using it as a kind of springboard to produce imagistic or textual material. Etchells observes that 'by the time we open the show, perhaps only two thirds of that narrative will be visible'. Starting with something quite fictional and 'blowing it to pieces' was a process also directed at the set, which began as a tiny, toy theatre stage, and ended up as a wide, deconstructed, metal structure that Etchells describes as looking, 'a little bit like a stage, but also a bit like a room'.

Forced Entertainment is interested in pushing a theatre form that creates new work that is not common to other companies. Devising is a way of rearranging the world for members themselves, confronting their audience with an emotionally, intellectually, complex experience that is indicative of their particular perceptions of the world. Although aware of a particular audience interest, the company wants the work to appeal to anybody and does not concentrate on devising for any one group of people. What is important to members is to find a form that is appropriate to the piece they are devising, as Etchells points out: 'we're working in a tradition that is established by twenty five years of theatre experimentation and devised theatre of a particular kind in this country.' However, it is also evident that the company has been inspired and influenced by devised experimental work outside of Britain. The Wooster Group from New York[9] has been influential on Forced Entertainment in developing an aesthetic about urban culture, film, and television, as well as creating a texture of confusion and technical chaos, whilst utilising collage or fast undercutting of found sources as a way of making work.

## The product

The first performance of 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love' was given at a work-in-progress preview at Nottingham Polytechnic on October 30th, 1989. The opening mood of the piece is soft, full of love, and set against the background of a dark, starlit sky viewed between the steel girders of a platform stage, which is defined by velvet curtains and fairy lights that are wrapped around the metal structure, upright microphones, and a centrally positioned bed. There is a nightclub host, Hans, (played by Robin Arthur) working alongside a rather dowdy act

of two badly wigged performers (played by Terry O'Connor and Cathy Naden), who both represent the New Jersey housewife Dorothy Sherry speaking as a medium, who in turn becomes Elvis Presley during the seance part of their act. This is clearly indicated when the two women place white muslin sheets over them, saying in false deep voices that 'heaven is inside all of us.'

In contrast to the relaxing, lilting soundtrack of late-night or tinpot hotel music throughout the piece, are two skeletons (played by Claire Marshall and Fred McVittie) who enter through trapdoors in the stage, acting out their Japanese narratives. They speak into Hans' hand-held microphone in a deliberately pretend playing style. There is a sharp contrast between these two groups of characters, particularly evident in the soft, quiet quality of non-acting that is revealed when the skeletons move around behind Hans and the two Dorothys. Hans now stands in his white underpants covering himself in talcum powder behind a sheet of muslin, held by the two skeletons. Powdered white, Hans makes a speech about love, in which he fancies Socrates, and later tells 'the dirty story about life in strange cities'. Three video monitors (covered in muslin) are employed on the set, revealing another nightclub routine entitled 'Mike and Dolores', beamed in from Hawaii; this is an inferior, second-rate love duo involved in violent, sexual acts that include shooting and poisoning each other.

The piece works on several levels. The pace is varied, and there is a certain energy at times from the two women playing Elvis. Humour is revealed in their continued love stories of Plato. The piece is all about quoted sexualities, with the Socrates story about homosexuality appearing as the character's revelation about his own sexuality. The show lasts one hour and twenty minutes.

## Assessment

The work-in-progress preview of 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love' is too long, needs more integration between the visual and textual aspects, greater variety of pace, tone and rhythm, stronger contrast of atmospheres and playing styles, tighter choreography, and the ending could be clearer. The

10 Terry O'Connor, Fred McVittie, Robin Arthur, Claire Marshall, and Cathy Naden in 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love'. Forced Entertainment Theatre Co-operative, 1989–90. (Photo: Hugo Glendinning.)

general view of the company after this performance is that the material needs to become more private and selfish, with less direct relationship to the audience. Etchells suggests that the material needs to be fragmented: 'at the moment there are no oppositional dynamics, it has a collaborative feel.'

The central issue is what is happening to the skeletons when they are not speaking the text. The question arises as to whether they are performing a play, or whether they are 'real'. They are portrayed as childlike, needing someone to hold the microphone, as they do not quite understand the technology. Sometimes they know it is a play, but other times they seem to believe the events or stories they are enacting are real. Etchells believes that there is not enough savagery or bite, that the piece has not found its place, with one of the problems being that all the material is equally weighted. The company will review the show later in the week. A team of three members will work together, trying things out. The company are touring '200% & Bloody Thirsty' in Poland during the month of November, so the bulk of the work will be done in January 1990, which includes the re-filming of the videos before the tour proper commences in February 1990.

In fact, the re-work period looks at the role of the two women and their relationship to 'Hans'. They are unclear about why the women are acting out the 'Dorothy' material, and so attempt to find the motivation and fiction for the women being in the room or stage space. The question arises of 'Elvis' visiting two showgirls in a hotel room with the change that these characters are now seen as three people together at the start of the piece. The characters are united, but not at an equal level. The womens' speeches about sex, love or romance shape the show, and their characters seem much more involved or caring in their commitment to the onstage project. A new section is devised, known internally by the company as 'The Presley Play', which is a trashy, semi-pornographic text about a ghost 'Elvis' taking two showgirls on a magical trip to Graceland, to Memphis. 'The Presley Play' raises more questions about pretence, pretending, and play acting. Now, the audience knows that Arthur is not 'Elvis Presley', and that the three characters, with their false, plastic breasts and penis, are not in a hotel room, Memphis, or Birmingham. 'The Presley Play' works well in contrast to other sections of the piece. Forced

Entertainment is constantly preoccupied with what is real and what is fake throughout this period, as well as into the spring tour of 1990.

## Changes

During its two-week run at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the company works on the piece daily. Etchells acknowledges that the show needs re-writing, but they experiment with performance and playing style. Observing performances at the start and end of this run with various students convinces me that I have watched two almost entirely different versions of the same material. This appears to be linked to a re-ordering and altering of material – for example, the opening of the show, which makes the audience read the rest of the material in a different way. The first opening, of three characters watching the videos of Mike and Dolores, talking about love and the stars, suggests three people locked in their play world, seemingly situated in a powerless and equal relationship. Alternatively, the second opening, of the women asleep on the bed, waking and putting their wigs on, frames the material differently again, indicating the beginning of some sort of performance with the focus on who they are, rather than the fiction they are about to create.

There is also a subtle change of acting style pursued by the performers, who are in danger of performing in a manner so monotone and minimal that members of the audience may simply mistake it for poor acting skills. An original impression for some is also of numerous conversations using bad language about sex, love or drugs – for example, the comment, 'I'm pissed and fucked up, and worse than that, I'm dead.' Positive evidence of the re-work is seen in the fuller integration between video performers and live performers on stage. The ending is much improved too, with the characters thanking the audience for having them, and bidding all good night.

'Some Confusions in the Law about Love' was described in a review by one critic as 'theatre of the terminus'[10], raising the question of whether it is possible to still feel something when all has gone. The show is about failure, both in the literal sense of sex acts that fail, and in a group of performers being unable

to reach a crescendo of performance. Etchells describes the process as taking the engine out of the car, with the product being all the bits of that engine laid out on the ground. O'Connor describes it as 'a kind of half-inhabited fiction', where nothing real happens.

## Further work

At the end of March, the company re-works the piece for a final time during a period of six weeks, when it is also considering ideas for the next show, 'Marina and Lee'. The devising process has changed during the project, becoming more unwieldy with a greater use of text in the piece. The company acknowledges that it will change the process or way of working for the next show by concentrating on more areas of work before rehearsals begin. The use of microphones in the show is viewed as hugely alienating, and prevents certain emotional areas being articulated. Vocally, the microphones give the voice an authoritative, professional quality to such an extent that the audience is never able to forget that characters are always performing.

During six weeks in April and May, the company decides to return to the notion of people explicitly presenting some sort of actual performance at the start of the show, rather than getting involved in their own narrative. They review Arthur's central role of 'Hans', so that he becomes a rather bad Presley impersonator, which links better with the second half of the play when he becomes the ghost of Elvis Presley. Second, they get rid of the seance material to support a clearer and firmer structure to the piece. Last, they decide to cut one video and make the remaining four all interviews, which suggest a constant interaction between video performers and live performers on stage. O'Connor points out that the final re-work process was about simplifying the work as 'there were all sorts of different kinds of theatre battling against one another', and that the relationship between the first and second half made little sense theatrically, intellectually or emotionally: 'this last stage of working on the show was about being quite clearheaded about what we already had that worked, and trying to apply that to the earlier part of the show so that there was a clear, formal

development.' The opening section becomes a group of people telling a story quite ironically, described by Etchells as though 'they're winking at you probably whilst they're telling the story.'

The most important consideration of this period was to clarify an articulate, structural architecture for the piece. This was one reason for losing the seance material, which could only provide a short-lived resonance rather than give any depth to the show. It was clear that there were two shows in the material being used, which did not fit together, underlining an important point about how Forced Entertainment approaches structure. O'Connor suggests that structure has 'to mean something and be satisfying on a very basic level, rather than just a kind of architecture that is made up of very removed and complicated ideas'. In grappling with the problems of bringing several strands of text on to the stage, the emotional crises clearly articulated in the company's earlier shows, 'Let the Water Run its Course (To the Sea that Made the Promise)' and '200% & Bloody Thirsty', have become mislaid amongst the debris of structure and form in 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love'.

## Performance

After the last re-work of 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love', I saw an early version of the new product at the Mirren Studio, Towngate Theatre, Basildon, on May 11th, 1990. I was slightly confused by the opening of the show, which now suggested that Arthur was performing some kind of poor-quality Elvis Presley act. I felt rather alienated and less involved as the women, a shabby sex act, reported on events surrounding 'Elvis', the 'crap' hotel, and so on. As spirits, the women were still covered in white muslin sheets, but were now in heaven looking down at earth with its cities and towns. The videos were more effective because they were all interviews, consistent in their presentational form, and integrated well with the text. The general playing style lacked bold definition. However, it must be said that I viewed the show in light of the three other versions I had seen, which did not enable me, as a spectator, to completely look afresh at the final, re-worked product.

## Evaluation

The devising process for 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love' was relatively unusual for Forced Entertainment in the way the product changed so much. Within a five- to six-month working period, the company certainly generates and discards a vast amount of material, but normally only has one substantial re-work after the opening preview performances. This show had three or four fairly substantial re-workings, and it was still felt by the company that the show lacked the finished quality of their previous two products. It was felt to be a long, drawn out process, an uphill struggle, that did not fall inevitably into place after the first re-work, which was usually the experience with earlier shows. The company accepts that there is too much emphasis on the text in this piece, but believes that the devising process and product of 1989 to 1990 have brought a development of what Etchells describes as a 'whole system of strategies and approaches to text that we'll probably be exploiting again and again'.

This particular process has also been their first experience of working with people outside the core group of the company, which Etchells suggests has proved useful and interesting in terms of future inter-personal relationships, what that has done for the work, and the company's perception of it. Likewise, every show reveals deficiencies or weaknesses in the working structure of the company, or in group dynamics, as Etchells points out:

> I think it's been quite revelatory in that respect, probably because it's been incredibly pressurised, it didn't come right after one go, so it put more stress on all the people, on all the relationships, and on all the mechanics of the group's working.

The company discuss these issues informally, as Etchells recounts 'what you got out of the project, what you hated about it, where you felt let down, where you felt supported, wanted support or didn't get any'. This provokes a gut feeling of what to do, or not to do, next time. It is an instinctual reaction.

With regard to the next project, 'Marina and Lee' (1991), the company thought about action and finding a way of moving on

stage before tackling the text. O'Connor indicates a desire not to let the text consume the whole experience of the show. 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love' became so text-based that the performers' role in the devising process changed considerably, because they were always waiting for the re-written text to arrive in the rehearsal room. O'Connor describes this role as 'applying what they could to it, making suggestions for the next re-write, talking about any ideas they'd had for the text', to the extent that the whole process became one that was based much more on discussion, rather than practical exploration or experimentation of ideas.

This was a different kind of generative process to the one used in 'Let the Water Run its Course (To the Sea that Made the Promise)', where all the structural or physical sections of the show came out of ideas that were then turned into improvisations, which were then tightened up and rehearsed as little set pieces. The energy of the whole piece evolved from bouncing off any physical energy that came out of improvisation or in rehearsal. By working primarily on action in 'Marina and Lee', the company hoped to arrive at a style of movement and a source of areas of possibly repeated action, described by O'Connor as 'giving us some clues as to the world of the people, what their interests are, what their kind of language is like'. The hope was that from this starting point, the company could make connections with text. This decision about the next process came out of their most recent experience of devising 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love', as O'Connor observes, 'starting with the action first in order to remedy the shortfall of action in the last show.'

## SOME CONCLUSIONS

Forced Entertainment's working practice reveals the importance of a developmental process over time, as well as a sharp critical awareness and analysis of the relationship of process to product. The company's most recent show, 'Emanuelle Enchanted' (1992–93), demonstrates clearly the progression of work since 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love' in 1990. Since 1990, Forced Entertainment has moved in a new direction, growing out of the problems and difficulties encountered with 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love', whilst building

on the foundations of previous shows to produce an extraordinarily exciting piece of work in 'Emanuelle Enchanted'. This latest show displays a balanced integration of action, text, video, and visual and choreographic imagery. There is a maturity in 'Emanuelle Enchanted', which has both clarity and precision, combined with a rich performance playing style. The engine of 'Some Confusions in the Law about Love' has not just been put back together, but has been re-constituted to create highly innovative work.

The significance of these examples of Forced Entertainment's practice is to illustrate that devising is an ever-changing process. How this group works together making art raises questions about how to document such a process or product, the form of language or critical vocabulary to analyse work that integrates different kinds of 'text' (physical, visual, verbal), and the appropriate criteria to evaluate this area of devised experimental performance. I wish to discuss the theoretical implications of these issues later in this book, and here simply want to identify some areas for criticism and analysis within the wider context of the devising theatre debate.

Reflecting on the two selected examples of working practice from both ends of the devising spectrum, it is apparent that a theatrical performance can be created in a very short time on a limited budget, or over a much longer period with different decisions being made about the use of finance and resources in relation to the company's lifestyle. There are choices to be made regarding how much time is available to the process in relationship to the product, the ways that money is allocated or distributed within the project, and what is important about the making of the work. The value of the devising experience is not only for the company, but also for the audience participating in the theatrical communion. The elderly empathise with memories from the past that are represented in a linear, narrative storytelling framework, whilst those watching a Forced Entertainment performance construct their own narratives out of the present fragmentary moments or fractured images of culture and society. The space is there to take or make a personal picture of the world, and that is the magic of theatre.

What then are the similarities and differences of Age Exchange and Forced Entertainment's devising methodologies? A central difference between the companies is that Age

Exchange has a clearly targeted audience in the elderly, and a specific community interest in devising theatre. The company's intentions are narrowly defined to focus on a form of theatre that can be created in a number of ways, but is always working towards the goal of reminiscence theatre for the elderly. Pam Schweitzer has constructed a devising methodology that can be applied to any theme, although no two shows will ever be the same. In the case of Forced Entertainment, there is no devising methodology as such, only the previous experience of devising that enriches the next process or piece of work to be created. This is not to say that there are no thoughtful processes of working, or recognised patterns by the company of various ways to make a performance text, but rather to reiterate that every devising process is unique and integral to the creation of a particular, original theatrical experience.

In considering two very different kinds of theatre companies, working practices, processes, and subsequent shows, it is easy to see the breadth and nature of the devising experience from process to product. Perhaps it is a question of how much risk a company is prepared to take in its work, or simply of being clear on a starting point that still allows the freedom to change direction within the devising process. It is certainly about trusting a process that provides enough opportunity and space all the way through, which is often frightening, but is also at the core of being an artist and making art. This is not to suggest that a safety net of early knowledge of subject matter (be it theme, legend, or oral history) or form is disreputable, but rather to illustrate the point that a balance is needed of both security and risk.

# 5

# FROM PROCESS TO PRODUCT

## The participatory theatre-in-education programme

> What's emerged from the programme is slightly different for every group because they bring something different to it, but the questions of freedom, rights and justice are very centrally there, as well as loyalty and betrayal which are at the heart of the programme.
>
> (Viv Harris, Theatre-in-Education Team Leader, Greenwich Young People's Theatre)

When considering a range of devised theatre products, it is clear that they are the result of how a company combines a variety of processes from its particular structure of operation. The input and interest of a group of individuals determines how the work will proceed. This interaction between company members can inspire, engage or promote conflict about the work, which is part of the devising process and creation of the product. Leadership is essential in order to focus direction, establish the way forward, and maintain an overall eye on the developing work. Devising a theatre-in-education programme utilises the many processes involved in creating community or experimental theatre, but, in focussing on the needs and interests of young people, also demands other ways of working that are specific to this particular product.

The conscious decision to make a participatory programme implies a desire to look at concepts, ideas, or source materials in a number of different ways, as well as in relation to a particular group of young people. A 'programme' suggests various viewpoints, approaches, or ways of looking at the subject. The theatre-in-education company wants its intended audience to participate in the making of the programme, and in the realisation of the product. It is the specific interaction between

actor-teachers and audience during the programme that makes a unique learning experience every time, with the possibility of always moving in a new, and ever-changing direction. Participation indicates a willingness between both actor-teachers and audience to cooperate, to share, to join in, and to have a say in the matter.

The audience is the focus for early decisions that relate to educational aims or objectives, learning areas, content, and form. The age range, type of children, and school environment all contribute to determining the kind of devised product or programme required. Assessing how to meet the needs of young people requires essential communication and interaction with pupils and teachers. Pre-visits to schools and potential audiences are vital to discover these interests so that the devising company may work from its audience at the start. During the devising process, it may prove important to 'workshop' potential ideas and material with an intended audience in order to keep sight of the reason for creating the theatre-in-education product. Using questions as a structural means of investigating concepts, subjects or issues is a popular tool employed in this area, as is investigation through exploring images to discover attitudes, ideas, or content. The extent to which a programme is participatory will also determine how the audience will experience the product, which clearly relates to decisions of structure and form.

## STARTING POINTS

The decision to devise a theatre-in-education programme for upper secondary pupils by Greenwich Young People's Theatre was made a year prior to the theatre-in-education company determining the needs and interests of pupils and teachers against their own obsessions. An initial full, free-ranging company discussion in 1989 considered possible content, themes, issues, and concepts, which isolated the areas of Aids and the French Revolution for further discussion. The Revolution's Bicentenary celebrations, the Tiananmen Square atrocities in China, and events in Poland and Eastern Europe were all influential in contributing to discussions about perceptions in 1989, how people perceive the status quo as unchange-

able, and what happens in terms of change when the hegemony of ideas is challenged. A third area of interest, homelessness, arose out of another debate on relevant material for young people. Although there were no formal meetings with teachers from local secondary schools, the education liaison officer talked with a selection of contact teachers for their initial responses to the proposed material.

Half a term later, a three-day workshop was held involving those company members who were to become the devising and performing team. Time was given to practically exploring material, discussing its contemporary relevance, and identifying the artistic and educational potential of each area. Workshops were led by three company members who had undertaken initial research. A decision was made to focus on events arising from the French Revolution as having the most educational and artistic potential of the three interests. At this stage, the prime concern was with the involvement of the French in the United Irishmen's Rebellion in 1798. A core team of theatre-in-education team leader, writer, musical director, and education liaison officer researched the material, keeping in close contact with the rest of the team by sharing research and keeping them in touch with changes in thinking. The potential use of music was also being discussed by the team, and it was during this period that the United Irishmen Rebellion disappeared in favour of a French setting.

Theatre-in-education team leader Viv Harris observes: 'At the beginning of each programme everyone within the team will identify the particular areas they may want to concentrate on, whether they be strengths or weaknesses.'[1] The dynamics of Greenwich Young People's Theatre is such that the four actor-teachers involved in 'The Edge of Reason' were unable to be active from the starting point of the process and came back later to the work via the specialist core team. Although the Greenwich company is hierarchically structured, the theatre-in-education team work cooperatively with the actor-teachers, who contribute significantly to the devising process in addition to performing, and this takes account of both individual and objective needs of the work. Whatever the starting point, the team must constantly return to addressing the original aims and objectives of the company. An unpublished company policy statement of July 1987 asserts that 'Our thoughts and our

attitudes, as well as our material lives, are dominated by the ideology and values of the white patriarchal, capitalist society in which we live.' As a company, Greenwich Young People's Theatre is committed to using drama and theatre in an educational context to raise awareness and consciousness of that situation. This is affirmed in the same 1987 policy statement:

> As educationalists, our task is not to give pupils the right answers but to find the right, the most useful, questions and empower the pupils to develop their own understandings, raise their own questions and find their own answers. As artists we acknowledge our responsibility to use and develop our skills to create high quality theatre. However, if it is to be an effective tool for liberation of thought and action, our theatre must reflect our educational aims in both content and form.

Greenwich Young People's Theatre is also committed to developing participatory forms 'that empower young people to take control of their creativity and their own learning' (1987 policy statement). In this same document the director of the company, Chris Vine, stresses the need to challenge dialectically, to 'recognise the contradictions of experience and seek to sharpen these (emotionally and intellectually) employing the full range of forms available'. Vine argues that 'The task is not to endorse the last answer, but to pose the next question.' Participation is part of the company's policy, and at some point the theatre-in-education team must decide whether the programme will be fully participatory or not. Other early decisions include the degree of theatricality in the piece, whether it is to be a touring show or an in-house programme, the budget allocated to the 'Teachers' Notes' or 'Follow-up Work', as well as issues relating to the company's overall activities, such as the external constraints of scheduling youth shows, special needs projects and the timetabling commitment of technical staff.

## Preparation

'The Edge of Reason' will be freely available to approximately thirty secondary schools in the Greenwich and Lewisham areas of south London. A resource pack of 'Teachers' Notes' that

offers preparatory materials with specified aims and objectives is sent to all those involved. There will be a pre-programme teachers' session after school hours about two weeks prior to the opening of the programme, when an extract of the play or participatory section may be shown, and teachers are briefed on what pupils should have done before their visit. Vine suggests that there is good Drama practice in local schools with a very supportive Drama Inspector and Drama Teachers' Support Group. However, all may change from April 1990, when the Inner London Education Authority is disbanded and the company works in collaboration with the Boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham,[2] who will provide funding alonside the London Borough Grants Scheme, and via The Arts Council of Great Britain's grant to the parent company, The Greenwich Theatre.[3]

At the end of the summer term 1989, a structural framework for a day's participatory programme has been established, and includes an introductory section, a play, and some form of 'role play' situation. The relationship of individual and collective freedom is examined over a period of four days, when the team 'workshop' and improvise both form and content. This leads to an agreed outline scenario of a 'Holding scene' (proposed by the writer), and educational aims leading from it. Later to become the play's ending, this scene of a father's betrayal of a loyal daughter contains all the concepts of the programme, providing a focus for a way forward to developing the work. The scenario refers to the play part of the programme, and establishes four central characters, a setting in a village bakery outside Paris, as well as ideas for using music, mime, and movement. The team also agrees the brief that a play be at the heart of the programme, preceded by an introduction to the historical and social context of the play, which will be explored non-naturalistically through dance/drama. Possible areas for active involvement of the pupils are also earmarked at this stage, which may examine the legacy of revolution through other contemporary revolutionary situations and how people take control. Individuals take responsibility for specific and general research over the vacation, such as examining revolutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, or considering possible images for the introduction. This will be the working situation when the whole team comes together in September 1989.

## Objectives

One of the aims of the programme is not to engage young people in a historical exposition of the French Revolution, but in agreed concepts of what people would sacrifice for liberty, or where values come from. 1789 is a vehicle to explore these concepts. It is through experiencing the concepts and issues via theatre or drama that young people make choices and decisions, drawing on their own experiences, and relating to their world. However, the actor-teachers must improvise and discuss a range of research materials linked to the French Revolution in order to create the reality of a village, Crèvecœur, in northern France.

In the first week of the new academic year 1989–90, markers are laid down for the form and content of the introductory 'dance/drama'. The group makes a sound picture of images arising from the material so far, and participates in a visual exercise that creates two-dimensional representations of the Revolution in 1789 and 1794 from the point of view of each of the four characters. A scenario/script discussion examines whether the material inevitably leads to naturalism, and questions the overall objectives of the play including the functional objectives of the characters. Possible titles for the programme are 'brainstormed' by the company, and a draft copy of the leaflet for the schools' handout is agreed.

## Methodology

The company reviews its work weekly, keeping a log-book or diary of its activities, looking ahead and planning next week's objectives. The following week sees individual discussions with the team leader and musical director, identifying that everyone wants to develop his or her voice and use harmony, and is keen to include musical anachronism and an integrated musical form. The unpublished company diary for September 12th, 1989 records, 'N.B.:- For your voices sake don't smoke, don't eat cheese, do eat apricots.'

Practical exercises are set up to consider the different ways that individual freedom is restricted, with particular reference to the Baker's daughter. This is done through company members 'brainstorming' ideas, creating and discussing pictorial,

static, group images or tableaux. Character histories are built-up for the Baker, Cézar Cachelin, his sister Charlotte, his daughter Rhea, and the Jacobin, Lefer. The studio space becomes covered in wall posters that note these developments, and a blackboard is used to chart specific areas of research.

On entering Studio One (one of Greenwich Young People's Theatre's two theatre spaces), I am confronted with a wealth of materials that includes a section of floor covered with musical instruments, a presentation of visual images that display the characters in 1789 and 1794, and numerous 'sheets' of hanging wallpaper that indicate individual qualities of characters and how they are perceived by others. A further exercise to develop characterisation is for each character to list their feelings, actions, and mental and physical attitudes. (See Appendix II for example of Baker's daughter.) The characteristics of each character as perceived by the others are explored through improvisation as if they were animal, element, sound, meal, material, or colour. Each actor-teacher visits and investigates the three others' special or secret spaces, noting how it makes them feel physically as an animal in that particular area of the studio. (See Appendix II for illustration of Baker's daughter's perceptions of others.)

The story and accessibility of material so far is discussed in terms of points to be developed, form and style. There is a brief reference to casting, including the possibility of cross-casting in the introductory section. The education liasion officer takes the company through two possible exercises for the 'Teachers' Notes' pack. There is also a read-through of monologues which the writer has prepared prior to a pre-visit to two local secondary schools. (See Appendix II for specimen monologues.)

## PRELIMINARY AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

Visiting local schools before and during the process is common to many companies devising a theatre-in-education programme. The aims of such visits will vary, but they are often concerned with discovering more information about the pupils' interests in the classroom. The pre-visit by the Greenwich team to a fourth-year English group at Kidbrooke School on September 14th, 1989 aimed to find out what pupils knew

about the French Revolution via the material, and where to pitch the show. A small group planned the visit to include a research exercise using the 'brainstorming' technique, and work that tested the concepts of freedom, individual rights, and liberty beyond the personal level. Three monologues were written by John Wood with the purpose of gaining initial feedback from the young people, through which the team hoped to establish and identify which chararacters provoked more sympathy, and why.

After a brief introduction that describes the company's work, one team member questions the class on what they think about the French Revolution. This is verbal 'brainstorming', and the answers are immediately written on the blackboard. Feelings, views and attitudes are encouraged through a series of further questions. The team leader asks the reasons why people were involved in the French Revolution, suggesting that this is discussed in pairs for one minute. Viv Harris summarises points from this, which leads to the question 'What is liberty?' The young people talk in groups for two minutes about what freedom means to them in 1989, establishing whether they are free today. In my group of three boys of mixed race, they decide that being free is not to be dominated by the adult world, which means not being oppressed by parents, teachers, or policemen. Following this, the scene is set in 1794 with the revolutionary government in power, and an event that might have happened involving three characters at the time.

An actor-teacher gives a preamble about fighting as a group and there being no freedom for the enemies of liberty. The team lines up to represent a queue as the first character's monologue is from a woman fed up with queuing for bread every day. The second offers the Baker's perspective on the situation from behind the counter, and the third establishes the character of the prosecutor, who reveals that the woman has stolen bread and is therefore an enemy of the revolution. The prosecutor presents the case to the class:

> Citizens. You have heard the testimonies. France is at war. There have to be sacrifices. This woman puts herself above everything. *She* is hungry. *She* is impatient. *She* is the enemy of the revolution! Leading a mob against the interests of the revolution makes her a counter revolu-

> tionary. You shake your heads. No, you say, she did not intend to be that, she only wanted bread.[4]

Groups of pupils are allowed two minutes to discuss at least two questions that can be asked characters to find out more information. One group 'hot seats' the actor-teacher, playing the member of government 'in role', as to why the woman should be guillotined, and is told that this is one individual versus the freedom of the nation. The Baker is questioned about whether he would have felt the same way if a man had broken into his shop, and the Woman is asked to consider other women who did not receive bread the next day. In answer to why she is against the revolution, the woman replies that the revolution is not all equal.

The team leader brings the visit to a conclusion by asking questions that lead to the area of how easy it is to decide who is guilty and who is innocent. The vote to establish which character is right indicates that nearly all the class support the Woman, no-one is in favour of the Prosecutor, and most are suspicious of the Baker. The feedback from this visit suggests that the notion of collective government is alien to the pupils, with the language of the Jacobin's speech being difficult to follow, suggesting that this character will need to be totally engaging if the pupils are to relate to him. Both schools brought an immediate response to the Woman's plight and disliked the chauvinism of the Baker. These areas must be addressed through the theatre of the programme, which uses the vehicle of the French Revolution to set an agenda that addresses the issue of individualism against the group. This must also be explored through the participation section of the programme, which could use images to investigate how pupils make judgements further.

## CLARIFYING GOALS

The devising process of theatre-in-education involves a constant re-evaluation of the work in light of educational and artistic objectives; for example, how can the characters in the scenario be used to explore the educational aims of the piece? It is a period of continued research through reading, visits to Museums, or personal resources, which contributes to 'on the

floor' work and discussion. Creating a story about what might have been is based on this research, and includes theatrical possibilities as well as educational challenges. The play will be set in a village outside Paris in January 1794. The Baker, a self-made man and an opportunist, is against the Revolution. He is a widower and has a sixteen-year-old daughter. His sister lives in Paris, is a secret revolutionary, and helps politicise her brother's daughter. The Jacobin is an ambitious man, sent to purge the village of anti-revolutionary forces, but who falls in love with the Baker's daughter. Family loyalties and politics are at the heart of the drama, with the Baker denouncing his sister to cover himself, the daughter denouncing her father to protect her aunt, and the Jacobin challenged by the daughter to make the right decision. The participatory part of the programme is focussed and shaped, making the work more concrete and highlighting the fact that the pupils must be able to relate emotionally to the work. The programme has to address the conceptual level and language of fourth-year secondary pupils.

In the remaining weeks of the devising period, the team discusses scenario developments, such as the Introduction, which needs a concise input that covers oppression or injustice pre-1789, and considers the start of the play through the fragmentary presentation of the four characters, whether by staging or use of music. The group refocuses its educational aims by asking questions: 'Why do a programme on the French Revolution at this time?'; 'What are the educational or social needs of the young people at this time?'; or 'Does the material speak truthfully to the young people?' Working from a key scene at the heart of act two, the team speculates further on content, and improvisations are videoed around particular ideas. The writer then sets to work on the script. There are updates from the musical director on the development of music and song, from the education liaison officer on the 'Teachers' Notes', and a character costume workshop is led by the designer. The non-naturalistic visual opening planned to give a background to the French Revolution is abandonned as the transition to the play is difficult and unclear for the audience.

The original intentions behind the participation work were to involve the pupils in a strong, emotional way in the issues of freedom, change, loyalty and betrayal, as well as engaging them sensually in the conflicts of the period through a piece of

physical theatre. These were modified in light of lack of devising time available, and the length of the play in relation to the programme. Chris Vine, the company's director, led various sessions on participation, and was responsible for this area of work. Three contrasting images of people who were not free were selected by Vine as part of the image forum work at the start of the programme. Pupils would be asked if they could see anyone unfree in each image, and to try to change the situation. The idea was to move from the familiar and close to home to considering different views of freedom in a wider world context. Later in the programme, after seeing the play, the young people would be confronted with the same challenges to individual and collective freedom as the characters faced in the play. A 'role play' section would explore the conflict between the rights of the individual and the need for collective action.

Devising a participatory programme that involves the audience in choices and decision-making means finding a subtle balance and relationship between constructed historical material and the present, socio-political, economic, and cultural climate or reality. This is not easy. It is not just a question of how much 'play' and how much 'participation', but concerns the kind of learning actively taking place through the chosen form of theatrical experience. In order to give space to both artistic and educational needs of the day-long programme, there is inevitably compromise in some areas of the work. This programme has chosen to focus on the devised play, written by the writer-in-residence, and performed as a piece of devised theatre. However, it is within the context of the pupils' immediate situation, and addressed through an examination of particular concepts and questions.

## THE PRODUCT

The first performance of the full-day participatory programme 'The Edge of Reason' was given on November 2nd, 1989 to fourth- and fifth-year pupils from Eltham Green Comprehensive school. We wait in the lobby area to be collected and taken into the drama studio. An actor-teacher welcomes us into the space, followed by introductions by the team and an explanation of the day's programme. A sign is held up with a statement and question, 'For people to be happy, they need to

be free', 'What does it mean to be free?', and the audience are asked for a response. An actor-teacher proposes that we get into groups to discuss what freedom means to us. I listen in to a discussion about less freedom at school, Margaret Thatcher taking away people's freedom, living on a desert island, only being free if totally alone, and 'there's no such thing as total freedom'. Back together again, another actor-teacher leads a general discussion, which moves to three actor-teachers making a still picture of a man on his knees with hands tied behind his back in between two others standing with sticks by his side. The audience are questioned about how they could change this picture, and after several interventions by the pupils, they are asked again about the altered image of freedom.

In the second constructed image, a pupil is dressed in an apron, holding a saucepan, ladle and baby, and the actor-teacher asks the young people to 'make the woman freer'. Different ideas are tried out, including the removal of the baby, placing the apron on a male pupil next to her, and the final image of two women bending down and pointing at the baby. The final picture also employs a pupil, sitting in a long black coat with a sign round his neck saying, 'Nowhere to live – Please help'. The discussion here centres on the issue of happiness, money, and freedom of choice. An actor-teacher questions the audience about all three pictures in terms of different kinds or types of freedom. The first image is considered the worst, as the man was tied up and could not simply walk away. One team member points out that the imprisoned man did have the freedom to think, which is met with the retort, 'That's not going to help him!' It is concluded that we cannot ever be totally free and that laws or rules are necessary to society. We are asked to refocus on the statement and question at the start during a five-minute break. The actor-teachers have facilitated an enquiry through questions, discussion, and forum image work. On our return, we will watch the play.

The seeds have been sown in terms of acknowledging the participatory framework for the programme. A form of enquiry has been initiated to encourage the pupils to think about the concept of freedom via group discussion and visual imagery. The images or still tableaux are effective in promoting an active dialogue between the young people and actor-

teachers. The pictures have provoked an emotional reaction in the audience, which has then been explored further in the visual/verbal deconstruction and re-construction of the original images. The pupils' involvement in the participation has demonstrated the importance of both visual and verbal consensus, as well as emotional and intellectual understanding. This first section of the programme has introduced certain concepts and questions about the nature of freedom, challenging and exploring initial reactions to the subject.

The actors are dressed in period French Revolution costumes. The setting reminds me of a rural barn dotted with bales of straw, bags of grain and wooden farm implements. In front of a central wooden platform is an area of sand covered in feathers and pebbles. We are sitting on three sides of the studio space. It is an hour later, and the musical director explains that they are now going to perform a play called 'The Edge of Reason' set in France five years after the revolution. We focus on four characters from the village of Crèvecœur, who briefly introduce themselves before the lighting changes and the first scene commences. The Jacobin has a letter from the Committee and is ordered to collect the grain. Modern electric guitar music begins and the actor sings his first song as the Jacobin. The pupils show signs of embarassment at the contemporary music and direct singing approach to the audience. We then witness the Baker putting the flour into sacks, 'One for the revolution and one for me'. He then grates chalk into the revolution flour sack. The set is certainly impressive and includes a slide for the sacks to go down, a ladder, a pulley, and a hook. We learn that the Baker's sister, Charlotte, has arrived from Paris, and that the Jacobin is here to see the Baker.

The pace is a little slow in the first few scenes. The playing style is established with the use of musical sounds and song integrated into the text. Using the synthesiser to create an atmosphere on a dark night, we see two people wrapped in shawls stealing the flour. This raises the issue of whether stealing is acceptable when a woman is starving and eating grass. Rhea, the Baker's daughter, disputes this with the Jacobin, who argues the case for thinking of France first and foremost. On discovering a villager has one stolen bag of flour, the Jacobin has her hanged. Meanwhile, Charlotte has discovered the hidden bags of grain and suggests that her brother

**11** Anthony Burbage, Lloyd Notice, Anne Clifford (Aine Clubhan), and Carole Lythgoe in 'The Edge of Reason'. Greenwich Young People's Theatre, 1989–90. (Photo: John Daniell.)

gives every villager an extra loaf free to get rid of the flour and to save face with the villagers after the Jacobin has left. It is at this point that we break for lunch, returning in the afternoon to watch the final act of the play.

Act three opens with the musical director on electric guitar in steel blue light playing an instrumental number. Issues and conflicts are already in place as the characters continue to argue about the needs of the individual against the needs of the village or of France. The Jacobin jumps to a hasty conclusion when he discovers Rhea with one of his letters open; he accuses her of being a spy. All the characters turn on each other with the Jacobin accusing Charlotte of 'counter-revolutionary activities', and Rhea telling her father that he is the enemy. The play ends and we are given five minutes to reflect on which of these characters we would trust most.

After a brief break, the audience discuss which characters believed in freedom, what choices they had, and whether any of them were happy in their situation. The pupils are then asked which of the four characters they would trust most to do the best for everyone. The characters are lined up according to the pupils' wishes, and Rhea is an ever-popular choice. This later alternates with Charlotte, and all are agreed that the Baker would be the last choice. From this, the team set up a participatory drama where the young people will play the villagers in a role-play situation. We are told that it is thirty minutes after the villager has been hanged by the Jacobin, and Charlotte has called a secret meeting with the villagers at the bakery. The musical director is to play the villager's husband, Jean, to help further potential action. The pupils are asked to consider what is justice, their needs and their rights. After several suggestions are given, they form into small groups to decide on three or four things they want to change in the village or in France. I listen in to a group discussing the issue of food, ownership of the mill, and how far they are prepared to go if the Baker will not give up his mill.

Each group reports back and the pupils discuss a plan of action. We are then told that Charlotte has been taken prisoner and she is chained up in front of us. The Jacobin addresses the villagers and says that all secret meetings must stop, the villagers must think of France, and all grain is to be collected for the soldiers, who are fighting for the good of France. It is the

villagers' decision as to what should be done with the bags of grain. The actor-teachers initiate some seeds of discussion, such as the freeing of Charlotte in exchange for grain, the need to listen to each other's ideas, the problems of too many individual decisions and not enough collective agreement. The group decides to set Charlotte free before the Jacobin returns. He demands to know who untied her, and two pupils are arrested and sent to Paris. The villagers talk of killing the Jacobin and the alternatives available to them. At this point the role play ceases and we return to our seats.

The musical director reminds us of the sign with the statement and question, commenting that the villagers did not feel free, and that the Jacobin had the power of government behind him. One pupil suggests that they were weaker when everyone had different ideas and did not stick together. However, despite a majority decision, there were two young people who did not abide by the agreement. The team leads a more general discussion about freedom in terms of choices and life today, which relates back to the French Revolution and what happened after the people had taken action. A last question is posed: 'Is it worth making sacrifices if you want something badly?'

The play forms a long part of the day's programme, which means that the participatory work can only scratch the surface rather than grapple with the depths of the issue. The role play is too discursive, and pupils are sitting for a long time. Somehow there needs to be more action, rather than talking the consequences through. The forum image work allows the young people to try ideas out, but this occurs earlier in the programme. The team agrees that more concrete information is needed about Charlotte and the Jacobin if the role play is to progress further. All observations and comments will be fed back into two re-work days which will change material or shape the programme differently. I look forward to visiting again in light of these sessions.

## THE RE-WORKED VERSION

On November 24th, 1989 I make my second visit to Greenwich Young People's Theatre, with fourth- and fifth-year pupils from Abbey Wood School. There are now two opening questions: 'What do people mean when they say they want to be