the space. [...] It was a bit like going back out into that world of the shopping centre. People never did just leave. They always hung around after the performance and so the exhibition was there and people could go and look at that. But I think it was…it was funny… it was like …a reluctance to leave it. (Land 2010)

Performed in the afternoon and during the evening, TCS conveyed different experiences of the shopping centre to its audience. During the daytime there was a contrast between the flow of people and noise inside the centre and the intimacy of the performance itself, while at night the performance emphasised the meaninglessness of the shopping centre’s spaces outside business hours.
TCS allowed for the possibility of a break in the mechanisms of possession and role-playing that affect the users of non-places: ‘[s]ubjected to a gentle form of possession, to which he surrenders himself with more or less talent or conviction, he tastes for a while – like anyone who is possessed – the passive joys of identity loss and the more active pleasure of role-playing’ (Augé 1995: 103). The spectators’ reluctance to leave the performance space and return to the shopping centre signals a disruption of the pleasurable experience of possession and role-playing, by exposing the emptiness and solitude at the core of that same experience.

The criticism of the shopping centre is all the more striking as it comes about at a time when the neoliberal system is being questioned. The 2008 recession brought about a wave of criticism of the mechanisms of the free market and in particular of the financial system. The shopping centre, with its plethora of corporate and globalised brands, can be taken to be a metonym for the globalised economy. If one takes into consideration that the most powerful symbols of the current recession have been the failures of the banking system (and the nationalisation of banks), the repossession of homes, the folding of companies (including chain retailers such as Woolworths) and the closing down of many city centre shops, the production of TCS, by setting itself inside an empty large retail unit, establishes a direct connection to the current economic crises through its site-specific location. The 2009 production becomes particularly topical because it is set in Wolverhampton, a city that went from being fourth in the national league of cities with the most empty shops to first on the list in 2010.
It would be limiting, however to consider TCS for its disruptive potential alone. Land, when asked in an interview if Foursight through the West Bromwich production ‘inspires its audience to storm out after the show and sabotage the development opposite’ is doubtful: ‘Incitement to corporate violence? Could we be done for that?’ (Logan 2008). In comparison to other shopping-centre sited theatre productions, TCS may even seem rather tame in its critique. The Space Highjackers theatre company, for example, have produced the A-Z of Retail Trickers, a devised and unauthorised walking tour of the shopping centre, where audiences are encouraged to recognise the hidden mechanisms that encourage consumption. While some performances of A-Z were uneventful, in others, such as in the Bull Ring Centre, Birmingham, at the end of May 2004, the performers and spectators were escorted outside by the building’s security guards (Govan et al 2007: 130).

Contrary to the guerrilla techniques of the Space-Highjackers, the production of TCS in the Mander Centre could not possibly have taken place without the cooperation of the shopping centre’s management. TCS was part of a larger project, Art In The Centre, promoted by the Wolverhampton Art Gallery, which, working in collaboration with privately-owned galleries and university students, brought art exhibitions and workshops to three empty shops in the Mander Centre, donated as free exhibition space by the shopping centre. As a performance, however, TCS required for logistic reasons that Foursight liaise more closely with the Mander Centre’s administration than any of the other art events. Land herself insists on the crucially beneficial role played by the shopping centre’s manager, Chris Grundy, who facilitated resources for the project, such as printing up leaflets and
assuring the cooperation of BB’s Coffee&Muffins (opposite the Sportsworld space) as a meeting point for TCS production.

In addition to the cooperation (but also restrictive relations) established between the shopping centre and Foursight, it could be argued that corner shops are rather simplistically addressed by the production. The straightforward promotion of the corner shop as an important focus for the community is held up without a critical acknowledgment of the overriding disintegration of social relations in the current consumer culture, which does not leave the original role of the corner shop unblemished. Performances such as Michael Landy’s *Break Down*, for example, acknowledge more clearly the performer’s own participation and powerlessness in today’s globalised culture. Landy emphasises his own role as a consumer, as well as forcing the spectators to ponder hidden aspects of consumerism such as the conveyor belt. In his performance, Landy brought into the former C&A shop on Oxford Street, London, a conveyer belt of destruction, through which the performer broke down the totality of his 7,227 possessions. Jen Harvie attributes a political potential to Landy’s performance, claiming that it is ‘an affecting metonymic sacrificial act that can function strategically as a disrupting politicised performance or performative protest that challenges consumer’s capitalism’s hegemony’ (Harvie 2006: 72). While Landy’s disrupting politicised performance rests in the effectiveness of the metonymy the artist builds, TCS’s disruptive potential is attained through the inscribing (or haunting) of the non-place with the memories of places and meaningful social relations.

With TCS, much like Graeme Miller’s *Linked*, ‘[a]lthough the work is rigorously sited – the location is the meaning – the site is absent’
(Lavery 2005: 149). In Miller’s work, the spectator walks along the motorway listening to the interwoven recorded narratives of the former neighbourhood’s inhabitants with the help of a transistor. The space that is talked about both is and is not there. People used to live along that road, but the houses talked about can now only be imagined by the listeners. With Foursight’s production, the corner shops evoked by the performance narrative are reproduced through a purpose-built set, but the site where the performance actually takes place is a large retail shop, and it is only through contrast and absence that TCS gains its full significance. In Miller’s Linked, the spectator (or witness) is invited to share the real stories of those that the London M11 has uprooted, Miller being one of them. With TCS, the audience or witness shares the real stories of local shop owners, many of whom were put out of business by large retail supermarkets such as Tesco, situated on the floor just above the performance.

Like Miller’s production, TCS also ‘re-appropriates space (the space of encounter and dialogue) from the desert of non-space’, which was ‘the isolation caused by cars on a motorway’ in Linked, and the solitude of the shopping experience in TCS (Lavery 2005: 159). However, where TCS goes further, than the site-specific examples mentioned above, is in that it engages with the non-site itself and its frequent users. It is this contradiction between assimilation (complying with the shopping centre’s rules) and resistance (pointing to another way of living) that heightens the work’s political potential. TCS has the potential to engage with the routine customers of the shopping centre and Wolverhampton residents, who can freely visit the set and exhibition on performance days, in addition to benefiting from a considerable reduction in the price of the performance. Land claims:
People are naturally nosy specially the people who know Wolverhampton and knew what that shop was before. They want to know what is going on. So I think... it was better to let people come to you. And they were hugely mixed [visiting the set], you know, it was a real mixture of young and old ... just family groups or just a group of young lads out for the *craic*. [...] That’s the joy of taking work out of a dedicated theatre space and going into a centre. You are pulling together people from such very different kind of backgrounds. (Land 2010)

The Mander Centre production of TCS would not have been possible without the cooperation of the shopping centre. However, while the binding rules of capitalist consumerism forced the production to be quiet and work within certain restrictions, TCS also manages to bend (or perhaps spill over from) the massification and anonymity of its surroundings. BB’s Coffee&Muffins, a franchise café, changed its opening hours because of the production, and provided information to customers about the performance. Like the corner shops the show draws upon, BB’s Coffee&Muffins personalised its service, taking into account the specific circumstances, and often providing information about the production and pointing people in the right direction. Such activities did not necessarily translate into extra revenue for the café, and took it, even if only momentarily, just as with the performance’s spectators, outside the market economy and into the familiarity of community spirit.

If not itself a community theatre company, the community spirit is all the same at core of Estefânia, EM’s new performance space, which embodies many of the traits that could be found in the non-traditional venues where the historical alternative theatre performed.
4. Escola de Mulheres

Of the four companies forming part of this study, EM is the only one that has so far not engaged with site-specific performance. While site has not been a part of EM’s creative process, location has nevertheless been an important aspect of the company’s history. In 2010, for the first time in 15 years, the company leased and refurbished its own performance and rehearsal spaces, a feat that put an end to long-running concerns when staging independent productions, as opposed to the company’s co-productions with some of Lisbon’s main theatres. Regarding the issue of space in EM’s adaptations of English language plays, the ‘foreignness’ of the fictional spaces is complicated in performance by signs that both invite and disengage concrete associations. The added or withdrawn geographical elements open up the possibility for establishing connections with aspects of Portuguese culture, which are directly alluded to during the performance, and, therefore, forfeit the specific associations of space and time established in the original text. Caryl Churchill’s Sétimo Céu (Cloud Nine) is a recent example of such complex geographical associations, to which I will return later (pp. 216-222).

The performance spaces most recently used by EM for its independent productions, Comuna and, from 2010, EM’s own home, Estefânia, in terms of their leasing conditions and their geographical and cultural signifiers are important for understanding the company’s identity and its status in Lisbon’s cultural scene. Equally, Sétimo Céu, a co-production with the Teatro Municipal (repertoire theatre) Constantino Nery, points to the interface of EM’s work between alternative and mainstream. In a review, Pedro Quadrio (2007) divides EM’s work into
two types, according to the type of text and where it is staged. For Quadrio, EM’s work covers chamber productions of Portuguese texts and large-scale productions of foreign texts. Quadrio’s division, albeit somewhat of an oversimplification, does encapsulate one of the paradoxes at the core of this theatre company. EM’s repertoire includes co-productions staged at major theatres, such as the National Theatre Dona Maria II and Teatro S. Luiz, with large casts and resources. EM’s successful co-production deals with national and repertory theatres reflect the recognition owed to its artistic director, Fernanda Lapa, the only member of the company who directs such productions. Alongside these large co-productions, EM’s own productions, more often than not, are theatre on a shoestring, performed in studio spaces and/or outside the capital. For years, EM has lived with uncertainty around its rehearsal and performance spaces, depending on the goodwill of other theatre companies. In 2002, for example, EM’s production of Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *Novas Anatomias* (*New Anatomies*) was interrupted by the Lisbon City Hall’s decision to close down A Capital, the building where the performance was taking place, for health and safety reasons (Serôdio, 2002).

The studio space in Comuna’s Casarão Cor-de-Rosa was the last space used by EM for one of its own productions before Estefânia was refurbished and adopted as the company’s performance space. Casarão Cor-de-Rosa’s historical importance and geographical prominence does not, however, impact on the unconventional nature of the theatre space.

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13 Not all foreign texts produced by EM have been in large-scale venues. Adshead’s *Dentadas* (*Bites*) and Upton’s *Marcas de Sangue* (*Bruises*), for example, were both presented in the studio space of Comuna. In addition, this categorisation does not take into account EM’s applied theatre project *Histórias da Vida* (*Life Stories*) or the commissions of works such as *Lisboa Fala e Fá-lo* (*Lisbon Speaks and Does it*).
Casarão Cor-de-Rosa is located in an important part of the city (Praça de Espanha), close to another of the city’s main independent companies and theatre spaces (Teatro Aberto) and to the important Calouste Gulbenkian building, housing an art museum, library, offices and performance spaces. Off Praça de Espanha are situated a number of hotels, business offices and the Spanish Embassy. Comuna, one of Lisbon’s main performance spaces, nevertheless lacks the infrastructure of a typical theatre, and fosters an informal approach to the theatre experience. As Carlson reminds us: ‘[t]he type of interior decoration, its lavishness, and its style will clearly contribute greatly to determining whether an audience member feels comfortable or out of place in a particular theatre’ (Carlson 1989: 205). In the spirit of the theatre’s name, the building’s interior decorative elements are minimal. There are no fancy rooms, uniformed staff or differences in seating in the two performance spaces. There is no ‘ticket office’, only a couple of desks and chairs fulfilling this role in one of the entrance halls. As the theatre is not provided with front of house staff, the companies performing in or renting the space must provide their own. EM’s producer, Manuela Jorge, has multitasked in EM’s performances of Dentadas and Diz-me como a chuva... (Tell Me Like the Rain) in Comuna as box-office staff, bartender, usher, technician and pre-performance announcer.14 Jorge’s multitasking reflects Fernanda Lapa’s assessment of EM’s standard working conditions: ‘[w]hen we are so taken in by a production that three of us work like we were twenty, what we earn is so small that we feel like we are being exploited by ourselves’ (Serôdio and Fadda 2006: 50).

14 A comparison might be made between Jorge’s multi-tasking for EM and the multiple roles undertaken by director Ariane Mnouchkine’s in Théâtre du Soleil: ‘[m]y work involves seeing that the food is good, that there’s no rain coming through the roof, and dealing with the money we have’ (Mnouchkine 1996: 187).
Symbolic of a new phase in EM’s life as a theatre company, Estefânia is similar to Comuna in its informality, although its location and historical significance are considerably different. As with Comuna, none of the imposing characteristics of traditional theatres can be identified here, and, similarly, none of its intimidating force is felt. In Estefânia, there is no box office, simply a desk located at the top of a set of stairs leading directly to the performance space in the basement. This contrasts with McAuley’s description of commodified theatre, where the economic values of the transaction are disentangled from the artistic experience through the distancing of the box-office from the performance space (McAuley 2003: 62). There are no allocated spaces of reception. While awaiting the start of a performance, the audience is forced to stand on the stairway leading down to the performance space. Unlike Comuna, however, Estefânia is housed in an inhabited building in a centrally-located residential area of the capital, with no similar entertainment venues nearby. It does not fit the ‘theatrical landscape’ of the city (Knowles: 85), nor is it ‘signalled’ in any way ‘in the urban landscape’ (McAuley: 37).

Established in 1890, Estefânia, named after the Associação Recreativa e Cultural (Community Club) that owns it, has a historical connection to Lisbon’s theatre scene. On site, a commemorative plaque to the renowned female Portuguese actor Eunice Munoz marks the club’s role as a theatre space during the twentieth century. The club, however, had ceased to be a performance space when it was leased in 2008 to EM, and was then being used exclusively for the leisure activities promoted by the Community Club. Holding no technical equipment, the main performance space was entirely refurbished by EM. With no additional state funding, the company took out a bank loan and reduced the
space’s intake from over 150 to 127 (Lapa 2008; Jorge 2009). Jorge recognises that, because Estefânia had no existing audience base for theatre, unlike the previous performance spaces used by the company, this represented an additional challenge for EM (Jorge 2009). Unlike the ‘official invisibility’ promoted by experimental performance spaces during the historical alternative (Carlson 1989: 125), EM has made a genuine attempt to make its performance known to a wider audience and the local community. Support was sought in promoting EM’s first production in Estefânia, Baby, from the local post, potentially enticing a local non-theatre attending audience (Jorge 2009). On Baby’s performance nights, Manuela Jorge asked audience members to provide their personal details for further contact (Jorge 2009). Despite not being marked in the city landscape, at the entrance of the building where Estefânia is based, posters are exhibited letting passers-by (and the members of the community who are involved in the local club) know about the company and its performances. Finally, Talking Heads, a monologue festival, organised for Estefânia over six months in 2010, as well as allowing less-established companies to perform their work in a central location, helped establish Estefânia as a performance space. Talking Heads also included the revival of Vulcão (Volcano), first performed in Teatro D. Maria II and nominated for a national award as best play. The inclusion of Vulcão in the festival is noteworthy, as it most likely enticed audiences attracted by the prestige of the production.

Estefânia was first used by EM in 2008 as a rehearsal space for their revival of Churchill’s Cloud Nine, 11 years after its first staging in 1997

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15 Vulcão, a co-production with Teatro Nacional D. Maria II and ACE / Teatro do Bolhão in 2009, was nominated for the 2010 ‘Globo de Ouro’ for best play.
in Lisbon, and, in 2008, a co-production between EM and the newly-refurbished Constantino Nery, in Matosinhos, in the Greater Oporto region. In the year of Churchill’s 70th birthday, with a new cast and setting, but the same director, set designer, costume designer and music as the previous production, EM’s revival of Cloud Nine (Sétimo Céu in Portuguese) opened in Constantino Nery as the only theatre production in the listings of the official celebrations for the theatre’s reopening. In her article, Christine Hamon-Siréjols considers that the motives behind a revival can be manifold, from strictly emotional to aesthetic and financial (Hamon-Siréjols 2008: 308-309). For Hamon-Siréjols, furthermore, ‘[w]hether the motives behind the revival of a success are commercial or emotional, the question asked is always: what is the relationship between the latest version of the production and that/those which preceded it?’ (Hamon-Siréjols 2008: 310). The 2008 production of Sétimo Céu came at a transitional time for EM with the planning and refurbishment of their new space taking centre stage in the company’s concerns. A co-production such as this one offered the opportunity to build on previous strengths, and considerably reduced the financial and time investments for the company, quite aside from the added prestige of partaking in the official celebrations of a city theatre (Teatro Municipal). For Constantino Nery, this production sat well with the artistic and cultural policy governing it, as one of the main objectives claimed is the raising of its national profile beyond its regional

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16 Sétimo Céu was a co-production between EM and Constantino Nery. It was directed by Fernanda Lapa and performed by João Grosso, Sérgio Praia, Amadeu Neves, Fernanda Lapa, Marta Lapa, Sofia Nicholson and Luís Gaspar. It was first performed in Constantino Nery, 19 November 2008.

17 Other (mainly local) theatre companies presented work during the inauguration of the theatre, but this took place on the street on the first day of the events. This work was all designated indiscriminately as ‘Street Theatre’ in the official programme. The listing of the specific companies performing that day was found separately from the official programme of activities in a day programme/poster (Constantino Nery 2008b).
associations. Guilherme Pinto, the city’s mayor, believes that: ‘[o]wing to its unique characteristics and potentialities, this theatre will become an unmissable reference point in Oporto’s cultural scene’ (Constantino Nery 2008a). Constantino Nery’s artistic director, Luísa Pinto, has also stressed Constantino Nery’s commitment to national audiences alongside the role the theatre is expected to play in the community: ‘we wish Constantino Nery to become a fundamental milestone in the national cultural itinerary’ (Constantino Nery 2008a).

A collaboration with a company working in the country’s capital and the reworking of a production previously funded by the National Theatre would presumably fit in perfectly with this ambition. In 1997, EM’s first production of Sétimo Céu was a co-production with the National Theatre D. Maria II, and featured well-known Portuguese actors in the national theatrical and television contexts, such as Rogério Samora and Ricardo Carriço. The 1997 Sétimo Céu benefited from the kudos associated with the National Theatre, as well as the attraction of the celebrity status of some of its cast. For Kershaw, such factors are those that determine the cultural conformity of theatre spaces. He believes that the spectator’s experience, even if watching a co-production with an alternative company or the staging of a provocative in-yer-face text, is often equated in traditional theatres with the consumption of a high-value commodity. Kershaw declares ‘the theatre mimics the cinema to create a star vehicle that delivers privilege to the necessarily select audiences for the show and simultaneously subjugates them to the dominant processes of cultural production’ (Kershaw 1999b: 54). Constantino Nery, a new theatre in the north of Portugal, seeking regional and national projection, would be enticed by such perceived signs of institutionalisation in EM’s work. Guilherme Pinto,
considering the outcomes aspired towards for the new theatre project, has revealed that one of the objectives governing Constantino Nery’s reconstruction was to overcome ‘the false stereotypes that during a good part of the twentieth century have been linked to the city [Matosinhos], describing it as a grey, sad, poor and peripheral place’ (Constantino Nery 2008a, my emphasis). This perception of Matosinhos (false or not) is important, as it informed the particular context in which the new theatre is rooted, and the circumstances that framed Sétilmo Céu’s reception. Beyond the regional and national ambitions for the new theatre project, the old Constantino Nery had played an important role as an entertainment site for the smaller constituency of Matosinhos and its local people. Guilherme Pinto recognises that ‘[g]enerations of residents have known this space, watched its plays, films, exhibitions, attended its concerts, musical events, official receptions to renowned visitors and political conferences’ (Constantino Nery 2008a). Luísa Pinto assured Matosinhos residents of the local commitment of the new theatre, which would welcome and give preference to local amateur theatre groups alongside professional organisations from the Oporto region (Peixoto 2008).

At the heart of a small constituency, rivalled by no other local entertainment venues, and twenty years after its original closure, it is fairly safe to assume that the refurbishment of the space itself, rather than the specific play or the company, was the fundamental aspect in attracting the audience to Sétilmo Céu, curious about the theatre’s restoration, or looking to relive past memories. One such audience member, Júlio Galante, posted an article on a local news website on the central role the theatre had played for the local community: ‘In our Matosinhos heart, we were really looking forward to this wonderful
moment, to the presentation of such a valuable space for us all. [...] There I performed for the first time, singing and dancing, with the cheerfulness typical of youth’ (Mhojeonline). Galante’s words, alongside the declarations by the theatre’s representatives, highlight that Constantino Nery, unlike other city or repertory theatres, had added symbolic elements framing the performance experience of its audiences. Susan Bennett, in *Theatre Audiences: a Theory of Production and Reception*, using Raymond Williams’ characterisation of performance as an ‘occasion’, distinguishes between the expectations of audiences in urban and community contexts. For Bennett, the reduced availability of entertainment in community areas translates into a greater importance attached to the event, embodying Williams’ concept of ‘occasion’, or what she designates as the ‘comfortable ritual’, bringing together familiar faces into a familiar space, and, unlike its urban counterpart, making the performance event ‘neither as commonplace nor as glamorous nor perhaps, as tolerant’ (2005: 102). Kershaw has also emphasised the feelings of site ownership expressed by the Middle England community watching *Poacher in Thatcherland* (1993b: 125-126) in their local village hall. More recently, different practitioners, including Kneehigh, have also testified to the peculiarities of performing in village halls, where the performance risks being ‘upstaged by the raffle’ (Logan 2005: 16). Due to its history, Constantino Nery’s identity conforms more to a community hall than to an urban theatre.

In its first week of events, the theatre’s *modus operandi* was close to that of a studio or a community theatre space. Constantino Nery had no official website, although some information was available on the city hall’s webpage; details such as ticket pricing were announced only on
the opening night. There was no telephone number for public enquiries or ticket reservations, and some tickets, such as my own, were simply handwritten on pieces of paper. While there was regional and national press coverage of the theatre’s reopening, it is safe to assume that local audiences were the only ones liable to comply with such peculiar logistics. On superficial observation, the audience on 21 and 22 November seemed to confirm this. On the first two performance nights, the majority of spectators were middle-aged; they attended the performance accompanied, and often different groups of spectators could be seen greeting each other. The age range and familiarity of the audience is coherent with a generation that had perhaps been involved with the theatre in their youth, like Galante, and who had returned to Constantino Nery to become reacquainted with the new theatre space. Some additional factors may explain the age range of this particular audience. Matosinhos (and Constantino Nery) are connected to Oporto by public transport, but, as this is a three-hour long play, finishing very close to the time of the last underground train, this may have been a deterrent for the younger audience located in the Oporto area, especially if one takes into account the standard length of the journey on the underground to and from central Oporto (forty minutes each way).

A theatre-based audience, rather than text-, actor- or company-based, may explain the unusual level of resistance with which some of the performances of Sétimo Céu were received in Matosinhos. On one of the nights for invited guests only, a number of people left while Betty was performing her monologue on her desire to be a sexually active woman, discussing the recently-rediscovered pleasures of masturbation (Lapa 2009). During the play’s complete run there were more adverse
reactions, and some spectators protested in writing (through email) to the city hall. Critics’ reactions to the 1997 and 2008 productions also differed greatly. Filipa Melo in 1997 claimed that Sétimo Céu’s discourses on sexuality and gender were dated, and that the play was relevant as ‘a historical document alone’ (Melo 1997: 136). Contrasting with Melo, João Carneiro, reviewing in 2009 the Cascais production, after its Matosinhos run, stated that Churchill’s text was ‘better and more relevant than ever’ (Carneiro 2009: 26). Carneiro qualified the play as ‘unmissable’, and added that, despite the play’s historical details, ‘[n]ever before has theatre been so up-to-date’ (Carneiro 2009: 26). Carneiro did not explain why this was so, but presumably the proposal for same-sex marriages in Portugal, which had, at the time, recently been rejected, and the public debates that took place before the approval of the second same-sex marriage proposal in the following year, should be factored in. This acknowledgement further complicates the reading of the Matosinhos audiences’ reactions in 2008.

The disparity of opinions expressed by Melo and Carneiro on EM’s two very similar adaptations of Sétimo Céu, in 1997 and 2008, confirms Dan Rebellato’s belief in the locality and universality of play-texts. Play-texts are ‘universal’ because the same texts can be staged all over the world and across the centuries with little or no change besides the ones required by translation into another language and any necessary lexical transformations. However, the same text when in production is significantly different from performance to performance, let alone staging, theatre, country and time. Side by side with the universality of their written form, play-texts are affected on-stage by the specificities of

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18 For more on the developments of Portuguese same-sex marriage and adoption/fertilisation legislation, see Chapter Five.
the local context. Rebellato claims that the ethical value of the play-in-performance ‘is its non-identical quality, its ability to be both general and particular, its ability to express and articulate a kind of theoretical cosmopolitanism that gives it a revolutionary ethical quality that is prior and profoundly resistant to global capital’ (Rebellato 2006: 113). The outrage caused by a contemporary classic in a state-endorsed and financed theatre is undoubtedly related to the specificities of this production and space. Whether the adverse reactions to Sétimo Céu in Matosinhos in 2008 were more influenced by a traditionally conservative Catholic stance associated with northern Portugal, or with the deflated expectations of long supporters of the theatre itself and its position in the community is debatable. However, more important than attributing a definite cause to the opposition was to observe the audience’s adverse reactions to an almost 20-year-old contemporary classic, performed in a Western urban setting. On another level, such reactions do justify the intervention objective claimed by EM. Fernanda Lapa believes that ‘when the subject is up-to-date I am interested in disturbing [the audience] so people leave the theatre having had an enjoyable evening but also having been given food for thought’ (Serôdio and Fadda 2006: 47). Provoking the audience was also a central claim for a significant number of productions within the historical alternative theatre movement. Where Sétimo Céu in Constantino Nery differs is that it forces a rethinking of the assumed power of institutionalisation associated with such elements as stardom and

19 A practical example of this is given by Kershaw (2001: 146-7). Kershaw quotes Dominic Shellard’s account of how Mark Ravenhill’s ‘in-yer-face’ Shopping and Fucking, showing in September 1997 at the West Playhouse in the immediacy of Princess Diana’s death, replaced Diana with Sarah Ferguson in the story about oral sex in the toilet. Shellard commented: ‘I was unsure as to whether the script would be changed. It would have been in keeping with the work’s desire to disconcert to leave things unamended. It would also undoubtedly have provoked a mass walkout or even […] a verbal or literal invasion of the stage’ (quoted in Kershaw 2001: 147).
theatre edifices, disputing furthermore the belief in the universal value of play-text-based theatre.

i) **Sétimo Céu**

Fernanda Lapa’s production of *Sétimo Céu* in 2008, like that in 1997, maintains the play’s original context. From costumes to textual references, it becomes clear to the Portuguese audience that the first part is set in an African colony during the nineteenth century and Queen Victoria’s reign, and the second part is set a century later, in London during the 1970s. Making allowances for those references that have been changed in order to prevent the alienation of the Portuguese audience, Lapa’s 2008 production, I would claim, makes a few decisions that have a fundamental impact on the audiences’ understanding and acceptance of the spatial markers in the play-text. I will analyse the different meanings evoked by the different spaces represented in *Sétimo Céu*, using McAuley’s characterisation of space in a theatre production, i.e. presentational space (setting, props, actors’ movements), fictional place (places evoked on stage), textual space (space in play-text) and thematic space (philosophical and ideological content of the play and production) (McAuley 2003: 29-35).

Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* opens with a song sung in a chorus by Clive’s family, as introduced by Clive in the very first lines of the play (Churchill 1986: 251). Churchill’s stage directions determine, moreover, that there should be a Union Jack flag on a pole on stage. Bennett

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20 Boxing Day and Ribena, for example, as non-existent in the Portuguese context, were replaced in the translation by the recognisable cultural equivalents of New Year’s Day and a baby’s bottle.
considers Churchill’s opening sequence, despite its paucity of elements, essential for locating the spectators in the action. For Bennett, ‘[t]he flagpole with the Union Jack establishes the British colonisation, British power, and the time period’ (2005: 147). When all characters on stage sing together, Bennett also believes that ‘[t]his draws the audience’s attention to the flag and its signification, and to the family group’ (2005: 147). Both song and flag were absent from the 1997 and 2008 productions of Sétimo Céu. Sétimo Céu in Constantino Nery started with Clive’s family and servants frozen in position as if waiting for a family portrait to be taken, while an instrumental piece of music, written by João Lucas for this production, was played. Instead of the Union Jack, the spectators see giant elephant tusks unevenly taking up most of the stage. On 21 November, one of the nights on which I watched the performance, I heard a spectator next to me commenting during this introductory scene: ‘Oh, it’s Africa, can’t you see?’ I assert that the replacement of the stage elements that facilitate identification with the British Empire with ones that portray the African setting as central is significant on two levels. Firstly, the Portuguese spectator’s initial contact with the performance space is, in this way, not alienated by the foreignness of the song and the flag. The audience is instead drawn to a closer cultural referent, Africa. Secondly, the colonial context, disclosed in Clive’s and other characters’ words, is not immediately imprinted on the spectator’s mind as pertaining to the British Empire. The unidentified African colony where the story takes place may instead invite associations with Portugal’s own colonial past. As the elephants’ tusks metamorphose in the second act, by the simple addition of artificial red roses, into the classic columns of a public garden, the
spectator is forced to continue within the African colonial context, even though nothing in Churchill’s text implies that this should be so. However, the characters on stage in *Sétimo Céu* refer repeatedly to England as their homeland throughout the whole of the first act, while this geographical referent is replaced by London in the second act, just as in Churchill’s play. Furthermore, this production maintains the Englishness of the characters’ names, pronounced by the Portuguese actors respecting native prosody and accent as much as possible. There is here no direct substitution of the English culture with the Portuguese reality. Instead, I would claim, there is an overlapping of the Portuguese context with the British one through the absence, addition and replacement of elements onstage.

During the first part, another important visual element is added in EM’s production that makes the centrality of African colonisation evident. Through most of the first act, black and white photographs of Africa during the colonial period are projected both onto the side wall (left) of the stage and against the army camouflage net curtain at the back. The projection of the photographs on the side wall is not pre-signalled to the audience in any specific way, and are positioned above eye level. Individual spectators may notice the photographs at different points of the performance, and seeing the photographs always implies a conscious decision on behalf of the spectator. In addition, the only images that are immediately obvious (those projected against the background army camouflage net) are distorted when projected onto the camouflage pattern, often becoming mere shadows. There is a clear

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21 The second act of Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* addresses British colonisation in Northern Ireland alone in the speech by the ghost of Lin’s brother, Bill, who was a soldier there (Churchill 1986: 310-1).
intention here to link the fictional story of Clive’s family to historical events and people in Africa during the colonial period. On stage, the audience watches Betty, elegant in her white period dress, ordering around her black servant, Joshua (performed by a white actor, in accordance with Churchill’s instructions), while images of richly dressed white women surrounded by black slaves are projected onto the side wall. When a picture of a colonial family, posing for the camera in an orderly manner, is projected, a parallel can be established between this image and the tableau-portrait opening the first act. Multiple images of slaughtered animals and of live elephants and lions are projected, emphasising the symbolic status of certain objects on stage. Both the elephants’ tusks, which form part of the set in the first act, and the zebra-patterned tablecloth belonging to Betty’s grandmother aim to remind the spectator of the metonymical analogy between the exoticised and exploited wild animals and the African continent itself.

The position chosen for the projection (sideways and above eye level) is very relevant. The sideways projection frees the spectator from the obligation of redirecting her/his gaze from stage to screen, but also means that the implied messages carried by these images work differently every time, according to what is actually seen or missed. On the other hand, the continuous projection of unrelated images (unrelated to each other, that is, as they are clearly related in the wider context of white Western exploitation of the African continent) is only interpretatively (but not literally) linked to the actors performing on stage. The historical photographic images on the one hand form a congruent narrative in themselves, immediately recognised by spectators, independent of the specific theatrical setting and the plot construed on stage. However, these same images can be simultaneously
read as part of and in relation to the performance, as addressed above. That is, as the real-life narrative impacts on the fictitious events represented on stage, a temporal and spatial historical deadweight is imposed on the comical farce performed. Furthermore, it is not necessary for the spectator to know that some of the images shown refer to the Portuguese colonial period and former Portuguese African colonies for this association to be made. Other elements in the play further invite the spectator to overlap Portuguese history with the onstage performance, through the replacement in the performance of some of the songs written or included in Churchill’s text by songs more readily recognisable by the Portuguese spectator.

Rossetti’s Christmas carol (‘In the deep midwinter’...), sung by Joshua in the English play (translated closely to the original in the published Portuguese translation) is replaced in EM’s 2009 performance by the Portuguese version of the internationally famous *Silent Night*. This change, introduced by Lapa, is noted and justified in Carvalho’s introductory text to the Portuguese edition of the play. ‘The use of a different Christmas carol’, states Carvalho, ‘was a natural adjustment to be made in order to find another Christmas song that would be more readily identified by the spectators and that would simultaneously retain the estrangement effect of the contrast between the singer, the Christmas theme and the geographical and cultural contexts’ (Carvalho 2002: 43). Potentially, it was this preoccupation with the Portuguese cultural context that determined the replacement in the second act of one of Cathy’s songs with an example taken from Portuguese culture.

*O Pretinho Barnabé* (‘Little Black Boy Barnabé’) is sung by Cathy on stage, replacing one of the songs Churchill had written for this
character. *O Pretinho Barnabé* is a popular Portuguese children’s song (no author has been identified) that can easily be recognised by any Portuguese spectator, as a significant number of CDs including this song can still be found for sale on the Portuguese music market. What is so noteworthy about the choice of this song is the connection it establishes between the first and second acts of the performance through its racist content. The song fulfils, as do the decorated tusks that remain in the second act, the role of a symbolic reminder of the Portuguese colonisation of Africa, even when the performance text has moved a century onwards. This fact is all the more relevant as, in the 1970s, while England was enjoying the freedoms of the sexual revolution, most Portuguese were immersed (in)directly in the traumas of the colonial war. To the Portuguese audience, *O Pretinho Barnabé* is reminiscent of the Portuguese colonial past, reflected in a racist cultural object that has survived to this day in Portugal, unaffected by the decolonisation process. There is therefore a complex superimposed relationship in Fernanda Lapa’s adaptation of Churchill’s *Cloud Nine* between the British colonial context of the original play and Portugal’s own colonial past. As with the choice to look at the images projected onstage, the spectators are free to make or overlook such an association. However, as with the images, which can only partially be ignored, given that even when the spectator chooses not look, s/he will still know they are there, Portuguese colonial history cannot but linger on the Portuguese stage.

22 ‘Little black boy Barnabé was jumping up and down when he broke one foot. Now he jumps on one foot alone’. The racism in the song relates to the emphasis on the little boy’s race and on the idea that the little boy can do without one of his feet, implying perhaps that the colonies could also do without freedom. Additionally, the song may be read as asserting that if you dare too much you will risk losing something important to you. Ironically, one of the CDs that includes the song is ‘Gil’s songs’, where Gil is the mascot and one of the main merchandise items for Expo 98.
In conclusion, as has been shown in this chapter all four companies in production privilege the superimposition of different spaces on stage and all four companies have in their repertoires performances which take place outside traditional theatre spaces and entertainment venue ‘regulations’. In Vale de Barris, o bando organises regular after-show talks, and an introduction to the performance and the company is given by one of its members before each production. Spontaneous discussion is often generated by making the performance and audience spaces available for the audience and actors to linger in after performance. Like o bando, during its 2010 summer Asylum season, Kneehigh’s performers could also be found around the bar after the night’s performance, often talking to audience members. Foursight, by opening the TCS exhibition and site to Mander Centre shoppers for free visits outside performance hours, promoted unregulated interactions between potential audience members, the presentational space and the actors/directors. With EM’s Estefânia, as the entire audience is forced to squeeze onto the stairway leading to the space before the (often slightly late) performances, they have ample opportunity to observe, eavesdrop on, or interact with fellow spectators, extending the informality of the performance space to the relationships established between those who occupied it. Contrary to Virginia Woolf’s idea that only a room of one’s own would allow women the solitude to be creative and artistically productive, each of the four companies regards in fact their ‘own rooms’ (performance spaces) as places of encounter and engagement. In the next chapter alongside looking at each company’s relationship to community theatre, I will analyse how all the companies foster through their productions temporary communities, places where actors and audiences can be together in the here and now of the performance.
V. ‘All together now’: Community

In 1980, Naseem Khan, in ‘The Public-going Theatre: community and “ethnic” theatre’, warned against imprecision in the use of such terms as community and community theatre for their polysemic nature. For Khan, community ‘has now been so thoroughly annexed by everyone that it can mean almost anything, from the “gay community” to the Commonwealth’s “community of nations”, from small interest groups to society at large’ (1980: 61). It is ironic that community theatre developed as ‘a form of theatre during the time that the specific meanings of “community” were being eroded’ (Khan 1980: 62). In its history, community theatre has accumulated a number of meanings, and covered a number of related practices such as applied theatre, new genre public art, participatory arts, theatre for social change and engaged art, as highlighted by Petra Kuppers’ *Community Performance: an Introduction* (2007: 3). In the early 1970s Britain, The Association of Community Theatres (TACT) explained community theatre as being based on ‘the everyday reality of ordinary people’s lives’ (quoted in Itzin 1980: 176). For TACT, community theatre takes place outside traditional theatres, in spaces and/or in association with events relevant to a particular community, providing the community portrayed with an opportunity for dialogue after the performance, as well as fostering a

1 Philip Taylor in *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community* defines applied theatre as a ‘new version of community theatre’ (2003: xviii). For Taylor, applied theatre ‘encompasses the breadth of work that theatre programs were creating inside and outside educational settings, mostly in nontheatrical environments for diverse purposes – raising awareness, posing alternatives, healing psychological wounds or barriers, challenging contemporary discourses, voicing the views of the silent and marginal’ (2003: xxi). In Taylor’s definition of applied theatre, community appears as an artificially assembled group whose purpose is to create the means for individual healing. This definition of community encompasses temporality as presumably the wounded group of individuals ceases to form a community once the limitations that have brought them together have been overcome.
'direct', 'hard hitting' style (quoted in Itzin 1980: 176). According to Khan, however, community theatre is not defined based on its geographical location, its address of non-traditional audiences, its use of non-traditional spaces or its particular subject-centred focus. The participatory element of community theatre is, for Khan, its distinguishing characteristic.

Khan proposes ‘that community theatre is based within a certain area, that it provides inhabitants with entertainment, an arts resource centre and the possibility of being involved in the process of shaping and mounting a play’ (1980: 64, my emphasis). Drawing on Khan, Kershaw further characterises community theatre by stressing its subdivision into two different types of practice, an idea he claims Khan had been the first to highlight: community theatre developed with the community, and community theatres developed for the community (1992: 63). Differences between the community theatre that is developed with the community and that developed for the community were central in the criticism of Arnold Wesker’s Centre 42 project. Centre 42 intended that artists and the unions would work together in financing and deciding which performances mattered most for particular communities. Instead, Wesker was accused of taking bourgeois art to working class communities, disregarding the possibility of the addressed communities taking a direct role in the artistic process (Itzin 1980: 104). More recently, Cohen-Cruz (2005) has also formulated a critique of this non-participatory type of approach, looking at it from an inverse direction. Cohen-Cruz criticises those privileged theatre professionals who go into underprivileged communities, drawing on them as inspiration for their work, which is then taken away from the community to be presented elsewhere. Whether related to these
polemics or not, the later definitions of community theatre stress community participation and the oppressed community’s empowerment.

On the subject of community and participation, Kuppers insists on two particular aspects of community performance, alongside its aim for political change. For Kuppers, community performance is ‘communally created’ and ‘rests in process rather than product’ (Kuppers 2007: 4). Examples of the facilitation role of professional artists in community theatre in the British context can be found in Kershaw (1992), and include John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy’s successful community-based projects in the early 1960s, John McGrath’s popular (and locally inspired) political theatre in the 1970s, the community play model developed in the 1980s by Ann Jellicoe and the Colway Theatre Trust she helped to establish, and Welfare State’s large-scale, carnivalesque outdoor performances in the 1980s and 1990s.

On community theatre and empowerment, Kershaw claims that ‘the underlying impulse is to enable the satisfaction of community needs through attempts at increased empowerment’ (1992: 62). Oppressed communities’ empowerment is also central in the collection of essays Theatre and Empowerment, authored by theatre practitioners and facilitators, and edited by Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, where the work covered ‘is all centrally about the marginalised reclaiming their identities by performing their usually ignored histories’ (2004: 11). Similarly, Eugene van Erven’s definition of community theatre in Community Theatre: Global Perspectives focuses on the participation of marginalised communities. For van Erven, community theatre is made up of ‘local and/or personal stories (rather than pre-written scripts) that
are first processed through improvisation and then collectively shaped into theatre under the guidance either of outside professional artists [...] or of local amateur artists residing among groups of people that, for lack of a better term, could perhaps best be called “peripheral” (2001: 2).

The four companies and productions discussed here exemplify very different understandings of and commitments to the concept of oppressed community and community theatre: from ethnic politics in Kneehigh’s assertion of Cornish identity, to cross-cultural and language-based communities with o bando’s Portuguese language community, to the Portuguese LBGT community in EM’s work, to Foursight’s multilingual productions, in which an appreciation for British multicultural society is shown alongside the focus on the ethnically-defined South Asian or the geographically and gender-bound Whitmore Reans women. Of all the productions studied in this chapter, only Foursight’s fulfils Khan’s understanding of community theatre as overall community participation. All the productions fail to meet Jan Cohen-Cruz’s strict definition of real community theatre as ‘made in the community, by the community, and for the community’ (quoted in Rebellato 2009: 53). Instead, the four companies (implicitly or explicitly) negotiate their own definitions of and connections to a community. Asserting allegiance to different large groups of individuals and/or widely defined identities (Lusophone, Cornish, Portuguese homosexuals, British immigrants), all of which are nevertheless interpreted as oppressed.

Each of the four theatre companies reads the word community differently. Foursight’s community productions are centred in
traditional understandings of the definition of community as a group of people who coexist daily in a certain area and/or are brought together by a shared cultural background. Kneehigh’s Cornish community is a more wide-ranging concept and one both reaffirmed and contested in Grose’s Blast!. The controversial claim for a Portuguese language community stretches the definition of community in the broadest possible way, while EM’s opportune interest in the Portuguese gay and lesbian community allows the company to expand its identity politics agenda. Ultimately the four companies engage effectively with the intrincasies of living in a globalised world of overlapping communities and identities. In such a world and within ruling neoliberal thought, the sense of a shared humanity, as put forward in each of the productions to be analysed next, is increasingly irretrievable, as different social groups no longer travel, live or work together.

The companies appeal to the inscription of the spectators in temporary communities, formed in the here and now of the performance, and partially conforming to a localist criteria. I would argue that, in the community theatre productions analysed here, the community empowerment desired by community theatre practitioners is expressed by the four companies in the privileging of a cosmopolitan view of society. In these four companies’ work, equal respect for individual differences is procured, as advocated by cosmopolitanism (translated in each of the theatre productions as the respect for such ‘minority’ identities as Lusophone, Cornish, Portuguese LGBT and British migrant communities). This is achieved through the temporary communities that form on the night of the performance. Part of a temporary community, established through the shared theatre production, the diversely-constituted public is, in their shared communal experience,
and for at least a couple of hours, led to suspend or question the
dominant hierarchies of values and prejudices underlying the
oppression of minority communities, such as those portrayed on stage,
and, in this way, invited to negotiate their own alternative into a more
egalitarian society. ‘All together now’, in addition to making reference
to Steve Gooch’s (1984) book on community theatre, is the title of this
chapter as it reflects both the inclusive and transitory nature of the
temporary communities proposed by the four theatre companies, or the
‘secular communities of faith’, as I designate them, adapting the
cosmopolitan concept of communities of fate.

For theorists of cosmopolitanism David Held and Ulrich Beck,
expressions such as ‘overlapping communities of fate’ (Held 2010a: 232)
or ‘non-territorial communities of shared risk’ (Beck 2010: 227) are
accurate in describing an increasingly smaller world. As a consequence
of globalisation (and its implied interconnectedness) but also of climate
change, the whole world is exposed to epidemics such as the bird flu,
natural disasters such as extreme floods or drought, and the
consequences of the ‘global’ (Western) economic crisis, which are felt
everywhere, even in the booming economies of developing countries in
South America and Asia. This interconnectedness, for Held (2010) and
Beck (2010), makes urgent the reinforcement of a cosmopolitan identity
and the pursuit of cosmopolitan global justice. ‘Fate’, however, is a
complex concept. If the future is predictable and prescriptive it has
already happened, and in its enclosure it is more like the past. In the
theatrical context I propose ‘secular communities of faith’ as a more
suitable expression, and one in agreement with Jill Dolan’s
conceptualisation of ‘utopian performatives’. For Dolan, there are
moments in performance, the utopian performatives, ‘where people
come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world’ (Dolan 2005: 2). Dolan believes that these moments may serve as inspiration to ‘reinvest our energies in a different future, one full of hope and reanimated by a new, more radical humanism’ (Dolan 2005: 2). This is the desire ‘for a more abstracted notion of “community”, or even for a more intangible idea of “humankind”’ (Dolan 2005: 2). In this chapter I will explore how all four theatre companies bring the actors and spectators ‘all together now’. Temporary communities are formed during the performance event by investing in a ‘more abstracted’ definition of community, and in a ‘more intangible’ conception of humanity; that is, in a secular community of faith.

1. O bando and the Portuguese language community

Consistent engagement with the local community of Palmela and its surrounding boroughs has been brought about by o bando’s relocation. Commenting on the choice of Vale de Barris, Brites asserts ‘[e]ven though o bando has always performed in non-conventional places, by also placing its home in a non-conventional site o bando has altered its stance, because the location has its own characteristics’ (quoted in Werneck 2009: 270). The company’s relationship with the local palmelenses was initiated by the physical operation of removal, and the cleaning and refurbishment of the company’s new base. Brites declares:

Some young people from Palmela shared with our actors, technicians and administrative staff a number of tasks, from cleaning and disinfecting the pigties to work related to the performance itself. They could verify from this shared work
that we are not pretentious artists, we are used to rolling our sleeves up. (Brites 2000a: 6)

The transferral to Palmela encouraged a hands-on approach, close to Brites’ own definition of creativity as ‘thinking with your hands’ (Brites 1986b; Rodrigues 2000: 15), being both the intellectual and the craftsman, or, as he has been called, the ‘poet-artisan’ (quoted in Conde 1994: 53). The interaction with Palmela’s community has produced an immediate positive effect, as o bando’s first production, *A Porca (Sow)* (2000) attracted a majority locally-based audience.²

Regarding community interaction, the one-off event of cleaning Vale de Barris’ multiple buildings has since been surpassed by many carefully-organised activities. Community lunches, for example, are organised on the first Saturday of each month. This informal event relies on a donation system (individuals choose how much they pay for the self-service meal) to guarantee its accessibility across the board.³ Lunches are followed by casual talks with invited artists and company members, or may pay homage to individual *palmelenses*, in addition to, as with *Tinhosol*, opening the rehearsal process to the general public. When staging a production in Vale de Barris, o bando often holds *Conferências de Palmela* (Palmela Seminars) in the local public library as a way to introduce writers and invited speakers to the local community in

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² Ten years later, audience figures continue to be largely favourable with regard to locals: 26.6% from the municipality (concelho) of Lisbon, against 46.8% from the municipalities of Palmela and Setúbal, and the remainder from the Greater Lisbon’s area (o bando 2010: 6). Just after the move to Palmela, in the programme for *Merlim* (Brites 2000b), Brites expressed as a company objective the desire to reach ‘a great variety of audiences that our move to Vale de Barris potentially favours’.
³ As donations are put into a bowl, people can (and have) not pay anything for their meal. This system of chosen expenditure is similar to o bando’s ticketing price system at Vale de Barris. There, the audience chooses one of three (in 2010) prices to pay: eight euros (‘o bando is sponsoring you’), ten euros (‘normal price’) or 12 euros (‘you are sponsoring o bando’).
anticipation of a play’s preview. During a play’s run, regular informal or programmed post-show talks also take place at Vale de Barris. With some productions, o bando promotes educational activities in liaison with schools and educational authorities. Classes of students are brought in to Vale de Barris to accompany the creative process through parallel preparatory and follow-up activities. Other activities held at Vale de Barris focus on breeding familiarity with the space, with the phases of the creative process and with o bando’s productions. With Por Dentro e Por Fora (Inside and Out), spectators have the opportunity to visit the various buildings of Vale de Barris, as well as temporarily reversing their roles with the actors. The Confraria do Espectador (Spectator’s Union), created in 2007, offers adults and children the opportunity to participate in workshops on different areas of theatrical production. Finally, there are also one-off task-centred initiatives arising from the characteristics of the landscape. In 2004, the olive harvest united practitioners and non-practitioners alike as part of o bando’s 30-year commemorative four-day conference (see o bando 2004: 308, 310, 312).

Engagement strategies with different types of community have been a hallmark of o bando’s history. Beyond its first years of community-centred work, however, community participation has very seldom been the main focus of the company’s work. In her recent article (2009) addressing o bando’s trajectory, Maria Helena Serôdio briefly mentions o bando’s relationship with the community, but does not include this as part of her core characterisation of the company. Instead, Serôdio (2009) identifies the four following characteristics as essential in o bando’s theatre: ‘a specific group philosophy, a preference for non-orthodox work spaces and which offer the potential to work in the open air, a
repertoire mainly centred on narrative texts (and specifically by Portuguese authors) and finally the group’s sets, using stage devices (*máquinas de cena*) well-recognised for their visual and symbolic qualities’ (Serôdio 2009: 50-1). A group philosophy, i.e. practitioners working as a collective, is seen as relevant, but ‘community’ is omitted here, as a reflection, I would argue, of how community has been idiosyncratically framed in the company’s history.

In o bando’s history, the company’s first claims to community theatre were made rather late, only in their second manifesto (o bando 1988: 16), as the decade of the 1980s was coming to an end and the company was close to its 15-year anniversary. Community theatre was again used to describe o bando’s work in their programme to the 1989 production *A Pregação* (*The Preaching*) (Brites 1989a). Ironically, the relabeling of o bando as ‘community-centred’ took place very close to the time when the company started to be criticised for moving away from its interventionist agenda. Contrary to what would be expected of a community theatre company, Dionísio (1994), in particular, has found that o bando’s productions in the early 1990s were increasingly performed to undifferentiated passive crowds in traditional theatres, and became notoriously associated with mega, state-endorsed events (Dionísio 1994: 94 and 107). In their second manifesto (o bando 1988: 21), o bando uses ‘community theatre’ as a way of expanding its typical age range (sidestepping children’s theatre in favour of theatre suitable for all ages). ‘Community’ as a category is also used as a replacement for ‘popular’ theatre, as established in the company’s first manifesto (o

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4 O bando’s keenness to discuss its work and welcome input from specialists and non-specialists has led Serôdio to state that o bando fosters its own ‘interpretative community’ (Serôdio 2009: 51).
bando 1980), but a problematic concept for its association with the Cultural Campaigns that followed the Carnation Revolution.\(^5\) While o bando decided to rename itself as a ‘community theatre’ in its second manifesto, it did not establish in its theoretical programme or in its practice an identification with any one particular community, or with a community-centred work ethos, even though in many instances and to variable degrees the company has interacted with multiple communities throughout its history.\(^6\) Quoting the company’s second manifesto, Serôdio highlights that o bando was potentially afflicted by ‘indecisiveness when using “community”: is it theatre done by the community? Addressed to the community? Loved by the community?’ (Serôdio 1994: 150). In the end, Serôdio agrees with o bando’s use of community, but only partly: ‘we recognize some legitimacy to the insistence on a concept that is also connected to that “different way of being in life”’ (Serôdio 1994: 150, my emphasis). The validity of o bando’s ‘community’ theatre, according to Serôdio, relates to the company’s group philosophy and living ethos, rather than to its relationship with a particular community, explaining why community was omitted from Serôdio’s 2009 characterisation of the company (2009: 50-1).

\(^5\) Reflecting this change of stance regarding popular, o bando problematises the word ‘people’ in Montedemo’s programme (Brites 1987b): ‘The people (povo) is not a synonym for kindness, for renovation, for revolution. Povo can be anything or everything’.

\(^6\) O bando has been remarkable for the frequency and geographical coverage of its touring productions over its 30-year history, reasons why o bando’s Natércia Campos believes that the company’s touring is an ‘exercise in citizenship’ (Campos 2009: 204). As part of its touring activities o bando has established relationships with different communities, local amateur groups and colectividades (community-run leisure centres). This was the case in Vila Real, where the company stayed for six months in 1977, jointly organising with the local population Os Primeiros Jogos Populares Transmontanos (o bando 1988: 101-102), and more recently for six months in Querença, as part of the Faro Capital of Culture Festival.
O bando’s collective of artists may constitute the most pervasive and enduring idea of ‘community’ in the company’s history, but it is not one without change. O bando’s ensemble has varied immensely, with regard to its constitution, the role of its members and not least the specifications of its cooperative status, as Brites himself readily admits: ‘[w]hen we first established the cooperative we were three and now we are more than twenty’ (Werneck 2009: 70). Unlike in its early days, when it had a relatively balanced spread of manual and artistic tasks (o bando 1988: 27), the cooperative now hires most of its actors on a piece by piece basis, and only members of the cooperative take part in the now less frequent and less extensive general meetings (Brites 2009: 196). In the current organisation of the company, there is a clear separation between the associates of the cooperative (the artistic management) and the workers (which include management, actors, publicity and general housekeeping) but all, including the cooking and cleaning staff, are fully credited in the company’s programmes. The company’s earlier working ethos of equal pay and shared work carries forward, at least in its recognition of roles that are not normally included in a theatre programme. While the creative and administrative roles are by now fairly separate and specialised, there is still a degree of availability and multitasking expected from anyone working for the company (Brites 2009: 199). Although the principle of equal pay was changed in 1975, almost immediately after the company’s establishment, the payment and working timetables may vary according to what is considered fair to a particular individual, rather than on a pay/skill ratio (Brites 2009: 197-199). However, the most decisive change in the nature of the o bando collective has been its transition ‘from a collective project to the acceptance of the individual guidance of one of its founders’ (Porto
1992: 105): Brites, the only one remaining of the company’s original members.

Brites’ leadership confirms for Porto one of the essential traits attributed to the Portuguese independent theatre movement. Citing Fernanda Lapa and Brites as examples, Porto claims that in the Portuguese independent theatre movement ‘we end up realising that there is a framework of personalised projects, and, in the majority, particular creators are identified as being their driving force’ (Porto 1994: 13). It is also Brites’ extensively recognised notoriety as an artistic figurehead in o bando that, in the mid 1990s, made Dionísio (1994) question the company’s identity as a collective (Dionísio 1994: 98). Furthermore, Conde points out that for reviewers from the mid/late 1980s, ‘o bando is, I mean, it has become João Brites’ (Conde 1994: 53). During the 1990s, and since Gente Singular (Unique People) in particular, Conde identifies Brites’ words as the only ones to be regularly quoted in o bando’s reviews (Conde 1994: 76). Its most influential artist, and almost always its public face, Brites was the director and dramaturge of most of o bando’s productions between the early 1980s and the mid 2000s. Brites’

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7 This ‘cult of the individual’ within the collective is also found within other European and American theatre collectives led by directors who develop distinctive and personal reputations such as Albert Boadella at Joglars and Mnouchkine at Soleil. On Mnouchkine, Delgado and Heritage claim that: ‘[a]lthough Mnouchkine’s status as “director” of the company may appear at odds with their collective ethos, the commitment to a cooperative structure remains’ (1996: 178). Mnouchkine declares ‘I think there is a reciprocity. (…) All the time I see actors doing something much better than what I proposed to them. They may hear me proposing things to them which are much better than what they are doing’ (Mnouchkine 1996: 185).

8 Since the early 1980s, mainly Brites, but sporadically other members of the company and invited artists such as Horácio Manuel, Raúl Atalaia, Pompeu José, José Carretas, Cândido Ferreira, Kot Kotecki and Eva Bal, have directed o bando’s productions. The period immediately before, during and after Expo 98 – in which o bando was responsible for Expo 98’s daily street parade, Peregrinação – was the period that constituted the most recognisable exception to Brites’ leadership of the company until 2005. During the ‘Expo years’, Brites, the overall appointed coordinator of ‘Unidade
máquinas de cena, and his specific method of stage adaptation of mainly Portuguese narrative texts have been largely credited for o bando’s aesthetic leap from the 1980s onwards, and for the company’s singularidade.⁹

Singularidade constitutes for Idalina Conde the paradigmatic value used to describe both the o bando’s overall working ethos and the individual works of theatre o bando has produced since 1976 (Conde 1994: 38). This is a dual singularity. An ‘existential singularity’, as Conde calls it, has been used to characterise o bando’s political activism and decentralising relationship to children’s theatre, popular culture and touring (Conde 1994: 38). In addition to this contextual understanding of the company’s work, a ‘strictly theatrical’ singularity is used to describe o bando’s aesthetics, from the realist to the allegorical, later applied to o bando’s stage machines and its use of non-conventional spaces (Conde 1994: 39-40). As the focus has progressively moved away from political theatre in both practitioners’ discourses and critics’ responses, and as the company has gradually developed more complex productions from a literary, aesthetic and referential point of view, ‘existential singularity’, while never disappearing from o bando’s
de Espectáculos da Expo 98’, directed none of the company’s productions in 1997 or 1998, partially resuming the role of director during 1999 and 2000, and again directing all of o bando’s work up until 2005, with the exception of the international 2003 co-production Noite nas Oliveiras (Night Spent in the Olive Trees).

⁹ Brites’ specific dramaturgical adaptation process has been recently classified as dramatography by Ana Pais in her critical selection of Brites’ essays and papers (Pais 2009: 19-43). Regarding dramatography, Pais explains that this is a ‘notion of writing dramaturgy’: ‘[w]hen representing graphically the dramaturgical concept, Brites establishes from the outset of the creative process a sound and indestructible relation between dramaturgical options, the set and staging of a production’ (Pais 2009: 26). When adapting narrative texts, Brites divides each play-text into three columns: in one of the columns is the text to be used in the production, in another is the original narrative text and in the third one some information is added about the rehearsal/production process (Werneck 2009: 279-280).
reviews, has generally given way to more elaborate discourses on the company’s theatrical singularity. More than ten years after publishing her 1994 article, Conde once again came to characterise o bando’s singularidade focusing on style, or what Conde sees as o bando’s ‘particular theatricality, syncretic, inter or transdisciplinary’ (Conde 2009: 87). Until recently, o bando had used singularidade as a qualifier for their work (o bando 2007a). From 2008, however, the company replaced singularidade with singularismo in funding applications, interviews (Werneck 2009; Brites and Francisco 2009: 16) and in funding reports (o bando 2009: 3). In their proposed definition of singularismo, o bando emphasises once again an ‘existential’ understanding of singularidade, summarising the company’s commitment to a collective working ethos rather than a particular style or aesthetics. Brites claims:

Our work is singular because it is a collective work […]. Our special way of being and thinking about theatre will produce different results as the ensembles progressively change. What we carry on is singularismo, that is a collective methodology for creation, supported in an experience of over thirty years. What we carry on is the presumption that the creation of unexpected and singular works is due to the fact that they do not belong to an inspired individual but to a collective. (Werneck 2009: 270)

When o bando recently superimposed singularismo onto singularidade, this was not merely an academic or a marketing exercise. Almost 30 years before, o bando had declared: ‘[f]or us to work collectively is a political option. […] [t]o group people is a subversive act when people cannot directly be controlled or policed. For us to work collectively is an aesthetic option that questions individual creativity’ (o bando 1980).
The use of *singularismo* may be read today as a way of reinstating the collective working ethos without returning to long-abandoned agit-prop strategies. That is, *singularismo* allows the company to demarcate itself from a particular *singularidade* associated with Brites’ artistic style, and to propose new directions for o bando’s work. It also means that other artists with whom o bando share a work-ethic but not aesthetics, can be invited to direct the company’s productions; this has taken place increasingly since 2005. The other major change to o bando’s profile in its latest funding application has been its commitment to adaptations of texts written *in* Portuguese, rather than *from* Portuguese authors.

*Portugalidade*, a value defended in o bando’s previous funding application (2005), is no longer prioritised. In o bando’s history, a focus on Portuguese culture and literature had always been present through the folk-elements included in the staging of its productions and in the numerous adaptations of Portuguese contemporary canonical writers, although the company never altogether excluded from its repertoire texts from Portuguese-speaking (or other) countries. From the mid 2000s, a more consistent expansion into the Lusophone world has taken place. In 2005, o bando adapted a novel by the Brazilian writer Ricardo Guilherme Dicke, *O Salário dos Poetas* (*Poets’ Salary*). Adapted in 2007, *Em Brasa* (*On Fire*) draws on the experiences of Brazilian immigrants living in Portugal, and on a collage of texts by Portuguese and Brazilian writers. Finally, in 2010, the company abridged the Mozambican short story *Tinhoso!* by Luís Bernardo Honwana. When explaining its interest in the Lusophone world, o bando declares:

In today’s world, [while] globalisation imposes the English language and binds us contractually to Europe, we reiterate
our belief that we are closer to Brazil than to Germany. We recognise that we have striking artistic and cultural references in the four corners of the planet, but we want to reinforce our identity in Europe, a continent that is progressively losing its cultural diversity. (o bando 2009: 6)

By asserting relatedness between Portuguese-speaking countries, o bando are construing a local that does not limit itself to national boundaries, but which is Portuguese-language based. This ‘local’ is seen as a potentially oppositional force to the pressures of globalisation, which Brites identifies in particular with the dominance of the English language:

I find scary the idea of a unified, uniform, normalised and globalising Europe, where the less powerful have little say and anchor themselves to the most powerful. We should not forget that the language selected as a linguistic bridge, English, is also the language of an invader, a territory which pursues its own interests and economic power. (Werneck 2009: 284)

O bando’s objections to the globalising force of English, and the company’s proposal of an oppositional Portuguese language-based community have much in common with Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s analysis of Portuguese-English relations. Santos simultaneously explores Portugal’s relationship to its former colonies and to Britain in his seminal postcolonial work, ‘Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-identity’ (2002).

In his article, Santos proposes that Portugal occupies the position of an inter-identity, a coloniser that was itself colonised by the English. For
Santos, Portugal’s semi-peripheral position was first established in relation to the way the colonial system was organised (centred on British colonialist models), and is maintained in the current context of the European Union and the late-capitalist globalised economy. Practicing a subaltern colonialism, both ‘the colonized other, and the colonizer as himself a colonized other’ (Santos 2002: 17), Portugal’s relationship to its colonies was characterised by ambivalence, interdependence and hybridity between the Portuguese coloniser and the colonised (Santos 2002: 16). For Santos (2002), Portugal’s integration into Europe seems to lend itself to ‘reproducing, in new terms, the semiperipheral condition’ (2002: 10). Taking this into consideration, Santos proposes that postcolonialist discourses should be a response to such ‘hegemonic globalization’ processes fostered by England and the United States. For Santos, a counter-hegemonic globalisation can be formed through ‘new local/global alliances among different social groups oppressed by the different kinds of colonialism’ (2002: 37), and he proposes, but does not develop, the idea of ‘an epistemology of the South’ (2002: 16).

Both o bando and Santos propose that a community based on a shared language can be an effective response to English-centred globalisation processes. This provocative idea of ‘new local/global alliances’ does not go unchallenged. Ana Paula Ferreira (2007) has pointed out that Santos’ proposed Portuguese-language based postcolonialism, can be charged with re-asserting Portugal’s supremacy in the former colonies. Ferreira argues that the concept of a Portuguese-language community perpetuates both a neo-colonialism, where the Portuguese language dominates in the former Portuguese colonies as opposed to English or
French, and an imperialistic timescale that structures history from the colonisers’ point of view. Ferreira states:

[a]s de-centred and semi-peripheric, not coinciding with either Europe or the non-Europe and as newly anti-colonial and indeed, utopic as “the time-space of official Portuguese language” may be vis-à-vis the Empire of neo-liberal globalization, such an imagining cannot be seen apart from the specific ex-colonial historical context that engendered it. (2007:36)

Ferreira describes the Portuguese language community as a ‘neo imperialist fantasy’ (2007: 36) dependent on such disputable claims as that ‘there is such a thing as a common, somewhat fixed ground of language, bringing together a myriad of temporally and locally diverse colonizers and colonized’ (Ferreira 2007: 37). It is my argument that o bando’s productions of Lusophone texts, while engaging discursively with the notion of a Portuguese language community, remain grounded in the specificities of their authors, cultures and/or the characters they portray.

With Tinhoso!, o bando chose a text that evokes the colonial war and the Portuguese colonial past from a postcolonial perspective; that is, the rewriting of the colonial history from the point of view of the colonised. The Portuguese language community is not seen ‘apart from the specific ex-colonial historical context that engendered it’ (Ferreira 2007: 37), which is one of Ferreira’s main objections to Santos’ argument. Secondly, and taking into account the classic, canonical and well-established Portuguese authors that o bando has staged, it is undeniable that being produced by a company such as o bando entails sharing that same status as a classic, still more so if the Portuguese audience is largely unlikely to know the text or the author, as is the case with
Tinhoso!. O bando invited Honwana to present a paper in Palmela’s library, and organised a joint art exhibition in Vale de Barris featuring dolls dressed in Mozambican *capulanas*. A parallel process took place in 2005 with *O Salário dos Poetas*, when Ricardo Guilherme Dicke was also invited to Portugal, and there was also an art exhibition on Mato Grosso. By inviting Brazilian and Mozambican writers to speak in public seminars, the linguistic differences in the phonetics and/or syntax of the Portuguese spoken language across the Lusophone world cannot be overridden, as in Ferreira’s claim. By exhibiting art that features local folk-culture from Mato Grosso and Maputo, the dominance of Portugal-centred references also comes into question. The particular adaptations chosen by o bando do engage with the Portuguese colonial past, but also address present-day issues affecting the relations between citizens and countries that speak Portuguese.

In *Em Brasa* (*On Fire*) (2008), TAob researched and quoted the real lives of Brazilian immigrants living and working in Portugal in the twenty-first century, together with texts by the writer Caio Fernando Abreu and 16 other authors, including Brazilian and Portuguese writers. *Em Brasa*, a commission by Teatro S. Luiz, was part of the festival ‘Ciclo Outras Lisboas’ (Other Lisbons), centred on the changing nature of the city of Lisbon. The objective of the festival, according to the artistic director of Teatro S. Luiz, Jorge Salavisa, was ‘to open the theatre not only to other companies but to the immigrant populations’ (Ferreira 2008: 22). To do so, Teatro S. Luiz requested three different theatre companies, including o bando, to work on and with communities of immigrants living in the city from Brazilian, African and Eastern origins.

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10 A type of sarong typically worn by Mozambican women to wrap their lower (and sometimes upper) body, used in a similar way to a skirt or dress.
European backgrounds. Teatro Meridional worked with the African community with *Lisboa Invisível* (Invisible Lisbon), Teatro de Praga produced *Turbo-Folk* about immigrants from Eastern Europe, and o bando produced *Em Brasa*, dealing with Brazil. Considering o bando’s repertoire since the 1990s, *Em Brasa* was exceptional in its community participatory element. It extended the participation of non-professionals beyond performance, making their stories the motor for the creative process and placing them at the core of the palimpsest text on which the production was based. *Tinhoso!*, unlike the more community-oriented *Em Brasa*, uses professional actors alone and is based on a literary text, but not a play. While not integrating the community’s direct participation into the production, during the creative process the wider community was invited to a rehearsal and a question and answer session. Children from the primary school in Palmela where the production was to be staged and a group of students of a special curriculum, differentiated by their underprivileged social background and disruptive behaviour, also took part in this type of activity.

Not straightforwardly a community production, *Tinhoso!* does, however, bear the imprint of the local community in terms of the place chosen for the production’s staging, and in the presence of spectators during the rehearsal process. In addition, the story, as adapted by o bando, both foregrounds and displaces the original context of colonised Mozambique, inviting spectators to reflect on power relations not only in the past colonial setting but also in their own present circumstances. Custódio’s was a non-realist adaptation of *Tinhoso!*, in which actors performed multiple characters, some of which did not match their gender, ethnicity and age. The idea behind Custódio’s non-realist adaptation of *Tinhoso!* was a reading based on consciousness. Custódio
adapted the short story to the structure of a classic tragedy, with the actors alternating between performing individual characters and uniting as the story’s chorus; that is, as the conflicted narrator of Honwana’s original short story, Ginho. The dog, Cão Tinhoso in this production is a symbolic and absent character, frightening or despised because it mirrors the conscience of the perpetrators of and accomplices to violence. For Custódio, ‘everything we do in the exterior world, whether it happens on our own, in our relations with others, or even with an object, is nothing more than an encounter with our most intimate essence’ (o bando 2010b). Afolabi’s analysis of the original short story is very close to Custódio’s: ‘[t]he question then is: why is Cão-Tinhoso’s gaze so bothersome to everyone? […] The gaze becomes a challenge: the difficulty of looking at oneself in the mirror for fear of seeing a guilt-ridden image as well as the shame of either being so brutal or brutalized within the colonial system’ (Afolabi 2001: 37-38).

The community theatre group ValArte, made up of young students, themselves coming from a minority ethnic background, enjoyed and connected to what they saw on stage. What o bando so successfully established, in contradiction to Ferreira’s counter-argument to Santos’ theory, is a temporally and locally diverse reading of Honwana’s short story, which became relevant to the young inhabitants of Vale de Amoreira, an area afflicted by serious economic and social problems and home to a huge migrant community (Lourenço 2008).

The ‘here’ and ‘now’ are central to this production’s philosophy, and fostered in the creative process. The collective of actors strongly affected the work, as they were free to choose and experiment with the characters they would potentially perform, adapting and intercalating their own words with Honwana’s as result of the improvisational
rehearsal process. But the ‘here’ and ‘now’ of this adaptation are perhaps best exemplified in the production’s prologue. At the beginning of the play, the actors come in and walk to the front of the performance area, facing the spectators and looking them in the eye. During the prologue they hold in their hands the costumes that will make their individual characters. The actor in charge of presenting the prologue on the day explains that as well as being actors they are spectators of the spectators, and that the work they do on stage depends on the audience. The actors then start clapping to a certain rhythm while pointing at the spectators. Gradually and naturally, the audience joins in, and only then do the actors take their place on the set, sitting on the wooden structure. The idea that the actors are spectators of the spectators, or that the spectators may take precedence over the actors is an inversion of the traditional hierarchies associated with the theatre. It works particularly well in this production in relation to the first moment of the prologue, but also in relation to the parallel work done with the schools that came and visited rehearsals and saw the production. In particular, one of the classes was made up of students who were following a special curriculum, designed for young people at risk of abandoning their schooling early. However, in addition to o bando’s intentional community engagement and audience participation, including visits to rehearsals and Q&A sessions following productions, the spontaneous dialogue that happened with one particular group of students after one of the performances was very significant.

The group of students, aged between 11 to 16, residents in Vale de Amoreira and members of ValArte theatre group, approached the actors spontaneously after the performance, wishing to discuss the
play. During the conversation that ensued, the students asked the actors to sit through a session of forum theatre, a technique the students practiced in their local community theatre group. In the forum theatre session, the young spectators analysed in the presence of the cast the meaning of the play they had just watched and their identification/dissociation with the characters, in doing so literally making the actors into spectators of the spectators. The actors’ emphasis on the active and empowered role of the spectators to *Tinhoso!* is particularly significant here, considering that this group of students belonged to ethnic minority groups and came from an area dominated by problems of economic deprivation and social exclusion. Within the particular context of these students, differentiation through social background and the issues of power/disempowerment at the heart of Honwana’s story and o bando’s production resonated strongly. The students’ willingness to share their own personal histories with the actors, and against the backdrop of a story drawing on Portuguese colonisation questions hierarchical notions of dominant culture and presupposed notions of community separation: actors/spectators, adults/teenagers, teacher/students. For David Held cosmopolitanism represents ‘each person liv[ing] in a local community and in a wider community of human ideals, aspirations, and argument’ (Held 2010: 229). O bando’s adaptation of *Tinhoso!* produced an example of cosmopolitan ideology by offering to people from different ethnic, educational, generational and economic backgrounds an opportunity for interconnection and dialogue, side by side with affirmation and respect for different local communities and cultures. In *Blast!* like in *Tinhoso!*, colonisation and oppression are central topics of the production. Here, also, the division and separation between different
national and cultural identities addressed by the play are overridden in the performance experience by a sense of shared humanity.

2. Kneehigh and the Cornish community

In the 2010 version of the 2007 village hall show *Blast!,* Chough, translating from the Cornish, the ‘old saying’ voiced by Stuggs reminds the audience: ‘[a] voice too loud never did good;/ [b]ut those without a voice are those without a land...’ (Grose 2010: 36). Finding and giving a voice to the Cornish community has been an essential part of much of Kneehigh’s work.

We have no political axe to grind and do not intend that this work should produce agit-prop theatre. But we do aim to firmly establish the connection between art and people’s lives in an interactive way. To ensure that in these times of rapid change our communities find a voice and our theatre will be inspired and informed by our own communities in an authentic and meaningful way (Kneehigh 1998a: 6).

Community intervention and participation has taken many forms in the company’s history. In its first five to ten years, Kneehigh produced shows aimed at children and families, and later carried out theatre-in-education workshops developed in schools, with children and teachers. These were so successful that in 1986 a short-lived decision was made that split the company into two: Kneehigh and Kneehigh Theatre-in-Education, the latter under the direction of Maggie Hutton. During this first stage of the company’s work, its community agenda had much to do with the accessibility of its performances and workshops, but also with the extensive county coverage of its activities, as the company was ‘journeying to virtually every town in Cornwall’ (Pascoe 1985: 35).
With the arrival to the company of experienced community practitioners Bill Mitchell and Sue Hill in 1989, Kneehigh entered a new stage of community-orientated festivals and large-scale outdoor performances. Often under Bill Mitchell’s direction, what would be later called ‘landscape theatre’ drew on the natural and industrial Cornish landscapes to produce site-specific theatre performances with the collaboration of hundreds of local volunteers, attracting non-traditional theatre going audiences. Sue Hill and Anna Maria Murphy were the company members mainly responsible for the more ‘strictly’ community events developed by Kneehigh (South West Arts 1991: 13), such as carnival processions, kite building, lantern-, mask- and puppet-making, training in pyrotechnics and joint collaborations in and organisation of feast days, openings and anniversaries. Kneehigh believed that such local celebrations, either building on existing local community events, as with the Mevagissey raft race, or established by new traditions, as with the An Gof Mummers Play in St Keverne, ‘bring whole communities together, crossing boundaries of age, sex and class to celebrate the place and time in which we live’ (Kneehigh 1990a). Kneehigh’s activities supporting local celebrations have included helping with the fish fair at Newlyn Fish Festival, creating the procession for Bodwin Riding, making banners for Charter Day in Marazion, building a sponge cake village for Trispen Tea Treat, devising street theatre on the harbour in Mevagissey, participating in the City of Lights lantern procession in Truro, helping with the creation of a giant phoenix in Penwithick, and collaborating on Penzance’s Mazey Day, the Golowan Festival and Tom Bawcock’s Eve in Mousehole. These activities helped, Murphy believes, to ‘[turn]

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11 On this see Hevva! Project 1999-2001: (7 and 26) and Kneehigh (2002b). For an account of the type of activities part of a Tom Bawcock’s Eve see Kent (2010: 626).
perceptions of a place on its head’ (Kneehigh 2000a), and inspired ‘pride of place’, as expressed in Kneehigh’s first long community project, *Hevva!* (Kneehigh 1998: 7).

With their three-year *Hevva!* project, and with the financial support of British Telecom and the Esmée Fairburn Trust, Kneehigh could for the first time develop a long-term relationship with communities. Part of *Hevva!, Hell’s Mouth*, a piece of landscape theatre developed at Hendra Pit during the summer of 2000, provided apprenticeship opportunities for local community members and drew directly on community experience. A group of local bikers that often used the area took part in the story, and the protagonist of *Hell’s Mouth* was a St Stephen resident who called himself the ‘king of Cornwall’ (Kneehigh 2000b: 22). In the following year, also as part of *Hevva!,* Kneehigh produced *Roger Salmon Cornish Detective,* based at Geevor Tin Mine, a tourist centre holding the most complete remains of a Cornish mine. *Roger Salmon* attracted the collaboration and the stories of the centre’s staff, former miners, and of many local families connected to the mine’s history (Kneehigh 2002c: 8). Kneehigh’s second long-running community project used an idea originally developed for their first community project, *Hevva!,* but which was then judged impractical due to a lack of funds: the landscape theatre production *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings,* based on a Gabriel García Márquez short story, and a significant example of Kneehigh having to go outside of Cornwall in order to be able to finance its own local site-specific projects.

Financed by the European Union and working on a extended notion of community, the idea took the overall title *The Three Islands Project,* and joined together two islands, Cyprus and Malta, with Cornwall,
metaphorically understood as an island, namely by Mitchell who headed the project (Thomas 2003). Over two weeks in the summer of 2005 (after productions in Malta in 2003 and in Cyprus in 2004), Kneehigh took over the derelict Hayle Harbour in Cornwall and built its own set, a carnival (based on the community’s own) and a market fair bringing together local produce from the ‘three islands’, alongside the overall site-specific performance. The project was rated as a success, not least by the ACE itself in the words of David Micklem:

On a multitude of levels “A Very Old Man” is an extraordinary piece of work. In terms of the regenerative effect of a piece of work on a depressed community, the social cohesion that this might inspire, the civic pride in hosting work of this quality (...). “A Very Old Man” is amongst the very best pieces I have seen in Europe. The artistic rigor, the commitment to the inclusion of non-professionals in the making of the work, the understanding of site and an audiences’ response to that site and the emotional power of the piece itself are all to be praised. This is fully accessible “event theatre” of the highest calibre (...). (quoted in Kneehigh and WildWorks 2005: 14, my emphasis)

A temporary community was established in Hayle Harbour during Kneehigh’s ‘occupation’, and the show created its own idiosyncratic language, mixing English, Maltese, Latin, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Spanish and Cornish, in addition to involving the collaboration of local musicians and weaving in stories from the local community.

Kneehigh has also involved the Cornish community indirectly by using Cornish history and culture as the subject of some of its productions. This has happened with Kneehigh’s collaborations with the poet Charles Causley, with the Cornish playwright Nick Darke and, more recently, with the village hall productions authored by Carl Grose, such
as *Blast!* and *Quick Silver* (2002), the latter based on the life and adventures of a Cornish tin miner in the Wild West. Regarding Darke’s Cornish plays, Kent notes that it was with Kneehigh that Darke ‘began to develop more explicitly Cornish-themed work’ (2010: 749). Darke’s *Ting Tang Mine*, first produced by Kneehigh, centres on the boom and bust of the copper and tin industry based on events in September 1815, which Darke took as an analogy for the ‘credit-mad eighties’ (Kneehigh 1990). The play was Cornish in theme but also in its ‘good Cornish sound’ (Bunn 1992), making it challenging for non-Cornish audiences, as the ‘Cornish People will pick up every nuance; but the uninitiated may find it hard going’ (Saddler 1992).

Darke’s most famous collaborations with Kneehigh, the *The King of Prussia* (1995) and *The Riot* (1999), use Cornish history to voice the contemporary concerns of the Cornish community. *The King of Prussia* is based on a late-eighteenth century tradesman, John Carter, who lived in Porthleah Cove. Locally known as the King of Prussia, Carter defied central government taxing and practiced free trading. The company’s programme mentioned the upsurge in military activity on the Cornish coast that was going on at the time, and the desperation of Cornish fishermen financially incentivised by the European Union to destroy their boats rather than to go out to sea, as contemporary examples of ‘foreign’ powers ruling over Cornwall. *The Riot* was commissioned by the National Theatre’s artistic director, Trevor Nunn, who, having watched *The King of Prussia*, had been impressed with Kneehigh’s Cornish-inspired ensemble work. Nunn claimed that Kneehigh ‘stand for their community, they are of their community, and indeed they are themselves a community of shared experience’ (Kneehigh 1999). *The Riot* takes inspiration from the historic dispute on Monday 18 May 1896,
between the local Newlyn Methodist fishermen, who were rest-abiding on the Sabbath, and Lowestoff-based fishermen. The Lowestoff fishermen, unlike the Newlyn Methodists, fished on Sundays and interfered with the Newlyn fish market’s prices by bringing their fish there on Mondays. This production is particularly interesting in marking the beginning of a trend in Kneehigh’s work, productions co-financed and produced outside of the county of Cornwall, and increased difficulties in touring locally, due to both the lack of appropriate venues and of local financial commitment. After its London run, *The Riot* did go to the then recently opened Hall for Cornwall, but this was a different production from the one seen in the capital. As the resources for set design that the National had offered were no longer available away from London, the play was reworked in a disused Cornish clotted cream factory, the old St Eval Creamery at St Earth, into a show, according to Shepherd, ‘more Kneehigh, much bolder and earthier’ (Morse 2000).

Differences in aesthetics are not the only ones to mark the London preview of *The Riot* and its subsequent Cornish and national touring to Blackpool, Sheffield, Newcastle, Bristol, Barnstaple and Brighton. Coincidently or otherwise, the programme for the national tour was more overtly political than that used in London. Darke added a statement to the national programme that explicitly critiqued British rule and reinforced Cornwall’s claim as a separate nation:

As John Angarrack argues in his iconoclastic new book, *Breaking the Chains*, laws formed in Strasbourg for the protection of cultural and ethnic diversity can help Cornwall fight to re-establish its constitutional status as an
independent nation in Britain, for so long denied by Whitehall. (Kneehigh 2000c)

No doubt such a statement regarding the potentially positive role of Europe in the recognition of Cornish sovereignty had been influenced by European Union Objective One status, then recently awarded to Cornwall, aiming to encourage ‘investment to help grow and reshape the economy of Cornwall and Scilly Isles’ (Objective One). As Kent (2010) has argued with regard to the Cornish Objective One status, ‘[a] European Union of “regions” and small “territories” appeared to benefit the peripheral parts of the community’ (Kent 2010: 700). Seven years on, Objective One status and the conflicting identities of Cornish and English again became the subject of another Kneehigh play, Grose’s village hall production, Blast!

Alongside their community-orientated activities and workshops, Kneehigh’s village hall productions have long stood for one of the principal ways the company has found to be close to its native Cornish audiences, even when nationally touring large productions, by ‘providing Cornish communities with a theatrical experience and the opportunity to be involved, where they might not otherwise attend the larger touring shows’ (Kneehigh 1998c). Rice has declared that ‘[w]ithout Village Halls, Kneehigh would be very different’ (Logan 2005: 16). Shepherd has also emphasised the importance of village hall touring: ‘[w]hat I love is that people still come to village halls for a good time and we want to serve that. Getting into these communities remains very important to us’ (Parker 2005a). If having a good time in the community, as Shepherd believes, makes the case for village hall productions, then according to Lyn Gardner’s description of their 2010
Blast! Kneehigh would have been entirely successful. For Gardner, ‘Blast! is as Cornish as a deep-filled pasty. […] [A] show where only the laughter is truly explosive’ (Cook and Gardner 2010). Kneehigh’s later village hall production of Blast! does focus on what are and can be Cornish communities in an increasing globalised world, in which Prince Charles’ ‘Cornish Duchy biscuits are made in Scotland’ (Grose 2010: 46) and in which, ironically, the true origin of the Cornish pasty was protected and regulated in 2011 by the European Union.  

From the beginning of Blast! we are introduced to representatives of two very different communities: the wealthy English over-60s community that has relocated to Cornwall ‘in search of paradise’ during their retirement years, and the young impoverished and disfranchised Cornish extremists. Both parties can immediately be identified by the way they carry themselves, what they are wearing and the subjects they talk about. The Cornish terrorists wave their Kernew (St Piran’s) flags, share and revere Cornish pasties, wear Cornish kilts, take pride in Cornish history, listen to Trelawny and cite Causley poems. Conversely, the ‘harmless’ retired middle-aged Englishman Colin Pickering embodies the worst stereotypes of the contemporary English occupation of the county. About his and his wife’s move to Cornwall, Pickering says:

We came down here to Cornwall / In search of paradise / The prices are extortionate / But the scenery is nice / We left our hectic city life / Where the problems never cease / We came down here to Cornwall / So we could rest in peace. […]

12 European Union law now determines that a spicy chickpea pasty, like the one bought by Chough for his last meal, cannot be designated a Cornish pasty at all. For the Protected Geographical Status recently awarded to the Cornish Pasty by the European Union see for example Gillilan (2011).
When I’m dead and buried, all I ask of you / Is to dedicate a bench to me / On a cliff top with a view! (Grose 2010: 52-53)\textsuperscript{13}

The Pickerings superficially partake in the Cornish identity through Colin’s joining the Parish Council, or his wife Janet taking up clog dancing and baking saffron buns. It is easy to see, however, that this is more of an English community living in Cornwall than a true Cornish acculturation process, as joining the cricket team and ‘starting a neighbourhood watch scheme in the little isolated hamlet where we live’ (Kneehigh 2010b) highlight.

Pickering may appropriate Cornish knowledge as his own (in 2007 Pickering presents himself as a specialist on Cornish hedges, and in 2010 on Kneehigh itself), he shows the audience nevertheless that in reality he knows nothing of Cornish history. Pickering has never heard of An Gof, of the killing of Cornish men and the destruction of Glasney College as part of the hegemonic strategy practiced under the reign of Edward VI. He, like the characters of Roy and Roger, local councillors for housing, is completely out of touch with the struggles of the contemporary Cornish community and of Cornish reality beyond the postcard version of the county that is sold to tourists. As Bernard Deacon claims, when addressing the cultural construction of Cornwall, the allure of the landscape has always been detached from its people: ‘outsiders tended to focus on the landscape rather than its inhabitants, thus beginning a process that continues to the present day’ (1997: 17). For Deacon, the ‘romanticised periphery’ has been the dominant

\textsuperscript{13} In the 2010 play-text, Pickering’s song is a post curtain call. In the performance on 27 August, however, it has been moved to the main section, as Pickering, feeling he has a touch of Stockholm syndrome, thinks the three of them should get to know each other better (Kneehigh 2010b).
construction of Cornwall from the 1870s (1997: 7). According to Deacon ‘[in] such a construction Cornwall is a product of the gaze of artists, and tourists, anthropologists and novelists. (...) [T]he voice of Cornish people themselves is rarely heard. The Cornish are constructed; they have little role in the construction’ (1997: 7).

‘The voice of the Cornish people’, represented in Blast! through Chough and Stiggs, starts indeed by describing Cornwall as a ‘romanticised periphery’. Chough and Stiggs use poetic phrases to praise Cornwall’s natural beauty (the land of endless sky, the land of salty breeze on steep/stony beach (Grose 2010: 7), but soon switch to discussing the problems brought about by Cornish tourists (land of overpriced fish dishes, 62-year-old men in Speedos, where the land ends in a theme park, where local young people cannot afford to buy a house (Grose 2010: 8). Blast! readdresses some of the issues already relevant in the 2005 production of A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings. Set in Hayle Harbour, one of the many possible examples of Cornwall’s decaying economy and impoverished native population, the production highlighted the perils for the locals of pursuing economic development at all costs. A local newspaper reviewing Kneehigh’s production questioned what would become of the area in the future: ‘homes for local children to inhabit’ or ‘sumptuous holiday accommodation strictly for those with up-country money’ (Sagan 2005: 25). Another reviewer wryly described the village Kneehigh had built as part of the production as the much-desired ‘affordable housing for Hayle’ (Ruhrmund 2005).

The Cornish economy and the problems of the native Cornish population are addressed in Blast!, but soon enough the spectator is led
to question the Cornish/English separation. This play is not solely about
the English rich pushing the Cornish poor from their own land, leaving
them voiceless and powerless, as in the saying quoted in Cornish by
Stuggs. It is also about how global greed dominates (and defeats?) any
claims to local culture. This is why one is allowed to feel compassion for
and empathise with the three characters Pickering, Chough and Stuggs,
and one cannot but agree with Pickering when he says to Stuggs: ‘It’s
not your [Cornish] flag! It’s everyone’s flag!’ (Grose 2010: 30). The
globalised postmodern world in its interconnection renders previous
border definitions and identity claims as problematic. In cosmopolitan
theory, it is said that globalisation, climate change and the most recent
economic crisis prove that states are bound together in communities of
fate or societies of risk where local events have inescapable global
impacts. Close to the end of the play, Stuggs and Chough let Pickering
leave, only to be devoured by the Alsatian dog guarding the tent’s
entrance, a version of the mythological Cerberus guarding the Gates of
Hell from possible escapees. The audience is also offered the
opportunity to go. This is a false choice, however, as Pickering’s fate
would presumably also ensue for them. As in the famous Eagles song,
‘Hotel California’, the audience is given the chance to check out but can
never truly leave. Chough explains his terrorist act as:

I’ve ad this question in me head that / I’ve always wanted
answered ever since I was a / lad. Oo’s in charge? Oo’s
responsible? Why is / the world like it is? I found Trev’s
website one / day and it seemed like e ad all the answers. […]
I wanted to be part of summin. […] With his rage and / my
curiosity, an instant bond formed, with / explosive results.
(Grose 2010: 37)
Chough’s explanation of his radicalisation sounds very close to the motives of real terrorists explored in a verbatim piece of theatre, *Talking to Terrorists*.\(^{14}\) *Blast!* does more, however, than reflect on why some people may be more liable to radicalisation than others. By playing with the characters’ geographical origins and assumed national identities it problematises a stable notion of locality, or of a division between self (law-abiding English citizens) and other (whether real Islamic terrorists or fictional ‘Cornish’ terrorists – ‘fictional’ as characters, and also in their adopted rather than geographically-ascribed identities).

As the audience cannot confidently place any of the characters’ identities as English or Cornish, or even trust such a distinction in an increasingly globalised world, the play must contribute as well to the problematisation of their own role (and of free-will) in the abiding world order that Chough and Stuggs attempt to oppose through their suicidal terrorist act. Grose’s questioning in *Blast!* of what it is to be local (two out of the three men in the play who choose to die for the Cornish cause are not even from the county: Stuggs is from Plymouth and Andy the technician is from Liverpool) must set the play (and the terrorists’ act) outside clear-cut regional or national identity politics. Andy’s words are particularly significant here: ‘I’m staying. I may be from / (where he’s from) / But after tonight, I’ve decided I’m Cornish / through and through!’ (Grose 2010: 48). In her article on theatrical responses to terrorism, Jenny Hughes claims that most productions on

\(^{14}\) A co-production between Out of Joint and the Royal Court, directed by Max-Stafford Clark and first performed at the Theatre Royal Bury St Edmund on 21 April 2005. In *Talking to Terrorists*, Edward says: ‘I can guarantee that if one of you goes out now and knocks on a hundred doors, ninety-nine people will tell you to get lost, but you’ll just happen upon someone in crisis; someone who’s bright but blocked. [...] It’ll be something like joining a cult...cut their hair, give them an orange robe, you’ll convince them they are now extraordinary’ (Soans 2005: 36).
this subject have attempted to present to their audiences unified and reassuring fantasies of ‘self’ and ‘other’: ‘theatre is a place where the separation of self, other and enemy can be symbolised in an attempt to capture an impossible certainty and sense of foundedness’ (Hughes 2007: 162). I would claim that Grose’s play constitutes instead an example of ‘a more complex, multilayered response’, as demanded by Hughes, not only on the subject of terrorism or identity politics but on the whole notion of community.

When Chough confesses that he is not actually from Cornwall, Stuggs, after expressing very comically his revulsion at such an admission, dismisses this fact by declaring ‘let’s set aside our differences, you know, we all come from the same place if you look far enough’.15 This assertion is coherent with a production that has constantly played with assumptions of place and identity, very visibly so in the moments quoted above, but also in such instances as the generalised incorrect comic address by Stuggs to the Asylum audience as ‘People of Chilverton’, based on the tent’s temporary location just off Chilverton Cross, and the impromptu instance in which Roy and Roger read out the answers filled in by members of the public on what they liked and disliked about Cornwall, replies which, on 27 August, included in the audience both a disliking of tourists and an identification as tourists.

It is certainly true that the play has as an objective to bring the self-determination of the Cornish people and their history to the forefront.

15 This is the line spoken in the performance of 27 August. A similar line to this had also been included in the 2007 play-text: ‘[e] don’t care – we’re all from the same place / [i]f you care to look back far enough...’ (Grose 2007: 17). The original line in the 2010 play-text is, however, significantly different: ‘[b]ut if ya look back in history, you’ll see Devon / was part of Cornwall anyway’ (Grose 2010: 48).
A ‘nationalist exposé’ (2010: 702) according to Kent, *Blast!* ‘responded to wider feelings in Cornwall that its political and linguistic claim for independence and/or devolution was growing, and had never been more confident’ (755). Like earlier Kneehigh projects, it could therefore be said that *Blast!* contributed to pride of place in Cornwall. However, in its understanding (and problematisation) of contemporary communities, I would claim that, like Rebellato, Grose prefers cosmopolitanism to localism as an opposing force to globalisation. Rebellato replaces the belief in localism, which asserts that ‘the world is indeed diverse’ and that ‘this diversity should be respected and defended’ (Rebellato 2009: 54) against cosmopolitanism, that is, a ‘belief that all human beings, regardless of their differences, are members of a single community and all worthy of equal moral regard’ (Rebellato 2009: 60). Only a belief in the principle of ‘equal moral regard’ could make the claim, as stated in *Blast!* (755), of the unfairness of the Cornish housing market, where money (and surveyors’ interests) rules all. Certainly one must consider that the last celebratory call for important Cornish men and women in the play emphasises that so many Cornish deeds are of importance with regard to their wider consequences beyond local politics, illustrated by the two very different notable feats mentioned of Richard Trevithick of Camborne (‘inventor of steam-propelled engineering’ (Grose 2010: 49) and Rick Rescorlla of Hayle (‘security chief / at The World Trade Centre who, thanks to his / foresight and knowledge, saved over 2000 lives’ (Grose 2010: 49). The ‘cosmopolitan’ quality of the play (a reminder, in a way, of the company’s earlier dictum, Joan Miró’s ‘to be truly universal you must be truly local’ (Rice and Shepherd 2010: [29]) might then explain the show’s unique response by what was presumably a fairly geographically (and socially) diverse audience.
At the end of the 27 August performance which I attended, and which Kneehigh video recorded, the audience cheered and roared non-stop, standing for four minutes and only stopping at Pickering’s request. I had never before witnessed such a response to live theatre, either in art house/studio spaces or at West End and Broadway star-studded shows. Helen Kemp, the writer of *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*, had said about *A Very Old Man*: ‘one of the great things about theatre is that it can produce temporary communities. The Three Islands Project became one such community. What makes it different is the fact that it is truly international and that it travels’ (quoted in Parker 2005b). The accessibility of *Blast!*, its poignancy and its strong impact for traditional theatre-goers and the group of lads from the local football team alike (who brought with them a crate of beer to be enjoyed during the show) seems to provide evidence for such a temporary community.

Kneehigh has rejected the label ‘political’ throughout its history. Shortly after the Kneehigh Asylum season in 2010, however, the company began to describe their work as political:

> We are a rare oasis of human engagement in an increasingly corporate landscape. In this almost ancient act of human communion, we are profoundly political, and it is in the spirit of this revolutionary passion that we have created ‘The Kneehigh Asylum’ – shelter, sanctuary, madhouse, home. (Rice and Shepherd 2010: [165])

By critically pointing out the Asylum as making no one the wiser, a play like *Blast!* shows, however, that such utopian beliefs (and their double-domed physical embodiment in the Asylum) cannot but be built through the means of the same corporate-orientated interests that they
so much wish to avoid and contradict.\textsuperscript{16} On the other hand, and akin to o bando’s ‘social island’, the Asylum (and in particular the company’s accessibility and community agendas) may allow Kneehigh, at least temporarily and circumstantially, to avoid the globalisation mechanisms o bando so disapproves of. As with o bando and Kneehigh, the utopia also has a place in Foursight’s productions. Foursight’s focus on a shared humanity is not, however, symbolised in a physical building, as with Kneehigh’s much-desired Asylum, but is made visible (and viable) in all its community-centred projects.

3. Foursight and the multiethnic Wolverhampton community

In 1994, Kate Hale and Naomi Cooke together devised a one-woman show, \textit{Slap}, first performed in Vancouver. \textit{Slap} is based around three generations of fictional Catholic Northern Irish women living in Belfast during the twentieth century, and set in the context of the Catholic/Protestant division. Hale stresses how both she and Cooke not only talked to Northern Irish women living in Canada during the devising process, but also researched the topic heavily, relying in particular on two books: \textit{Only the Rivers Run Free: Northern Ireland: The Women’s War} and \textit{Born of a Woman} by John Shelby Spong (Cousin 2000: 94). Approached by an audience member dissatisfied with their portrayal of the Northern Irish experience, Hale was, however, forced to question whose voice was represented through the production:

Naomi and I had a conversation with a woman who objected to the idea that we were telling Irish women’s stories when we’d never been to Belfast. [...] I felt guilty for a while.

\textsuperscript{16} The words are Stugg’s: ‘Ere we are, the present day. 2010. Chiverton / Cross. In a tent that looks like a giant bra. And / I’m still none the wiser’ (Grose 2010: 46).
panicked because I wondered if she had a point. [...] My argument would be that there is room for both. There is room for people it directly affects and room for people who are coming in and studying it from the outside, bringing their own issues into it. (Cousin 2000: 98)

Hale’s critical acknowledgement that they ‘are coming in and studying it from the outside, bringing their own issues into it’ is fundamental in this context, in which two English women, Hale and Cooke, presumably more familiar with the English colonialist discourse and perspective, are recounting Northern Irish history, albeit through a fictional story and characters.

The experiences portrayed in Slap have neither been lived by its creators, nor been drawn from collaboration with the community that inspired the play. Participation marks the key distinction between community theatre pieces, such as the ones Foursight would produce from 2002 onwards, and other types of production such as Slap. While Slap may be committed to giving an insight into a particular community, it does not establish, as community performances desire to do, an active, indispensable and continuous engagement with that community throughout the creative process and beyond. Foursight’s Slap, entirely created by two English artists, cannot be said to be, like community-based theatre productions, ‘about the marginalised reclaiming their identities by performing their usually ignored histories’ (Boon and Plastow 2004: 11). Only from the early 2000s onwards did Foursight venture into community-based theatre, first with Reans Girls (2002/3), followed by Apna Ghar (2006) and TCS
Foursight’s move into community theatre was connected to the company’s own critical assessment of their audience base in the late 1990s and early 2000s as having changed into the type of audience typical of repertory theatre: ‘following our last two national tours of *Pushing Daisies* and *Medea*, our audience has become more middle class and middle aged, predominantly white and “mainstream”’ (Foursight 2001). It was in response to this desire to make ‘more overt links with culturally diverse communities’ (Foursight 2001) that the company decided to create *Reans Girls* (2002).

Their first regional, rather than national, touring production, *Reans Girls*, is based on the stories of different generations of women coming from all over the world to settle in the local Whitmore Reans area of Wolverhampton, the city to which Foursight had moved early on in its career in 1989. In Foursight’s *Reans Girls*, the Whitmore Reans area, traditionally known for its rains, floods and boggy landscape, and the old slipper baths in Wolverhampton, now demolished but mentioned by some of the women interviewed, were evoked in Purvin’s set: a swimming pool surrounded by changing rooms. In each of the

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17 In addition to the productions quoted, Foursight’s *Agamemnon* constitutes an interesting example of community participation even if not strictly a community-based production. Foursight’s 2004 production of *Agamemnon* used a multi-lingual chorus, recruited from the local community, constituted by people of different ages, ethnicities, genders and backgrounds. For Lorna Hardwick, in ‘Remodeling Receptions: Greek Drama as Diaspora in Performance’, Foursight’s *Agamemnon* is a concrete example of the propitious use of Greek plays in diasporic contemporary situations. Hardwick claims the diasporic nature of the original classic play-texts, ‘uprooted from their origins in time, place and language’ (Lorna 2006: 205) is conducive of the plays’ recontextualisations by contemporary productions such as Foursight’s.

18 *Reans Girls* was directed by Naomi Cooke. It was first performed at the Newhampton Arts Centre Theatre, Whitmore Reans, Wolverhampton in 2002. The cast was: Nina Battley, Gina Biggs, Lucy Goss, Donna Heaslip, Nicola Jennings, Toni Midlane, Royona Mitra, Louise O’Grady, Josie Parker, Bharti Patel, Emma Simpson.
changing rooms, five different groups of five spectators were able to experience food from different countries and rummage through suitcases and personal belongings, being invited to remember those who had been left behind. Through a promenade and often interactive performance, Foursight structured the material collected in the recorded interviews with different generations of local Whitmore Reans women. Unlike Slap, totally devised by Hale and Cooke, Reans Girls had very little devising, as ‘[m]ost of what was created was either taken directly from the interviews with the women and then literally rehearsed and put into a space – or the idea was almost totally fully formed and then just put on its feet’ (Kuppers 2007: 165).

Lisa Harrison, the company’s special projects coordinator and researcher for Reans Girls, testified to the powerful experience of listening to the women’s stories and then sitting through the production alongside some of the interviewed women:

[T]his moment came when I knew this was going to be part of Stephanie’s story […] as soon as it started involuntarily she went, ‘that’s me’ … and the actor carried on and she said it again, ‘that’s me’ … and the tears came into her eyes [Lisa starts crying]. […] [I]t was so raw, this moment of … that is my story being told here in this funny swimming pool area … and she couldn’t help herself from just explaining it out loud. (Harrison 2003)19

Through Reans Girls, Foursight collected different biographical histories of Whitmore Reans-based women and translated these experiences, unchanged, into a performance to be shared with the wider community. By including snippets of the women’s first languages and by using

19 All transcriptions from audio/video recordings are my own.
different forms of English, the production emphasises the diverse cultural background of the women portrayed.

The real ‘Reans Girls’ were given a voice in Foursight’s production through the ownership of both the content of the story and the linguistic register used, despite not acting themselves. The performance, entirely based on the Reans women’s own stories, also fulfilled Foursight’s objective to attract a more culturally diverse audience to the company’s shows, as the subject matter, the Reans women and their families, drew an audience that would most likely not have been there otherwise. In their use of local stories collected through interviews, in their inclusion of different languages and non-native English accents, Foursight’s two subsequent community projects have many aspects in common with Reans Girls. The promenade performances of Apna Ghar and TCS, however, take community participation further than did Foursight’s first community piece.

Apna Ghar and TCS called more directly on the community by drawing on the active role of several community volunteers during both the research and creative stages of the projects. In 2006, Apna Ghar (‘Our Home’ in Hindi/Urdu), an English Heritage-funded piece and the first co-production between Black Country Touring (BCT) and Foursight, is also focused on the testimonies of several generations of women, but this time, and reflecting BCT’s prior projects and community implementation, Foursight focused only on South Asian women of the Sandwell area. TCS, once again a co-production with BCT and funded by English Heritage, in addition to substantial funding having accrued through a National Lottery grant, closely followed Apna Ghar’s creative model. The interviews on which both Apna Ghar and TCS were based,
unlike in *Reans Girls*, were now carried out by a number of volunteers from the local communities researched (women-only with *Apna Ghar*, and mixed with *TCS*), who had received training to do so and who also had the opportunity to then participate in the devised performance as actors and collaborators. The oral histories collected by the volunteers were then recorded and preserved by English Heritage in Swindon and the Sandwell Community History and Archive.

*Apna Ghar* and *TCS* are not only about the community but were developed actively with the community in the research and performance stages. Because of this, as Govan et al. emphasise, both productions have an added democratic potential: ‘collaborations between professional theatre practitioners and community based participants are often intended to improve the lives of the participants, to extend cultural democracy and contribute to the process of social change’ (Govan et al 2007: 73). Such objectives are clearly expressed by the creators of *TCS*, who assert that ‘[s]ocial improvement and positive change is at the heart of the proposed corner shop project’ (Foursight and Black Country Theatre 2008). Moreover, with *Apna Ghar* and *TCS*, the stories from these Wolverhampton communities are those that have acquired historical status and social validation through the archival nature of both projects.

By collecting their own stories and having them preserved by English Heritage and local museums, minority communities such as the South Asian community may find themselves encouraged to further procure heritage access and training. As Foursight/BCT rightly point out, ‘this is a particularly successful format in introducing people (especially BME communities) to history and heritage; people who would not otherwise
access heritage sources through conventional methods. The service users at SCH&AS are 100% white (based on SPFA 2006-07 research) (Foursight and Black Country Theatre 2008). Foursight’s published statistics are certainly encouraging concerning the wide outreach of their community productions. According to the questionnaires filled by the public attending the revived TCS in 2008, 33% of the total responses were from BME audience members (Foursight 2009). The 2008 production in Wolverhampton’s Mander Centre, due to its location, had the added potential, in comparison to the 2007 West Bromwich production, to attract if not a purely ‘accidental audience’ as defined by Wilkie, as performances of TCS were all paid and spatially circumscribed, then at least a spontaneous and otherwise unlikely audience. TCS’s frequent lunch-time performances (four days out of the total seven), when the shopping centre was at the peak of its activity, may have favoured the unplanned attendance of shoppers attracted by spontaneous curiosity rather than by the company’s credits or the kudos associated with theatrical spectatorship. Certainly, it could conversely be argued that the Foursight piece and other art events attracted to the shopping centre a knowing and ‘culturally experienced’ spectatorship that would not otherwise have visited the shopping centre, promoting in the same space, as with Kneehigh’s 2010 Asylum season, a rare occasion for a communal shared experience between very diverse types of theatre audiences.

While the statistical weighting of different types of audience is understandably hard to ascertain, the TCS exhibition (and the opportunity to have a guided visit to the TCS set), which opened for free visits before and after the performances, proved particularly successful in attracting unprompted visitors. The exhibition raised
significant interest among passers-by, as Foursight counted one hundred visits to the exhibition outside performance times (Land 2010). As well as the democratic potential implied in the TCS exhibition and in the potentially broader-based audience of the production located in the Mander Centre, it is the promenade nature of all three of Foursight’s community-based productions that has been instrumental in the creation of temporary communities during performances.

With TCS, Apna Ghar and Reans Girls, the separation required by the walk-about performance and the set design (and, with Apna Ghar, the real school site used) fostered intimacy and a collaborative spirit. The audience of all three productions was divided into small groups who occupied exiguous spaces. The expected collaboration between spectators from very different contexts favoured a sense of communality rather than separation. Foursight’s community productions have invited spectators to informally squeeze onto a couch, as at an overcrowded family gathering, to play guessing games, share food, and to use mime when linguistic communication became no longer possible. In the feedback survey for TCS, many spectators commented positively on the intimacy of the performance, and one, watching it on the evening in 4 October 2008, recognised that ‘as an audience member moving from scene to scene I also felt like one of the threads and part of a connection with the community’ (Foursight 2008). With Reans Girls, given that water was a crucial element to the performance, Cooke, the director, found it necessary that all spectators got wet after each show. Cooke testified: ‘you hear them breaking the laughter when they get to the other side partly relieved that it’s not raining but I think at that moment it is just getting that sense of realisation of why they’ve just been baptised’ (Cooke 2003).
The artificial rain created for the spectators as they left the performance each night invited them to extend the communality of theatre spectatorship beyond the performance space. Despite their own individual circumstances, spectators were united first by the (make-belief) vagaries of the weather, and then in the sense of realisation and rejoicing provoked by the theatrical artifice. Such feelings of belonging and difference make all of Foursight’s community-based productions remarkable. In *Reans Girls*, the diversity of the women’s backgrounds was evoked in performance through the actors’ use of multiple accents, the inclusion of lines in different languages such as Spanish and Punjabi, through music influenced by different cultural traditions, and through a food-tasting session in which spectators had to guess the country of origin of the food they were trying. Small groups of spectators were taken on a journey through the lives and stories of Irish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, South Asian and Chilean female immigrants. The audiences’ experiences were constructed to emphasise cultural difference and focus on particular communities. However, spectators were also invited to accept these differences and to open up their understanding of local community to include the fellow spectators at the night’s performance, the actors and characters and, ultimately, by implication, the whole of humanity. Because of this, *Reans Girls* carried ‘[a] sense of people leaving behind country and family, of arriving, joining and becoming a part of another community, yet still carrying a strong sense of cultural identity and ties to homeland’ (Foursight 2010).

*Reans Girls, Apna Ghar* and *TCS* partake of the cultural cosmopolitan belief that each individual occupies and has commitments to two worlds simultaneously, a local culture and a commonly shared human culture. In Foursight’s community theatre productions, spectators are
invited to feel part of a small but incredibly varied group of people, sharing what is an irreproducible performance experience, crossing boundaries of personal trust, visiting the shopping centre, the local school or conversely going to the theatre for the first time, widening their experiences and their understanding of local and distant cultures. With regard to Reans Girls, Harrison emphasises the superimposition of the local and the global in the production:

There was something so extraordinary about the piece that it became something much bigger than I think any of us had anticipated ... and ... that was to do with ... that’s what made it so special ... it was to do with Humanity with a capital H, with the World with a capital W, it was Global with a capital G, it wasn’t just little Whitmore Reans, it was something much much bigger and about what it is that we share as human beings on this earth. (Harrison 2003)

Reans Girls reflects cosmopolitan identity, that is, the experience of individuals and of cultures living within two worlds simultaneously. As Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held claim: ‘human beings, as well as various cultures, can accommodate a cosmopolitan identity beyond their immediate cultural border without also abandoning the important features of their cultural belonging’ (Brown and Held 2010: 10).

Reans Girls, Apna Ghar and TCS respect to different degrees community theatre’s premise of being focused on the stories of a particular community, giving that community a voice in and through the creative process and bringing the production back to the community. The communities represented in Foursight’s community theatre productions are identifiable by their gender and geographical area of
residence in *Reans Girls*, by geographic, gender and ethnic criteria in the case of the South Asian women from the Sandwell area taking part in *Apna Ghar*, or by their profession and wider geographical spread in the case of the Black Country-based independent shop owners’ stories inspiring *TCS*. Nevertheless, such initial definitions of community are always widened through the accumulated cultural identities of the individuals portrayed both as British and not British, from here and there in the productions. As Foursight states with regard to *Apna Ghar*, it explores the idea of where home is, of the ‘homes left behind and new homes made’ (Foursight 2010). This statement could equally be applied to any of Foursight’s community theatre productions. In its redefinition of home and community as this cross-cultural place, both fixed and moving, Foursight’s community theatre embodies its own construction of cosmopolitan citizenship and community.

4. *Escola de Mulheres*, English language-based plays and the Portuguese LGBT community

Playing in a number of performance spaces mainly located in the city of Lisbon, EM’s work over the last 15 years can be essentially characterised by its relationship to English language texts and authors, rather than its identification with a particular location or community, or the collective organisation of its creative process. Unlike o bando’s focus first on Portuguese culture and then on a broader concept of a Portuguese language community, EM has, from its origins, aligned itself with English and American texts in particular. Many of the plays produced were written by women writers and have recognisable feminist themes, such as Judy Upton’s *Bruises*, Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *New Anatomies*, Kay Adshead’s *Bites*, and a number of
plays by Caryl Churchill and Paula Vogel, including Churchill’s Cloud Nine and Vogel’s How I learned to Drive and The Oldest Profession. This association with the Anglo-American world is not to do with a belief in common cross-cultural values, as with o bando’s idea of a Portuguese language community. It is also less to do with the overall preference in Portuguese theatre for foreign texts (Serôdio 1994: 59; Rebello 2000: 159; Porto 1985: 141); or with the increasing production of English texts on a global scale (Rebellato 2006: 98; Kershaw 1999: 145; Mark Ravenhill in Rebellato 2009: viii; Billington in Delgado and Svi ch 2002: 57). While women’s theatre companies in England in the 1990s were detaching themselves from the ideologies that had been core to the women’s theatre movement during the historical alternative (Oddey 1998: 120; Foursight 1998), EM was directing texts and authors precisely because they had been influenced by, closely connected to or inheritors of many of the claims of the second wave women’s movement.

Staging internationally-recognised authors such as Vogel and Churchill had the potential to further EM’s cause of moving towards a much-needed rebalancing of gender power in Portuguese society and culture, given that, unlike its Western European counterparts, Portugal’s own second wave feminism is still emergent (Tavares 2000: 123). Acknowledged both for their literary value and their feminist claims, the use of texts by Vogel and Churchill allowed EM to foster the company’s gender-centred agenda while potentially shielding it against claims of radical gender separatism due to Vogel and Churchill’s

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20 Male writers produced by EM include Euripides, Brian Friel, Tracy Letts, Jorge Humberto Pereira, Ingmar Bergman, Mark Ravenhill, David Lan (co-author with Caryl Churchill), Yannis Ritsos (co-author with Marguerite Yourcenar) and adaptations based on a collation of texts by Tennessee Williams, Bernardo Santarenno and Aristophanes.
international reputations. Fernanda Lapa was the first director to bring both of these authors to the Portuguese stage, and texts by both have been jointly produced by EM and the National Theatre. Churchill, second only to Vogel as the most-performed author in the company’s repertoire, is considered by Lapa ‘one of the most interesting contemporary playwrights and the issues she talked about were exactly the same ones I felt like discussing, that is: sexism, racism and repression’ (quoted in Carvalho 2002: 8). Dipping into politically and academically established histories of feminism in the United States and England, together with the power of institutional legitimation from the English-language authors staged and the kudos associated with the National Theatre, at first glance EM seems to have found the right tools to ease the passage of a gender-centred company in a broadly feminist-averse (albeit not female artists-averse) Portuguese society. However, when the company recently broadened its political objectives to include the rights of same-sex couples, this relationship to the sexual politics of the Anglophone world becomes complicated.

Texts by Vogel and Churchill had previously been performed by EM on the Portuguese stage, validated by a previously-consolidated history of feminism in the United States and the UK. Unlike these productions, the 2010 production of Vogel’s 1985 play Baby was previewed in a country that, following the example of Spain and a handful of other countries, became a pioneer in establishing equal rights to wedlock for same-sex couples. In the UK, ‘civil partnerships’ were legalised in order to officialise relationships between same-sex couples, conferring on the

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21 Prizes won by Vogel include the Obie Award for Best Play in 1992 and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1998. Churchill has been awarded, among many others, three Obie awards in 1981, 1982 and 1987, for Cloud Nine, Top Girls and Serious Money respectively, and, in 2001, the Obie Sustained Achievement Award.
same-sex couples property rights, social security and pension benefits equal to married couples, but with one important difference: ‘Civil Partnerships do not have equal recognition in all countries of the world’, unlike a heterosexual marriage certificate, which ‘is recognised by other countries when a heterosexual couple move abroad’ (The Lesbian and Gay Foundation 2011: 29). The symbolic and legal differences between civil partnerships and marriages have played an important part, first in Spain and later in Portugal, in the campaigns pushing for same-sex marriages over any other type of legal recognition for same-sex couples. For Vale de Almeida, Spanish movements in favour of same-sex marriages soon ‘broke away from the conservative attitude which could be summarised in the English expression separate but equal (a formal recognition for gay and lesbian partnerships but which excluded marriage), recognising that this position translated in fact into separate, therefore unequal’ (Vale de Almeida 2008: 27). For the first time in EM’s history, therefore, the specific Portuguese context superseded both the claims of the fictional American story and the marital status bestowed upon same-sex relationships in most of the Anglophone world.

In early 2009, as Vogel’s play was rehearsed in Estefânia, the recently re-elected Portuguese Prime Minister, José Sócrates, and the socialist party government (PS) prepared to fulfil one of their electoral promises: to legalise same-sex marriage. Similar proposals had been put forward by Bloco de Esquerda (BE) and Partido Ecologista Os Verdes in the previous year but failed to reach the necessary number of ‘yes’ votes in the National Assembly. Commenting on this, Miguel Vale de Almeida asserted in 2008 that the same-sex marriage law in Portugal was the logical next step to the structural changes that had affected Portuguese
society: ‘I believe that a process similar to what happened in Spain – albeit slower and more contradictory – is taking place in Portugal, and that desires and anxieties about same-sex marriage reveal the transformations of the gender and sexual landscape of the country in the last decades’ (Vale de Almeida 2006: 4-5, my emphasis). As Vale de Almeida had forecast, the legalisation process of same-sex marriage in Portugal has indeed been more contradictory than in Spain.

The Spanish government led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero proposed and approved a law that not only granted wedding rights but adoption and artificial insemination rights to homosexual couples in June 2005. In Portugal, the PS majority had in all its declarations separated these issues, emphasising that the proposed changes concerned marriage rights alone, a less ambitious law in comparison to those put forward to (and rejected by) the Portuguese Parliament by BE and Os Verdes in 2008. The right to parenthood for same-sex couples was precluded by PS, some would say in order to ease the process of change in Portuguese society regarding the progressive equalisation of rights between same-sex and heterosexual couples to first include marriage and then, at a later stage, parenthood. The ‘phantasm of the child’, as designated by Vale de Almeida, has been constantly used as a counter-argument to the recognition of same-sex marriage in several countries (Vale de Almeida 2006: 20-1 and 26-7), Portugal included (Vale de Almeida 2008: 9-10). In Portugal specifically, the concern about adoption/insemination rights was central to the protest group Citizenship and Marriage established as a response to the changes proposed by the PS party. In two weeks alone the protest group gathered the necessary 90,000 signatures to request a referendum proposal that could have frozen the legislative process. The referendum
proposal was refused by the National Parliament, and on the same day (8 January 2010) the changes to the matrimonial law were approved, becoming for José Sócrates a ‘historic moment’. The new marriage law approved by the PS-led government became an unprecedented victory for LGBT rights in Portuguese society. The issue of family rights for same-sex couples nevertheless remains unresolved, although presumably the new marriage law will put forward the case for LGBT families in the not-so-distant future.

In relation to its particular focus on same-sex couples and families, it would be hard to find a more topical play in the contemporary Portuguese context than Baby. In 2009, Fernanda Lapa publically campaigned for same-sex marriages and equal adoption rights for same-sex couples. In an interview at the time she declared:

> It does not make sense today to discriminate or to refuse to accept that all minorities should have equal rights. […] What objections could be raised to a homosexual person having full rights to constitute a family and being a parent? I think nothing could justify it. (Lapa 2009)

In the same year, Lapa was the public figure invited to read the manifesto written by the Equal Access to Wedding for Same-Sex Couples Campaign (Almeida 2009). Lapa’s personal political stance was extended to EM when Lapa and Medina decided to include in the company’s 2009/2010 repertoire one of Vogel’s earlier texts, Baby, focusing on same-sex relationships and families, written about twenty-five years earlier, between 1983 and 1984.

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22 EM’s adaptation of Baby, Bebé, previewed on 7 January 2010 in Estefânia, Lisbon. The play was directed by Marta Lapa and performed by Cristina Carvalhal, Margarida Gonçalves and Sérgio Praia.
Same-sex couples’ right to parenthood is a central theme in Vogel’s play, *Baby*, produced by EM in 2009. In *Baby*, a lesbian couple, Ruth and Anna, and their friend Peter are brought to live together in the same New York apartment by Anna and Ruth’s shared desire to have a child of their own. Peter, Anna’s old college friend, is the father of the child Anna is carrying, and the three enter into a sort of three-way relationship. The play starts with Anna, heavily pregnant, and Ruth role-playing their fantasy children. During the play, in addition to Peter, Anna and Ruth, the spectator gets to know Henri, Cecil and Orphan, the three children that have been imagined and are frequently role-played by Anna and Ruth. Now that the new baby is on its way, Peter finds Ruth and Anna’s ‘hobby’ troubling, and thinks it is time for them both to give up their make-believe characters: in Ruth’s case, these are Henri, the French boy obsessed with balloons, and Orphan, the child raised by dogs, and in Anna’s case, the child-genius, Cecil. During the two-act play written by Vogel, these three children often appear on stage, while the three adults discuss and disagree about a number of things, including the viability of the fictitious children and the difficulties of raising the unborn baby. In the end, after three unsuccessful attempts by their creators to ‘murder’ the fictitious children, the new-born Nathan is found to have a happy existence alongside his six family members, counting as the seventh person in the household, as expressed by the play’s title.

By alternating and intertwining the naturalistic moments between the three adults with the absurd register of the three invented children, Vogel’s text cleverly demystifies ideas of normality, traditional families, happiness and the real. As David Savran has highlighted, this play is ‘most original and important for its redefinition of family’ (quoted in
Vogel 1993). However, although preconceptions of ‘real’ relationships and couples are exposed in *Baby* as just another construction, the play is nonetheless carefully grounded in a specific time and place. Its set directions and textual references establish this clearly as late twentieth-century New York, after the euphoria of the 1960s and 1970s, and before the terrorist and technological craze. More importantly, Anna, Ruth and Peter are forced in the play to cope with the ‘very real’ social and biological impositions of life, whether these are the impossibility of a geneticist somewhere being able to mix Anna and Ruth’s DNA to form a baby (as poetically expressed in Ruth’s soliloquy) (Vogel 1993: 40-41) or a world where same-sex couples’ rights to parenthood is still contested.

If the right of a homosexual household to have a baby is, in Vogel’s text, shown to be fulfilled through the happy and nurturing context created by Peter, Anna and Ruth in the play, such a right must also be understood as inextricably related to this family’s specific circumstances (including Peter’s indispensable contribution), rather than resulting from the type of overarching changes in society put forward by the legalisation of same-sex marriages and homosexual parenthood in several countries. Much has been accomplished worldwide in terms of LGBT rights in the years between the publication of Vogel’s play and EM’s production, but Anna, Ruth and Peter’s arrangement remains unsurpassable in present-day Portugal. The right for a same-sex couple like Anna and Ruth to have a child of their own, either through artificial insemination or adoption, independent of the role played by a friend like Peter, is still unrecognised under Portuguese law. Incidentally, it was a lesbian couple and family, Teresa Pires and Helena Paixão, living together with their biological children
from prior heterosexual relationships, who, of their own exclusive initiative, sued the Portuguese state for discrimination regarding the previous marriage law in 2006, thereby making an indispensable contribution to the current changes.23

In *Baby*, Anna, Ruth and Peter’s tripartite arrangement is construed as a happy family for baby Nathan outside of conventional heterosexual norms. However, such a family arrangement, unlike Joana and Helena’s, recognisably introduces heterosexual relationships into the homosexual household, as the self-declared gay character in Vogel’s play, Peter, eventually becomes a partner to both female characters. Conversely, EM’s adaptation of Vogel’s text, *Bebé*, by privileging and expanding the fictitious world in the original play, establishes an interesting and often contradictory dialogue between the playwright’s original text and the effective and potential changes happening in Portuguese society at the time. In her stage adaptation, Marta Lapa disregards Vogel’s text breaks (and respective time and space indicators) by doing away with the actors’ exits and entrances and the text’s specific space markers: kitchen, lounge and bedroom. While the audience infers from the words spoken by the actors that the play is set in North America, specifically in contemporary New York, the objects and costumes used on stage displace the text’s references. During rehearsals, Lapa instructed Ana Luena, the set and costume designer, that ‘nothing should place us anywhere […] [the costumes] should not enable a concrete reading/interpretation’ (rehearsal notes).

23 See for example Lusa (2010).
Both set and costumes displace the action of the text. The set is minimalist, and the only object on stage, aside from a large carpet (stairs? A set of three overlapped blocks?) does not entail an obvious practical function, but only acquires one through the actors’ interaction with the object itself, when they sit or rest upon it. The boundaries of the space on stage are not clearly defined: the stool or chair can simultaneously represent an outside and an interior location in the play’s narrative. In the same way, the costumes also dislocate reality in this production by intentionally diluting gender differences. The three actors wear the same type of baggy trousers, while wearing different items on top (coats, shirts and waistcoats). The similar colours of the clothes point to the connection (or extension?) between the characters (Anna and Cecil wear dark blue with vertical stripes, Peter wears dark grey, and Ruth, Henri and Orphan wear black). The costumes also dismiss any concrete identification in terms of period, and for this reason emphasise the fictional value of what we are watching on stage.

The opening scene (the first prologue of the play) is very important to understanding the structural changes that EM’s production has made to Vogel’s text. In Baby, according to the stage directions, the first scene of the play is set almost in darkness. Children’s voices are heard (Anna and Ruth impersonating Henri, Orphan and Cecil), talking about how you make babies. At the end of the scene, Uncle Peter comes into the room and straightens out the facts of life for them, moving from a lyrical approach to a more graphic one at Cecil’s request. The semi-darkness in Vogel’s text was presumably chosen by Vogel to create some confusion in the spectator. Who is speaking? Are these children or adults? In Bebé, Peter is on stage, lying sideways downstage, his head to the left and his back to the audience. The audience can only fully see his
body. On top of Peter and between his legs, the audience can see another two pairs of legs. The bodies of the female actors are concealed, as they are lying perpendicular to Peter. They will only be seen as they alternately raise their upper bodies from the floor during the dialogue. When it is time for Peter to ask what the boys are talking about, Peter does not move, but only raises his right arm, holding his hand with the thumb joined together with his fingers; the thumb and fingers separate and join as he speaks, and the hand’s movements resemble a talking puppet. When Cecil mentions the word ‘vagina’, Peter pokes Cecil in between the legs, and while Cecil laughs and tries to remove Peter’s hand, Henri/Orphan also pokes and prods him.

The idea of concealment constructed in Vogel’s text through lack of lighting is actually performed on stage through Sérgio Praia’s body, which hides the female actors’ identities. But because Praia is already on stage when the play begins, rather than joining both women from offstage, a significant change is introduced into the way the three characters’ relationship is presented to the public. Peter ceases to be the outsider to the lesbian relationship (symbolised by Anna and Ruth’s games with the fictional children) at the beginning of the play, and actually takes up the role-playing himself through the puppet-like image of the hand. In Vogel’s presentation of her own opening scene, the role-playing is an activity exclusive to the women. However, in EM’s performance of the opening scene, the three adult characters seem to have the same level of importance in the relationship. When I enquired of the actors how this change had come about, Margarida Gonçalves replied that it happened because in this way ‘it becomes more cohesive […]. Sérgio is with us from beginning to end’ (Gonçalves 2009), and Cristina Carvalhal added: ‘Sérgio was uncomfortable
entering the stage so we tried it out in different ways’ (Carvalhal 2009). This, then, is a clear example of the actors’ creativity and improvisation exercises being superimposed onto the original text. Conversely, this change was only possible because Marta Lapa adapted a directing approach that disregarded the text’s scene breaks and allowed for the actors to be on stage even when the text indicates they should not be.

In scene four in Vogel’s text, Ruth enters and exits the stage (going to the kitchen and coming back) both as Henri and Orphan. The idea that Vogel tries to evoke on stage is that Henri and Orphan fight with each other over a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. That is, Ruth is alone on stage and fights with herself, using her own arms as if belonging to different people. At the end of the scene, Anna is supposed to come in and witness part of this, looking at Ruth in astonishment. In *Bebé*, ‘Peanut Butter Sandwich’ (or its Portuguese acronym, MAG) becomes the code name for an adult version of a ‘children’s game’, just as ‘angst’ does in a later scene. In this scene, when Ruth asks what she can have for breakfast, Peter and Anna perform a freeze/defreeze sexual game in which every time Ruth looks at them they are actually groping different parts of each other’s bodies in statue-like positions. Here, the discussion between Henri and Orphan is now performed by Ruth turning to either Anna or Peter, while groping and feeling each of their bodies, culminating in an ecstatic movement where the three kiss and rub each other frenetically.

While this scene in *Bebé* evokes comedy and nonsense as does Vogel’s original text, it is done in a significantly different manner. The scene gains sexual connotations where it had none in the original. This is not to say that EM’s production altogether removes the representations of
child-play or child-like environments from the original text, but these are at times transferred to moments other than those specified in the play. What EM’s production does differently, however, is push the representation of sexuality on stage to places Vogel’s text does not go. In Baby, sex is alluded to, but only physically represented once through the grabbing of Anna’s breasts by both Ruth and Peter, emphasising the physical representation of the threesome relationship over the lesbian one. Bebê evokes more strongly the different sexual relationships established between the three characters. It is noticeable that the lesbian couple more evidently express their love on stage when, in one of the scenes where Henri/Ruth interacts with Anna alone, Carvalhal and Gonçalves kiss, fondle, embrace, lie and roll on top of each other. But while the representation of the physical and emotional ties between same-sex and heterosexual partners seems to gain audacity and complexity in the Portuguese production when compared to the original text, the space given to the representation of the family is reduced.

This deconstructive approach to the scenes of the original text that have a realist bearing is maintained up to the very end of EM’s production, and the final scene, relating to baby Nathan’s birth, was still changing very close to the play’s preview date, the director telling the actors: ‘do not stop proposing endings to me’. In some of the endings tried out, the actors gathered around in a way that represented the existence of a baby, that is, they gathered around a chair or stood in a circle looking at the centre. In other endings, Nathan becomes another code name for more sexual games, or assumes a puppet-like character, becoming another fictional character in the household. The chosen finale does not set out to deny outright the existence of baby Nathan in the play, as do...
the examples mentioned above, but does not clearly establish it either. This ambiguity is encouraged throughout the play through images of pregnancy and birth which are simultaneously represented and denied by the actors. In its ambiguity, the final scene parallels the play’s opening, with Carvalhal’s body now working as a concealment image, wrapped around Praia and Gonçalves’s and, potentially, baby Nathan’s. In preferring the absurd to the real, and, by extension, persistently making sexuality take centre stage when it is often only alluded to in Vogel’s text, Bebé rejoices in a changed Portuguese society, where homosexuality has ceased to be controlled by ‘silence and invisibility’ (Vale de Almeida 2008: 12). However, by making Nathan’s existence ambiguous, this production also possibly transforms Nathan into a ghost-child, both a symbol of the last frontiers of LGBT rights, and the main argument often used to deny same-sex couples the right to marry, reminding us that Portugal has yet to fully face up to all its ghosts.

In conclusion, EM as a company is currently the least community-oriented of the four studied in this thesis. Bebé can only be read as a community production if community is understood in its broadest possible sense. However, Bebé is also possibly the production that best exemplifies the cosmopolitan belief in the equal value of human beings, and also the complex intersection between local and global citizenship. Contrary to the belief by some that homosexuals are the lowest form of human being, cosmopolitan theories offer us the possibility to believe in a future globalised world where people have equal access to marriage and a family, as well as social acceptance, regardless of their sexual preference or country of birth. In present day Portugal, however, the ‘local’ may encapsulate legal equality to the right of same-sex couples to
marry, but this takes place in a context where the phantom of prejudice, visible through the restrictions imposed on adoption and artificial insemination, still looms. Conversely, the increasingly widespread pro-LGBT rights stance pushes the Portuguese ‘citizen of the world’ to question his/her local prejudices.

Unlike EM’s disengagement with geographically identifiable and circumscribed communities, o bando, Kneehigh and Foursight have included in their repertories more traditional forms of community theatre. O bando and Kneehigh, in particular, have consciously engaged with both local and more intangible notions of community. O bando established its home in the historic village of Palmela ten years ago, while Kneehigh has, since its origins, rooted its productions in Cornwall. Additionally, both o bando and Kneehigh disapprove of the pressures of the global and corporate economy in Western societies, and envisage that their productions (in all their stages) contribute to the creation of a ‘small social island’ and an ‘oasis of human engagement’, each company’s phrasing coinciding with what I designate as ‘secular communities of faith’. Finally, Foursight creates productions that are more straightforwardly integrated into a particular community, but ones that stress engagement and cohesion while respecting differentiation. More importantly, all four companies, and all the productions I have analysed here offer (and deliver), I believe, the
crucial opportunity to get to know, mix and connect with that ‘totally different type of people’ that travel (and/or live) second class.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} I am quoting here the words of MP Sir Nicholas Winterton live to BBC Radio 5, who, angered by the fact that he was no longer able to claim expenses for first-class rail travel, declared: ‘if I was in standard class I would not do work because people would be looking over your shoulder the entire time, there would be noise, there would be distraction. […] They are a totally different type of people’ (BBCNews 2010: my emphasis).
VI. Conclusion

This book is dedicated to all Portuguese theatre workers that under fascism and after its fall have fought for an art free from capitalist subjection and who are still committed to the transformation of Portuguese society [...]. (Rebello 1977)

The theatre that is recorded in this book was created primarily by people who did think that capitalism is absurd and damaging, but who also believed that minds could be changed. Their work was a contribution to that change. (Itzin 1980: x)

HEDGE FUND MANAGER: [...] [T]his is a new kind of socialism. Socialism for the rich. For everybody else it’s business as usual. In Michigan, in Cleveland, they don’t have socialism. They just have it on Wall Street. Everyone else is in as much trouble as ever. (Hare 2009: 57)

The big idea of utopia seems to have disappeared. [...]. We have forgotten how to imagine a future beyond market society [...]. Anything that looks vaguely different from what is known as the neoliberal project appears to be almost inconceivable. [...] We have lost something that went with the whole history of utopian thinking and that is imagining a future which is harmonious and egalitarian where people live with each other happily ever after. (Ash Amin 2010)

Kneehigh’s cheeky troupe of players in Blast!, wearing Duchess Camilla and Prince Charles masks, incite the audience to scream ‘off with their heads’. A few protesters during a march against tuition fees in London
intercept the royal couple’s car, crack the windshield and cry out, like the Kneehigh cast and audience, the famous antimonarchist slogan. Foursight in their TCS, performed in a recently disused shop, one of the staple features of the latest economic crisis, rejoice in a multiethnic British society. David Cameron declares multiculturalism to have failed, and the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition puts into practice the most stringent immigration laws of recent years. O bando stages a Portuguese-language production, reactivating in the play’s programme prior claims that Portugal has more in common with Mozambique or Brazil than with Germany or Britain. Greece, Ireland and Portugal, so-called periphery European economies, are forced into bail-out and to follow the regulations stipulated by the European Union and the IMF. EM performs Vogel’s 1980s play on parenthood shared between a lesbian couple and their gay friend. Portugal becomes one of the few countries in the world to approve same-sex marriage, but denies parenting rights to same-sex couples. London theatre practitioners react to the financial meltdown by producing an unprecedented number of plays (and one West End success) criticising late-capitalist culture. Social unrest spreads across Europe as a result of the economic crisis. Multiple student protests take place in Britain, while in France protests are compared by some to May 1968. An alternative to the status quo never seemed more urgent, yet harder to find.

In this thesis I have proposed an analysis of the narratives of the alternative in the context of British and Portuguese theatres from late-1960s onwards. I have explored the traits attributed to the historical

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1 See for example Billington (2009) and Armstrong (2009). Both critics highlight the 2009 productions of David Hare’s The Power of Yes and Lucy Prebble’s Enron.
alternative theatre movements prominent between the 1960s and 1980s in Portugal and Britain, focusing in particular on their ideological premises and corresponding theatrical incarnations. As Rebello’s and Itzin’s quotations above testify, this is a politically-centred theatre; that is, one that *dreams* and *deconstructs*, as Sandy Craig’s (1980) seminal book proposes. *Dreaming of a new society*, the alternative/political/radical/fringe/independent theatre practitioners of Western Europe and the US sought to bring about social change fuelled by powerful civic and political oppositional movements that included the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in the United States, the student protests in France, the French, British and US women’s liberation marches and the uprisings against and overthrow of dictatorial regimes in the Iberian Peninsula. A core concern behind such theatre practices was to move beyond unequal wealth distribution, in which 7% of the population owned 84% of the wealth, as embodied in the popular theatre company name adopted by John McGrath, 7:84.\(^2\) In addition to criticising liberal ideology, some political theatre groups in Britain further specialised into *deconstructing* the naturalised emphasis of power relations, whether these pertained to the hegemonic patriarchal, racist or heteronormative discourses.

As seemingly utopian twentieth century experiments of socialist-oriented societies have collapsed, politically-invested cultural practices have dwindled into post-ideological postmodernism and market-orientated cultural production. Theatre projects rooted in the historical

\(^2\) Rebello addresses the question of worldwide wealth inequality in 2008 by analysing *Forbes Magazine’s* annual rich list and the per capita GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the world’s poorest countries, coming up with some interesting statistics: ‘[t]o equal the combined wealth of the poorest 3.25 billion people in the world, it would take only the richest 522 people’ (Rebellato 2009: 38).
alternative variously fold as a result of ‘natural extinction’ and/or
government pull-out, become part of or fully institutionalised in high-
art theatre power houses, embrace consumerist and entrepreneurial
strategies and/or metamorphose into aesthetically-defined practices
eschewing former radicalisation. Playwrights and practitioners
formerly associated with the alternative can now be found working in
partnership with repertory theatres and the National Theatre. National
Theatre productions transfer to the West End and Broadway.
Hollywood actors star in the National Theatre. The mega-musicals in
particular, and live entertainment in general have become highly
profitable and standardised. Spectators increasingly pay for and
anticipate being challenged in their expectations, taken into the work of
art, seeing spatial, temporal, fictional and cultural signifiers collide.
Fragmentary, nonsensical, biographical and/or non-narrative
performances purposefully and ambiguously mingle reality and fiction,
the historical and the imaginary, the artistic and the everyday.

Both the aesthetic and the ideologically-construed alternatives seem to
have been overthrown in the postmodern era. Aesthetically,
mainstream and fringe, high and popular cultures blend or exchange
influences. Ideologically, Ash Amin’s assessment that ‘[w]e have
forgotten how to imagine a future beyond market society’ translates the
current absence of overarching oppositional narratives to neoliberalism.
The rigidly defined conflicting notions of hegemonic powers and
dissident countercultures may have fallen into disrepute, but even so,
this does not mean that all postmodern cultural practices have become
(a)political. This study has proposed that currently state-endorsed
theatre projects can be found to be overtly politicised in localised
contexts. The four case studies for my applied study respond broadly to
the desire to look at postmodern alternative theatre practices, covering such broad categories as urban, rural, gender-centred and community-centred. If within the historical alternative, oppositional practices may have simply defined themselves as women’s or community theatre, no such essentialist definitions are now possible. A politicised postmodern theatre, such as that circumstantially ascribed to o bando, Kneehigh, EM and Foursight, must now favour paradoxical oppositional strategies inscribed within particular performance circumstances. Negotiating the alternative means both engaging with and, locally and momentarily, criticising neoliberalism.

As shown in my analysis, o bando and Kneehigh have, through criticism and self-reflection, established their own brand of alterntiveness in each company’s profile. O bando’s singularidade has recently been reinterpreted by the company as singularismo in an effort to readdress the collective ownership of the work, distancing itself from the repeated emphasis given to João Brites’ authorship in the company’s profile by inviting different artists from within and outside the cooperative to take on the directorial role, such as with Nuno Pino Custódio’s adaptation of Tinhoso. Kneehigh’s Cornish-inspired landscape theatre, the particular form of site-specific theatre successfully produced by the company until the mid 2000s, has set the company apart from other devising and physical theatre-based companies. Rice’s individual success as a director and adaptor to the stage of universal folk tales and iconic films would, however, pull Kneehigh’s larger productions away from Cornish outdoor performances and Cornish texts/histories. The timely travelling structure, the Asylum, potentially offers Kneehigh the opportunity to
return to its frequent Cornish touring of the past, without being forced to limit its performances to open air and/or small village hall spaces.

EM and Foursight have, in contrast to the mixed community theatre companies, and also between themselves, contextualised alternativeness differently in their work. Foursight has rooted its work mainly in devised performances, using physical theatre and live music to bring such famous, infamous and anonymous women as Boadicea, Thatcher and immigrant women in Whitmore Reans to centre stage. More often than not, ‘the words [spring] from the action’ (Cooke 2001: 16) in Foursight’s productions, rather than the reverse, and Foursight assumes itself to be an experimental theatre company that has a particular (but not exclusive) interest in telling women’s histories. Unlike Foursight, EM is a text-based theatre company. EM is known for bringing to the Portuguese stage, often for the very first time, a large number of Anglo-American texts, mainly written by women. Its main objective has been to provoke spectators into thinking differently about gender roles, and to promote a gender equality agenda through theatre. Both Foursight and EM nevertheless reject the labels of ‘alternative’ and ‘women’s’ theatre because of their implied association with marginality.

In addition to each theatre company being profiled as (or disengagement with) alternative (or equivalent synonyms), either by themselves or by others, two fundamental aspects considered within the historical alternative have been analysed in this thesis in relation to specific productions: non-traditional spaces, and, related to these, non-traditional audiences. Both o bando and Foursight perform their pieces in found spaces. Tinhoso!'s central characters are the school children of a Mozambican school. Many of the most relevant events of the short story
on which the production is based take place in the playground and the classrooms of the school, but also in the forest and in the village’s bar. Given that o bando was partly funded for the production by the fund for the rehabilitation of Palmela’s historic centre, the Plano do Centenário school seems an obvious choice as a performance location. In the same way, Foursight’s promenade performance piece on local commerce was particularly suited to the Mander Centre in the heart of Wolverhampton, both because this is the city with the highest number of high street shop closures, and as part of the city’s initiative, the later award-winning scheme, ‘Art in the Centre’. Neither of the productions, however, is strictly site-specific theatre. For both, there is a purpose-built set where the action occurs, and both pieces can and have been performed in different locations to the specific spaces analysed here. In fact, the two productions establish instead an analogous relationship of exteriority to each of the found spaces in which they are set.

The hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping in the Mander Centre is drowned out in the lunch-time performances of TCS by the intimate nature of the performance and the exiguous ‘local shops’ setting. The guided and personalised experience of the spectator during the piece sets itself in stark contrast to the impersonal annihilating nature of the non-place, as classified by Augé, making visible that which in habitually rushed consumerism remains concealed (Augé 1995: 103). As a result of this, and as described by Frances Land and witnessed by me, TCS’s audience would not leave immediately after the performance, hanging around in the exhibition area, free to decide when to go. Kneehigh’s Asylum has also been conceived as providing the spectator with a special place to express their own creativity. As discussed in this work, the Asylum (in its running and associated logistics) is, however,
more like a traditional bricks and mortar theatre than a travelling circus tent. Conversely, EM’s space in the heart of a community centre in a residential area places the company on Lisbon’s alternative theatre circuit and raises the very viable possibility of its location attracting non-traditional theatre spectatorship.

As discussed in this thesis, all four companies do at least in part of their work bring an alternative focus to theatre performances. Against the sectioning of former historical alternative theatre groups as either community or women’s theatre, LGBT or even either lesbian or gay, there is much more contamination of alternatives (and contradictions) in postmodern political theatre. To start with, the reading of ‘minority’ varies across time and across Portugal and Britain. It is likely, for example, that queer thought is currently more homogeneous and visible than feminist public discourse in Portugal, even if homosexuality is a much bigger taboo than women’s participation in politics or the arts. Despite the increased number of women working in Portuguese theatre, it is striking how few of o bando’s productions have been directed by women. However, o bando’s recent feminist production, Rua de Dentro (Inside Street), co-directed by a woman, performed solely by women and written by a woman, may push the company in different directions in the future. In this respect, EM has led clearly by example. Its latest production, O Outro (Other), brings together two women directors from two female-led companies, Marta Lapa from EM and Ana Luena from Teatro Bruto, in creating a production described on the company’s website as being ‘between life and death, between sexes’. On the other hand, Foursight’s recent co-production with Portuguese company Teatro do Montemuro, Pertencia, brings the Portuguese language to the British stage, a rare event, given
that Portuguese is a language that in the British theatre context better fits the status of minority than Punjabi or Hindi/Urdu, used in Foursight’s previous productions. Kneehigh’s exclusive latest production, a privately-financed venture (with its most costly tickets to date), *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, was a world apart from its muddy Asylum season which presumably it helped fund. Publicised as the next mega-musical in the West End, and highly criticised for its money-making agenda, the production was nevertheless forced to close early, confounding its producer’s expectations and ironically confirming Rice’s statement: ‘I do not have a problem with the basic mechanisms of business. But if you are led commercially it can destroy work and sometimes destroy people in the process’ (Radosavljević 2010: 94).

The present circumstances of the companies point therefore to other possible ways of dialoguing with (or discontinuing) the alternative than those covered by this thesis. When I first moved from literary studies into studying performance, one of the main difficulties that I faced was precisely that I just wanted my four companies to keep still. Books are very well-behaved. When put down they do not go anywhere. Research into performance is a different story altogether. Companies are constantly mutating and evolving, *aka* living. It is with great sadness, however, that I find that one of the four companies will soon leave behind the present and future timescales required by the methodologies used in performance research, being reduced to the archive alone. In times of economic crisis, as Foursight has painfully and personally discovered, the artistic sector is an easy target. As universities face unprecedented funding cuts, unemployment rises, social benefits are withdrawn and the next generation’s professional future is mortgaged,
the arts world is finding it increasingly hard to maintain current levels of state support.

Considerably less scandal was provoked and a different pitch in terms of press coverage was taken this time around, compared to the previous ACE funding cuts in 2008. The whole arts sector, and Kneehigh’s West End production of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* in particular, came under attack in Christopher Hart’s review of the production, published shortly before the ACE’s 2011 decision (Hart 2011). A similarly critical article on Portuguese artists was written in 2010 by politician José Pacheco Pereira, complaining about the withdrawal of the previously-announced cuts to the arts sector in Portugal (Pacheco Pereira 2010). The cuts had provoked, as João Brites recalled in a personal interview (Brites 2010), the biggest protest meeting of professional artists in Portugal since David Mourão Ferreira’s funding cuts in 1977. While the no doubt grave consequences for the Portuguese arts sector arising from the country’s bail-out and public expenses cuts are not yet known, the ACE’s decisions are now irrevocable. While any reading of the present cuts could raise different conspiracy theories, my own highlights how two of the companies who have seen their funding completely cut, Shared Experience and Foursight, were long-running, women-dominated and often women-centred companies. Under the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition, women have been the main victims of public sector cuts; they have also been recently blamed for keeping white working class men out of universities; and inferred as

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3 For more on this, see for example ‘Low-paid Women Workers Miss Out on Public Sector Pensions Protection Promise’ (www.tuc.org.uk/industrial/tuc-20290-f0.cfm).
4 In 2011, David Willetts, the Conservative universities minister, held educated working women responsible for the lack of jobs available to working class men (see
irresponsible, for some time now, due to the number and the lateness of pregnancy terminations in Britain⁵.

The most important limitation to this study lies in the fact that there has not been sufficient space in which to speculate about what negotiation of the alternative is possible without the ‘hand that feeds’. Itzin’s expression regarding the institutional funding of oppositional practices in the context of the historical alternative problematises, as does Craig’s book, the situation of having oppositional ideological theatre practices funded by the same national boards and states they most likely oppose. Both the Portuguese and British historical alternatives developed in particularly fortunate times regarding funding of so-called independent theatre groups. As Itzin put it, in relation to British theatre but equally applicable to Portuguese theatre, much of the alternative movement was about ‘organisational effort’ (Itzin 1980: xiii). In relation to the four theatre companies surveyed due to lack of space I have not sufficiently addressed the inescapable nature of the market, even in relation to state-funded projects.

Important questions that remain regarding funding and the market are, for example, how much of Kneehigh’s and o bando’s alternative work is allowed precisely because of their more mainstream productions? In addition, and due to the increasing size of these companies and their ambitious collaborations, how much could we say that these are not one but several theatre groups merged under one name, specialising in

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for example http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/apr/01/david-willetts-feminism-lack-of-jobs).

⁵ Conservative MP Nadine Norris in 2011 campaigned to reduce the abortion time limit and the number of terminations. Norris claimed that 60,000 terminations could be prevented each year if women were independently advised (see for example http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/aug/28/anti-abortion-lobby-reforms).
different forms of theatre and audiences? What to say of Kneehigh’s rich donors, unashamedly sought by the company, which links in the company’s website the emotional closeness to the project (friend, ally, family etc) directly to the amount of money donated, in what might be seen as a naively-worded and misguided marketing strategy. Could it not also be said that EM’s survival over the last fifteen years has been solely related to the status of its artistic director rather than the political or aesthetic quality of the work, or the experimental potential of the company? Finally, and in relation to the successful national lottery bid for TCS, how significant is Steve Tanner’s confession that ‘when we were filling out the form, we tried to make the show sound un-theatrical, just so we could get the money’ (Logan 2008)? The nature of the current ACE cuts could equally raise questions regarding the market-oriented strategy of its funding policy. One could question why the Manchester International Festival’s comfortable budget remains if the festival’s top-end Wagner tickets cost almost one hundred pounds apiece, and are sold out months in advance? Does this not constitute, as Hare has claimed with regard to the results of the recent global financial crisis, another example of ‘[s]ocialism for the rich’? The global crisis has left unscathed the six-figure salaries of the financiers that gambled on the market, while average citizens have been deprived of their houses, their jobs and their former lives. If one considers that the Manchester International Festival’s prohibitive ticket prices would, in effect, exclude most average- and low-income earners from attending any performance, one can only conclude that only the middle classes have been funded by the ACE to go to the festival.

As someone who came to know the wonders of theatre for the first time when just reaching adulthood, and through my local state school, the
democratising potential of all the productions by o bando, Kneehigh, Foursight and EM analysed in this thesis strikes a particular cord. Perhaps one of the most relevant conclusions of my work is to show how alternative thought, that is, thought that is not dominated by neoliberal logic, is possible in the small utopias constructed through performances that have much in common with a cosmopolitan belief in a shared humanity. As in Dolan’s definition of utopian performatives, however, ‘[this] reanimated humanism is contextual, situational and specific, nothing at all like the totalising signifier it once described’ (Dolan 2005: 22). Temporary and secular communities of faith are fostered by the four theatre companies in singular performance events. Rather than having a straightforward definition as entertainment or commodity, these productions infringe in different ways the dominant ideology of the market. They do this by providing the space and time for people to meet informally with the actors before and after the performances. They do this also by allowing the spectators to bring their own food and drink to the theatre, by sharing a cup of tea for free before outdoors performances or even by transforming ‘innocent’ shoppers into theatre spectators. When a production provides the incidental opportunity to literally make the actors spectators of the spectators, and endows authority to school children’s words, it carries an important democratic agenda.

Disempowered voices are brought to centre stage in all the productions analysed by this thesis, through the focus on the experiences of ethnic and sexual minorities and of immigrant and formerly colonised populations. The productions promote discontent with Western contemporary societies, they work on a word-of-mouth basis, they give power to the voiceless, and emphasise the site-specificity of text-based
theatre. By situating themselves in residential or rural areas, and by cancelling out the privileges associated with more expensive tickets, they force some spectators out of their comfort zones and invite all to create temporary secular communities of faith. Secular communities of faith are a form of parodoxical alternative. They imply a temporary engagement (and negotiation) with the here and now in the hope of creating a strengthened sense of shared humanity and justice. Different individuals are brought together and challenged to ‘[imagine] a future which is harmonious and egalitarian where people live with each other happily’, if not ‘for ever after’, at least until the performance ends.

THE SINGER

And after this evening Azdak disappeared and was never seen again. But the people of Grusinia did not forget him and often remembered His time of Judgement as a brief Golden Age that was almost just. (Brecht 1994: 96)
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