

THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF ELS JOGLARS AND TEATRO DE LA ABADÍA

Beyond the Playwright

Simon David Breden



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AND TEATRO DE LA ABADÍA

BEYOND THE PLAYWRIGHT

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SIMON DAVID BREDEN

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TAMESIS

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Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	1
Part I Els Joglars	
1. Introduction and History	55
2. Theory and Practice	79
3. Development and Improvisation	121
4. Experiential Performance	143
Part II Teatro de la Abadía	
5. Introduction and History	157
6. Rehearsal Room Ethos	177
7. Theory and Practice	193
8. Holy Theatre	209
Conclusion	223
Bibliography	237
Index	251

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Introduction

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

A Methodology for Rehearsal

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

The analysis of rehearsal process in theatre studies is a relatively new field. It focuses on an examination of how artistic creativity evolves primarily from active discovery; by delving into the ways in which inspiration and intuitive response shape a theatrical piece we can obtain an understanding of its artistic value. Solutions to practical problems, then, result from actively doing rather than merely talking. The practitioners I refer to throughout the book repeatedly claim that they always prefer to stand up and do things, to try ideas out and not just talk about them. It is within this context that I approach the study of Els Joglars and the Teatro de la Abadía, while also seeking to place them within the international parameters of contemporary theatre-making and assessing their contribution to the study of process through the development of a working methodology.

In her written rendering of Jerzy Grotowski's *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, Malgorzata Dzieduszycka goes some way towards expressing the nature of the problem encountered by the spectator in the process of viewing, interpreting and analysing performance:

¿Hasta qué punto un receptor analiza este espectáculo? ¿Qué y cuánto comprende del mismo? El espectador que ve el espectáculo por vez primera, recoge tan sólo unas cuantas palabras, percibe únicamente algunas acciones. La obra fagocita al espectador con multitud de informaciones distintas (texto, movimiento de cada uno de los actores, relaciones entre ellos) de las que, en su conciencia, se revelan solo fragmentos. Y eso ocurre en aquellas acciones que originan un choque psicológico, en los momentos que sorprenden con su resolución estético-formal. (Dzieduszycka, 2003: 52)¹

Although she is speaking of a particular show, this is a reflection that we can apply to all theatre experience for an audience, including to what point as commentators we modify performance in our memories. Nevertheless, it is notable that in this account of *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, arguably a precursor of a more experiential mode of performance, Dzieduszycka isolates the moments of psychological shock for the spectator as those that remain and are more easily brought to mind. The question that interests me here is how a theatre company constructs a methodology for harnessing and controlling these psychological shocks to achieve a particular effect on their audiences.

Speaking of Spanish theatre in particular, a chasm separates the violent promenade excesses of La Fura dels Baus² and the placid proscenium texts of Alejandro Casona³ or Enrique Jardiel Poncela.⁴ This chasm is not just an artistic one, although clearly the concerns of the artists differ widely. In terms of the audience experience, the key to the differences resides in how these artists choose to communicate and what sensations they choose to stimulate. This is a problem of definition that has always faced academics and theatre practitioners: 'we find in language the notion of sensation, which seems immediate and obvious: I have a sensation of redness, of blueness, of hot or cold. It will, however, be seen that nothing could in fact be more confused' (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 3). Many strategies have been employed in an attempt to reduce this confusion, shifting the focus of academic analysis away from the product as a text and towards the live product that requires a more sensorial involvement. Even within the field of

¹ 'To what degree does a viewer analyse this performance? What and how much do they understand? The spectator who sees the performance for the first time gathers only a few words, perceives only a few actions. The play is absorbed by the spectator through a multitude of different information sources (text, the movements of each of the actors, the relationships between them) of which only a few fragments are revealed to their consciousness. And this occurs through those actions that generate a psychological shock, the moments that are surprising due to their aesthetic-formal resolution.'

² A Catalan devising collective, formed in 1979. For an overview and of their work, see my review of their retrospective publication, *La Fura dels Baus, 1979–2004* (Breden, 2006a).

³ Spanish playwright (1903–65), most famous for *Los árboles mueren de pie* (1949) and *La sirena varada* (1933) (Casona, 2005).

⁴ Spanish playwright (1901–52) noted for his comedies, of which we may highlight *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* (1940) (Jardiel Poncela, 2000).

literature, the Constance School developed the theory of aesthetic response in an effort to explore the gap between the product and the interpretation of the individual reader or spectator: 'As a literary text can only produce a response when it is read, it is virtually impossible to describe this response without also analysing the reading process' (Iser, 1978: ix). The theatre director Anne Bogart speaks in similar terms of how art can arrest the attention of its viewer:

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

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

A rehearsal is, in its simplest terms, a period of practice before the placing of a theatrical production in front of an audience. However, the artistic process that informs this act of preparation can take many different forms. Speaking on the nature of art, Aristotle emphasised that primarily 'all art is concerned with coming into being [...] art must be a matter of making', and so he defined the particular state of mind necessary to enter a 'reasoned state of capacity to make' (Aristotle, 1998: 141). Hence Aristotle appears to give the process of making art as much importance as the artwork itself, as well as identifying that a specific state of mind is necessary to engage with artistic creation. Aristotle underlined the paramount importance of process in the act of artistic production, and yet throughout the ages the written product alone, the play-text, has been the cornerstone of academic analysis of theatre, at the expense of performance and process. This in spite of the fact that any art or drama school will emphasise process above all else,⁵ since the nature of art, as Aristotle rightly recognised, depends upon it.

This text-centred theatrical culture led the director of the UK-based theatre company Forced Entertainment, Tim Etchells, to complain about 'harping on endlessly about writing as if there was nothing in the theatre but words and writers' (Etchells, quoted in Giannachi and Luckhurst, 1999: 29). This is not a new

⁵ I studied at the Central School of Speech and Drama for the MA in Advanced Theatre Practices from 2002 to 2003, and from the very beginning we were encouraged to log our rehearsal processes and attempt to define how we wanted to work as much as what sort of work we wanted to create. This wasn't just an exercise; the log book was an attempt to define a process of theatre-making.

debate, since as early as 1908 Edward Gordon Craig had issued the following warning: ‘Those people who are interested at all times in creating a “literary theatre” would do well to remember the dangers which beset such unnatural efforts’ (Craig, 1999: 15). Eugenio Barba argues that the partial view of theatre studies that has excluded the creative process from analysis has in fact hindered an understanding of the performing arts: ‘Historical understanding of theatre and dance is often blocked or rendered superficial because of neglect of the logic of the creative process, because of misunderstandings of the performer’s way of thinking’ (Barba, 2005: 11). It is from this perspective that I wish to deal with the concept of process in the rehearsal room, as an artistic entity in itself that deserves academic attention. Furthermore, in order to define and contextualise the theatrical languages of the practitioners at the core of this study, I draw on the examples of international theatre-makers to highlight similarities, influences or differences in processes. This is fundamentally a study of theatre in the making, albeit focused on two companies in Spain, but the cross-fertilisation of working processes on an international scale is a reality that must be acknowledged. I hope not only to shed light on the methods of Els Joglars and the Abadía, but also to indicate the importance of the development of process in its own right.

This study, then, will be equally relevant for students of the rehearsal process as for students of the specific companies. After all, process is increasingly becoming not just a focus of study but also a product that can be sold. The growing importance of process has reached the status of ‘marketable commodity’ in the commercial field, in what Stuart Marshall has called, speaking specifically of video art, the encompassing of ‘documentation of performance [...] in place of the work itself’ (quoted in Armes, 1988: 202). Furthermore, the fascination with products that reach a wide audience, such as commercial films, has been matched by an increase in ‘the making of’ documentaries.⁶ The music industry is also beginning to take note, with the band The Smashing Pumpkins launching a twelve-week online subscription service for video and sound file updates on the creation of their new album: ‘The goal is to create a working model that is not profit motivated but rather information and access motivated. In exchange for a fixed resource base fans will be let inside in an unprecedented way to the creative process of preparing to make the next SP album while also inspiring an inter-active dialogue that will help shape the work’ (Corgan, 2009). Process is, therefore, not simply an unavoidable delay prior to the product itself but an artistic entity of interest to a wide audience who appear willing to pay to witness it.

Theatre has noted the possibility of engaging the audience in an interactive dialogue in order to adapt the final product with the use of previews in commercial theatre or work-in-progress showings in experimental venues such as

⁶ Indeed, Els Joglars’ venture into film, *¡Buen viaje, Excelencia!* (2003), when released on DVD, included ‘making-of’ documentaries in its features, and was accompanied by a book *Franco y yo, ¡Buen viaje, Excelencia!* which also discussed the making of the film (Boadella, 2003).

the Battersea Arts Centre in London, and other venues which host ‘scratch’ performances of ideas still in rehearsal. Setting aside these special cases, when an audience actively affects the performance outcomes of a production, the relationship is based on a social contract that Susan Bennett defines as follows: ‘Spectators are thus trained to be passive in their demonstrated behaviour during a theatrical performance, but to be active in their decoding of the sign systems made available’ (Bennett, 1997: 206). These notions rely on differentiating between an act of performance and rehearsal. However, theatres such as the Teatro de la Abadía and companies such as Els Joglars compile a large amount of documentation relating to the process of creation rather than recording performance, material which is kept in their archives, revealing the importance given to rehearsal and process.

In too few cases has the artistic process itself been explored as a subject, in an effort to define how it influences both the finished product and its reception by the audience. The director, playwright and head of Els Joglars, Albert Boadella, highlights the importance of process, as contrasted to product, providing the analogy of watching his wife dressing up: ‘Ya sé que sin estar presente en el proceso el resultado final también puede ser una sorpresa muy atractiva, pero, debido a mi deformación profesional, siento mayor complacencia asistiendo a la tarea de composición’ (Boadella, 2009a: 277).⁷

In terms of theatre studies, Shomit Mitter’s *Systems of Rehearsal* is representative of a number of studies of theatre-making that appeared in the 1990s which attempted to go beyond a purely textual analysis of drama: ‘This is largely because scripts can be reproduced and are therefore easier to study than performance which is ephemeral’ (Mitter, 1992: 1). Mitter’s study is valuable for its rejection of the ‘indiscriminate application of the critical methods of literature to theatre’, instead attempting to express the concerns of Konstantin Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook within their respective rehearsal rooms. However, Mitter’s focus on the conceptual grounding of rehearsal does not give a specific idea of what a rehearsal is like, nor is this his intention: ‘I find that rehearsal logs [...] tend to be far too embroiled in the day-to-day details of workshop to give a sufficiently substantial account of the principles and aspirations that underlie the work they discuss’ (Mitter, 1992: 2). This is a criticism that is certainly applicable to David Selbourne’s *The Making of A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, to which Mitter alludes. While this book also looks at the subject of rehearsal, in this case logging Peter Brook’s production of Shakespeare’s comedy at the RSC in 1970, its own author virtually disqualifies the study in his introduction: ‘I have been able [...] to make more use now of the immensely rich possibilities with which that theatrical encounter

⁷ ‘I know that if I were not present during the process, the final result would be a wonderful surprise, but given my occupational bent, I feel a greater pleasure in attending the task of composition.’

presented me, than I could have done then. I have also lost some of the arrogant political dogmatism which led me, in the weeks and months following the rehearsals, bitterly to reject their validity almost entirely' (Selbourne, 1982: xxxii). Tirzah Lowen had the opposite experience when she logged Peter Hall's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* (1987) with increasing awe: 'By now, having sat through rehearsals day after day, I find it impossible to remain detached, not to be caught up in the working process' (Lowen, 1990: 100). As Anne Bogart emphasises, the rehearsal room 'is a place of potential rapture. In a rehearsal room, like making love, the outside world is excluded. It is a process of arousal, of heightened sensation, alive nerve endings and sudden pinnacles. It is an extreme event separate from our daily lives' (Bogart, 2001: 75). The reason for this intensity, and thus the purpose of rehearsal, Bogart explains, is that 'Actors and directors together are constructing a framework that will allow for endlessly new currents of life-force, emotional vicissitudes' (Bogart, 2001: 46). Mitter's own study relies on 'first-hand accounts' (Mitter, 1992: 2), which he says that he has attempted to rationalise, but we can only hope that his witnesses are not as biased as accounts of rehearsal rooms appear necessarily to be as a result of the intensely lived experiences they often accommodate.

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

While this study provides context for both Els Joglars and the Teatro de la Abadía, charting their roots and development up to the present, it should be noted that the bulk of the research was carried out between 2004 and 2007.

Hence to some extent my conclusions are applicable primarily to the realities of both companies at that time, as later developments have led to changes to the processes and intentions of each. I do not hesitate to point out that this apparent compromise of the values that set them apart has had a direct impact on the quality of their output; nevertheless the results of the period 2009–2013 do not detract from the high points of their work that this study focuses on. It would, however, be disingenuous to pretend that either company represents a model of perfection, and recent years have seen their weaknesses exposed.

First of all, it is worth establishing a few differences between what I regard as conventional mainstream theatre at the end of the twentieth century and the outset of the twenty-first as compared to some of the tenets at the core of Els Joglars and the Teatro de la Abadía. We may locate the fundamental difference within the notion of process, which is why it is so critical to make a consistent study of process as opposed to text or performance. As Brook points out in *The Empty Space*, if we look purely at results within the commercial theatre we will always find ‘one great success [...] that succeeds not despite but because of dullness’ (Brook, 1990: 13). If we consider the rehearsal circumstances of a mainstream company or director, we will find much of the artistic kleptomania and trickery that Jerzy Grotowski referred to as the paraphernalia of ‘rich theatre – Rich in flaws’ (Grotowski, 1981: 19). For instance, journalist Maddy Costa describes an instance of mainstream production and schedule issues in an article written for the *Guardian* on the occasion of the staging of Tom Stoppard’s *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* at the National Theatre, London, in 2009: ‘While every member of the creative and production teams has a distinctive role, their work overlaps ... the actors have five weeks to rehearse. On the technical side, we have three days [...] It’s a wonder that the directors – let alone the production staff [...] don’t exist in a permanent state of frustration’ (Costa, 2009: 21). Costa describes the mayhem of artists and technicians involved in the production and the compartmentalised nature of their distinctive crafts coming together for a theatre performance. This working system has been fruitfully employed for decades, although the thin line between a collective performance and a series of individual endeavours may result in the overlapping that Costa mentions but does not question. Peter Hall described the technical rehearsal as ‘a test of endurance, patience and tenacity’ (Lowen, 1990: 118), which only intensifies the question of why such a frustrating system is never called into question nor replaced within the mainstream. Perhaps, as Guy Debord said of the spectacle, ‘the attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances’ (Debord, 2006: 15). The studied slickness of a technical exercise thus becomes a replacement for taking risks: ‘Without embracing the risk, there can be no progress and no adventure. To attempt to perform from a state of imbalance and risk imbues the action with extraordinary energy’ (Bogart, 2001: 48). Without this risk within

the process the performance may be slick, but it will always be the success that depends on its own dullness, as Peter Brook expressed it.

I have been fortunate enough to work professionally in the theatre in both London and Madrid, both as assistant director on large-scale productions and as director. I would prefer not to enter into the relative merits of these productions, but I have often encountered issues relating to the overall workings of a theatrical company very close to those of Maddy Costa's description. Much of the rehearsal period consists in herding the assets of a 'rich theatre' around the space, and the director's attention is necessarily turned towards making the paraphernalia of stage trickery function. Work with actors too often consists of narrations of context followed by an establishment of cursory Stanislavskian objectives. Whatever the results, the emphasis of such a process quite simply cannot be said to reside in communion between the actor and the audience, in the way that Grotowski advocated or envisaged. This is where companies such as the Teatro de la Abadía and Els Joglars diverge from the mainstream, each in their distinct way. Both have resisted an established pseudo-Stanislavskian method, irrespective of its merits. Not content with the processes of the theatre they saw around them, José Luis Gómez and Albert Boadella turned the focus of their careers towards finding a way of developing theatre by elaborating an alternative method of creation. This is not to judge the merits or demerits of any existing methodology; however, it must be pointed out that Gómez and Boadella represent a conflicting notion of process compared with the mainstream.

If we proceed from the premise that Els Joglars and the Teatro de la Abadía provide an alternative to the mainstream by means of constructing a methodology that enables them to communicate with an audience in a particular way distinct from conventional norms, then we must also define how this reaction against tradition is formulated. Theatre has always existed in a paradoxical world of inadequate and incomplete descriptions, making product and process extremely difficult to document: hence the study of theatre has often referred principally to play-texts, to the work of literature. This is especially the case in Spain where theatre studies does not exist as an academic discipline and play-texts are regularly seen as the markers of theatrical culture. This is the point that Miguel Romero Esteo made when asked about the process of analysing theatre and the critical establishment in the latter years of the Franco era:

es que todo instrumental prefabricado de análisis configura un sistema en el que quieras o no, hay que encajar la representación y el texto, y así, en suma, todo acaba en labores de encasillamiento y clasificación. Digamos que, en general, el pensamiento sistemáticamente profesional, profesionalmente analítico, implica la lógica –poco lógica– deformación profesional de querer uniformarlo todo, de querer meterlo todo en un mismo saco. Y en concreto,

en la crítica teatral, el saco suele ser el teatro decimonónico como tácito punto de referencia y tácito baremo irremediable. (Isasi Angulo, 1974: 396)⁸

This remains the prevalent position, in which critical studies of modern theatre have continued to focus exclusively on playwrights and their texts, such as César Oliva's *La última escena* (2004) or María José Ragué-Arias' *El teatro de fin de milenio en España* (1996) which defines its intention from the outset: 'Del proceso seguido por el teatro en España en estos años, poniendo básicamente el acento en la autoría teatral' (Ragué-Arias, 1996: 12).⁹ We must resist these acts of critical reduction when we are faced with theatre that likewise resists classification and the nineteenth-century traditional models that Romero Esteo alludes to.

How, then, do we engage with pieces as visceral and distant from convention as performances by experimental artists such as La Fura dels Baus, Rodrigo García¹⁰ or Angélica Liddell?¹¹ Shows that have attempted to challenge the status quo of well-made theatre with its neatly bottled messages have almost without exception been received with critical hostility. Angélica Liddell's performance of *El año de Ricardo* (2008) was described by *El País* critic Begoña Barrena in the following terms: 'la machaconería de la Liddell es tal que su reflexión sobre cuerpo y poder se hace si no insoportable, si difícil de soportar' (Barrena, 2008).¹² Miguel Medina Vicario described Rodrigo García's *Tempestad* (1993) as an 'estrepitoso naufragio teatral'¹³ because García's company 'La Carnicería teatro nos ofrece [...] un laberinto de imágenes que confunden de principio a fin, y en consecuencia agotan hasta la desesperación' (Medina Vicario, 2003: 274).¹⁴ Medina Vicario viewed a later piece, *Macbeth, Imágenes* (1999), with equal

⁸ '[E]very prefabricated instrument for analysis configures a system where, like it or not, you have to fit performance and text together and, at the end, everything becomes a task of pigeon-holing and classification. Let's say that, in general, systematically professional thought, professionally analytical, implies the – illogical – logic and occupational desire to make everything uniform, to put everything under a single heading. Specifically, in theatre criticism, the heading tends to be nineteenth-century theatre as a tacit reference point and tacit unshakeable measuring stick.'

⁹ 'The process followed in Spanish theatre during these years, placing the emphasis fundamentally on the author.'

¹⁰ Rodrigo García (1964) is an Argentinean director based in Spain who, with his company La Carnicería teatro, specialises in a particularly direct and violent mode of devising, entering into an openly confrontational relationship with the audience.

¹¹ Angélica Liddell (1966) is very much part of the same movement as Rodrigo García, but her writings appear to be more palatable to the mainstream as some of her performances have been absorbed by the Centro Dramático Nacional.

¹² 'Liddell's work is of such a repetitive nature that her reflection on the body and power becomes, if not quite unbearable, certainly difficult to swallow.'

¹³ 'Spectacular theatrical shipwreck'.

¹⁴ 'La Carnicería teatro offers us a labyrinth of images that are confusing from start to finish and in consequence exhaust the spectator to the point of desperation.'

bemusement: ‘Un todo excesivo donde el espectador (no más de una docena en la representación que se comenta) se satura, pierde el hilo de cualquier conato de argumento, sufre con el desgaste del actor que no dosifica sus esfuerzos técnicamente’ (Medina Vicario, 2003: 314–15).¹⁵ The theatre critic Enrique Centeno went even further when faced with *La Fura dels Baus*, entitling his review of *Noun* (1992) ‘Basura Nazi’ (Centeno, 1996: 359).¹⁶ He goes on to explain: ‘importa el ruido, la sorpresa, el temor del espectador que contempla todo entre el asombro y el desconcierto. Nadie entiende nada, pero eso es lo de menos, porque se busca premeditadamente el desconcierto, la violencia, la afirmación del vacío o la *performance* anticreativa [...] inquieta que esta ideología fascista nos toque con su aliento y encima tengamos que pagarla’ (Centeno, 1996: 360).¹⁷

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

Theatre will never be itself again [...] unless it provides the audience with truthful distillations of dreams where its taste for crime, its erotic obsessions, its savageness, its fantasies, its utopian sense of life and objects, even its

¹⁵ ‘A complete excess in which the spectator (no more than a dozen people at the show I witnessed) is saturated, loses all notion of the plot, and suffers from the wearing down of the actors who do not ration their energies technically.’

¹⁶ ‘Nazi trash’.

¹⁷ ‘[W]hat matters is the noise, shock value and fear the spectator feels when looking on with a mixture of astonishment and confusion. No one understands anything, but that’s the least of the problems, because what is deliberately sought for is confusion, violence and the affirmation of emptiness or empty performance [...] it is unnerving that this fascist ideology should taint us with its touch, and to top it all that we should have to pay for it.’

cannibalism, do not gush out on an illusory make-believe, but on an inner level. (Artaud, 2001: 112)

Jerzy Grotowski's thinking runs along parallel lines:

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

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

Una de las finalidades que persigo con mi teatro es precisamente aspa ventar y aterrar un poco ... Estoy seguro y contento de escandalizar. Quiero provocar revulsivos, a ver si se vomita de una vez todo lo malo del teatro actual. (Luengo, 1987: 28)¹⁸

The increasing reliance on the immediacy of emotional communication is patent throughout the twentieth century, as the intellectual process behind staging a play finds itself increasingly relegated to a secondary position. This school of thought has finally started to filter into some mainstream theatre-makers, such as English director Rufus Norris, who has notably directed Lope de Vega's *Peribañez* (2003) at the Young Vic and Federico García Lorca's *Blood Wedding* (2005) at the Almeida: 'Theatre is an emotive experience. It's not an intellectual one. What a sweeping gesture, of course it's both, but if you haven't got the emotional one, forget it ... So much of it has to bypass the brain' (Norris, 2003).

This study shows how Els Joglars and the Teatro de la Abadía attempt to 'bypass the brain', as Norris would have it, in an effort to create their own set of conventions and communicate with audiences on their own terms. This implies the need not just for a new analytical engagement with the theatrical product,

¹⁸ 'One of the objectives I seek with my theatre is in fact to shock and scare a little ... I am quite happy to create a scandal. I want to act as a catalyst to see if we can finally vomit up all that is bad about theatre today.'

but also a new methodology geared towards establishing replacement conventions. Before establishing exactly what these theatre-makers have contributed, however, we must first examine the influences that have shaped both companies and inspired them to work towards alternative methodologies.

To do this, we need to get a sense of the theatrical climate that conditioned the arrival of both Els Joglars and the Teatro de la Abadía, by looking at the ways in which the rehearsal process developed throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In order to chart the progression of a more critically minded theatre in opposition to a perennially decadent mainstream, I will use three key practitioners to identify the major shifts taking place in Spain. These figures are Ramón del Valle Inclán, Federico García Lorca and Antonio Buero Vallejo, all of whom were aiming to challenge the establishments they so firmly opposed. These three playwrights are perhaps the most iconic and representative practitioners of their different eras. José María Rodríguez Méndez indicates their importance in the development of a theatrical culture in Spain: 'Valle-Inclán, Benavente, García Lorca, etc., tuvieron que luchar [...] y por eso constituyen hitos y no cadena lógica; cada uno de éstos supone una lucha aislada frente a la incultura teatral de nuestros intelectuales' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 54).¹⁹ Furthermore, in a theatrical climate which granted playwriting such importance, only the playwrights themselves could significantly challenge the system by writing plays that encouraged innovation because they demanded new modes of thinking about how to stage the work. Valle Inclán and Lorca were certainly innovators in form, and Lorca was himself a director and so had an affinity for the making of theatre. Buero Vallejo, while not 'on a par with García Lorca and Valle-Inclán [...] such views are simply unsubstantiated by the derivative nature of Buero Vallejo's theatre' (Delgado, 2003a: 3), does deserve credit for devising a more experiential style of writing that depended for its success on its emotional impact in performance, thus presenting a staging challenge for the practitioners of his time. Finally I will look at the role of the director throughout the twentieth century in Spain, creating a context for Albert Boadella and José Luis Gómez and their challenge to the playwright as the dominant figure in Spanish theatre. In the development of their practice, all these artists laid the foundations for the methods that Boadella and Gómez went on to apply.

A Spanish Legacy: Major Influences at Home

Albert Boadella and José Luis Gómez both looked beyond the frontiers of 1970s Spain in order to find inspiration in shaping their theatrical language. Gómez

¹⁹ 'Valle-Inclán, Benavente, García Lorca, etc., all had to fight [...] and that is why they are milestones rather than a logical sequence; each one of them represents an isolated battle when faced with the theatrical ignorance of our intellectuals.'

spent a significant period training in Germany, while Boadella looked to the French mime masters Marcel Marceau and Etienne Decroux during the opportunities afforded to him by Els Joglars' international festival appearances. In his provocatively titled work *La incultura teatral en España* (*Theatrical Ignorance in Spain*), Rodríguez Méndez goes so far as to suggest that most Spanish theatre practitioners were more familiar with international theatre trends than with Spanish classics: 'El tipo de actor o actriz que aparece hoy [...] desconoce a Lope de Vega pero está muy al tanto de Grotowski' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 83).²⁰ This dependence on external influences, in Rodríguez's opinion, has given rise to a mainly mimetic theatre scene with little or no personal identity: 'ese afán mimético de calcar estilos y modos y no de "refundirlos" en lo nuestro. Actualmente estamos viendo como una gran parte de nuestra juventud copia del extranjero' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 53).²¹ As a result of this, Rodríguez suggests that there have been a minute number of achievements in Spanish theatre and no theatrical investigation: 'Puede decirse que en España no existe la investigación teatral' (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 117).²² Francisco Nieva agrees with this view, stating that works of theatrical investigation have almost all been foreign: 'Un tratado de "puesta en escena" para españoles, para directores españoles, nos falta de todas todas' (Nieva, 1996: 35).²³ Indeed, both Boadella and Gómez have noted the lack of inspiring theories or practitioners within the Spain of their formative years: Gómez points out that 'Las circunstancias históricas mantuvieron al teatro en España alejado de la evolución que se había experimentado en el resto de Europa' (Brouwer, 2005: 11),²⁴ while Boadella is even more dismissive: 'hay poca cosa en España [...] no hay un estudio sobre el proceso de metodología' (Boadella, 2005d).²⁵ While there is indeed a dearth of practice-based exploration within Spanish theatre, they were not the first to note it. A number of practitioners from the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century expressed their restlessness with regard to Spanish theatre. One anecdote recounts Ramón del Valle Inclán's behaviour during *El hijo del diablo* (1927) at the teatro Fontalba:

Mediada la representación en el tercer acto, un parlamento de la Xirgú fue aplaudido calurosamente. Cuando se apagaban los aplausos,

²⁰ 'The kind of actor or actress that exists today [...] is unaware of Lope de Vega but knows everything about Grotowski.'

²¹ '[T]hat mimetic desire to copy styles and ways of working and not "recreate" them into something that is ours. Currently, we are seeing how a large proportion of our youth is copying foreign models.'

²² 'It can be said that theatrical investigation does not exist in Spain.'

²³ 'A treatise on "staging" for Spain and Spanish directors is most certainly missing.'

²⁴ 'Historical circumstances have kept theatre in Spain far from the developments taking place in the rest of Europe.'

²⁵ '[T]here isn't much in Spain [...] there is no study of methodology.'

una voz clara, rotunda, gritó: “¡Mal, muy mal, muy mal!...”. Era don Ramón del Valle Inclán, que quería tener un gesto de protesta frente a un asentimiento, al parecer común. Hubo unos instantes de confusión y, enseguida, una ovación cerrada al escritor insigne de las *Sonatas*. (Valle Inclán, 2000: 227)²⁶

Valle Inclán's frustration with the theatre of his time and the acquiescence of the audience is at least as telling as the audience's abrupt switch of allegiance in this anecdote, apparently confirming an impressionable nature that Valle Inclán repeatedly described as inclined to bad taste (Valle Inclán, 2000: 211).

Further accounts of the limitations of the audience and the critical establishment abound: Buero Vallejo states that ‘ya se sabe que en España este tipo de estudios sistemáticos ha sido siempre deficiente y escaso’ (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 48).²⁷ Jerónimo López Mozo is even more cutting, stating that ‘En España la crítica suele ser nefasta, salvo muy escasas excepciones. Yo personalmente no tengo ninguna confianza en sus juicios. A los críticos les falta formación para ejercer su función, son superficiales’ (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 342).²⁸ José María Rodríguez Méndez joins the chorus of disapproval: ‘abundó mucho el crítico que se enfrentó al teatro con una formación escasa, por no decir nula, de cultura teatral propiamente dicha, sino de cultura general’ (Rodríguez Méndez, 1974: 107).²⁹ José Martín Recuerda expands his criticism of the Spanish scene, depicting a bleak scenario: ‘siempre hemos escrito mutilados y cortados por una censura feroz y para un público mojigato’ (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 253).³⁰ Perhaps there is also a useful distinction between the above and other practitioners whose notion of theatrical theory is entirely practical, such as Max Aub, ‘Jamás me importaron las teorías literarias, me aburren’ (quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 17);³¹ and José Martín Recuerda, ‘A mí la teoría me trae sin cuidado. No hay más verdad que ir descubriendo lo verdaderamente humano’

²⁶ ‘Half-way through the performance of the third act, one of Xirgú's monologues was warmly applauded. As the applause died down, a clear and matter-of-fact voice uttered: “Awful, absolutely awful, absolutely awful!...”. It was don Ramón del Valle Inclán, who wanted to make a gesture of protest when faced with, it seemed, common approval. There were a few moments of confusion and then an ovation for the distinguished author of the *Sonatas*.’

²⁷ ‘We already know that in Spain this sort of systematic study has always been deficient and sparse.’

²⁸ ‘Criticism in Spain tends to be awful, with a few notable exceptions. I personally have no confidence in their judgement. The critics lack training to perform their function, they are superficial.’

²⁹ ‘[T]here was an abundance of critics who engaged with theatre with little, not to say non-existent, training not only in theatrical culture, but in general culture.’

³⁰ ‘[W]e have always written while mutilated and restricted by fierce censorship and for a prudish audience.’

³¹ ‘I never cared about literary theories, they bore me.’

(quoted in Isasi Angulo, 1974: 254).³² Given this theatrical climate of discontent throughout the twentieth century, it is worth looking at a series of key practitioners and how their concerns, faced with what they perceived as an immobile theatrical tradition and an ill-educated audience, have to some degree conditioned or influenced the explorations taking place within Els Joglars and the Teatro de la Abadía.

I examine these writers and theorists chronologically, charting the course of a theatre of discontent in an attempt to evolve both practice and product within the confines of Spain. The goal of their theatrical explorations always centres on revitalising drama in order to reach their audiences in innovative ways, so the following section will focus on how they adapted their thought and craft to this end, creating the theatrical climate which Boadella and Gómez in time came to form part of. Ultimately, what connects them is their overriding desire to have their audiences react to the experiences their plays formulate by distancing themselves from traditional conventions of theatre. There have always been lone innovators who have pushed at the boundaries of taste and mainstream culture. Without looking at the advancement of a theory of theatre and sense of practical methodology in Spain, we cannot fully appreciate Boadella's and Gómez's contributions to the field.

Ramón María del Valle Inclán, the Polemical Commentator

Few playwrights have had more influence on the thought and practice of theatre in Spain than Valle Inclán. It is no accident that the Abadía's debut production was Valle's *Retablo de la avaricia, la lujuria y la muerte* (1995). Indeed, this outspoken public figure is reminiscent of Albert Boadella, who much later also adopted the persona of outspoken satirist on the political realities of his time. Valle Inclán is a cornerstone and a reference point of Spanish theatre, but we must bear in mind that he repeatedly stated that he did not see himself as a writer of theatre. In a 1928 interview, he said: 'Yo no soy autor, abastecedor de esos teatros ... cuando la obra se editó yo no puse, yo no hice la más leve mención de que aquella obra de lectura había sido de teatro' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 264).³³ Of course, one can tell Valle Inclán is making the point that he does not write theatre for the commercial venues of the time. Nevertheless, there is another critical artistic point to his claim:

Y a los cinemas, ya lo creo que voy. Ése es el teatro moderno. La visualidad. Más de los sentidos corporales; pero es arte. Un nuevo arte. El nuevo

³² 'I could not care less about theory. There is no other truth than to discover what is truly human.'

³³ 'I am not an author who supplies work to those theatres ... when the play was published I did not write or make the slightest mention to the fact that that work for reading had been theatre.'

arte plástico. Belleza viva. Y algún día se unirán y complementarán el cinematógrafo y el teatro por antonomasia, los dos teatros en un solo teatro. Y entonces se podrá concurrir, perder el tiempo en el teatro. (Valle Inclán, 2000: 265)³⁴

Valle Inclán's point is that the theatre of his time was failing to stimulate dialogue, which means 'no penetra en el verdadero sentido de la realidad teatral' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 265).³⁵ Hence he is not a writer of theatre, but rather a writer of dialogue: 'Yo escribo todas mis obras en diálogo porque así salen de mi alma; y porque mi sentido de la vida así me lo ordena' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 265).³⁶ Without going into an in-depth exploration of theatre in Valle's time, one can nevertheless glean that he is pointing to a distinction between physical expression and vocal expression, and that theatre will only find itself in a heightened hybrid of the two. Through the years, his perspective changes little. In 1911 he stated: 'la acción sacude fuertemente lo que hay de temperamento emocional en el público [...] el laborar escénico debe girar en sentido de vigorizar nuestro teatro' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 48);³⁷ the following is from 1929: 'a la importancia que asume el escenario [...] es preciso añadir la del grito' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 275);³⁸ also from 1929: 'Todo el teatro es creación plástica. La literatura es secundaria' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 280);³⁹ and in 1933: 'Si en el teatro algo ha de levantar con palanca de emoción el alma de las multitudes, sólo el tono obrará el prodigio [...] el teatro dramático ha de ser un teatro de tono o no ha de ser' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 418).⁴⁰

This emphasis on tone and the power of dialogue makes Unamuno's interpretation of Valle all the more compelling: 'hay que leerle a ser posible con los oídos' (quoted in Valle Inclán, 2000: 400).⁴¹ The elements Valle enumerates combine to produce a theatre primarily of emotions, and it can be argued that Valle's theatrical output is a precursor to Artaud's theatre of cruelty. After all, both spoke of shaking the audience emotionally, of the irrational division between word and movement that has dulled the potential of theatre, and both created

³⁴ 'And of course I attend cinemas. That is the modern theatre. It is visual. It is more about corporal senses; but it is art. A new art. A new plastic art. Living beauty. Some day the two will join and complement each other, both cinema and theatre itself, both theatres in a single theatre. And then you will be able to attend and lose all sense of time in the theatre.'

³⁵ 'It does not penetrate in the true sense of theatrical reality.'

³⁶ 'I write all my works in dialogue because that is how they come forth from my soul; and because my sense of life thus instructs me.'

³⁷ '[T]he action forcibly shakes the emotional temperament of the audience [...] the scenic work should revolve around reinvigorating our theatre.'

³⁸ '[T]o the importance that the stage assumes [...] we must add the scream.'

³⁹ 'All theatre is artistic creation. Literature is secondary.'

⁴⁰ 'If in the theatre we are to crowbar the emotions of the souls of multitudes, only the tone can produce that marvel [...] dramatic theatre must be a theatre of tone or it cannot be.'

⁴¹ 'He should be read, where possible, with the ears.'

plays in which the audience was confronted with the basest elements of humanity. They even shared a love of the potential of cinema, as Artaud also proposed the notion of a multimedia theatre:

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

Valle Inclán has perhaps become best known for his *esperpentos*, which he defined in 1921: ‘Esta modalidad consiste en buscar el lado cómico en lo trágico de la vida misma’ (Valle Inclán, 2000: 126).⁴² Luis Emilio Soto attempted to give some sense of the dramatic form of an *esperpento*, stating: ‘El mundo guñolesco [...] a base de realismo grotesco y bufón’ (Valle Inclán, 2000: 269).⁴³ This extreme world of grotesquely presented satire is again reminiscent of Albert Boadella and Els Joglars, who have also played with the grotesque and buffoonery in order to indict aspects of society, such as the masks of *La torna* (1977) which turned the Spanish Guardia Civil into roosting chickens. Much of Valle Inclán’s work springs from an intense political commitment. In his interviews, he is called upon to comment on the political situation in Spain just as often as on his work as a playwright, poet and novelist.⁴⁴ On a rare occasion when his interviewers had the forethought to ask how the two might be combined, Valle stated: ‘En primer término [...] yo creo que la suprema aspiración del arte, y especialmente del teatro, debe ser recoger, reflejar, dar la sensación de la vida de un pueblo o de una raza. Por esto afirmo que será mejor de todos los escritores el que sea más estadista’ (Valle Inclán, 2000: 78).⁴⁵ Therefore, his theatre strives to be as didactic as Brecht’s: ‘No he temido ser educador. Es más, he querido serlo, pues a ello entiendo debe encaminarse el teatro en todo tiempo y lugar’ (Valle Inclán, 2000: 39).⁴⁶ Even when probed about the classic

⁴² ‘This mode of writing consists of seeking out the comic side of the tragedy of life itself.’

⁴³ ‘The world of grand guignol [...] based on grotesque realism and buffoonery.’

⁴⁴ This is also true of Albert Boadella. An article in *El País* described a breakfast meeting with Boadella, ostensibly in aid of the Día Mundial del Teatro, and yet the column deals with his stormy relationship with Catalan nationalism and his partnership with the conservative politician Esperanza Aguirre who invited him to take up the artistic directorship of the new Teatros del Canal in Madrid (P.O.D., 2009). His involvement with the Ciutadans political party in opposition to Catalan nationalism has also thrust him into the public eye, and his interview on *La hora de Federico* for Libertad Digital Televisión featured as many questions about his politics as his theatre (Boadella, 2008).

⁴⁵ ‘In the first instance [...] I think that the supreme aspiration of art, and in particular of theatre, should be to compile, reflect and give a sensation of the life of a people or a race. Therefore, I affirm that the best writer will be whoever is the greatest statesperson.’

⁴⁶ ‘I have not been afraid of being an educator. In fact, I have sought to do so, because I believe that theatre anywhere and throughout all time should strive for this.’

authors of the genre, Valle's interpretation is telling: 'Calderón, Lope y Tirso, nuestros clásicos, respondieron a las necesidades de una época y un Estado' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 347).⁴⁷ Elsewhere Valle expanded on what it meant to him to respond to the needs of his era and society:

Hay no solo el derecho de opinar, sino el deber de opinar lealmente, desnudamente ... Hay que hablar, y opinar y protestar ... Si alguna obligación tengo yo es ... la de opinar, la de advertir al público cuando se trate de algo que no debe ser, la de decirle si una cosa es buena o no. Porque el público se desconcierta, y hay que decirle la verdad. (Valle Inclán, 2000: 228–9)⁴⁸

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

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

Valle: ¡Phs! ¡Fusilando a los Quintero!

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

Valle: En el público.

Ortega: ¿Incultura, acaso?

Valle: Peor. Mal gusto. Un público inculto puede educarse. Un público que se cree educado y que está viciado y corrompido, con comedias estúpidas, no tiene remedio. ¡Bah! (Valle Inclán, 2000: 211)⁴⁹

In 1926 Valle would hit on the same phrase as Lorca a few years later, on the subject of how theatre should deal with the audience: 'El artista debe imponerse al público' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 211).⁵⁰ Valle clearly intended to be polemical, and his views on theatre often express a certain feeling of futility within the medium:

El teatro es lo menos universal que existe. Cada país tiene el suyo ... Además el teatro antes que nada exige un público, incluso antes que el propio autor.

⁴⁷ 'Calderón, Lope and Tirso, our classics, responded to the needs of an era and a State.'

⁴⁸ 'We not only have the right to give our opinion, but the duty to do so faithfully, honestly ... We must speak, and give opinions, and complain ... If I have any obligation, it is ... to give my opinions and warn the audience when we are dealing with something that should not be so, to tell them if something is good or not. Because the audience can be confused, and they must be told the truth.'

⁴⁹ Estevez Ortega: (deliberately) How could we fix the theatrical crisis?

Valle: Bah! By executing the Quintero brothers!

Ortega: Where, or what is the cause of our theatrical decadence?

Valle: The audience.

Ortega: Do they lack education, perhaps?

Valle: Worse. They have bad taste. You can educate an ignorant audience. An audience that believes itself educated and which is spoilt and corrupted by stupid comedies can't be saved. Bah!

⁵⁰ 'The artist must impose himself on the audience.'

Y la condición específica de este público es estar ligado por un sentimiento común, lo cual es privativo de un solo ambiente. Esta imprescindible cohesión se perfecciona y encarece hasta convertirse en fondo religioso, íntima y suprema comunidad hacia donde debe converger el haz de incitaciones estéticas. (Valle Inclán, 2000: 272)⁵¹

Theatre may impose this cohesive mood or atmosphere on an audience by drawing on society for examples: 'nos mueve la plástica antes que el concepto'⁵² states Valle, to which Paco Vighi ripostes: 'De ahí la visualidad de una buena tarde de toros' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 273).⁵³ In a later interview, Valle expands on this nascent thought: 'España tiene una expresión dramática ... Hay dramatismo en la religión, sintetizado en las procesiones de la Semana Santa de Sevilla; el de los toros, que es un espectáculo dramático; en el canto, en la música de los contrapuntistas españoles y en ese claroscuro de nuestras catedrales ...' (Valle Inclán, 2000: 283).⁵⁴ Albert Boadella also speaks eloquently about the artistic value of bullfighting, stating: 'Nunca he sabido exactamente por qué los toros me han proporcionado las mayores emociones artísticas de mi vida'⁵⁵ (Boadella, 2009a: 186).⁵⁶ However, he relates his passion to catharsis, a term coined for the theatre:

La tan cacareada catarsis que siempre citamos los del gremio escénico y que ha llenado innumerables páginas de especulaciones puedo afirmar que existe. [...] Público y oficiantes estuvimos ligados por unos lazos tan profundos que no existe en el mundo occidental ninguna ceremonia capaz de conmover y

⁵¹ 'Theatre is the least universal thing in existence. Every country has its own ... Also, theatre requires an audience before all else, even more than an author. And the specific requirement of that audience is to be linked by a common feeling, which is limited to a single environment. This necessary cohesion is perfected and elevated until it gains a religious dimension, an intimate and supreme community towards which the beams of aesthetic incitations should converge.'

⁵² 'We are moved by aesthetics rather than concept.'

⁵³ 'Thus the visual delight of a good afternoon of bullfighting.'

⁵⁴ 'Spain possesses a dramatic expression ... There is drama in religion, specifically in the Seville Easter processions; in bullfighting, which is a dramatic spectacle; in song and the music of Spanish contrapuntists, and that chiaroscuro of our cathedrals ...'

⁵⁵ Federico García Lorca was of the same opinion, as he eulogises bullfighting in terms similar to those Boadella would later employ: 'es probablemente la riqueza poética y vital mayor de España [...] los toros es la fiesta más culta que hay hoy en el mundo; es el drama puro [...] es el único sitio adonde se va con la seguridad de ver la muerte rodeada de la más deslumbradora belleza' (García Lorca, 1974: 1024) ('it is probably the greatest poetic and vital richness of Spain [...] bullfighting is the most cultured celebration in the world today; it is pure drama [...] it is the only place where you go in the certainty of seeing death surrounded by the most stunning beauty'). Ortega y Gasset also spoke of bullfighting's roots in the popular festivals of Dionysian Greece (Ortega y Gasset, 1958: 81).

⁵⁶ 'I have never known precisely why bullfighting has given me the greatest artistic joys of my life.'