

# **Towards an Intracultural Actor Training:**

## **Utilising the cultural context of the performer**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis offers an evolved methodology of practice that acknowledges and utilises difference in performance, and offers a potential way forward for theatre practice. This methodology is addressed primarily to directors and teachers in both training and professional theatre environments, and therefore offers specific guidance on rehearsal room practice. In 2016, state funded theatres in the United Kingdom and Australia (the territories in which I locate this thesis) are still largely monocultural, both in terms of the people on stage and the people watching the work created. While there are theatres that serve varied communities and engage with international and intracultural arts, there is still an imbalance whereby cultural representations reflecting society's diversity are not seen on a consistent basis. The pace of change remains slow. Why is it that theatre has not yet moved beyond a homogenous world view to presenting a world that more accurately reflects society's heterogeneity?

I have developed a methodology for directors, teachers and actors that seeks to speak back to these discriminatory practices by opposing the idea of 'neutral'; in which actors' differences are stripped away and "the assumption of a shared universality" (Bharucha, 2000: 35) is favoured. After all, the category of 'neutral' more often than not overlaps with the identity of the cultural authority, and so is not in fact *politically* neutral.

The methodology described in this thesis offers a pathway to step beyond notions of identity as "fixed" and instead engage with identity as something that is fluid and ever changing. For individuality to flourish, teachers and directors need to develop an understanding of how to embrace and play with difference on the rehearsal room floor and move their focus away from a "one approach fits all" mentality. The methodology outlined in this thesis offers teachers and directors the skills and freedom to work courageously with multifarious personalities and diverse historical narratives as a rich resource in the realisation of work for performance.

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I can't pretend that this document is a solo work. So many people assisted me on my journey as I endeavoured to interrogate a practice that came instinctively when working with actors on the rehearsal floor. The articulation of the interrogation has opened my eyes and deepened my practice in a way that I could never have imagined. However, the exploration and the writing of my enquiry were not easy. It was immensely difficult and required patience and a break with regular rhythms in order to get deeply under the skin of the investigation. It was frustrating and exhilarating in the same measure and I would not have succeeded if it were not for the exceptional individuals who supported, encouraged and guided me in moments where I had lapses of confidence and in moments where I needed direction in the development of my argument.

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## **Chapter One**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.

(Taylor, 1994: 74)

## 1.1 Rationale

In 2016, state funded theatres in the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia (the territories in which I locate this thesis) are still largely monocultural, both in terms of the people on stage and the people watching the work created. While there are theatres that serve varied communities and engage with international and intracultural arts,<sup>1</sup> there is still an imbalance whereby cultural representations reflecting society's diversity are not seen on a consistent basis. The *Creative Diversity* report, recently published by the Creative Industries Federation in partnership with Music of Black Origin in the UK, suggests that only 6% of those working in the performing arts are from black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds (2015: 1-8). There is no similar report in Australia capturing recent statistics in this area, which is broadly indicative that Australia lags behind the UK in incorporating performers and other creatives of diverse backgrounds into the cultural industries.

The pace of change remains slow, despite the fact that the Arts in Australia is incorporated into the official policy of Multiculturalism<sup>2</sup>. In the UK, there have been numerous reports and initiatives – starting with Naseem Khan's seminal report published in 1976, *The Art Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* – investigating racism in theatre and advocating for both faithful representation and broader inclusion. Why is it that theatre has not yet moved beyond a homogenous world view to present a world that more accurately reflects society's heterogeneity? To address this challenge, this thesis offers an evolved methodology of practice that understands how to acknowledge and utilise difference in performance, and offers a potential way forward for theatre practice. This methodology is addressed primarily to directors and teachers in both training and professional theatre environments, and therefore offers specific guidance on rehearsal room practice.

The focus on training is key, as many actors first experience the erasure of their cultural context during the course of their creative training. Making adjustments to training practice will therefore affect future professional practice. Joyce E. King speaks of racism in the context of higher education, and names this form of discrimination as 'dysconscious':

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<sup>1</sup> The term "intracultural" is explored in more detail later in this thesis and refers to the mélange of cultures within a nation state.

<sup>2</sup> Multiculturalism became official policy in Australia with the Whitlam government in the 1970s. This followed the policy era of the White Australia Policy. The journey to multiculturalism is documented in *Culture, Difference and the Arts* (1994), edited by Sneja Gunew and Fazal Rizvi.

Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given [...] Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominating White norms and privileges (King, 1991: 13).

Dysconscious racism is prevalent in the theatre when directors and teachers display a mindset that does not critically examine assumptions and ways of thinking which reinforce a dominant culture's power and privilege, thereby keeping social inequities in place. I have found this dysconsciousness to be particularly widespread in training environments, as demonstrated by the following extracts from a focus group I conducted. In each case, the limitations of a training environment that does not embrace cultural pluralism was exposed:

Every monologue that was given out was [...] Shakespeare [...] things, plays that had nothing to do with Asian actors at all. [...] So, you know, I was always playing white women, which I'm not (Actor B, 03.02.2013)<sup>3</sup>.

We had a group that were from all over the world; We had an American, a Korean, a Canadian, Australians [...] So, we would look at the Stanislavskian approach or the Strasbergian Approach, or the Meisnerian approach, or a little bit of Suzuki or Butoh. But there was never ever a moment where, um, cultural context was ever sort of broached as a subject (Actor D, 03.02.2013).

We were all taught to speak RP... um... no matter what your accent was. [...] Which... if it is so, really quite far from yourself, it's extremely difficult to do and... all these voice classes and the breathing and centring [...] breathing and centring yourself is to try and get you to this place of complete relaxation and, um, being who you *are*, being... being *you*, right? Are they there to get to *you*, or are they there for you to get to *neutral*? Not *all* teachers, but *most* teachers are... the idea is to get to *neutral* (Actor C, 03.02.2013).

I have developed a methodology for directors, teachers and actors that seeks to speak back to these discriminatory practices by opposing the idea of 'neutral', where actors' differences are stripped away and "the assumption of a shared universality" (Bharucha, 2000: 35) is favoured. After all, the category of 'neutral' more often than not overlaps with the

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<sup>3</sup> The full transcripts of the Focus Group: Intracultural Masterclass Series are available in the Appendices to this thesis. These quotations are taken from Appendix A.

identity of the cultural authority, and so is not in fact *politically* neutral. This methodology engages and plays with difference in work for performance and takes up Denzin's challenge to

seek emancipatory, utopian performances, texts grounded in distinctive styles, rhythms, idioms and personal identities of local folk and vernacular culture [...] These performances are sites of resistance. They are places where meanings, politics, and identities are negotiated. They transform and challenge stereotypical forms of cultural representation – white, black, Chicano, Asian American, Native American, gay, or straight (2003: 123).

Fear and lack of ability to acknowledge and utilise the cultural differences of actors in rehearsal and training rooms is one of the key factors that has stalled the pace of change. The lack of understanding of how to play with difference in rehearsal and training environments means that often an actor's cultural specificity is negated in favour of casting the actor in the image of a cultural authority that is “invariably white, patriarchal and heterosexist” (Bharucha, 2000: 35).

The methodology described in this thesis offers a pathway to step beyond notions of identity as “fixed” and instead engage with identity as something that is fluid and ever changing. As Hall argues, identities come laden with histories, diasporas and historical oppressions:

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power [...] identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past (1990: 225).

To understand identities as fixed, then, misrepresents the complex and ongoing interplay of their constituent elements. I draw on Hall's definition of cultural identity and extend this by using the term “cultural context” to capture not only historical narratives but also the societal beliefs and tropes related to ethnicity, class, gender, religion, sexuality that we play with as signifiers in bodily performance – in short, everything that an actor has in her cultural makeup. The methodology does not take an ‘essentialist’ approach attaching stereotypical notions to ethnicities. Rather, it offers a praxis that opens up a space where the nuance, breadth and complexity of each individual in the collective can be fully explored within an

intracultural theatre practice approach. While the methodology can be expanded to recognise and work with all constituent parts of cultural identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, social background and sexuality of the actor, the scope of this thesis is to investigate cultural context principally in relation to ethnicity and psychological realism. The methodology outlined here could be developed to address and embrace each of these iterations of difference; however, I recognise that each is particular in terms of its histories and oppressions and therefore concentrate my attention on ethnicity.

I worked with an actor in a masterclass who described how liberating it was for her to work on a classical Greek text in her own voice, bringing her cultural context and historical context to the work:

I mean, normally I was always told, um: “The voice! The voice! Always support! Support!” And when I did the, um, Greek tragedy masterclass with [KLS] and she said to me: “Do it in your own... in your, um, Indian accent” everything just fell into place. I didn’t have to think about anything – it all just came out and it was just wonderful! The breathing and the voice and you just... I didn’t have to think technically about anything; it just completely fell into place [...] speaking with an Indian accent was – just felt like me – that was really who I was – that was me. Really felt great, it really did (Actor B, 03.02.2013).

In my work as a professional theatre director and actor trainer, I have witnessed similar freedom with many actors once they are given the permission to work from their own cultural contexts. Many actors from Indigenous or diasporic heritages realise that, in working on texts mainly from a Western canon, they have often suppressed a part of themselves in their endeavour to fulfil often false assumptions of what it is to be an actor in the mainstream. From their training onwards, these actors have been taught and accept that the part of themselves that includes their cultural context and historical narrative has no place or relevance in the delivery of these texts. By utilising their cultural context and working from a place of particularity and knowing, actors can feel “everything just falling into place” in performance, as the actor describes above. Rehearsal room practice in training and professional environments must evolve in order to utilise all of the multifarious identities present in the room.

This thesis offers a methodology to kick-start this evolution. I contend that it is only when equitable conditions exist for each and every actor regardless of their background that

each and every actor can have a chance of success, affording them equal opportunity to achieve excellence. For individuality to flourish, teachers and directors need to develop an understanding of how to embrace and play with difference on the rehearsal room floor and move their focus away from a ‘one approach fits all’ mentality. Criteria for assessment of excellence also need to develop that embrace a myriad of perspectives and experiences. The methodology outlined in this thesis offers teachers and directors the skills and freedom to work courageously with multifarious personalities and diverse historical narratives as a rich resource in the realisation of work for performance.

## 1.2 Practice as Research

I know how to ride a bicycle, but I cannot say how I balance because I have no method. I may know that certain muscles are involved, but that factual knowledge comes later, if at all, and it could hardly be used in instruction (David Pears, cited in Nelson, 2013: 9).

The above bicycle example by philosopher David Pears personifies the practice as research project where insightful practice and intelligence located in embodied knowing is made visible. The practice as research project is an enquiry where practical knowledge primarily demonstrated in practice is the application for exploration. A more traditional enquiry abstractly conceived, resulting in a thesis in words only cannot serve a process where enquiry and conclusions are drawn from the “doing” of practice. Therefore a multi-modal research enquiry is called for which includes practice; documentation of process and practice; complementary and contemplative writing around practice which includes locating practice in a lineage of influences; and something that can offer a durable record such as a performance, exhibition, DVD, CD or similar. Practice-based research techniques emerged out of a tradition of action research, in which the embodied practices and experiences of the researcher were cast as central to the research process.

My thesis is of the tradition of practice as research that asserts the primacy of practice where as a practitioner I practice my way through to a resolution by “doing-thinking” (Nelson, 2013: 10-11). This conforms to what Sarah Rubidge characterises as “research into practice, through practice” (2004: n.p.); that is, I am investigating and documenting a particular way of working through practising that methodology. Unlike some other writers working in this tradition of practice-based research, I am not utilising practice here as a way to interrogate a pre-existing research question. Instead, I have utilised research techniques and methods in order to document an area of practice, and thereby to produce new knowledge. This brief description also speaks to the attractiveness of practice-based research to creative arts practitioners. This mode of research can allow artists to capture their practice in meaningful ways, and to communicate their unique ways of working to be appreciated, interrogated, and followed by others.

My enquiry includes multiple modes of evidence that reflect the multi-modal research enquiry. As Nelson (2013) and others advocate, I documented my practice throughout the

period of this research, preferring video documentation as the most comprehensive yet unobtrusive form. This was complemented by some still photography, as well as audio recordings of master-classes and focus groups. The video footage in particular is central to this investigation, as it reveals something of the felt, embodied experience of my research project. Where appropriate throughout the thesis, I have included references to these recordings, and a DVD is included as Appendix E. Additionally, these audio-visual captures of the practice can be found at

<http://kristinelandonsmith.com/intracultural-thesis>, password: thesis

These video recordings are a major component of this thesis and serve to guide the reader through the enquiry where the physical examples of doing can be seen, felt and understood.

### **1.3 Methodology of the Thesis**

My practice as research project seeks to enlarge the library of practices available, recognising that there is an absence of “working propositions” of how to engage one’s cultural history and subjectivities in the delivery of text based realism in theatre and other applications (Bharucha, 2000: 1). The intracultural project in theatre actively challenges the legacies of colonial and postcolonial structures and seeks to dismantle them to allow every voice in the collective to be heard with its individuality intact. The practice demonstrates how to nurture this individuality in a space where colonial legacies still weigh heavily on the environments in which work for performance is made. I offer more detail about the development of intracultural practice in Chapter 2, below; in the context of practice-based research and auto-ethnography, though, it is sufficient to note the emphasis intracultural practice places on multi-vocality and unpacking the individual dispositions of every agent in the process.

The cultural context of the director or teacher who may represent the authority is clearly a key factor in initial negotiations with actors. For example, while my cultural background can position me as an insider within a group of artists who consider themselves to be outside the cultural authority, I still often experience situations where I know very little about an actor’s cultural context and must therefore work with unfamiliarity. Bharucha suggests that “to work with the acknowledgement of ‘imperfect knowledge’ could be the surest way of securing the trust of one’s collaborators” (2000: 70), and this is a key element of the intracultural methodology. This thesis seeks to provide communication tools between director or teacher and actor which can help to break down well-worn hierarchies and assumed power positions which are not conducive to collaborative working. While this may appear difficult, particularly if one is already implicated in an exclusionary discourse due to one’s own cultural context, the first step is to acknowledge this difficulty with the admission of one’s own lack of knowledge around the multifarious cultural contexts that present themselves. By showing and acknowledging the limits and horizons of one’s own culture, the authority of that culture can begin to be delimited.

The method that I use to interrogate my practice to produce an intracultural methodology is informed by a theoretical position of ethnography and autoethnography. Research through ethnography requires a deep involvement and engagement in collaborative relationships which have the possibility to produce change. Anthropologist Douglas Foley

suggests “knowing yourself as you come to know others is a big part of ‘being an ethnographer’ [...] learning to be with – and listen to and take seriously – others” (cited in Campbell and Lassiter, 2015: 3). This form of research requires an engaged and unstinting commitment to communication and collaborative relationship building. It is fluid and unpredictable and relies heavily on interaction and communication often with people who sit outside one’s own frames of reference.

Ethnography requires a person who is comfortable living with contingencies, who is good at associating with others from widely diverse backgrounds and interests, [...] seems to require more of a particular, identifiable, but oddly ineffable attitude toward living and working than belief in method (Anderson and Goodall, 1994: 100).

Ethnography is relationship-based and requires constant re-evaluations of the researcher’s own assumptions as she relates to others. The deep commitment to human relationships and the level of engagement with the particularity of each individual that I apply in my work means that ethnography is the appropriate methodology with which to interrogate my practice.

Autoethnography takes place when the researcher communicates with people who share her frame of reference. The ethnographer in these situations has some feeling of “insider” status and this distinguishes the autoethnographer from the ethnographer. I often work in situations where by my professional activity as teacher/director and my definition of myself as a BAME<sup>4</sup> artist gives me common ground with the actors I work with, and in these situations I am able to interrogate my practice through autoethnography.

My case studies in the following Chapters serve to illustrate the level of complexity of engagement required for the intracultural interaction. Drawing on the intracultural being-in-the-world, language, behaviour and expression of actors as a key tool in the shaping of content and texture of a work for performance requires deep engagement, listening and participation in actors’ lives and historical narratives. To produce this work, I therefore participated with my actors and immersed myself fully in the task of encouraging each actor to offer their individual cultural context to the process. This is what Georgina Born refers to as ‘participant observation’:

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<sup>4</sup> BAME: Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic. This is an official designation used by the British Government. While the term has come in for some criticism recently, including in a 2015 speech from Trevor Phillips (the former Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality), it remains in widespread use in the UK.

‘Participant observation’ or ethnography, anthropological fieldwork is a method that involves living among or hanging out with the people being studied (Born, 2004: 14).

However, I am more comfortable with the term observant participation, “which builds on but reformulates participant observation [...] focusing attention on the points where co-understandings between and among people surface” (Campbell and Lassiter, 2015: 3).

Clifford Geertz describes the difficulty of recording the results of field work:

What the ethnographer is faced with [...] is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render [...] Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalised graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior (cited in Shankman, 1984: 262).

Geertz and fellow ethnographers advocate the writing of field notes during the ethnographic research process, which constitute the doing of ethnography. My field notes were drawn from a range of sources: audio and video recordings of fieldwork that offer the most accurate way of capturing words spoken and gestures. I also gathered data through semi-structured interviews in the form of focus groups. Where participants were not able to attend focus groups I used questionnaires posing questions similar to the prompts in the focus group conversations. Focus groups were run some months after the rehearsal or class in question to give actors time to reflect on their experience. Questionnaires issued to participants who could not attend focus groups were also distributed some months after the event and can be found in Appendix C. I notated the offers, the comments, the reflections, the answers to questions from my actors and wrote them up in a manuscript. I then reflected on the experiential study and begin to draw threads together to begin to shape my work as a piece of research.

Analysis of data began after a thorough reading of all field notes and viewing of video footage. This analysis phase commenced at least five months after the capture of fieldwork, which allowed me some distance for reflection yet was still supported by the live memory of certain exchanges within the process. Once all my data was recorded I began my analysis by embarking on the two-phase process of open coding and focused coding to help with the

generation of ideas and categories that speak to the major themes of my topic. Open coding is a line-by-line inquiry which articulates themes, topics, questions and suggestions that present as I read and re-read my field notes. Focused coding refines this further by repeating the same line-by-line exercise, but with already identified themes and areas for further investigation which prompt a further organisation of material. The qualitative research coding of detailed field notes and actuality allowed me to capture the key recurring themes that speak to my research question.

Through deep engagement with personal histories and narratives, I aimed to position complex multifarious identity in the work we see on stage. Denzin advocates that we must change how we write and perform culture in order to effect change:

Traditional ethnography represents attempts to write and inscribe culture for the purposes of increasing knowledge and social awareness. Performance ethnography represents and performs rituals from everyday life, using performing as a method of representation and a method of understanding (2003: 33).

Having collected data through this (auto) ethnographic process, I then proceeded to organise it into a methodology designed for teachers and directors who wish to create work for performance using an intracultural practice. In this way, this document not only captures my practice, but also situates that work within a lineage of intracultural approaches to performance.

## 1.4 Roadmap

In this introduction, I have posited that discriminatory and marginalising practices and ideologies contribute to the fact that cultural representations reflecting society's diversity are not seen on a consistent basis in theatre production. In response, I have evolved an intracultural theatre practice and by capturing this methodology, I seek to enlarge the library of practices that might assist teachers and directors to work with confidence to embrace and work with the diversity of their rehearsal rooms. I set my investigation within the theoretical frameworks of intracultural practice and post-colonial discourse and in the following Chapters take the reader through practice in action case studies integrating these theoretical positions. That is, this thesis sets out a praxis: a particular integration of theory and practice.

In Chapter 2, I outline the theoretical underpinning of the methodology, concentrating on the term *intracultural* and the specific philosophical positions it invokes, before relating these positions to wider theoretical concerns. I also position myself and my own work as a researcher and practitioner within a continuum of intracultural practice. I begin by considering the development of Stanislavski's system, highlighting the potential lack of appreciation for the specific cultural context of the performer. I detail how this lack was addressed by Stanislavski's later, and less well-known, work, before turning to the work of Philippe Gaulier as a model of practice that more fully develops the 'real I' of the performer. Subsequently, I introduce the terminology and practice of intracultural performance, before detailing how I adopted this way of thinking and working in my own artistic practice. The Chapter closes with a brief articulation of the key points of the intracultural methodology, to contextualise the following case studies.

Chapter 3 articulates how the methodology might be utilised as a problem-solving tool. Across two case studies, I demonstrate how the intracultural methodology can be used in self-contained moments to elicit more engaged and grounded performances. This does not necessarily entail a full-scale embrace of the methodology; rather, I present here illustrations of the intracultural methodology being used to troubleshoot the work of actors and directors on the floor. Accordingly, it might be of most interest to teachers and others working in a pedagogical setting, where the focus is not necessarily on an over-arching methodology but instead on working moment to moment. The first case study is a series of auditions for an Australian professional production, where I was seeking to put actors of diasporic heritages at

ease in the audition room and allow them to access the power of their cultural context. The second case study is a masterclass between industry practitioners in UK and acting students in Australia. The master class was designed to illustrate the practice in a teaching environment, and this Chapter therefore offers guidance to teachers and trainers who seek to work with and through cultural difference in their classrooms and rehearsal rooms.

Chapter 4 articulates the methodology through a case study of a multi-discipline production, *The Arrival*. Although this work began as a public work made with students, it evolved into a professional interdisciplinary production, and therefore illustrates the application of the methodology at a professional level. The case study illuminates, particularly in relation to three actors in the company, how employing intracultural theatre practice allows actors to develop in ways they have never previously considered. The focus in this Chapter is on the intracultural methodology as a full framework for making work, beginning at the first rehearsal and carrying through until opening night. This Chapter will therefore be of most interest to directors, who seek to follow the methodology as a strategy for producing work that allows actors to fully engage with their cultural context in performance.

Chapter 5 offers a conclusion which posits how a different interplay of race relations in theatre practice can reveal and develop the production of new work from a diversity of voices on a consistent basis. It also draws out the key points, findings and insights generated throughout. There are numerous examples throughout this thesis where actors have found power and freedom in performance when allowed to bring their cultural context to the floor. I argue that it is only when each actor is given the equal opportunity of bringing their historical narratives to the rehearsal room that will we see the quality of artistry residing in every individual. This has the power to effect change. Artists who are free to express themselves and who are given the space and permission to work with the nuance of their cultural context begin to reaffirm their sense of self and find confidence in the agency and currency that their unique perspective has to offer.

We've got a voice, and we've actually got something to say, and we will say it (Hone Kouka and Howard McNaughton, 1999: 109).

## **Chapter Two**

### **ENTER THE INTRACULTURAL**

To work with an acknowledgement of imperfect knowledge could be the surest way of securing the trust of one's collaborators.

(Bharucha, 2000: 70)

## 2.1 Introduction

Throughout my work in professional rehearsal rooms and conservatoire training institutions, my attempts to work with the specific cultural contexts of performers were frustrated. It was clear that actors lacked a language for investigating the richness of their own background, and moreover lacked a methodology that would allow them to bring these to bear on the acting challenges they were facing. In my early explorations of this territory, I found that performers faced great difficulties breaking free of a perception that the specifics of their own being-in-the-world did not have a place or function when working on the floor in rehearsal or on stage. Instead, performers often felt they should always start with a kind of neutrality, in order to reach for certain parameters to do with the world of the play, and should follow a methodology that did not call for individuality. I believe that this perception, which might usefully be dubbed the ‘Stanislavski straight-jacket’, is standing in the way of allowing performers to find an authentic expression of cultural context on stage.

Of course, the work of Konstantin Stanislavski is both complex and widely misunderstood; I refer here to the way his system has been taken up as the *lingua franca* of the contemporary conservatoire and rehearsal room. While this may be a degree removed from Stanislavski’s original formulations – and indeed may have more in common with the American Method that developed out of them – these perceptions of fixity and neutrality have become almost impossible to shake. In setting out to create work that more fully captures the diverse range of cultural contexts present within our society, I was first forced to contend with the legacy of Stanislavski-inspired training and technique. I met this challenge through the work of Philippe Gaulier, whose mantra of the ‘pleasure to play’ encourages actors to appear on stage as nothing but themselves, laden with their own cultural contexts, perspectives, and unique richness. By building on the foundation provided by Stanislavski’s conception of the ‘Real I’, I found Gaulier’s techniques allowed actors to reconcile my intracultural approach with their training, and to thereby produce richer, more detailed performances.

In this Chapter, I detail the evolution of the intracultural methodology through outlining this genealogy from Stanislavski’s early work, through his recently-translated later work, to Gaulier’s approach. I begin by outlining some key features of Stanislavski’s system, focussing on formulations from the early part of his career, and demonstrate how these were

built into the American Method, arguably the most famous and wide-reaching manifestation of Stanislavski's early ideas. Throughout this account, my focus is on the distinction that Stanislavski draws between the 'Real I' and the 'Dramatic I', as this distinction lies at the heart of the intracultural methodology that forms the subject of this research. The section on Stanislavski's work concludes with his later articulation of Active Analysis, as translated by Sharon Carnicke (2009) and outlined by Egil Kipste (2014). I then turn to Rustom Bharucha and his conceptualisation of the intracultural in order to illustrate the 'gap' that I was experiencing with Stanislavski-trained performers. This is followed by a brief introduction to the work of Gaulier, focussing on his efforts to allow actors to embrace their individuality as a route to effective performance. I then illustrate the confluence of these ideas through a brief introduction to my practice, through the case study of the Tamasha Intracultural Millennium Education (TIME) programme. The Chapter concludes with a brief formulation of the intracultural methodology, setting out the key planks of the work that forms the basis of Chapters 3 and 4.

## 2.2 Genesis of the project: Influence of Stanislavski

Any system of acting that seeks to engage with the life-world of the performer falls under the shadow of the system developed by Konstantin Stanislavski in the early twentieth century. Considered the ‘father’ of modern acting, almost all contemporary Western acting practices set themselves in conversation with Stanislavski’s work. This is particularly the case as Stanislavski developed his methodology at the height of realism’s reign on the stage, and his work therefore still has a natural affinity with the predominantly realist work of the contemporary stage. In this section, I articulate how the intracultural approach can be understood as a development of Stanislavski’s work with the actor’s real-life experiences. To do so, I offer a brief introduction to the system, before delineating the points of departure for the intracultural methodology.

In many accredited and non-accredited trainings and with the prevalence of realism on our main stages today, the ‘Stanislavski system’<sup>5</sup> remains the *lingua franca* of the rehearsal room. Most Drama UK<sup>6</sup> accredited drama schools offer Stanislavski training in their flagship BA and BFA Acting courses, as does the National Institute of Dramatic Art<sup>7</sup> in Australia. As training academies have a close relationship with the wider field of cultural production, their approach is a major determinant of the prevalence of realism on professional stages. From the fourteen accredited Drama UK schools, all apart from four offer Stanislavski and study in realism as a key component of the pedagogy.

Stanislavski was well known for his rehearsal model which was founded on a system of analysis of the play he was working on, as set out in his seminal work *An Actor Prepares* (1937). In the early years, this analysis was done sitting around a table where the company firstly looked at the given circumstances of the play. Each actor would then break down the play into episodes and try to analyse their character’s objective in each episode. To carry out an objective, each actor would then find the action best suited to achieve her objective. Stanislavski thus developed a series of exercises that asked actors to imagine and enact the

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<sup>5</sup> The system was Konstantin Stanislavski’s attempt to design a comprehensive method of actor training. The work was notated between 1935 and 1938 and later taken up by other practitioners and documented. It has been the cornerstone of Western conservatoire actor training from many years.

<sup>6</sup> Drama UK is an overarching body that oversees UK accredited schools representing the highest standard of training within the vocational drama sector.

<sup>7</sup> NIDA (The National Institute of Dramatic Art) is a Higher Education Institution in Sydney, Australia, offering Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees through conservatoire training to actors, designers and other creatives. The institution also offers a range of degree courses across many disciplines of the Performing Arts as well as VET Foundation courses and part time courses, and MFA-level graduate courses.

episodes that related to the narrative arc and circumstances of a play and he articulated this as the journey of the actor moving from the ‘Real I’ to the ‘Dramatic I’ (Benedetti, 1998: 4). Stanislavski likened the ‘Real I’ to when the actor comes to the stage as herself, with her words and actions bearing the imprint of her own personality. The ‘Dramatic I’ was described by Stanislavski as something that would look and sound as human as the ‘Real I’, but would in fact be created behaviour; something that looks like life but is organised in a way to make an audience believe in the events presented.

The ‘Real I’ was important to Stanislavski as he believed in the presence of the actor’s self as the foundation on which to build a performance, stating that truth in performance emanated from the actor and it was the sharing of the actor’s inner soul or inner self which gave the feeling of truth or authenticity.

Stanislavski believed that the actor most likely to affect an audience profoundly is the actor who behaves most like a complete human being, thereby stirring not merely their emotions but their minds as well. His art is based on an understanding of the way we behave in our daily lives, which he then uses when creating a character. If a character’s behaviour is similar to our behaviour in life, then it becomes ‘human’ (Benedetti, 1998: 2).

In the privileging of the actor’s self over her role, Stanislavski stated that “on the one hand the actor and character should fuse completely in performance and, on the other, that an actor can never play anyone but herself, since she “can’t expel [her] soul from [her] body and hire another to replace it. The merging of actor and character thus results exclusively in a fresh presentation (or representation) of self” (Zarrilli, 1995: 54).

In all Stanislavski’s writings, however, there is no mention whatsoever of one’s own idiosyncratic detail, one’s own historical narrative and cultural context and how this finds a position within the creation of a character. While Stanislavski advocated using one’s own emotions in order that one can find something that resembles authentic human behaviour on stage, there was no provision for incorporating the actor’s own cultural context in this process. It is as though Stanislavski privileged the fictionalised character rather than the artist creating the fiction. He advocated for an intangible belief in the make believe which in so doing necessitates an erasure of difference as the actor subjugates herself primarily to the fixed circumstances of the play.

The actor creates his model in his imagination, and then, just as does the painter, he takes every feature of it and transfers it, not on to canvas, but on to himself [...] He sees Tartuffe's costume and puts it on himself: he notices his gait and imitates it; he sees his physiognomy and adapts it to himself; he adapts his own face to it. He speaks with the same voice that he has heard Tartuffe use; he must make this person he has put together move, walk, gesticulate, listen and think like Tartuffe, in other words, hand over his soul to him. The portrait ready, it needs only to be framed; that is, put on the stage, and then the public will say either, "That is Tartuffe" or "The actor has not done a good job" (Stanislavski, 1937: 21-22).

Stanislavski believed that repetitive exercises around emotional memory, imagination and the 'magic if' (asking actors to imagine how they would react if they were faced with similar circumstances to the play) would ultimately result in the actor's mind accepting circumstances in a play as true, "a point when the borderline between me and the 'character' is blurred" (Benedetti, 1998: 9).

This idea of merging with character means actors potentially lose contact with 'the now' and the full reality that they are experiencing. For an actor to 'live in the moment', as if conjuring up words at a particular moment in the play – Stanislavski referred to this as "the creation of the living word" (cited in Merlin, 2007: 17) – she must be free and available to pick up every nuance of the relationship that she and her fellow actors are building together. There is therefore no room for imaginings that sit outside this critical channel of communication. In intracultural methodology, this critical channel of communication is built via the actor's sense of self always being at the fore, and that sense of self must embrace and include the actor's historical narrative.

In later years, Stanislavski himself began to wonder if his process was overcomplicated for the actor, as he found the system risked doing the very thing it set out not to do: taking actors too far away from themselves to play well. He therefore developed his system to allow actors to explore the world of the play through a more physical approach through a series of improvisatory exercises on the rehearsal floor. He called this development 'the method of physical action' or 'active analysis'. This later development in Stanislavski's practice is less well-known, in part because it is overshadowed and selectively reflected by the development of the American Method, acting style commonly known as The Method<sup>8</sup>. It

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<sup>8</sup> "The strongest influence of Stanislavsky's ideas was experienced by the American theatre. The historical

is mainly through the pervasive implementation of The Method that most actors and directors are familiar with basic Stanislavskian terms such as objectives and beats.

While early Stanislavski is often understood through the American Method system, the ‘active analysis’ phase has hardly been documented and in my experience is little understood and therefore hardly taught. Very recently, however, a comprehensive study and documentation has been conducted by Egil Kipste, Head of Directing at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) who states “active analysis (it has never been clearly and fully formulated in writing as a methodology) seemed to offer all that I felt was missing in traditional directing conventions” (Kipste, 2014 xii). Kipste refers to traditional directing conventions as those where early rehearsals consist of cast and crew coming together, looking at the concept of set design and then no time being wasted before the company sit round a table for two to three weeks to discuss the play where decisions at the table are fixed around dramatic figures based on these in-depth deliberations. Kipste outlines that as far back as the mid 1930s – having invented ‘table talk’ discussions of the play – Stanislavski himself abandoned this practice, as he felt it made the actors too passive. Kipste continues by outlining that Stanislavski began to work with the idea of asking actors to get up on the floor from the beginning of rehearsals to discover for themselves, via a series of exploratory improvisations (known as ‘études’) what the text meant to them.

All agree that Stanislavsky was working out a new rehearsal technique based on the idea that the play, like a score of music, encodes actions, and the words, like notes, suggest what and how the actors, like musicians, need to play. Moreover, this ‘score’ is best discovered by the actor through an improvisatory approach to analysis, rather than through extended discussion at the table (Carnicke, 2009: 190).

Given that a full and robust documentation of ‘active analysis’ is only so recent, I have concentrated on writings of Stanislavski’s earlier period in this discussion. This is because I have only once in conservatoire training environments been aware of ‘active analysis’ being used as a rehearsal room technique. This was at NIDA in rehearsals for *Twelve Angry Men* in 2013 and then *Tartuffe* in 2015 conducted by Egil Kipste. In all other conservatoire environments that I have experienced, the Stanislavski work has centred around

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Moscow Art Theatre tour of 1923– 1924, 380 productions performed in 12 months, not only shook the US theatre world but led to the creation of the American Laboratory Theatre (1923–1930), which became the first place where American actors were consistently exposed to the Stanislavsky System” (Tcherkasski, 2013: 94).

‘table talk’ determining objectives and beats of scenes before any work on the floor took place. Having observed both aspects of the Stanislavski system I posit that neither approach provides any guidance around how to incorporate pluralistic cultural identities in the crafting of a work for performance and how to hold a sense of self while merging with a fictional character. While there is more room for individuality in the ‘active analysis’ approach, the emphasis on text, world of the play and the life of the character, even in early improvisations still weighs heavily on the actor not allowing them the freedom to think and do uniquely as themselves on the stage. They still must hold back some of their uniqueness to merge with something seen as outside themselves – the play and another character.

The intracultural methodology outlined in this thesis prescribes exercises that encourage the ‘Real I’ before any exploration on the text begins and seeks to make a bridge between the actor’s identity and the world of the play. Even once text work begins, the ‘Real I’ is preferred over the ‘Dramatic I’, which can cloud the ability of the actor to be present on stage. This is a departure from the Stanislavski system, where while it is acknowledged that the actor behaving as human being is what is required, the individuality of each and every human being has little place in the exploration. It is a universalist approach – unlike the intracultural methodology, which is local and invites diverse cultures and perspectives into the world of the play, where the work develops first and foremost by interacting “through difference” as advocated by Bharucha (1996: 138). It is only once these explorations through the ‘Real I’ have been conducted that the actor and her teacher/director can turn to the specifics of the character she is playing, as outlined further across Chapters 3 and 4.

## 2.3 Towards an Intracultural Performance Practice

Intracultural is a term coined by the Indian academic and theatre practitioner Rustom Bharucha, who sought to differentiate *intercultural* relations across national boundaries, and *intracultural* dynamics between and across specific communities and regions within the boundaries of the nation state. Bharucha is critical of interculturalism as “primarily a Western-based tradition: a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions” (1988: 36). Bharucha contends that this encounter is predicated on a “naïve acceptance of an innately human universality”:

The interculturalist erases all distinctions through an assumption of a shared universality. In the empty space of the intercultural meeting ground, which assumes the point zero of an authentic first contact between essential human beings, there is a total erasure of the participants’ ethnicities in favour of their universal human identities, creativities, and potentialites. The interculturalist is above ethnicity; he/she is always already human. And therefore he/she can afford to propose a universality for all, cast in an invariably white, patriarchal, heterosexist image (2000: 35).

The actors quoted above in section 1.1, who participated in a series of intracultural masterclasses, are speaking to this erasure of particularity in favour of something which is offered up as a universal starting point; that is, in favour of a false neutrality. However, through dysconscious racism, the privileging norm of universality is mostly framed by the dominant culture.

Bharucha’s enquiry began in 1977 with a question he raised in response to Peter Brook’s production of *The Ik*, itself based on Colin Turnbull’s anthropological study of an African tribe that had been dehumanised through hunger and displacement. Bharucha critiques Brook’s production by saying:

*The Ik* in its chic use of non-verbal babble to suggest the primitivisation of African ‘natives’ will surely go down in intercultural theatre history as a paradigmatic example of the premordialising the Other as an anthropological object (2000: 2).

It was in this moment that Bharucha changed his questioning and instead of asking “Does it ‘work’? Is it ‘true’? How ‘real’ is it?”, he found himself instead demanding

Is this *right*? Is it right to do a play about people from another part of the world, with whom you have no real contact, but whose condition provides you with a convenient metaphor for ‘inhumanity’? [...] Is there an ethics of representation in theatre? What are the alternative modalities of representing the Other with responsibility and engagement? How does one begin to respect and not just tolerate cultural differences? (2000:2).

This led Bharucha to question how one can presume to talk about interculturalism “when one has not begun to encounter the diverse social and ethnic communities inhabiting one’s own public space” (2000: 2). Bharucha therefore proposes intraculturalism as “a meeting and exposure of differences within seemingly homogenised identities and groups” (1996: 138). He advocates the importance of interacting “*through* one’s difference constituted as it is through social and cultural specificities, angularities, quirks, imperfections, and limitations” (1996: 138, my emphasis).

Like Bharucha, I believe that interaction and engagement with each individual in the collective with their historical narratives as part of their specific cultural context must be an integral part in the making of work. The ‘particular self’ is the first step in an intracultural exchange – a step common to both Bharucha’s work, and the methodology I describe here. In terms of performance practice, this means the teacher/director and her cultural norms must not be privileged above those of the actor, but she must be placed as an equal collaborator. The actor is privileged before the text, such that only once the teacher/director has a sense of the actor does she look for a way to merge the actor’s individuality with the given text. A teacher/director must guide and mould from what she sees and her experience of the actor, drawing out aspects of the actor’s cultural context that can be used in creation and performance. The teacher/director and the actor can then collaborate to create a bridge between the actor’s identity and a given text.

This approach contests practices that reinforce culturally dominant norms. Such practices include those that erase pluralistic identities through choice of canon, reinforcement of a standard accent and vocal delivery, and hierarchical power relations between student and teacher. The intracultural practice instead has the potential to uncover codes of behaviour and language that are often concealed, thereby nurturing the potential of engagement with a range of diverse communities. If the cultural representations of our society mirrored back to us do not reflect our diversity then the narrative being told is incorrect and therefore inappropriate.

Authentic representations that include one and all build and bind community, confirming to every citizen that they belong. Without reflective representation, the communities that are overlooked can be rendered non-existent in the narrative of the nation.

As Bharucha states, there are very few working propositions around intracultural practice. The first flush of interest in the intracultural began with Bharucha and I have found that it has not had sustained academic attention since. In the last fifteen years, however, I have been lucky enough to study and work with the French master clown Philippe Gaulier from whose work the intracultural methodology finds support. Gaulier says

When you know Falstaff, when you know Rabelais, when you know great tragedy – all these marvellous things – I try to say to that person, [the actor] *you* are higher, *you* are funnier, *you* are bigger” (cited in Rea, 1991, my emphasis).

Gaulier insists on privileging the actor over the character by suggesting that the iconic character of Falstaff, or a great comic work such as one written by Rabelais, is only the starting point for the actor. The actor should not be in the shadow of these imaginings. The actor should rather use them as source material and create from there.

The development of this intracultural methodology draws on Gaulier where the actor has to work from within themselves rather than paying attention to exercises and techniques that sit outside of who they are. Gaulier encourages actors to find their pleasure and ease on the stage often by clowning: a process of ‘playing the idiot’. Sacha Baron Cohen remarks:

What do the characters of Ali G and Borat have in common? They are both idiots. Imagine my excitement when I heard through a friend that, instead of attending one of the ‘great’ British drama schools, where fencing, practising iambic pentameter and practising ‘memory recollection’ of painful childhood experiences would be the staples of the course, there was a legendary teacher of theatre who was giving courses on how to be a professional ‘idiot’... I owe my career and the discovery of my own inner idiot to Philippe Gaulier (cited in Gaulier, 2006: 163).

While Baron Cohen expresses his discovery with Gaulier as finding his ‘inner idiot’, this is simply a way of expressing the pleasure and freedom found in bringing oneself to a rehearsal process and this approach is one that as Baron Cohen suggests contests many previous methodologies (including that of Stanislavski, as outlined above). Baron Cohen is not suggesting that to find one’s ‘inner idiot’ is not a serious business – he is rather suggesting

that from one's 'inner idiot', the actor can find the pleasure to play anything, even a text as serious as Hamlet or Macbeth.

Gaulier's concentration on the actor playing as themselves is expressed in a number of ways, but his overriding aim "is not to make the actor a neutral being but to enjoy his imperfections" (Gaulier, 2006: 173). The intracultural methodology draws on and expands the work of Gaulier. Like his work, it demands that actors bring their whole selves to the floor – strengths and foibles alike – but extends his language by asking actors to play with their cultural context in action. That is, the methodology encourages actors to find the pleasure to play through their unique cultural context – in playing the idiot, the actor is free to play as no one but herself, laden with all of her cultural specificity. Through engaging and playing with the multifarious cultural identities that inhabit our rehearsal and training rooms, new interpretations will evolve and work shaped by the dynamics of an intracultural ensemble will start to emerge. This is one way to effect change: developing work on a consistent basis that is a truly reflective representation of society today. I took up this challenge in my own practice through my work with Tamasha Theatre, which I describe in the following section.

## 2.4 Thinking Intraculturally

I began to develop an intracultural theatre practice during my work as co-artistic director of Tamasha Theatre, a BAME led company, between 1989 and 2012. My work with co-artistic director Sudha Bhuchar emerged from a desire to bring stories of the Asian diaspora to the British stage. At Tamasha our stories of the Asian diaspora were varied and required deep engagement with the specific communities whose stories we were telling: the Hindu Sindhi community in *House of The Sun* (1991); the Birmingham Muslim Punjabi community in *Balti Kings* (1999); and the Gujarati community of North London in *Strictly Dandia* (2001). Our engagement with these groups was predicated on an intracultural approach, where we developed our comprehension and empathy through curiosity and deep engagement. In order to create the work, we began by immersing ourselves in each community, engaging in their daily lives and talking and interviewing people as a key part of our research. We were, therefore, seeking to understand and challenge the perceived homogeneity of Britain's Asian community through performance.

However, in developing the material for theatrical presentation and in helping the actors capture the nuance of what we had experienced, I recognised that this was not only an issue of professional practice but also a pedagogical issue; that is, the actors arriving in our rehearsal rooms had simply not been taught to embrace their cultural context, or given permission to do so in the course of their training. Tamasha's work therefore expanded to include the education sector, in order to facilitate our performative explorations of identity. This work, done in collaboration with academic and practitioner Sita Brahmachari, sought to address the fact that

Drama education and mainstream theatres have shied away from investigating the particularities of people's histories and artistic practices. Therefore as yet there is no overarching philosophy informing practice which could provide students with a fully integrated aesthetically grounded intercultural curriculum exploring the dramatic texts, functions, forms and genre of the dramatic traditions of diverse cultures. I am proposing a curriculum that will weigh representations of the politics of oppression alongside the politics of aesthetic representations (Brahmachari, 1999: 8).

Our aim was therefore to facilitate the creation of a pedagogy that would allow teachers to feel confident in playing with and through the diverse cultures of their classrooms,

and to embrace cultural difference and diversity instead of seeking to ignore it. In our primary investigations in a number of schools across the UK it was observed that many teachers felt unable to support the development of a drama pedagogy that could embrace the cultural diversity of the classroom. Students from non-English-speaking backgrounds were not given the opportunity to work in their first languages, so even where Bengali (for example) might have been the predominant language of a class group, the language used would only be English. This was most often due to teachers' discomfort in asking students to improvise in languages, vernaculars and behaviours from the students' own cultural context, and the difficulty of shaping and directing work where they did not understand the literal meaning of the text a student created. In response a programme was developed named TIME (Tamasha Intracultural Millenium Education), which aimed to address these difficulties through a tool kit of exercises to set up improvisations or character studies that would embrace each and every cultural identity in a classroom or drama workshop. TIME also encouraged teachers not to place undue importance on their own literal understanding of situations and scenarios, giving them the confidence to prompt students to work in languages other than English.

When teachers relinquished the idea that they needed to understand every word of an improvisation in order to judge quality or to develop an improvisation to a scripted scene, the multi-lingual improvisations – a key tool in the intracultural methodology, articulated in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3 – began to assist teachers in managing the intracultural dynamics of their classrooms. Sometimes these improvisations were as simple as asking a student to play their mother, father, grandmother in the everyday language of that person. Teachers began to see that through not engaging with the multifarious identities in their classrooms, they had not allowed each and every cultural background a meaningful voice or position. TIME aimed to provoke a massive culture shift in classrooms where many teachers admitted to previously only working from the position of the cultural authority. In this project we were asking teachers to move towards a position of profound engagement with, and respect for, diverse cultures in performance. Crucially, this did not mean discriminating against the White British students; rather, the work was designed to contest the centre and allow a diverse range of cultural contexts to take centre stage in the classroom.

The TIME project highlighted the challenge presented for teachers seeking to play and engage with the diversity of their classrooms to enable

teachers moving from the more neutral multicultural stance where differences were celebrated rather than engaged with to the intracultural where they had to climb out of a false neutrality, to make a personal connection between the ‘other’ and themselves and their own cultural, historical and geographical position (Brahmachari, 2001: n.p.).

My reflections on the TIME project were the catalyst for my enquiry into and development of a practice that could respond and engage with the complexities of each and every student’s cultural contexts in actor training and in making work for performance. This methodology is outlined in the following section.

## **2.5 The Intracultural Methodology in Brief**

In taking the lessons learned in the TIME project back to the everyday work of Tamasha, it became clear that a comprehensive intracultural methodology would need to be articulated in order to scaffold and support the company's work. These included empowering both directors and artists to play with and through cultural context in order to create work for performance. In this section, I briefly outline the key steps of the methodology as they developed out of the TIME project. This outline serves to contextualise the case studies in Chapters 3 and 4, and I refer back to it throughout where appropriate. It is important to note throughout that this is not an 'essentialist'<sup>9</sup> approach, attaching stereotypical notions to ethnicities, but rather an approach which emphasises direct and straightforward language in conversation to give permission to and encourage actors to play through their cultural context.

In order to provide a clear, concise reference point, the key steps appear in **a box**, followed by a brief unpacking of each in relation to theoretical positions. The methodology has three main components:

1. Setting the culture of the rehearsal room
2. Placing the actor at the centre
3. A multi-lingual, multi-vernacular approach

### **2.5.1 Setting the culture of the rehearsal room: An ethics of engagement**

In practice, the establishment of the culture and language of the rehearsal room means:

- Emphasising the value for the actor of drawing on themselves and their particular cultural and historical narratives in the crafting of work for performance.
- Beginning rehearsal with an investigation into the cultural context of the actor herself, rather than with an investigation into text or character.
- Giving actors the means of bridging the gap between their own identities and narratives and the narrative and world of the play.

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<sup>9</sup> Essentialism suggests that for any specific entity there is a set of attributes necessary to both the identity and function of that identity.

- Tackling ‘cultural contexts’ head on by using very straightforward language in conversations around culture and context; for example, “what is your ancestry?”, “do you speak another language?”.
- Developing conversations during rehearsals that address the notion of stereotyping and essentialism.
- Revealing the political implications of the practice by making clear than an intracultural approach contests the centre to create the possibility of new narratives.

Phillip Zarrilli asserts that every time an actor performs, she does so “according to a set of assumptions about the conventions and style of the performance, and informing these assumptions are culture-specific assumptions about the body-mind relationship, the nature of the ‘self’, emotions/feelings and the performance context” (1995: 3). Actors are often asked to work within paradigms that may hold no direct meaning for them and they can therefore develop ways of being and coping which hide their own personalities. They can behave in a manner that seems to be second guessing assumptions, instead of embracing their own cultural differences. In an intracultural practice that draws on the individuality of the actor as a key tool in the making of any work for performance, an explanation of the rehearsal process needs to be conveyed carefully and in detail from the outset. The prevalence of Stanislavksy-inspired realism in rehearsal rooms makes it particularly imperative to convey precisely how the intracultural methodology develops notions of self and character, as discussed in the case studies.

Each actor will respond differently to the teacher/director’s request to work with and through their cultural context, and the director or teacher needs to be empathetic to the sensitivities that occur when actors engage their cultural contexts for the first time. The fear of stereotyping is at the heart of this cultural negotiation; that is, directors and teachers are often afraid that any recourse to cultural context with only partial understanding of that culture will necessarily invoke a caricatured portrait. The methodology must therefore address stereotype head on: teachers and directors must work carefully and responsibly, negotiating resistance if it arises. In early and frank exchanges about culture, it is important to emphasise that cultural context is being used as a tool for artistic enquiry; it is not an end in itself. The methodology should not be presented as a form of type-casting where the actor can only play from the perspective of their cultural background. Nor is the intracultural methodology an essentialist practice, suggesting that certain character traits go with certain

ethnicities. Actors need to feel that the conversation around bringing their cultural history to the floor is creatively liberating rather than oppressive and reductive, and the methodology will bring forth modulation and difference rather than stereotype.

The teacher or director helps make a bridge for the actor between their own identity and the world with which they are engaging. For example, when working in a masterclass on Tom's monologue from *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams, a Spanish student (Rodrigo Penalosa) could not access any of the emotions that the text presented, as he ignored his Spanish-ness in an effort to pretend towards something resembling American. Reflecting later on the masterclass, he asked “to what extent can we really achieve to become another human being if we hide everything that makes us real and human?” (Written reflection, 2014). By re-embracing his cultural context, he was able to find a way in to the text that had not previously been available to him, as he had been playing through Tom's fictional American context. Following the intracultural methodology, I worked with him from Spanish to English, helping him make the bridge between his own identity and the words of the play. Through this channel, he found an emotional resonance and finally delivered the text with an individual nuance that merged with the world of the play. The process of working with Penalosa on this text can be viewed at <http://kristinelandonsmith.com/intracultural-thesis>, password: thesis, or view the DVD included in Appendix E (**Clip 1**).

### 2.5.2 The actor as expert at the centre

In practice, when working intraculturally in the rehearsal room the actor must be prioritised above text and character. The steps to achieve this include:

- Complicité: establishing complicité<sup>10</sup> as the key tool to help the actor achieve “bodymind” (the moment that mind and body integration become one in practice) engagement (Zarrilli, 1995: 4) and giving actors a set of apparatus by which to establish complicité every time they play together.

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<sup>10</sup> Complicité is a term used by Philippe Gaulier referring to the rapport between actors, not characters. Kenneth Rea observes that this emphasis on rapport between actors not characters is what distinguishes Gaulier from other practitioners. Gaulier describes ‘complicité’ as “the relationship between actors not characters and like the rapport that two close friends exhibit when they are together” (cited in Rea, 1991).

- Improvisation: continual use of improvisations centred on the actor and their unique attributes and interests that encourage cultural interplay in the rehearsal room.
- The director in-role: employing role play. Director-in-role provides a shorthand, showing and prompting actors about how far they might go with a particular accent, vernacular or behaviour. The director in-role is able to work from inside rather than outside, which can expedite an actor's journey.
- The Real I: helping the actor hold their sense of themselves as they move from actor to a character in a play by emphasising the need to continue to play through themselves. This encourages the actor neither to second-guess what is being asked of them, nor to mimic something that they feel is closer to the 'cultural authority'.
- The actor as expert: in asking the actor to utilise their cultural context they become the expert in the room. Only the actor holds the full knowledge of her cultural context, and power relations in the rehearsal room can be recalibrated by inviting knowledge from the actor that only she holds.

This methodology aims to make a bridge for the actor between their own identity and the stage narrative with which they are engaging. To do this, the actor must have the freedom to be 'themselves'. The problematic of self is central to performance theory: as Benedetti points out "we often praise acting by calling it 'honest' or 'self revelatory', 'truthful' when we feel we have glimpsed some aspect of the actor's psyche through her performance [...] it is the presence of self in performance that provides the audience with access to human truths" (1995: 53). So to talk of "truth" in acting, often refers to a "truth" of the actor – catching a glimpse of the actor's experiences and emotions as she plays in a work. While 'truth' is also the methodological aim of realism, from Stanislavski onwards there seems to be a confusion and lack of clarity around 'truth' of the actor and 'truth' of the character. The intracultural methodology looks for 'truth' only in the actor, rather than "in the collapse of the person of the performer into the role" (Zarrilli, 1995: 8).

This is a critical departure point of this methodology from Stanislavski, as the methodology never asks the actor to imagine herself as another character. The methodology instead draws here on Gaulier's work, by asking the actor only to have the pleasure to play something: a text, a physical attribute, a person called something. The 'pleasure to play' is a phrase coined and consistently used by Gaulier, and places emphasis on the pleasure found by *playing with* attributes that you might invent for performance, rather than *believing in*

them. Ultimately the actor herself must always be present and aware of the pleasure in the artifice she is creating. Re-directing actors to think of having the pleasure to play, rather than beginning by investing in a make-believe, is very productive. Actors can concentrate on being themselves on stage with the pleasure to play something, and only move toward character through this pleasure. While Stanislavski in his later work evolved a Method of Physical Action asking actors to focus physically on actually what they had to do in a scene, the work was still tied very closely to the given circumstances of the play and finding tasks and actions that fulfilled the fictional drive of an episode of the narrative (Benedetti, 1998: 106). This over-emphasis on the primacy of the text is what pushes the actor to character in Stanislavski's method, where in my method I strip all this away in the first instance in order to push the actor towards self.

### 2.5.3 A multilingual, multi-vernacular practice

In practice, to work with a multi-vocal mise-en-scène<sup>11</sup> that employs all the languages and vernaculars present in the rehearsal room requires:

- a direct exchange around language and culture: the director or teacher needs to frankly question the actor about her heritage, languages and vernaculars that she may have other than English.
- exploration with first languages and vernaculars that may be normally reserved only for friends and family, and helping actors to understand that the use of language and personal vernaculars can act as a tool to discover artistic freedom and confidence
- navigating the actor's journey in the use of language and culture as part of the process. Each actor works at their own pace and comes to understand the value of multi-lingual practice in their own time. It is important to be empathetic to this.

The production of the voice is key to the intracultural methodology. Mainstream Western voice pedagogy posits that a person's voice reflects their identity and their socio-cultural

<sup>11</sup> Yana Meerzon (2009: 84) uses the term multi-vocal when describing Bharucha's practice of identifying a creative dialogue between various cultural traditions simultaneously co-existing within a single geographical local. Within the context of theatre, Meerzon refers to this as a multi-vocal mise-en-scène. More information is provided on this term in Chapter 3, below.

influences. This is reflected in comments from leading practitioners like Barbara Houseman, who identifies the voice as “an expression of self” and “a bridge between the inner and outer worlds”, and Patsy Rodenburg, who asserts that “as we open our mouths [...] we frequently reveal the deepest parts of ourselves [...] class, background, and education [...] perceived status in the world” (1992: x-xi). There is a contradiction between vocal pedagogy requiring certain standards predicated on a Western Eurocentric benchmark on the one hand, and on the other acknowledging that “nurture and culture are in fact the major determinants of vocal quality and vocal behaviour” (Linklater, 2000: 29). Voice training looks at the interplay between breathing, phonation, resonance and articulation and it is these four areas that have been the basis of texts on voice training in the twentieth century. However, benchmarks of quality of the voice that is a harmonious mélange of these four aspects has been determined by a Western Eurocentric standard that is not broad enough to embrace the breadth of variation coming from the multifarious identities that inhabit our rehearsal rooms.

Received pronunciation (RP), a standardised English drawn from the accents of Southern England, is still often the accent adopted for stage work in drama schools and industry settings. For many years the adopting of RP for performance meant that this also created a class barrier, where people from working class backgrounds who did not speak with the RP of Southern England or who were faltering in their attempt to speak RP were excluded from theatre and broadcasting industries. Where authentic accents of actors were situated in the vernacular of their region they were often disregarded, until a broader approach to speech variation was adopted. Intracultural practice rejects the default employment of RP and moves towards a vocal approach that is capable of embracing all the variations within the sounds made by actors and students from diverse backgrounds. Stan Brown rejects the idea of a ‘standard’ English in training where multicultural influences are not acknowledged:

why is a speech standard that predates a consistent presence of minority actors in mainstream theatre and the racial integration of schools still used in multicultural professional training programs? Why are actors of all races and cultures taught a standard that remains relatively uninfluenced by living multicultural impacts on the English language? This kind of blatant and unacknowledged disregard of culture raises a number of questions (Brown, 2000: 18).

Even in countries where RP is not spoken by any of the populace, such as Australia, these countries have historically adopted it as a norm. In contexts where the predominance of RP

has been challenged, such as in the 2016 MFA Voice degree offered at NIDA, it has been replaced with a fabricated ‘standard Australian’ that nonetheless requires a mimicking of the centre.

Instead, the intracultural methodology utilises all the languages and vernaculars present in the rehearsal room as a critical part of the rehearsal process. This is because “language is not just an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power. This is just as applicable to accents or variants of a language as the actual language itself” (Ginther, 2012: 29). Language and culture are key factors in intracultural practice and there are many examples in the following case studies that show actors finding an inherent power residing in a language or vernacular that they often do not bring to the professional space but reserve only for home or other environments or situations. In the intracultural methodology, it is critical that each language and each vernacular that is present in the room is given an equal position, resulting in a rebalancing of power, removing the superiority of one language or vernacular over another and positioning each and every language and variance as equal. Languages, vernaculars and cultures that have been marginalised in mainstream environments can begin to move to the centre through a more democratic rehearsal process.

Historically, the implementation of a standard norm has acted as a barrier to entry where race, gender, class and ethnicity might be considered outside the accepted standard. By encouraging and advocating for variance, actors who find themselves on the periphery can begin to move centre stage as they perform with power, knowledge and confidence, offering their particularity as an advantage rather than disadvantage. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002) describe the complex ways in which English has been used in colonised societies and they distinguish between the ‘standard’ British English inherited from the empire and the English which the language has become in post-colonial countries:

Though British imperialism resulted in the spread of a language, English, across the globe, the English of Jamaicans is not the English of Canadians, Maoris, or Kenyans. We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world [...] the political reality is that English sets itself apart from all other ‘lesser’ variants and

so demands to be interrogated about its claim to this special status (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002: 8).

A Trinidadian actor living and working consistently in Britain described a moment in an audition for the part of a mother of a Trinidadian family, when the director became uncomfortable as her delivery became more Trinidadian-accented during the course of the audition. The explanation given by the casting director when she didn't get the job was that the director had felt that her Trinidadian vernacular was too strong for the role.

I was doing my acting things and had my brain, my mind in family mode: so I was talking to a family member, so my accent immediately goes ... stronger, Trinidadian. So if it becomes something too complex and too layered, where you want to bring your own truth and your own heart speak to it, then um, you're not allowed to do that in your own accent [...] the message is continually driven home that your very essence is not acceptable (Martina Laird, 03.02.2013).

The actor speaks further about her frustrations around what she sees to be the limits of British identity:

if we allow Northern people to bring their northern-ness, whatever that is, you know, however that's expressed, other than the verbal. Um, same way with the Trinidadian: If we bring that together, we will create a new sensibility, I think, that is British [...] it's not even just about accent; it's about even when you bring who you are, there's ... you're still perceived as different, [...] what a harmful message to deliver to a young generation (Martina Laird, 03.02.2013).

This actor reflects on how her own individuality seems to contest the director's view of the nation and she concludes that the concept of Britishness has to change in order for work for performance to embrace all the multifarious identities that exist within British society. It is precisely this change that is advocated by the intracultural methodology, which is able to embrace the diverse cultural contexts within one society. As Melissa Agnew noted at a recent Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA) Conference, "vocal world theory sits well with intraculturalism because the vocal possibilities can be as vast and numerous as the population itself" (Agnew and Landon-Smith, 2015: n.p.).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This Chapter has outlined the genealogy of the intracultural praxis, beginning with my frustrations with the perceived limitations of the Stanislavski system, before turning to the theorists and practitioners whose work has allowed me to move beyond those limitations, including Bharucha and Gaulier. As noted in Chapter 1, it is an important concern of any practice-based research to situate its object of study within a particular lineage of practice. It is for this reason that the Chapter also included a case study of my own work, outlining how the TIME programme responded to the interactions and contradictions between Stanislavski, Bharucha and Gaulier, as well as how it empowered drama students and teachers to embrace the multifarious cultural contexts at play in any given classroom or rehearsal room. The findings of the TIME programme resulted in the formulation of a specific intracultural praxis, which I outlined in this final section of the Chapter. This praxis lies at the core of my research, and as such I will return to these observations as a structuring device throughout the remainder of this thesis.

This Chapter concluded with a systematic explanation of the intracultural methodology, organised around a set of core questions that can be asked and exercises that can be conducted at each point. To further this investigation, and in particular to offer some practical illustrations of the methodology at work in creating work for performance, the following Chapters centre around specific case studies. In Chapter 3, the case studies are drawn from non-performance situations, including an audition process and a masterclass attended by both student and professional actors. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the methodology as a whole by following the rehearsal process of a devised work for performance. Taken together, these later Chapters provide a start-to-finish picture of the intracultural praxis. Throughout these accounts, I refer back to the foundations of the intracultural project that I have outlined here in Chapter 2, and I return to them again in the concluding Chapter 5 in order to demonstrate how the praxis can act as an intervention against hegemonic performance practice that prefers neutrality to specificity.

## **Chapter Three**

### **METHODOLOGY 1: BEHIND AND IN FRONT OF THEIR MASKS**

In their performances, all persons reproduce shreds and pieces of the epochs to which they belong. Behind and in front of their masks and performances, persons are moral beings, already present in the world, ahead of themselves, occupied and preoccupied with everyday doings and emotional practices, defined in and through their presence.

(Denzin, 2003: 32)

### **3.1 Introduction**

This Chapter details the intracultural methodology in action as an intervention against discriminatory practices in theatre. A ‘one size fits all’ approach, where teacher and director give instructions and standard exercises to all actors and students regardless of their cultural heritage, can no longer accommodate a rapidly changing society. Constant mass migration means that the narrative of the nation is constantly shifting and changing, alongside the internally marked differences within supposedly homogenous society that Raymond Williams identifies:

Idealised pictures of homogenous local communities as the bedrock of a stable society are not only highly sentimental, but they also provide an inadequate account of the complicated network of social relations in which many people now live  
(Williams cited in Govan, Nicholson and Normington, 2007: 73-74).

The case studies described in this Chapter show how the intracultural methodology’s foundation privileges the individual in rehearsal, granting freedom to the performer to escape domination by text or physical impulse. The performer does not try to manage or control habitual patterns of self-hood, but rather is asked to bring forth idiosyncratic detail of self as a way of expressing artistic power and presence, which can co-exist with a text or impulse.

The two are not mutually exclusive, as student Gloria Bose noted when reflecting on a masterclass conducted at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA):

When you came along and asked me to use my Fijian and Samoan culture, that was confronting and liberating at the same time. It was something that I could also use in a contemporary Australian industry. It doesn’t mean that I have to save my Samoan/Fijian culture for just for Fijian or Samoan audiences or for Polynesian audiences, it can be used in front of an Australian audience (04.03.2014).

Her cultural context is a legitimate and powerful aspect of her work and does not need to be kept at bay, only to emerge when in front of her community. In the wider world, the nuance and truth of her own identity can act as its own intervention. A significant shift in the power dynamic can emerge when the teacher or director is ready to deeply engage in the unfamiliar encounter, where one’s cultural context is not neglected but utilised, where the actor can be positioned as “expert” and where the possibility exists for rich and meaningful dialogue

between every member of the ensemble. This in turn allows us to look forward to the Utopian multiracial society that Denzin envisages, an image to which I return in Chapter 5:

It is possible to imagine and perform a multiracial society, a society where differences are honoured. If the students of this generation are to make a difference, that difference will be defined, in part, in terms of opposition or resistance to acceptance of the representations and interpretations of the racial order and the colour line that circulate in the mass media and the majority of social science writings. This resistance, in turn, will be shaped by how we read, write, perform, and critique culture (2003: xiii).

The imperfect knowledge of the Other that characterises an intracultural exchange is the very thing that can enable the director to win the trust of her collaborators. A director needs to step towards each individual actor in the collective, demonstrating curiosity towards the diverse historical narratives of the ensemble. If a director can do this, and thereby demonstrate that each individual in the room holds equal value, then trust and understanding can grow through embracing the uncertainty of the intracultural exchange. Inevitably, many misunderstandings and miscommunications can occur within this uncertain exchange. The director however needs to understand that miscommunication itself is a necessary part of the approach. Bharucha emphasises that when vulnerabilities that spring from the intracultural encounter “infiltrate our imagined modes of expertise, we have no other choice but to acknowledge our distance, and thereby, to explore new proximities to the echoes and repercussions of the encounter” (2000: 108).

I take up these contentions in this Chapter by outlining two separate instances where I use the intracultural methodology in isolation as a way to empower actors in short, discrete periods. These are: the audition process for a new Australian play, *Samson*, where I utilised the methodology with professional actors to elicit effective audition performances; and an intracultural masterclass I conducted with a mix of professional and student actors, designed to highlight the unique capabilities of the intracultural methodology. Each brings to light particular aspects of the intracultural methodology and these pressured environments serve to highlight the importance of the language used in the intracultural negotiation, as well as the possibilities for the actor that present when she is given permission to use her cultural context in any piece of work. The audition and masterclass offer a snapshot of the methodology, showing how quickly results can be achieved when the actor’s individuality is brought into

play. In both case studies, I am concentrating on drawing out the on-the-ground applications of the intracultural methodology, with particular reference to the constant negotiations that take place throughout the process. Across this Chapter, I critically engage with the application of and development of the intracultural praxis, which allows teachers and directors to appreciate its application in both training and rehearsal room environments.

### **3.2 Samson: An Intracultural Audition**

A key aspect of the intracultural project is the honouring and negotiation of sense of self and difference in the performance space. This can be clearly demonstrated in the audition process for *Samson*, a new Australian play by playwright Julia-Rose Lewis. The story of the audition succinctly addresses and problematises two key aspects of the intracultural methodology as it applies to working with actors:

1. the potential tension in the dynamics of the intracultural exchange
2. the constant negotiations that take place at every moment of the exchange

In this audition scenario I was looking at two things: the first was how to get the best work out of the actor, and the second was the actor's suitability for the role. In order to effectively use the intracultural methodology, this is the necessary order of things but it is perhaps a departure from the norm, where the director normally privileges suitability for the role. The practice here prioritises creating conditions to facilitate an actor's best delivery. This is particularly important in an audition scenario for actors of diasporic or Indigenous heritage, who are not consistently invited to participate fully in the audition process. If differences are honoured and thought of as a rich resource for exploration of artistic work, opportunities open up for a whole range of actors. In the course of the *Samson* auditions, I was asking actors to create themselves, not to present an imagined version of the self that they thought was required for the play I was casting. For the actors generally perceived as "Other", it was an empowering opening to be asked to perform their own citizenship and cultural narrative in an audition scenario.

This opening realises the key aspect of the intracultural methodology: to reposition the actor as expert. Other aspects of the intracultural methodology illustrated throughout this section are:

- tackling 'cultural contexts' head on by using very straightforward language in conversations around culture and context.
- using improvisations centred around the actor and their unique attributes that encourage 'cultural interplay'.
- exploring improvisation and text with first languages and vernaculars that may be normally reserved only for friends and family

- employing director-in-role to speed up the process. Role play acts as a shorthand as the director or teacher can direct from ‘inside’ the improvisation or scene rather than from the outside.
- encouraging actors not to ‘second-guess’ what is being asked of them or indeed to mimic something that they feel is closer to the ‘cultural authority’.

*Samson* was co-produced by Belvoir Theatre Sydney<sup>12</sup> and La Boite<sup>13</sup> in Brisbane in 2015. The playwright had stated as a written instruction in the front pages of the script that the play needed to be cast so that each character within the Australian context had a different ethnic background. This mirrored her own upbringing, growing up in a small suburb just outside the metropolis of Brisbane, on the edge of rural Australia, where everyone in her friendship group had a different cultural background. An Anglo-Australian actor had already been cast with my agreement, and it was my task to find the three remaining actors. Auditions were set up in both Brisbane and Sydney and we auditioned over fifty actors from diverse cultural backgrounds across the two cities. Casting approaches were made directly from Belvoir and La Boite to Indigenous<sup>14</sup> and diasporic heritage actors known to them. Agents who represented a large number of actors from diverse backgrounds were also contacted.

It is not unusual for actors in an audition situation to come with “assumptions” (cf. Zarrilli, 1995) around the type of actor required for work produced by venues like La Boite and Belvoir, both of which are classified as mainstream. These venues do not produce culturally diverse work on a consistent basis and therefore the work that audiences often see in these venues features casts of Anglo Australians speaking Standard Australian English in cultivated accents<sup>15</sup> displaying little diversity and variation. Most of the actors auditioning had not auditioned for the two companies before, and some auditionees told me that they had never expected that they would audition for such prestigious companies. I was therefore aware that actors were carrying assumptions and perceptions, which in most cases meant that

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<sup>12</sup> Based in the building that originally housed the Nimrod Theatre, Belvoir is a producing theatre in Sydney which realises an annual season of work in its Upstairs and Downstairs spaces. Work also tours nationally and internationally. It is considered Sydney’s second mainstage company, after the more handsomely funded Sydney Theatre Company.

<sup>13</sup> La Boite is a producing theatre in Brisbane producing a season of work and host to visiting companies. Originally designed as an in-the-round space, it is considered Brisbane’s second mainstage company, after the more handsomely funded Queensland Theatre Company.

<sup>14</sup> Indigenous in Australia refers to Aboriginal persons as well as Torres Strait Islanders.

<sup>15</sup> Australian English is a regional dialect of the English language and spoken by most people born and raised in Australia and those who immigrate during childhood. There are three major subgroups: Standard Australian English, Aboriginal English and Ethnocultural Australian English varieties. Australian accents are classified as broad, general or cultivated. Cultivated bears some resemblance to the British RP.

on first reading of the text they tried to hide or disguise their cultural backgrounds and behaviours in favour of foregrounding the Australian part of themselves or a version of their Australian self. This often meant using Standard Australian English with cultivated accents that they felt might be palatable for a show produced by these mainstream theatre venues.

The intracultural methodology seeks out the point where the actor starts to feel free, in control, and empowered: this is where the truth and humanity of the actor herself comes into play as the actor starts to play through her own material body and mind. Much of the terminology used tries to signpost and to reassure actors that when they play through themselves, engaging their cultural context, they are then feeling that empowerment. The methodology is concerned with nurturing ease and excellence in the actor, which can sometimes appear divorced from the script and the actor's suitability for the role. Phrases like "do not move beyond that", "sit in it", "that's enough", "that's all you need" might be confusing if you do not understand exactly what they are being used to refer to. However, it was only when seeing actors at ease that I could then determine their suitability in relation to the text and character. The intracultural praxis must therefore respond flexibly to the particularities of each auditionee in this context, a point reinforced in both of the below examples. During the audition process of the play, I used a bespoke application of the intracultural methodology with each performer, and I describe two of these applications in the following sections.

### **3.2.1 Engaging Cultural Context**

Auditionee A was an Indian woman who had migrated to Australia in 2010. She spoke in Australian English with an Indian inflected accent with Australian sounds, but like many of the auditionees who were not from Australian backgrounds she emphasised an Australian accent over her Indian cultural context. My first port of call was to ask her to do a quick reading of a scene from the play. In her first tentative reading, I could hear the Indian sounds coming through her Australian accent and I stopped her reading of the script before she finished the scene. I explained to her that we would work through improvisation before we returned to the script. This was the first negotiation in this intracultural encounter and needed careful handling, as improvisation in individual auditions is unusual – it is more common

when groups of actors are called together for audition, but it is quite rare when only one actor is the subject of the audition.

The improvisation should be set up from the cultural context of the actor; the aim here is to give the actor something with which they might feel comfortable. A number of improvisation scenarios might be suitable for the task at hand: the director/teacher should use their empathy and instinct for the individual actor to decide on a specific setting, and be prepared to experiment to find the most productive scenario. In this instance, I set up an improvisation located in India. With my knowledge of India, I had some sense of the particular socio-economic group the auditionee might have come from, and so I set up a family scene set in a middle class Indian family. The improvisation was a conversation between two sisters around one sister's refusal to go through with an arranged marriage<sup>16</sup>, although the auditionee's understanding of the details of the improvisation are much less important than its general outline. It is a case-by-case decision as to the language in which the improvisation will be conducted, and again the director/teacher should make use of her instincts in making this decision. As well, the director/teacher can use both approaches, and switch between the use of first language and accented English to elicit the best results. In this case, I asked the auditionee to work from her Indian cultural context, using the accent and other particular behaviours that came with her knowledge and lived experience of her cultural context, but not in her first language. (For an example of multi-lingual improvisation, see section 3.2.2 below).

If the actor is unsure of how to proceed, or not able to fully embrace the content of the improvisation, the director should enter the scene in role in order to guide the actor. In this case, in response to visible confusion from the auditionee, I joined the improvisation, putting on an Indian accent of my own to accelerate the process and direct the auditionee from the 'inside'. As explained in Chapter 2, the use of role play acts mainly as a shorthand and in this example it helped encourage and propel the auditionee to the geographic site and culture of the place she grew up in and knew so well. This situation also raises the latent risk in the intracultural process that the director's interventions may be read as racist. In this case, my attempt at an Indian accent must have felt like an inappropriate mimicking of a foreign accent and in this short audition situation there had been no explanation; with no sharing of the principles of intracultural practice this delicate negotiation could have taken a wrong turn.

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<sup>16</sup> Arranged marriages are still common amongst the middle class in India and I felt that the improvisation would therefore be familiar for the auditionee.

While I am of Indian/Australian heritage, the auditionee and others did not know that, so my Indian accent would have certainly felt like an inappropriate mimic. As director holding the power in the room, it may even have felt like I was setting the Indian actor as Other and then giving my version of that Other – which in turn could have felt like a stereotype (I addressed this concern at the end of the audition, as I discuss later in this section). However, as the priority of the methodology is to help the actor to play well within her cultural context, at this stage in the audition I did not necessarily need to connect this to demands of the character or the script.

This early exchange illustrates the complexity of this uncertain encounter. The director or teacher needs to work imaginatively and sensitively, gauging how to balance the unfamiliar request or application of the methodology in relation to achieving a desired outcome. In this instance, with me in role the improvisation began to develop and the auditionee began to demonstrate that she was finding success through the intracultural methodology. Some of these signs of success included:

- **Relaxation:** The auditionee began to relax into playing a middle class Indian woman without restraint and started to use specific turns of phrases appropriate for every exchange.
- **Timing:** She also began to time lines, drawing laughter from the onlooking creative team.
- **Control:** She began to drive the improvisation from a place of knowledge and confidence.
- **Expertise:** More critically, she was the only one in the room able to bring this particular nuanced knowledge and detail to this scene; she was bringing her rhythm, her mannerisms, her subtext, inner tempo and historical narrative to the exercise and in this moment she became the expert.
- **Specific detail:** She brought in very specific imagery – she described the groom-to-be and gave him a name, she spoke in clear detail of exactly how her parents would react, delighting us with imitations of her parents, and spoke to me using the Indian phrase ‘Aunty’ which is commonly used for any elder in an Indian society.

While success will ‘look’ different in every case, this list of features provides a guide to the director/teacher to recognise success when it arrives. Director/teachers will note that this list is very similar to the markers of success in realist improvisation; these goals are simply tweaked and focussed for intracultural praxis.

The final step of the process is for the actor to return to the text, while still holding all of the discoveries made through the improvisation. In this case, when she finished the improvisation I then asked the auditionee to return to the text of *Samson* – but with the understanding that I wanted her to play as herself (middle class Indian and not quasi Australian) and exactly as she had played during the improvisation. I was still not asking the actor to move towards the demands of the text and the given circumstances. She went back to her text with an assured delivery with her Indian voice and her Indian behaviours. Ultimately, though, I could see that this particular actor was not appropriate casting for this play. It is only at this point in the audition that all the requirements around casting come into play: age, likeness to the character, suitability against actors already cast etc. After working with this actor I felt she did not possess enough of the attributes that I was looking for, as she was not anchored in an Australian voice and her Australian-ness, so I did not ask her to go further by returning to her Australian voice in a further script reading.<sup>17</sup> While it might appear as a contradiction that I steered the actor away from her Australian-ness and then did not cast her for that very reason, the intracultural methodology was employed to free the actor to give the best possible audition. Had she demonstrated an ability to sustain the discoveries of the improvisation in her Australian voice, she may have been more appropriate casting.

There is one final problematic feature of the praxis that must be shared with the participants before the actor leaves the audition or training situation. Because of the limitations of director-in-role, it can be difficult to share the specifics of the practice with the actor in the course of the improvisation or audition. In this case, as the actor started to leave, I was conscious that I had still not had the chance to explain the detail of the intracultural approach. Without this, the actor might leave feeling that while she had given a good audition, it was brought about by my mimicry and by distancing her in the guise of the Other. Fortunately, on her way out the auditionee asked me if I had ever been to India. In that moment I was able to tell her that I was of mixed heritage and I could see that this gave her some understanding of my role play with Indian accent and behaviours. The key point here is to ensure that there is a sharing with the actor, which allows her to understand some of the implications of the intracultural process and thereby feel empowered instead of marginalised.

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<sup>17</sup> Chapter 3 is a case study of a production using the intracultural methodology that details the relationship between casting, actor and role.

### **3.2.2 Multi-vocal Improvisation in Audition**

Multi-vocal improvisation is a key tool of the intracultural methodology, where actors improvise together in two or more different languages. These improvisations can be undertaken regardless of whether the director/teacher shares or has knowledge of the cultural context(s) of the performer(s). Similarly to the above example in section 3.2.1, director-in-role can be used as a tool to advance and sustain the improvisation. In that example, I was very much an insider, since I shared some of the auditionee's cultural location – and this of course affected the delivery of the methodology and the exchange between the performer and me. This example shows the exchange that took place with an auditionee who was Congolese, a cultural context unfamiliar to me; in this audition, I needed to find a way of working with the auditionee's cultural context by adapting the intracultural approach to suit this particular auditionee, when I had no embodied experience of her cultural site.

This can be undertaken by the director/teacher as long as care is taken to select improvisations that will empower and embolden auditionees to find the pleasure to play, rather than those that can potentially lead to limited or harmful representation. Like many of the other auditionees, auditionee B began her text working in an Australian accent. The reading was hesitant, and it felt as though the situation she was playing in the text had little meaning for her. I stopped her and asked with gentle interest and curiosity about her background, not prompting her to divulge anything too monumental in her life: where had she and her parents come from and how as a family had they come to be in Australia. In this instance she seemed happy to share her story. She was Congolese and had moved around a great deal, and on her journey had spent some time in a refugee camp. This detail was now 'on the table', and I took my chance to ask her if she would be happy to do an improvisation employing the 'Real I' approach. The improvisation was set in a refugee camp where auditionee B had been having problems with one of the officials, and she was speaking to a friend about her troubles.

As I captured briefly above, it can often be productive to work with many different languages within a single improvisation. This allows each of the actors in the scene to find their own pleasure to play through their cultural context; however, the process must be tightly managed in order to ensure that the improvisation can continue smoothly. The director-in-role can help to facilitate this, as can side-coaching – the actors at all times must be reminded to listen with care and attention. These multi-lingual improvisations can be very productive,

particularly in audition situations as they force actors to listen to each other and to work through the puzzle of not literally understanding each word yet having to deliver a logical response. In this instance, I asked the actor to work in Congolese and she performed a skilled improvisation, with the actor playing opposite her working in English but pretending to understand. Auditionee B responded enthusiastically to the improvisation, and was able to find a power and confidence in her Congolese delivery that had been lacking from her hesitant first reading in English.

Similarly to the process described above in section 3.2.1, the final stage of the multi-lingual improvisation is then to return to the text, while still holding the discoveries made in the improvisation. However, an additional step can be utilised here in a situation where the actor finds it difficult to hold onto these discoveries, as indeed happened with auditionee B. When, as the next step of the audition, I asked her to go back to the text and read in English, she struggled to hold the power and artistry that had been so clear in her Congolese improvisation. I therefore set up another exercise asking her to preface every line she read in English with an improvised line in Congolese. The exercise is strict: one line in the actor's first language to lead into the line from the text. In this audition, as she travelled from Congolese to English nothing of her individuality as a performer was lost. By embodying the Congolese line before moving to English, she became anchored to the text and was able to produce a sophisticated, expert delivery full of meaning. To complete the multi-vocal improvisation, the non-English lines can then be removed in order to allow the actor a final opportunity to display their mastery of the text.

### **3.3 Masterclass: Intracultural Theatre Practice in a Teaching Environment**

To refer to the clips used please visit:

<http://kristinelandonsmith.com/intracultural-thesis>, password: thesis

or view the DVD included in Appendix E.

*Using, not ignoring, the cultural background of the performer* was a masterclass that I ran at the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) on 17 September 2013. Using video conferencing I worked with four industry professionals in London and six ‘live’ students in Australia showcasing my intracultural approach to an invited audience. My analysis of the practice alongside reflections from the actors and students<sup>18</sup> on the masterclass serve to illustrate more fully the key points in my methodology. The UK and Australian participants were facing the similar issues in practice and their reflections also demonstrate that their experiences were not dissimilar.

The case study takes place at NIDA, and while the masterclass was outside hours and not part of the formal course of study at NIDA, students display some behaviours informed by the culture and values of the institution. These behaviours relate to ideas held by the students of what it is to be a ‘perfect’ NIDA student. It was not within the scope of this masterclass to interrogate how students formed their ideas, but there are many examples both in the master class and the reflections where students confess to playing the idea of an actor worthy of a NIDA training rather than making an honest exploration of themselves in action unburdened by assumptions they have might have held of what is expected of them.

#### **Masterclass Participants**

##### *Students in Australia:*

Metasebia Fenwick Nevin: Brought up in Australia, of Ethiopian heritage

Gloria Bose: Fiji Samoan now residing in Australia

Shakira Clanton: Australian Aboriginal

Charles Wu: Australian of South East Asian heritage

James Raggat: Anglo Australian

Thuso Lekwape: South African now residing in Australia

##### *Industry practitioners in the UK:*

<sup>18</sup> Data from these reflections can be found in Appendices C and D of the thesis.

Felicity Davidson: Anglo British

Tuyen Do: British Vietnamese

Japjit Kaur: British Indian

Rodrigo Penalosa: Spanish residing in UK

The masterclass with accompanying clips provides examples that illustrate many of the key characteristics of the methodology as outlined in Chapter 1. In the following sections, where I narrate work with individual actors, I will begin my observations by highlighting which of the particular aspects of the intracultural methodology the example illustrates. These include:

- Prioritising observation of the actor before any work on text or character begins.
- Making direct communication in relation to observations, particularly in relation to culture, language and ethnicity.
- Setting up of improvisations in response to observations that determine the ease or lack of ease of the actor on the stage.
- Setting up improvisations that are not in relation to the world of the play, character or text but reflections on the world of the actor.
- Setting up multi-lingual improvisations
- Setting up sequential improvisations that move from something that might appear stereotypical to something more nuanced.
- Using role play: the director or teacher in role with the actor.
- Reinforcing instructions that can assist the actor in their understanding of a methodology that might feel unfamiliar.
- Developing and emphasising complicité by setting exercises where the actor can practice complicité through the rehearsal process.
- Helping to bridge the journey from improvisation to text for the actor.
- Helping to make the bridge for the actor from their own reality to the work they are playing in.
- Using side-coaching to encourage and/or discourage certain traits that the director or teacher deems to be helpful or unhelpful to progress.
- Referencing other practices and practitioners so students can make connections to markers and language that they are familiar with.
- Positioning the actor as expert.

### **3.3.1 Overcoming Barriers to Embracing Cultural Context**

(a) Stereotype and Cultural Context

**Actor:** Japjit Kaur (UK).

**Text & Character:** *The Empress* by Tanika Gupta, the Ayah.

**Clip:** 2.

**Key Interest Point: Stereotype** – the participant of Punjabi origin in this clip is shown “mimicking” a Punjabi accent, rather than bringing her own nuance and subtlety to it. In the conversation after the masterclass, another actor of Punjabi origin talks about how she has often been asked to approximate an accent of Indian origin, not allowed to bring particularity of vernacular to an accent. She says the resulting effect can be to resist taking on parts where one is asked to perform with a cultural context in place because of the anticipation of being pushed towards stereotype.

This section works through and demonstrates the following features of the intracultural methodology:

- Prioritising observation of the actor before any work on text or character begins
- Making direct communication in relation to observations, particularly in relation to culture, language and ethnicity
- Using role-play: the director or teacher in role with the actor, or side-coaching as appropriate.

The first presentation of Japjit’s text demonstrates that she does not use her cultural context. My first step is to make observations in very clear and frank language such as, “the text is false and seems to be controlling you – it should be the other way around”. I then begin a forensic problem solving process, which relates directly to the individual that I am working with. I ask myself “what do I like about the actor?”, “what do I not like?”, “when does she appear comfortable?”, “when does she appear uncomfortable and why?”. I acknowledge that in this direct relationship with the actor, the teacher or director is the arbiter of quality, and in my language I try to impart my instructions, giving markers of what ‘success’ may look like in this situation. In this example, I am looking for a body that seems physically at ease, a vocal quality that pops and crackles with the life of the actor, and a facility with text where the actor is a mistress craftswoman of fluid text delivery.

Japjit is playing an ayah with Indian accented English. I note that her textual delivery feels more like mimicry of an Indian accent, surface and superficial. Even directors or teachers who are not familiar with the particular features of an accent can easily make this observation, using the same markers of success that were outlined in section 3.2.1 above (relaxation, timing, control, expertise, and specific detail). In this case, to my ear the accent feels staccato and over-done; she places too much emphasis on consonants, which feels unnatural. The voice sounds false, forced and too bright, as though she is trapped in a delivery with no nuance or life, a delivery that feels where the text controls the actor. Japjit comes from a Punjabi heritage, and has the accent in her voice as well as the language of Punjabi. The actor is not playing with her own knowledge and truth of this cultural context and has slightly removed herself from this to present something that feels less true, lacking in detail and nuance.

I suggest that this is what is happening and use frank and direct language to convey this to the actor. She does not disagree. I set up an improvisation asking her to embody a poor Punjabi woman who comes to the city to work and speak in Punjabi language. I am also in role and I play in my Indian accent as I join Japjit in the improvisation. The work shows that the actor experiences an ease and fluency in improvisation when working in Punjabi. My language is emphatic and my instruction to her is simple and clear: “that’s excellent – now as we continue do not move beyond that.” The actor at this point may not fully understand the implications of where we are in the process, but she does understand the simple instruction of “do not move beyond that.” This is a step by step process where the teacher is fully involved in the collaborative process of bringing the actor to the text. The teacher gives very simple instructions at each stage, which relate more to physical and vocal attributes of the actor herself, with no conversation around character. The teacher can also instruct and direct from the inside if in role herself, encouraging the actor towards the direction of travel. The actor only needs at this point to follow the simple instructions to begin to work more easily both physically and vocally in order to inhabit the text she is delivering.

At the end of this session, I work with Japjit again to bring her from the Punjabi improvisation back to her scripted text. The work is immediate and my language and actions are insistent and direct. I offer her hints of what works well and what she does when she works so effortlessly in Punjabi. These are simple things that the actor is unaware of: for example in Punjabi she tends not to smile, which somehow helps her never lose her

connection with herself, whereas in English she tends to smile, which for the work she is doing feels false and presented. She speaks too loudly when working in English, which seems to throw her off balance. So I give very simple instructions: “don’t smile”, “not so loud”. The director or teacher should attempt to give actors physical reference points, rather than just intellectual analysis, as this can often be easier for actors to understand. In this case, Japjit can begin to physically feel what happens when she is in Punjabi: she is still, she speaks effortlessly, not too loudly, her face does not present a smile. The physical reference point is enough and a powerful foundation on which to build.

In conversation after the masterclass Sudha Bhuchar, Artistic Director of Tamasha, reflects on Japjit’s approximation of her own Punjabi context, saying that many actors of diasporic heritage pick up bad habits as “there are many contexts when you are not in control and you are asked to approximate your own culture”.<sup>19</sup> Bhuchar (who is also Punjabi) elaborates on her own experiences of being asked to present an exaggerated version of her cultural context in many audition and rehearsal situations. This reinforcement of stereotype can lead the actor away from playing from their cultural context at all and when these experiences are repeated, skepticism and cynicism around playing from culture can develop. It is a central function of the intracultural methodology to offer space for the actor to embrace a fuller, truer picture of her cultural context, and in so doing find the power and depth that drawing on their cultural context can offer her performances. Japjit’s experience here speaks towards the broader political implications of intracultural praxis, which are discussed at length in Chapter 4.

(b) Ethics and Cultural Context

**Actor:** Gloria Bose (Australia).

**Text & Character:** *Antony and Cleopatra* by William Shakespeare, Octavia.

**Clip:** 3.

**Key interest point: Ethical responsibility toward the actor** – the following example shows a level of resistance from one of the participants to use her Fijian/Samoan context in our work together. I work carefully trying to assuage her fears by imparting theoretical underpinnings that help her understand the value of the practice and what it might hold for her personally as

<sup>19</sup> Bhuchar was observing the masterclass with the UK participants, and contributed this reflection via video link during the masterclass.

an artist. The actor had previously admitted to me that she had found it difficult to use her Fijian/Samoan context in an Australian setting but she had made a commitment to do so in her work with me and for that reason agreed to participate in the masterclass and reflective study.

This section illustrates the following features of the intracultural methodology:

- Setting up of improvisations in response to observations that determine the ease or lack of ease of the actor on the stage.
- Setting up improvisations that are not in relation to the world of the play, character or text but reflections on the world of the actor.
- Setting up multi-lingual improvisations.

As the masterclass setting is an environment that engages with difference, and contests the marginalisation of cultural context as a tool for the actor, I hope to empower Gloria to use her cultural context confidently as a hinterland for discovery. In this case, working with an actor who is somewhat resistant to the methodology, it is useful to use a multi-performer improvisation, in order to grant permission and encourage the actor to join in. In this improvisation, I bring Thuso in asking him to play her older brother and I ask him to work in Zulu, his first language. I also bring Metasebia in and ask her to sing a song in the background. I have worked extensively with Metasebia prior to this masterclass, and she therefore intuits that I want her to use her cultural context, so she sings a song in a language that is not English. Slowly as the multi-lingual improvisation progresses a growing confidence emerges; a relaxation and an expertise comes into Gloria's work. My language reinforces her work: "Do not move beyond that Samoan woman, just be that woman whom I know you know so well". In Gloria's reflection on the master class, she admits to "whitening up" her voice due to the expectations and vocal demands put on her from the training she has received:

Yeah, I'm whitening it up. I say that because, because my whole thing was to show you what I think an actor is and that's how I'll portray it [...] so I will talk like this because they'll all accept me like that. That's what I had to come in with. That's how I came in (04.03.2014).

I try to encourage Gloria to find and use her natural speaking voice, which seems to disappear as she comes to the stage. Her natural voice has strong traces of her cultural context and I endeavour to give her permission and confidence to bring this to her work rather than push it away entirely. This is the critical point of departure from the Stanislavskian system and many other methods that encourage a merging of self and character. Gloria continues to improvise in her Fiji Samoan dialect with the limited vocabulary to which she has access. She begins to drop in lines of her text and manages not to lose what she has been able to access through using her cultural context. Her lines now feel owned by her and are delivered with some confidence and authority. There is still a lot of work to do, but as a first rehearsal it is an excellent start. I am not suggesting here that Gloria will always play Fiji Samoan; rather, I am asserting that by using or engaging with one's cultural context, the channel to access artistic power can be found. This is explained in greater detail with the case study in Chapter 3 where there are examples of helping the actor build the bridge between her own identity and the work in which she is playing.

### 3.3.2 Multi-Lingual Improvisations

#### (a) Expanding the view of cultural context

**Actor:** James Raggatt (Australia).

**Text & Character:** *The Distance from Here* by Neil LaBute, Tim.

**Clip:** 4.

**Key interest points: The actor performing an assumption of the paradigm of a rehearsal**  
– this is evident in the case of James, where he tried to bring his idea of the “perfect NIDA student” to his work. In doing so, he leaves some of his background out of the equation and uses an “acted” version of himself as he explores work for performance. The series of improvisations which lead from what could be seen as potentially stereotypical moments in power dynamics in choice of the narrative of the improvisation, to something which is more complex and nuanced. The initial stereotypical narrative where the Anglo Australian male accuses the Vietnamese woman of double crossing him is progressively activated towards a narrative of harmony.

This section illustrates the following aspects of the intracultural methodology:

- Making direct communication in relation to observations, particularly in relation to culture, language and ethnicity.
- Setting up sequential improvisations that move from something that might look stereotypical to something more nuanced.
- Multi-lingual improvisation.

James is stiff in his initial delivery and does not instinctively bring his individuality to the text that he is working on. I stop him and ask where he is from, and he replies that he comes from Townsville, a town in the northern Australian state of Queensland.<sup>20</sup> I ask if people in Townsville speak the way in which he is speaking in his delivery of his text. The questioning is direct, about him and his history, and he can relate directly to it. James then realises that he is not speaking with his Townsville voice; subconsciously he has been using something that is slightly removed from himself and more in line with his idea of the perfect actor or the perfect student.

I therefore set up a multi-lingual improvisation between James and Tuyen, locating the improvisation in Townsville. The scenario is that James is drunk, and he goes to a Vietnamese take away and orders some food. On leaving, he believes the Vietnamese shop keeper has given him the wrong change and a heated exchange takes place. Tuyen works only in Vietnamese, James works in his Townsville accent, and both actors play as if they understand each other. In the recording of this improvisation, it is clear that the intensity of listening and the resulting connectedness between actors is physical – the actors lean in, they are still as they endeavour to pick up every nuance.<sup>21</sup> By using his Townsville accent, James's physicality completely alters. There is immediately more air in the mask of his face and more exhalation of breath as he speaks. The improvisation has revealed that James is prone to working with tightness in the mask of his face, which seems to restrict his delivery and spontaneity, and keeps him from relaxing into the scene and finding his pleasure to play through his cultural context. I make the point that when he works from his Townsville

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<sup>20</sup> Townsville is a town in Queensland, which is a state in northern Australia known as the Sunshine State. The stereotype attached to people from Queensland is that they live a slow pace of life, wear shorts and thongs and speak in a lazy drawl.

<sup>21</sup> Stanislavski placed great emphasis on listening and advocated that an appropriate inner creative state is one in which “you can begin to listen internally to your body and externally to your fellow actors, and from there you can enhance your sense of playfulness and spontaneity” (Merlin, 2007: 19).

context the mask of his face becomes more fluid, he seems to breathe more air into his cheeks, and this simple physical change allows him more expression and detail.

James's reflection on his work shows his own recognition of what this brought him, and the importance of bringing his full self to his work:

I mean it is a useful tool, the way we were working (with an intracultural methodology) but it was more that it is actually an essential part of me as a person and therefore as an actor. So, being a white Australian from North Queensland, coming down to NIDA where there are very different social viewpoints, different accents. And being someone who aspires to be a type of actor who works in the industries down here and in England, I find myself getting trapped in a very idealised image of how I need to behave and speak and be if I want to be that kind of actor. And it was a good: a really big lesson last year, over the past year to approach that with, while maintaining a strong sense of self and reminding myself that my background, my social-cultural background is part of who I am as a human being and that I can't shut that off in order to be this thing that I aspire to (04.03.2014).

It is important to note here that the Anglo British or Anglo Australian actor is an integral part of the intracultural project, bringing her own culturally specific history to the table. However, because she often shares the culture of the authority, where there is greater knowledge and familiarity of the myriad of cultures within that culture, this actor will not always feel and experience the constraints of a paradigm in quite the same way as actors who feel outside the majority. Through experiencing an intracultural approach James realised that he had been hiding or disguising his own cultural context. James's conception of the 'ideal NIDA student' who aspires to particular work in theatre in the metropolises of Sydney, Melbourne and London was not one that he thought required him to bring his Townsville vernacular or personality to the floor. In our work together, he realised this was not true; indeed it was critical that he did not forget his own background, as it was a valuable part of himself and therefore of his work as an actor. Forgetting one's background or not engaging with one's own cultural context is very common, especially in training environments. Students and actors can pick up the habit of playing as neutral – the very category contested by the intracultural methodology – leaving their individuality at the door when they enter a rehearsal room. Over time, this habit can become ingrained and a permanent way of being as

an actor. As time goes on, this habit is harder to break and it therefore becomes harder for the actor to get back to a real sense of self.

The other point of interest in this improvisation is the environment that was created in the room through setting up this scenario. While this early improvisation with a narrative of an altercation possibly along racial lines may feel stereotypical, intracultural practice relies on a series of improvisations that move from potential stereotype, through activation of the narrative, to something more nuanced and harmonious. It is easy to self-censor when dealing with issues of race and culture which can lead very swiftly to silence and inaction. The fear of stereotypical connotations is the first thing that leads practitioners away from any investigation into cultural heritage. It is therefore essential to understand this aspect of the practice and the value of lack of censorship in this approach. These improvisations are a series of activities which end up modelling from something which may appear primary coloured to something which is much more specific, nuanced and complex.

In order to progress beyond stereotype, as well as assist James in moving from the improvisation and back to his text, I set up a second improvisation where James returns late at night to apologise to the Vietnamese woman for his outburst. I instruct James to stay in the mindset of this Townsville man and deliver his scripted text as an apology to the Vietnamese woman. The text is fluid: James is in control of the text, the text is not controlling him. *By playing through his own cultural context* he has found a way to master the text with his own idiosyncratic detail. For a first rehearsal, this is very productive. The actor feels confident in what he has been able to offer. The actor is open and working with nuance and detail and from this position it is easy to move forward. In the Stanislavski methodology, this is where actors may start to incorporate exercises that move them from the ‘Real I’ to the ‘Dramatic I’ – where the line between actor and character begins to merge or blur. The intracultural methodology instead demands the actors to continue to play as themselves and merge their ‘self’ with the text not the character. It is the notion of character that can confuse the actor: once the actor begins to think about the character as outside their own materiality, they often disconnect from themselves and lose their connection to the text and to other actors on the floor. While following the intracultural methodology, the actor is always encouraged to continue to bring their own individuality to their explorations – they continue to talk in their own idiosyncratic voice, move in their own idiosyncratic body.

(b) Positioning the Actor as Expert

**Actor:** Charles Wu (Australia).

**Text & Character:** *Cymbeline* by William Shakespeare, Belarius.

**Clip:** 5.

**Key interest points: The sense of confidence that comes from working from a context when the actor knows that he is the expert:** the only person in the room who can do what he is doing because it is specific only to him. Where there is no doubt in the actor's mind around how to play, the actor can be free and fluid and this will be evident in improvisational choices. Playing from this position of knowing has a positive effect on vocal delivery where the voice sounds full, rich and true.

This section illustrates the following aspects of the intracultural methodology:

- The actor as expert.

Charles is of South East Asian origin and in this multi-lingual improvisation and text work with Rodrigo and Felicity (who play in Spanish), I ask him to play as a Chinese man who is alerting a king and queen of the whereabouts of their son whom they discarded twenty years prior. Again I use very basic language: "You are going to be that Chinese man". I also ask him to squat. This is a particular image of a Chinese man that conjures up perhaps a stereotypical image of a rural or poor street seller in China squatting by the side of the road selling his wares. The use of the squat is a physical position very different from Charles's everyday being-in-the-world that can assist in propelling him towards his cultural context.

Charles has limited Mandarin, but the minute Charles begins to work with this language and his Chinese cultural context, there is a marked difference in his voice. It feels as though it drops to a comfortable place; his voice is lower, and more free. His delivery is softer in Mandarin, where it sounded brittle and metallic in English. I observed a completely different quality in him when he works from his Chinese context where his communication with the other actors is unbroken and fully engaged. He is displaying many of the markers of success that I outlined above, including relaxation, timing, and control. Slowly over the course of the improvisation, Charles softens his Chinese accent, coming closer to his Australian accent without losing anything of the quality achieved when using Mandarin, and subsequently Chinese accented-English. When he plays through his Chinese cultural context,

he manages to maintain this channel for his text delivery even when he goes back to English; his connection with his fellow actors is always taut and never breaks. Through the complicité achieved by playing through his cultural context the actor has everything he needs. When actors play through cultural contexts that belong to them, and which are often underused in their work, different rhythms and sensibilities begin to display themselves: voices change in pitch and timbre, bodies move in different ways and actors relate to other actors with a different mode of communication. It is important to recognise and understand that an actor's demeanour can completely transform when playing through a specific channel of communication. This recognition is the first step towards exploring and playing with difference in the rehearsal process.

Prior to working with me Charles had never used his South East Asian heritage in his work. His comment below shows that he had in fact made a decision to pretend not to be the person he once was, and I suggest that means a man with more South East Asian behaviours than he now shows. However, he admitted to the sense of confidence that working from his South East Asian context gave him, because in that moment he was the expert and could not be challenged:

I'm a rare case, English is my mother tongue ... what I did was an approximation of what I thought ... It wasn't myself, but it's something I knew a lot about ... so I could at the very least... if it wasn't someone I used to be, or someone I pretend not to be, at the very least it came from knowledge. So there was truth in that sense ... It was fun, it was fun, almost like a leg up you know, do not question me on this performance because I have first-hand knowledge that you do not (04.03.2014).

### 3.3.3 Building Bridges for Actors

#### (a) Historical Narratives

**Actor:** Shakira Clanton (Australia).

**Text & Character:** *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare, Hermione.

**Clip:** 6.

**Key Interest points:** in the use of historical narratives lack of self-censorship on the part of the teacher or director is called for. Lack of censorship is often the key to elicit the best work from actors who are not used to using their narratives in work for performance.

This section illustrates the following stages of the intracultural methodology:

- Helping to make the bridge for the actor from their own reality to the work they are playing in.

Shakira, an Australian Aboriginal student, begins with a text and like the others' early readings, it too feels too light and automatic, with no clear direction. I stop her delivery and set up an improvisation that takes her immediately to a place where she must fully use her experience as an Aboriginal woman: a place of knowing. I bring Japjit and Metasebia into an improvisation where Shakira is to play a woman who has had her child taken away from her. Japjit plays in Punjabi and Metasebia in what I believe to be Amharic.<sup>22</sup> On asking Shakira to play this improvisation, there is a real sense of tension amongst the audience around the subject matter of the Stolen Generation.<sup>23</sup> Using traumatic points for departure into improvisation or text needs to be handled very carefully, and in particular the teacher/director must consider their ethical relationship and responsibility to the actor. In this instance, I had previously had experience of working with Shakira in which she had used trauma as a departure point and she trusted me to handle this with care and sensitivity. However, this understanding needs to be in place before delving into areas that artists may not be ready to share, and the teacher or director needs to lead responsibly, with awareness of and sensitivity to the issues that this can expose.<sup>24</sup>

Shakira begins the improvisation and in the same way I tangibly saw a difference in Charles when he performed through his Chinese cultural context, this arrives immediately with Shakira. The connection, the commitment, and the certainty of how to play this situation is immediately apparent – key markers of success for the intracultural methodology. Shakira is the expert and I can see the detail and nuance is something only she can deliver. I side-coach Shakira and swiftly take her back to the text, asking her not to change a single thing in her delivery. As she returns to the scripted text she is in full control: the narrative of her community and their suffering over this issue sits underneath her textual delivery, and her

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<sup>22</sup> Amharic is an African language, commonly spoken in Ethiopia.

<sup>23</sup> The practice where children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent were removed from their families by the Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions, under Acts of their respective parliaments.

<sup>24</sup> In a subsequent reflection, facilitator David Fenton remarked “I must say as an Australian in the room, the moment...when you went to the ‘stolen generation’ with Shakira there was a ripple through the room : I almost wrote I’m not ready for you to go there yet. But what was lovely was the constant negotiation for the care of the actor inside what is fundamentally a very thin fiction: the thinner the fiction the better: what we get is some very powerfully authentic choices” (Reflection on Masterclass, 17.09 2013).

performance is assured and powerful. Once she completes her text, I check her emotional state to see if she needs a moment to recover and I then outline the key learning experience for her that was brought about by this exercise. She has been able to use her Aboriginal context and story as the tool that unlocks her artistic power. I make sure that she understands not to confuse this with the idea that she needs to relive the pain of her Aboriginal history every time she comes onto the stage. Rather, she needs to understand how to honestly play through her Aboriginal self to access the power that lies inside her as an artist. In an improvisation as sensitive as this, it is critical to check in with the actor and look after their emotional state directly after the work is completed.

Shakira herself reflects at a later date how she feels when allowed and encouraged to bring her culture and her context to her work,

Being able to bring a part of me into the rehearsal room and my culture once I allowed the fear of judgment to pass, was a breath of fresh air. Being able to share and tell my ancestors' stories, my grandmother's, my mother's and my own experience into a safe environment in both the rehearsal room and on stage was a key part for me and my journey of helping unlock my true self and my capabilities as an actor and as a person, no longer pleasing people or putting on a voice to make people feel comfortable [...] I was just being myself: Shakira Clanton the actor who happens to be Australian Aboriginal, African American and Native American Indian (04.03.2014).

(b) Representation and Performance

**Actor:** Metasebia Fenwick-Nevin (Australia).

**Text & Character:** *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, Beneatha Younger.

**Clip:** 7.

**Key Interest points:** Drawing on the cultural specificity of the actor positions them as equal experts in the room. This excerpt highlights the importance of diversity in training and industry so **all** actors have the same opportunity where they can play with the other actors in a work believing that they could all be of the same family or community.

This section illustrates the following aspects of the intracultural methodology:

- Setting up multi-lingual improvisations
- Emphasising complicité by setting exercises where the actor can practice complicité through the rehearsal process.
- Helping to bridge the journey from improvisation to text for the actor
- Helping to make the bridge for the actor from their own reality to the work they are playing in
- Positioning the actor as expert

Metasebia performs a snippet of her text and then I take her immediately to improvisation with Thuso. I ask them both to play from their particular contexts: Ethiopian and South African. The improvisation that I give is of a young African woman who is going off to college and saying goodbye to her boyfriend and trying to find out whether he will wait for her. You can instantly see that these two actors relish the idea and know exactly how to play this. They also know that they are the only two in the room who can play this together in this way with this knowledge, nuance and detail. They have never worked together before (as they are in different cohorts of the Acting program at NIDA) but now revel in the potential of what they can do together, knowing that no one in this institutional setting will have seen them in this light before. They both bring an insight, cultural reference, detail and humour to this situation that is thrilling to watch. Their language, idiomatic phrases and behaviours are particular to them and their cultures: they are the experts and the script they invent is particular to them. Within this intracultural negotiation lies the possibility in a shift in the power dynamic in an institutional setting such as NIDA. With these two actors as the experts, not able to be challenged, not able to be judged by criteria that are not culturally specific, the audience have to step towards them. This is where the real potential in intracultural practice lies, and this example is a clear case of something that contests the centre that has the possibility of rebalancing ingrained hierarchies and power relations.

Gloria reflects on the power and ease afforded to each actor when working opposite someone from a culture that is not Anglo. For Gloria, the masterclass scene she played with Thuso was the first time at NIDA that she was able to work opposite a male who had an ethnicity that was not Anglo and whom she could believe more easily to be her brother. She recognised this also in the work between Thuso and Metasebia and subconsciously she could

sense the power of the work, which came from the complicité and understanding that these two actors could uniquely find together because of their shared African heritage.

**GB:** What I loved about it was acting across from Thuso. Like that was great because ... there aren't any ethnic guys in my year. So it was great to work across someone...someone who was, who was ethnic as well, like I could... And also you were playing my brother as well and you...

**KLS:** We also had that wonderful thing between you [Thuso] and Meti.

**GB:** Yeah and that was beautiful to watch, like I loved that.

(04.03.2014)

Not only do these observations underline how important it is for actors in training to be in diverse collegiate groups, but they also show how playing with difference in a training environment prompts these critical observations that are part of the learning. It is essential that directors and teachers reconsider the advantages given to students who always play from their ethnicity, as well as the disadvantage and damage done to the student where this is not consistently awarded or available. The expertise shown from all students when they work from a place of knowing is clear in all the excerpts above and it demonstrates the existence of a subtle power play that seems to work towards keeping the student considered as Other in their place. In this workshop, the power shift of the intracultural approach is illustrated, as each and every actor regardless of ethnicity has their moment as expert.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This Chapter has shown how intracultural and post-colonial theory is played out in the intracultural methodology that I have been developing. I have offered many examples of how “cultural neglect”<sup>25</sup> can play itself out in the rehearsal room and have shown the potential damage that it can do to the actor. The Chapter has also given tangible examples of the potential of the intracultural project to recalibrate power dynamics in the rehearsal room by positioning the actor as expert when working with their own cultural context. This in itself lends a confidence to the actor, as evidenced by the case studies. Developing practice which is broad enough to afford *all* actors with the conditions to produce work from a departure point of confidence and knowledge would help the industry to see the talent residing in all communities in our society. This recognition of excellence with broad criteria of assessment is what will lead to a much more diverse theatre industry reflecting society as it is today.

In this Chapter, I have demonstrated how the intracultural methodology can be utilised in isolation in order to allow actors to fully engage with their cultural context in both audition and workshop settings. I demonstrate the value of improvisation in both contexts, including multi-lingual improvisation where appropriate. Additionally, I offer some benchmarks for success, and examples of how this success is experienced by actors in both settings. Finally, this Chapter offered a series of examples of the negotiation that takes place between director/teacher and actor in the intracultural praxis. These were broadly grouped into three categories: overcoming barriers to embracing cultural context; multi-lingual improvisations; and building bridges for actors. While acknowledging that intracultural praxis demands a bespoke approach to the individual actor, these illustrations over a broad portrait of the kinds of situations in which directors and teachers will find themselves as they seek to embrace an intracultural methodology.

The next Chapter develops these findings further in relation to a production of a piece of work for performance. In the example actors seek to apply the methodology in relation to its usefulness when developing and sustaining a role in an overarching narrative and they reflect on what it means to them to be allowed to bring their nuanced, multifarious identities to a work in the mainstream. Furthermore, in providing a sustained illustration of a rehearsal

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<sup>25</sup> I first heard the term cultural neglect used by Gaylene Gould at a conference called “The D Word” held in London in May 2015 and I felt it aptly described the sensation experienced by many actors I work with. Cultural neglect is where one’s own culture in the professional space is consistently ignored and neglected and as a result an artist can feel there is no place for them.

process, it details how the intracultural methodology can be utilised in the context of sustained work on character.

## **Chapter Four**

### **METHDOLOGY 2: STANDING STILL, BUT NOT STANDING STILL**

Technically we are all free to express ourselves. But when the cultural representations mirrored back to us do not reflect our diversity, we lose our sense of meaning. This is what binds us into a community and affirms that we belong. Without it we are rendered non-existent.

(Teresa Crea, co-founder Doppio Teatro, Australia  
keynote speech at Kultour 2013 Artist Laboratory)

#### **4.1 Introduction**

A collaboration between Tamasha Theatre and Circus Space produced in the UK in 2013, *The Arrival* was a semi-devised interdisciplinary work inspired by the graphic novel by Shaun Tan of the same name. It was interdisciplinary in that it worked with text, circus, projection, physical sequences and a complex soundscape, and included verbatim texts. It was semi-devised in that the multi-lingual improvisatory devising practices and the use of physical improvisations employed in rehearsals provided stimulus for scenes shaped by the playwright Sita Brahmachari, and for movement sequences devised by myself and choreographer Freddie Opoku-Addae.

The intracultural praxis lay at the heart of the improvisation process that we employed in the creation of *The Arrival*; rehearsal strategies that rely on improvisatory techniques were introduced to enable the creativity of the actor to be central to the making of a work. This improvisatory approach was developed as a move away from hierarchical structures often used in mainstream spaces where the director and the playwright often sit at the top. The intracultural processes used in *The Arrival* created conditions where the actor moved from a peripheral position to being a key creative force in the artistic process. The actor is privileged above the character and the text and the circus artist privileged above the circus discipline. The shift towards a process where the actor is central and the benefits of this process are described by Govan, Nicholson and Normington:

Emphasising the creativity of performers in the process of theatre-making not only reflected a commitment to breaking the authority of directors and, in some instances, to challenging the authorial voice of the playwright, it also signalled a new interest in the power of spontaneity and improvisation [...] This led to theatrical experiments that aimed to liberate individuals through unleashing their ‘natural’ creativity in rehearsal and devising processes. This legacy has led to practices where performers use their own experiences – social, physical and psychological – to create performance texts (2007: 16).

In intracultural praxis, these “own experiences” are provided through the engagement of the performer’s cultural context in the preparation of performance. This provides a through-line from the avant-garde practices of twentieth-century theatre, to the contemporary intracultural praxis that can be harnessed by practitioners.



**Figure 1:** Production photograph from *The Arrival*, taken by Barrie Lewis (2013).

In particular, this mode of working finds support from French-Canadian-Lebanese practitioner Wajdi Mouawad, whose multi-lingual texts have been produced around the world. He begins these works with “the linguistic particularities of the actors: their personal vocabulary, intonations, and everyday syntax they utilise during the process of ‘collective writing’ [...] In other words, Mouawad transcribes the oral and cultural specificity that each of his actors/co-creators possesses into the space of his written texts” (Meerzon, 2009: 99-100). This form of intracultural praxis, which begins with the linguistic and cultural particularity of the collaborators before inscribing this diversity into the performance text, provides a model for the work on *The Arrival* described in section 4.2.

In this Chapter, I turn to the use of the intracultural methodology across the length of a rehearsal process. I interrogate the process of devising, rehearsing and performing *The Arrival* in order to illustrate the intracultural praxis at work in production. While this structure entails a degree of repetition with material introduced in Chapter 3, I have maintained the shape of a complete rehearsal process in this account so that directors and teachers can easily follow and apply the intracultural methodology in their own settings. This is broadly divided into four sections:

- Games
- The readthrough

- Rehearsal improvisations
- Contesting the centre.

In each section, I offer some commentary on the intracultural praxis, and a number of illustrations drawn from the rehearsal process of *The Arrival*. Taken together, these provide a comprehensive illustration of the praxis at work in production, and offer a methodological blueprint for future productions that seek to make intracultural work.

#### 4.2 *The Arrival*

To refer to the clips used please visit:

<http://kristinelandonsmith.com/intracultural-thesis>, password: thesis

or view the DVD included in Appendix E.

Shaun Tan's book *The Arrival* was inspired by his own parents' migration from Malaysia to Australia. Tan uses their story as a catalyst to echo countless other migrations over many generations.

Much of this book was inspired by anecdotal stories told by migrants of many different countries and historical periods, including my father who came to Western Australia from Malaysia in 1960 (Gathering Books Blog, 2011).

Our cast size was not able to capture all the recent migrations to Britain, but the diverse experience amongst our cast infused the work with a range of languages and details that came from their multifarious lived experiences. I aimed to put together a company of artists with a high level of skill in circus and acting, where the range of their specific life experiences would resonate with the telling of Tan's original story. The specific ethnicities required for the roles had not been determined before we started casting; during auditions I was seeking a cast that could offer the intracultural condition of their daily lives as an integral part of the creation of this work. The work was concerned with migration and I needed a company that could offer up their cultural specificity and difference, each distinct from the other.

Bharucha explains how in the intracultural encounter the director or teacher, must take care “not to homogenise difference but rather translate difference through new modes of dramaturgy” (1996: 119), and as a result we took care to maintain the cultural specificity of each distinct member of our cast in the creation of the work. That is, the particular script that developed for this project was bespoke, and tailored to the cultural contexts of the actors we assembled to perform in the work. The first step, then, was to incorporate the particular cultural contexts of the performers into the narrative provided by Tan's book. In our production the central character, played by Charlie Foloronshu, was a Nigerian man who travelled to London in the 1950s, in search of a better life for his wife and son. His wife and son die in an accident in his home country and he never goes back. He builds a home for himself in London and welcomes other migrants who are passing through or settling in

Britain. The ethnicities of these migrants – Vietnamese, Chinese, African and Greek – were drawn from the cultural contexts of the cast. We worked with Charlie in the very early research and development phases, and the idea to use a Nigerian man as the central character came from early collaborative, exploratory work with him. We had chosen to situate *The Arrival* in the context of post-war migration to Britain, the two biggest sources of which were Africa and the Indian subcontinent. At this time Tamasha Theatre was expanding its remit from solely Asian-focussed theatre to a broader intracultural focus. Correspondingly, we chose in this show to situate the story of Black African migration to Britain at the centre.

Cast

Antoinette Akodulu: Black British, Nigerian heritage

Giselle Edwards: Caucasian Australian

Charlie Foloronsho: Black British, Nigerian heritage

Sam Hague: Caucasian British

Antonio Harris: Italian/African American mixed heritage

Jackie Le: Australian, Vietnamese heritage

Nektarios Papadopoulos: Caucasian Greek

Addis Williams: Caucasian/Black British, Caribbean heritage.

Rehearsals for the 2013 production of *The Arrival* started on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2013 at the Circus Space rehearsal rooms in Coronet Street, North East London. Two previous creative exchanges had taken place at Circus Space: a research and development phase culminating in a student production of *The Arrival* as the second years' public end of year show; and a further development where we showed an excerpt of the work at The Alchemy Festival, South Bank in 2011. The ensemble for the 2013 iteration of the performance was made up of five artists who had worked on *The Arrival* in research and development phases at different times, and three new members. We wanted to emphasise that the same collaborative, intracultural approach would extend to this company and that the evolution of the work was still in process. In an early conversation, the emphasis was on helping the artists understand the expectations placed upon them: how they would be asked to share themselves and their cultural contexts to collaborate in the realisation of this multi-vocal mise-en-scène. The early



**Figure 2:** Charlie Foloronshu in *The Arrival*, taken by Barrie Lewis (2013).

conversation as the first step of the intracultural methodology nurtures a very particular culture of collaboration in the rehearsal room:

the work of an ensemble [is] a ‘process of collaboration’ which developed from empathetic support between actors rather than competition, and a technical ability to generate a shared dynamic and rhythm between actors in performance (Govan, Nicholson and Normington, 2007: 37).

Artists are the consciousness that brings the stage to life; they are the imperative human presence: they therefore must feel free and anchored in their own personality in order to be the sensitive instrument they need to be to play live with their fellow performers. This case study demonstrates that privileging the individuality of the artist paves the way for realisation of character, drawing on the honesty and authenticity of the artist. This in turn develops the text in a way that embraces authentic life experience, and the artist becomes subject and object of the work in the same moment. In the case of *The Arrival*, there was a further methodological layer, as I was working with circus artists who are unused to being asked to privilege the circus *artist* above the circus *discipline*. While I was asking artists to work using their trained circus disciplines, I was asking them to do so through the lived experience of their own bodies – complete with that body’s cultural context. Many of the

circus artists had not experienced this approach before and I was suggesting to them that by engaging the uniqueness of each body, mind and cultural context we would be able to shape individual and idiosyncratic movement sequences on the equipment, which would extend beyond an accepted set of traditional moves. I take up this discussion further when discussing the work of Antoinette in section 4.2.4, below.

In this section, I outline the progress of rehearsals on *The Arrival*, and relate this to the intracultural methodology. This contains several discrete steps:

1. **Games:** Setting the culture of the rehearsal room and developing complicité.
2. **The readthrough:** Continuing the development of complicité and empowering the actor as expert.
3. **Rehearsal improvisations:** Allowing actors to experience and create a multi-vocal mise-en-scène through improvisation.
4. **Contesting the Centre:** Empowering actors to adopt practices that actively contest hegemonic cultural representations.

#### 4.2.1 Games

##### (a) Setting the culture of the rehearsal room

The commencement of rehearsals is a critical moment, as it sets the tone and atmosphere of the working processes and environment for the weeks ahead. Many rehearsals in text based work, or even semi-devised work where a draft text is used, begin by sitting around a table with a discussion of the play before beginning an analysis of the text. Other rehearsals begin with conversations around history and background of the world of the play. As the intracultural methodology emphasises the actor, it encourages the teacher/director to begin by working with the actor on the floor, thereby introducing conversations about the world of the play while performers are working on their feet. The intracultural methodology begins rehearsals with games which:

- warm the atmosphere and help break down real or perceived hierarchies
- encourage individuality and sense of self
- place a concentration on fellow actors so the concentration is not on oneself but outside oneself
- establish the idea of ‘playing well together’ and developing complicité

- provide an easy segue to improvisation and in turn to text.

The particular games that are suitable for inclusion in an intracultural methodology are those with an element of competition, which demand an interaction that forces the actor out of a neutral space. Actors must only think of the rules of the game and not their own potential feelings of self-consciousness, as they try to score points or try to be the last actor standing. The element of competition asks the actors to play simply as themselves, adopting what has been called the ‘Real I’ to follow Stanislavski’s vocabulary as introduced above. The games are fast and actors need to think quickly on their feet. There is no time for actors to play as anything but themselves; there is no time for actors to be self-conscious; there is no time for actors to judge themselves against others. Playing a carefully chosen game early on in rehearsal can set the atmosphere needed for collaborative and fearless work. There are two key points of departure here for the intracultural praxis from a more traditional devising process. Firstly, actors are encouraged not to move beyond the ‘Real I’ during games: they must bring themselves *and nothing but themselves* to the floor, laden with all of their multifarious cultural contexts. Furthermore, actors are encouraged to find a *pleasure to play* during these games, as this pleasure can then be carried with them into further improvisations and subsequently back to the text.

Games can provide a very useful channel for actors to segue into text-based rehearsal, so that they hardly realise the moment when game becomes scene. The freedom of spirit which often comes from playing games, can be put to work moving “from a game into an exercise – into another game, which leads into a scene”, so that the actors “hardly know when they are in a scene or not in a scene” (Simon McBurney on *The Late Show*, 1992). The primary function of the game in the rehearsal process is to allow the actor to experience and then to hold this freedom of spirit and to remove the moment of fear that seizes most actors when they come to the floor to rehearse a scene. In the moment an actor gets up from her chair and crosses the line moving from spectator to performer, all eyes are on her; I try to ease this moment for the actor in the same way that McBurney does by moving from game without notice to the floor. I call this moment ‘smudging the line’. Early rehearsal games suitable for this stage of the intracultural methodology include:

- Volleyball – a game where the company simply keeps a soft round ball up in the air attempting to reach the highest number of hits possible

- Tag back – everyone begins sitting on a chair in a square, and the idea is for participants to get up in the square and try to get back to an empty chair without being tagged
- Musical chairs – actors dance around and play to beat their fellow actors to the empty available chairs when the music stops; and
- Clapping –the artists divide into two groups and are given a rhythm sequence which they have to follow. The group starts together, syncopates the rhythm by following the instructions and then after eight phrases the groups find themselves in unison again. (For a video of this in action, see **Clip 8**).

Early games offer an environment for performers to shed their inhibitions and habitual defences. Performers' default positions or blocks often present themselves in these games and it is useful for the director to note these. Once performers understand this concept of the *pleasure to play*, they begin to understand how this translates to the pleasure to play specific performance elements: a gesture, an emotional state, a vocal variance, the wearing of a costume. All this they will play with pleasure as themselves without trying to develop a belief that they are playing as someone else (a character). This is my message through rehearsals:

to lay down the vocabulary around *playing well together* – that's what I'm doing – I'm laying down that vocabulary because sometimes you do see stuff that gets totally stuck and people stop playing well together and then you see nothing – 'cause I absolutely believe when you're watching something – whatever it is – you are really watching Jackie and Addis playing something together, you are not watching Romeo and Juliet or a hoop and straps [...] you are watching Jackie and Addis – that is what we are actually watching on a Monday night in the theatre (Rehearsal exchange, *The Arrival*, February 2013).

#### (b) Practising complicité

Games also give the teacher/director the opportunity to nurture complicité between all the actors in the ensemble. Games are the first step in an investigation of how to establish good connections with fellow actors. The games provide a quick and sure mechanism of nurturing complicité in a company of actors where many are unknown to each other. As rehearsals progress, the director/teacher is in fact 'training' the performers in finding complicité and the

pleasure to play and giving them a practical set of apparatus to help them to do so. It is therefore critical to explain that the games are the mechanism that provides actors with the apparatuses to start practising complicité. For the actor who is used to a methodology that works with the principles of investigating and analysing text in the first instance, this approach may feel less concrete, but it is not; intracultural praxis seeks to make a comparable forensic analysis into the psyche of each and every individual and how they communicate with their fellow actors as the starting point. The use of games at this point in the methodology provides tools to help the actor to be sensitive, open and released from fear: open to other actors, open to the natural power of language and sensitive to the nuances of each scene, finding pleasure to play as herself with her fellow performers.

When utilising intracultural praxis, it is crucial to draw on the cultural context of the actor in order to help her achieve this complicité, even in these early rehearsal games. In the pursuit of pleasure, actors might even participate in the games utilising their first languages or other elements of their cultural context. In part, this is because engaging cultural context brings the actor back to the ‘Real I’. For example, in a rehearsal at the end of week 1 of the rehearsal process for *The Arrival*, the tag back game (**Clip 9**) shows how Antoinette finds it difficult to play without force and aggression. I have observed through rehearsals that Antoinette approaches each exercise first and foremost with energy. She has trained her body to a high level of strength and it is with a strength and energy that she comes to the floor, rather like an athlete preparing to run a race. However, through the course of rehearsal I have seen moments where Antoinette does play with ease and less force and all these moments have been where she has been asked to play through her Nigerian cultural context. I convey to Antoinette and the ensemble what happens when Antoinette plays through her Nigerian context:

You have to play through your soft Nigerian (*everyone laughs*) ... Seriously, when you’re with that Nigerian context , you’re so soft , you play so well [...] because your energy is so strong in terms of playing with someone, that it can act sometimes as a bit of a screen – so you keep knocking in to your hard energy as opposed to going through that to play with someone ... so just culturally ... think about that woman (the Nigerian) on the ship and play like that (Rehearsal exchange, *The Arrival*, February 2013).

By using the term “soft Nigerian”, I am not attributing “soft” to the ethnicity of Nigerian. I am rather suggesting that Antoinette *becomes* soft and open as an actor whenever she plays through her Nigerian context. In order for her to play well, I explain that I believe she has to find that softness which she finds so effortlessly when playing through her Nigerian context. In this negotiation I have to be careful and clear to ensure that the whole company understands exactly what it is that I am raising here. I am careful to ensure that the company understand that this methodology is not essentialist, suggesting certain character traits go with certain ethnicities but rather it is a methodology that explores the potential of playing through the specific cultural context of the individuals. The language I use through rehearsals is key; it is simple, direct, immediate, personal and specific to every actor: “you are Vietnamese”, or “don’t forget you are that Nigerian woman”. In this case, I try to convey to Antoinette that when she plays through her Nigerian context, it affords her performance an openness, a fluidity and an ease through which communication between her and other actors can flow more freely. In this process, it is useful to use the same markers of success I outlined above in Chapter 3: in particular, the teacher/director should look for signs of **relaxation, timing and control** – all of which are central to both the successful playing of games, and the achievement of complicité.

(c) Intracultural praxis and skills

This intracultural exchange is like the point of strain experienced in the auditions detailed in Chapter 3 where the auditionee was asked to do something that felt unexpected and out of the ordinary in an audition scenario. While Antoinette is of Nigerian heritage, as a circus artist she has never been asked to use this in her work. It is as though as a circus artist she is completely detached from her own cultural background and her own self. This interdisciplinary project gives me the opportunity to help Antoinette see that the prowess that she has developed on her equipment does not have to be devoid of her individuality; she can combine the two to make her work on her equipment richer and more nuanced and this is what this project is asking of her. Although these issues of her cultural neutrality would have arisen in any intracultural rehearsal context, her attention was particularly focussed on them due to the interdisciplinary context of *The Arrival*.



**Figure 3:** Antoinette Akodulu in performance in *The Arrival*, taken by Barrie Lewis (2013).

**Clip 9** shows that even after the explanation, Antoinette's play is ill-timed and not relaxed, and I change the game to something easier with less movement, where she might be able to experience what I am talking about. Each moment of rehearsal is in response to what I am seeing in the actor and I have to move quickly, change games, change direction in order to find something swiftly for the actor so that they can see for themselves the potential in what I am offering them. This offers another step to the methodology, and reiterates that the director/teacher must not only be involved in the games, but also responsive to the actors' engagement with them. In this case, I change the tag game to a game of hand slapping.<sup>26</sup> The clip shows that in the hand slapping Antoinette starts to show her pleasure in the game she is playing. This results in an unbroken and pleasurable communication with the other actor: this is complicité. The measure by which I evaluate how well Antoinette is working on the floor is the presence of complicité, and her commitment to sustaining it. She is open and nothing is getting in the way of her playing with her opponent. You can see her

<sup>26</sup> Player 1 puts their hands flat out, palms facing down and Player 2 puts their hands underneath with palms facing up. Player 2 tries to quickly slap the top of Player 1's hands. Player 1 has to be quick enough to get their hands away without being slapped in order not to lose a point. This is an excellent game to establish complicité between players. The actor has to stand still and look at their partner in the eye with competitive mischief that says "I will win!". Once Player 1 has had five turns, the players swap positions and the player who scores the highest score out of 5 wins.

openness in her face, in her smile. Her openness is allowing her now to connect with the other actor (me) and her engagement evidences the private and personalised relationship that is developing. Once I have established what it is we are looking for and have given her this tangible experience to reference, I take her back to the tag back game. I cajole and remind her always to play with the “soft Nigerian”, and progress is made. It is the combination of her embodied experience of the games, combined with my verbal exhortations, that allowed Antoinette this breakthrough. She can then take this discovery back with her into the improvisations, and ultimately back into text-led rehearsals. I discuss her progress further in section 4.2.4 below.

#### **4.2.2 The Readthrough & the Actor as Expert**

A readthrough is the next logical step in this methodology as it offers the opportunity to actors to continue to explore their complicité with each other as they move to the text. Many will feel exposed in this moment hearing each other speak the text for the first time, particularly when utilising their cultural contexts in this professional space. It is imperative however to step towards this moment bravely and in early stages of rehearsals with a readthrough. I therefore set up a readthrough asking actors to think about the sense of being with each other and the sense of playing well together that they have experienced in the games. It is by no means unusual to begin a rehearsal process with a readthrough. However, one particular feature of intracultural praxis sets it apart from other methodologies: actors are invited from this very first moment to consider themselves the expert in the room, as far as their cultural context is concerned. The teacher/director should take care to set up the conditions for performers to display and exercise this expertise, by deferring to actors when decisions need to be taken about the inclusion of culturally-specific material. This is the key function of the readthrough in intracultural praxis: to remove anxieties around the embrace and deployment of cultural context in the rehearsal room, through empowering the actor as expert.

In the first readthrough of *The Arrival*, Jackie Le is the first actor to speak with her portrayal of a young Vietnamese migrant. I know she is nervous to bring her Vietnamese heritage to the floor, as she has told me that in a professional setting this is something that has never been asked of her, and that her Vietnamese selfhood only comes to the fore when she is

with family. However, she is prepared to experiment through her Vietnamese cultural context, as this was a condition of her accepting the part. Working in Vietnamese and through her Vietnamese context means that using language, accent, physical shifts in her body in a professional setting with her new colleagues feels new, unfamiliar and vulnerable.

In the previous research and development phase of *The Arrival*, the character Jackie is playing was called Analia because the actor previously playing the character was Spanish. Before starting the readthrough, I ask Jackie to find a new name for the character since the cultural context is shifting to a new context which is hers. I show my ignorance in not knowing a name myself and then by not knowing the spelling of the name that she offers: I invite her to be the expert. I am constantly looking for ways for the actor to bring her cultural context to the room, though on her terms, not mine. By allowing Jackie's unique experience into the room, the relationship between actor and director is recalibrated, and the actor can see that the democratisation of rehearsal room relationships is a major aspect of this intracultural project. I ask her to utilise her background as the starting point of our work together – and in this moment, *the actor has become the expert*:

**KLS:** So you're the mother [*KLS reads Jackie's text*] "He is ten years old".

**JL:** I'm the mother?

**KLS:** That is you... you're the mother, but you do not have the baby with you ...so you're the mother.

**KLS:** [*reads the script again, this time taking Charlie's part*]: "ten ten, Chidi... Chidi, Akindele from Nigeria Africa, Akin" that's it... obviously your name is not going to be Annalia, cos you're going to be um... well you're Vietnamese in the house – but you're going to be of Vietnamese heritage.  
What's your name going to be?

**JL:** My? Asian? I am Vietnamese and my name is Thanh Chau.

**KLS:** What?

**JL:** Thanh Chau

**KLS:** How do you spell it?

**JL:** T h a n h C h a u

**KLS:** C h a e

**JL:** U

**KLS:** U. Fantastic. So then Dele says

**CF:** Thanh Chau

**KLS:** Mother says Tanh Chau and Dele says Thanh Chau [*in this moment KLS puts on an African accent*].

(Rehearsal exchange, *The Arrival*, February 2013).

The read through begins with me reading the stage directions; Jackie begins the spoken text as the Vietnamese migrant in Dele's house. She is on her mobile in Vietnamese language and then in conversation with Dele in English with her Vietnamese accent. I slip in "good" to Jackie as I know what it takes for her to do both the Vietnamese language, and the English text with a Vietnamese accent. Jackie's anxiety has been eased through a recognition of her knowledge and power as the expert in the room, and the opening sections of the read through are very good. **Clip 10** demonstrates however just how nervous Jackie is to work from her Vietnamese context. Her body language shifts and changes, showing her anxiety, and she breaks out into nervous bursts of laughter, covering her face with her script. Her Vietnamese delivery on the phone is still very tentative but I can see the potential as even in this first step she takes, there is knowledge and a certainty underneath her nervous delivery. I recognise this and pursue this line of enquiry, encouraging her throughout rehearsals to develop her work by playing through her cultural context. Jackie who has never brought her Vietnamese heritage to the professional space is nervous to do so through the absence of never having done it. This is the first time and she is not sure how her voice is going to sound in the space, how the rest of the company will receive her, how she herself will work in a context that in this space feels unfamiliar and even false. However, as the process continues I take care to empower Jackie as the expert in the room about her Vietnamese heritage, and she begins to participate from a place of knowledge and power.

#### 4.2.3 Rehearsal Room Improvisations

##### (a) Multivocal mise-en-scène

In Chapter 1, I discussed how critical it is to create the conditions where every voice, language and vernacular has an equal position in the rehearsal room. *The Arrival* developed as a multi-vocal work crafted from the various languages and vernaculars present in the rehearsal room. The work develops as it draws from the actors' narratives and experiences and can therefore be seen in the lineage of autobiographical performance where the identity of the actor as a real person and performer is blurred as the actor reveals herself through

rehearsal and performance. This approach, which places equal value on each and every self through a collective exploration of individual stories, paves the way for a more equitable space where all actors have equal opportunity. In this stage of the intracultural methodology, this respect for difference manifests as an embrace of the many languages present in the rehearsal room. Instead of insisting on a common centre, teachers and directors should seek to maintain a multi-vocality, introducing and valuing languages other than that of the dominant culture. In this section, I discuss one particular example of creating and maintaining a multi-vocal mise-en-scène in *The Arrival*.

As introduced above, the text for *The Arrival* was changed in each iteration of the project to reflect the cultural contexts of the particular performers engaged to work on it. As such, our first task was to adapt the existing text in order to suit the intracultural dynamic of the new company. Day 2 of rehearsals was our first foray into the capture and reflection on real life data to shape our performance piece, as we worked on the ship crossing where the narrative of the scene charts the moment when people leave their homes and make a journey to a new place. This was the first moment for this company to start inscribing their collective multi-vocality into the text, and my focus was to encourage the actors to work with languages besides English and to work with their own ‘english’ as described in Chapter 1. I began by setting up a multilingual improvisation that embraced the cultural contexts of the actors in the ensemble. I asked Jackie, Antonio and Antoinette to be a family group, where the culture of the narrative sat with Jackie as a Vietnamese woman. Antonio played in the narrative as her Vietnamese brother and Antoinette as her aunt. The narrative of the improvisation I set was that the parents had died and Antonio, as elder brother, had instructed his sister and aunt to leave the small town where there were no prospects for them. The sister had recently had a child out of wedlock and the brother felt ashamed so he wanted to escape the shame by leaving the child behind, so he and his sister and aunt could start afresh somewhere else.

The improvisation centred around the Vietnamese family, but each actor had to play from their own cultural context in this family scenario. I asked Antonio to work in Italian (his first language), Jackie in Vietnamese and Antoinette to work in her English with a Nigerian accent. I asked them to play the improvisation as the family, and not to worry that the languages and accents were different. The benefit of these multilingual improvisations has been explained in previous Chapters, but to emphasise again: the fact that the actors play from a place of confidence and knowing (even if they are not used to using their family

languages and accents in a rehearsal room environment) gives them an ease and agility in these early improvisations. The secondary benefit comes from having three different languages in the scene where at least two are not understood by the other actors, which means that the quality of listening is acute with actors having to pick up the nuance of the vocal quality to ensure that the improvisation looks as though it is making sense and that it is travelling in a forward direction. This normally results in concentrated and sensitive playing from all involved as there is not only an improvisation going on but also a puzzle while the actors try to figure out what is being said to them, within the framework of their improvisational objective. **Clip 11** is a rehearsal of the scene that flowed from the improvisation detailed above.

The creation of multi-vocal mises-en-scène is a further extension of the quest to position the actor as expert and the consequent recognition of the equal expertise of other performers. After this improvisation, the actors reflected on the power that working from their cultural context had afforded them, as well as how it allowed them to discover a pleasure to play through their cultural context. Jackie commented that although she is fluent in English and that Vietnamese is the language she uses only to speak to her parents, she still feels more confident and more natural when speaking in Vietnamese, particularly when she needs to express emotion. She realised that she can be more assertive and more direct in Vietnamese, and that as an inexperienced actor it takes a lot of heart to play the emotional scenes with fellow actors – for her this is easier in Vietnamese. I recognise this in Jackie's work and while I do not necessarily need to understand or know the nuance of why Vietnamese gives her a freedom, I do need to set the conditions whereby she can work freely in Vietnamese and explore the potential of her range as an artist by allowing her cultural heritage to be fully present. Antonio describes working multi-lingually and intraculturally as giving him the opportunity to explore the nuance and variety of himself. By using Italian, which was the language he used speaking with his mother as he was growing up, he says:

you can bring all these little parts of yourself out that you can potentially forget by just speaking English. I'm a different person in each language I speak (Rehearsal exchange, *The Arrival*, February 2013).

(b) Utilising the full cultural context of the actor

As discussed in the previous Chapter, it is important for directors and teachers seeking to embrace the intracultural methodology to expand their conception of the cultural context. The most effective work in this area allows for actors to discover their *pleasure to play* through routes other than simply ethnicity; indeed, conflating cultural context with ethnicity risks impairing the effectiveness of the methodology. This process was followed in *The Arrival* when working with Giselle, an actor of Caucasian Australian heritage. To complete the ship scene, other characters had to be worked on, integrating the cultural context of the actors in this ensemble with the existing script. I began to work with Giselle, who speaks fluent Mandarin and who in previous development stages had expressed to me how easy it was for her to work in Mandarin as an actor. She admitted to finding a freedom and fluidity when working in Mandarin because this was the most direct route for the actor finding her *pleasure to play*.

I set up an improvisation where Giselle played a mother with a baby and she worked in Mandarin. This gave me the opportunity to explore the complexity and nuance of Giselle's identity shaped by her societal experiences and gifts as a linguist. In previous rehearsals I had witnessed a freedom and pleasure to play in Mandarin from Giselle, and I pushed this further in this improvisation with an emotional scenario of her talking about her plight: single mother with a baby making this perilous sea crossing. The improvisation was charged and while no one in the room knew the literal meaning of the text, the onlookers were clearly affected by the force and reality of the improvisation Giselle created. In a situation like this, the director must trust her own criteria for judgement in terms of the quality of the work. The director is seeking an actor who is fluid, open, and ready to play with any idea thrown at her from her scene partner. She times the improvisation well, her body is relaxed and responsive, her voice free and full, capable of rhythm and timbre changes as the improvisation demands. So I accept this must be part of Giselle's cultural context and in collaboration with her we agree this is something that can be positively utilised during the course of rehearsals. Giselle reflected:

I play Chinese – I'm not ethnically Chinese but what I got from Kristine is this sense of not trying to be anything or anyone but to sort of be oneself – be in the moment of the situation that's occurring um so physically [...] I was sort of myself but through language and situation. I was aiming to arrive at the character – it's a process [...]

The language really helps: that for me is Chinese – its finding something that is very natural to you – very familiar – something that you are comfortable with – it gives you access to being. By letting the cultural identity of the individual speak, people are natural, you stop pretending and can just be yourself. I do this by disappearing into something that is personal to me. You inhabit your own space, you can be in that little world that is yours without regard for what you think might be required (Rehearsal exchange, *The Arrival*, February 2013).

In **Clip 12**, the moment that Giselle finds an ease in performance is clear: as soon as she begins to work in Mandarin. She firstly plays the scene in English and then I ask her to explore working between Mandarin and English. Just like the example in Chapter 3 where Charles Wu works in Mandarin, there is an immediate shift in energy and in voice. The voice instantly sounds more centred, more assured and less metallic. There is a relaxation and ease when Giselle works in Mandarin and when she first works in language she actually breathes out (it is audible). Her voice takes on a deeper timbre, full of emotion and she holds this as she moves back to English. It feels like an actor at one with herself, “standing still, but not standing still” as Zarrilli (1995: 24) describes when speaking of fully embodied performance. She begins to understand how to make a seamless move to her English text: the instinctive knowing in her body how to work in Mandarin has given her the key, the clue of how to sculpt the performance in English as well.

As she progresses and plays between Mandarin and English, one can feel and see the actor at work, exploring the sensation of working between Mandarin and English and beginning to physically embody what this gives her. In Mandarin, Giselle’s body seems to be comfortable and responsive. In a previous rehearsal, I had noticed that Giselle could not instinctively find the same ease in her body when working in English. Her positions felt forced and false, she tried to demonstrate, tried to imitate her idea of age, making the woman too old, too hunched over. It was only when Giselle’s cultural context came into play that she was able to start to find vocally and physically how to have the pleasure to play as someone called Tian Mey, the woman who cares for Dele. The parameters of the character are to a large extent authored by Giselle. Giselle is not pretending to be someone else, and she does not have to delineate between herself and the creation. Everything flows from her sense of ease and her sense of finding what is personal to her. This is the actor as the expert, able to bring her particularity to the creation and to play with her own attributes and shape them into a creation called Tian Mey.

#### **4.2.4 Contesting the Centre**

##### **(a) Empowering the actor**

In order to speak back to the dominant paradigm of performance, actors must be empowered to experiment with the different forms their cultural context can take. This is a difficult negotiation, as actors must not only learn to embrace their own contexts, but also become sensitive to the many and varied cultures at play within the rehearsal room. The ultimate aim of the improvisations and experiments described in this Chapter is to empower the actor – whatever their heritage – to find the *pleasure to play* through cultural context. In this section, I recount one moment from the rehearsal of *The Arrival* that demonstrated a radical re-balancing of power relations in the room, and the potential for actors to contest the hegemonic centre.

Nektarios played from his Greek context in Greek and in placing Sam with him in improvisation, Sam spontaneously created the character of his Greek brother, using an approximation of a Greek accent in the process. This was of great interest to me in this intracultural project where normally it is the other way around: where the actor of diasporic heritage tries to fit in to the mould of the cultural authority. The atmosphere created in the rehearsal room had given Sam the confidence and daring to do this and the rest of the company understood this as part of how we were working. Never was there a hint that Sam assuming a Greek accent was an improper or inappropriate mimicry. While this example might seem to run counter to other elements of the methodology, I include it here because it demonstrates the effectiveness of contesting the centre. Instead of expecting the actor of diasporic heritage to meet them in a culturally neutral state, Sam chose instead to alter his own behaviour and assumptions.

In this section, I have construed these moments in rehearsals as empowering examples of an actor who identifies with the cultural mainstream stepping outside of this privileged position in order to engage with an Othered, or non-mainstream, cultural identity. This is a powerful moment because it illustrates that these actors are valuing these non-dominant cultural identities on the same level as their own cultural contexts. However, these examples also expose the limits of cultural context, and raise the question of who is allowed to play whom? After all, Sam's creation of a Greek character could easily have been seen as inappropriate mimicry of a minority identity position. In intracultural praxis, however, a

space is created where experimentation with culture is not only permissible, but also encouraged, and so actors must feel empowered to play with cultural context wherever they deem it appropriate. The director/teacher is responsible for setting the terms of this engagement, and should at all times model a sensitive and engaged approach to playing through cultural context. I discuss the political implications of these adjustments further in Chapter 5, below.

(b) The power of playing through cultural context

The final step of the methodology is to allow actors to feel and experience the power of playing through cultural context. As I go on to argue in the conclusion, it is only with this discovery that actors can move back into the profession as advocates for the intracultural methodology and potential agents for change. In order to fully embrace this power, performers should be playing through their cultural context at all times when they appear on stage, projecting and ease and pleasure in their actions. In this section, I conclude my examination of the rehearsal process for *The Arrival* by describing the journey of one performer from frustration to empowerment as she grants herself permission to embrace her cultural context. I include Antoinette's story in such detail as it encapsulates the journey of an actor from games, to improvisation, to text through an intracultural rehearsal project.

**Clip 11** is day 8 of rehearsal and the scene was almost a word-for-word transcript from the original improvisation. Jackie's text is completely in Vietnamese and the clip shows Jackie at ease and in control of her enactment of her Vietnamese selfhood. All the tension in her body from early rehearsals has disappeared and rather than being tentative and embarrassed by playing through her cultural context she now draws confidence and power from rooting her work in the Vietnamese. It shows an actor in charge, an actor as expert, revelling in her unique Vietnamese text that she developed herself.

The photograph on the next page (Figure 4) also reveals that by the time we got to production Antoinette had managed to seamlessly combine authentic person and creation. The stiffness and over energised approach created by the tension between self and character that was evident in the early rehearsals is replaced by something anchored and heartfelt. For Antoinette to achieve this ease and confidence rooted in her cultural context took constant reinforcement at every rehearsal. **Clip 13** on day seven of rehearsals shows me continuing to

encourage and reassure Antoinette of her progress: ‘I really believe that Nigerian woman, those tiny little things you were doing, it’s so perfect.’ The difficulty Antoinette experienced in bringing her ‘Nigerian-ness’ to everything she was doing is seen in the mother and son scene on her rope.<sup>27</sup> She is very exposed in this rehearsal as she is still at the stage where self and performer have not yet reconciled. In this clip she seems only to manage to live as the circus artist with no engagement of who she is. The transcript of an exchange I had with her shows that she has still not understood the full impact of playing through the selfhood of her Nigerian cultural context:

**KLS:** That’s better – so do not be scared of being that woman, Nigerian woman  
who [and KLS lets out a sigh].

**AA:** Can I improvise a sigh?

**KLS:** Yes, yes, yes, you can, you can, and you have to. You have to have the  
freedom to be her and live as you. That’s what this project is about and in that  
it’s unusual.

(Rehearsal exchange, *The Arrival*, February 2013)

It is a small but telling exchange because it shows that even at this stage of rehearsals the actor has not yet fully understood that the creation of the role must come from her and not from an instruction from me or an assumption of the meaning of a circus artist. She has not yet understood that the solution lies in playing through her cultural context even though all the work through rehearsals has been emphasising this point. It is understandable that Antoinette somehow cannot forget her years of training on her circus discipline, which has given her the habit of working on her equipment in one way only that does not appear to include a psychological engagement, where even the very idea of breathing or sighing on her equipment seems new to her. However, this is where the intracultural methodology comes into its own, in granting her permission to embrace every detail of her cultural context, rather than just her identity as a circus performer.

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<sup>27</sup> The mother and son scene was a scene where the son, played by Antonio, comes home after his father has interrupted a game of football to say goodbye. The son had no prior knowledge that the father was leaving and when he comes home he is angry and blames his mother, played by Antoinette, for keeping this from him. It is played on the rope and the Chinese pole.

**Clip 14** shows Antoinette trying to reconcile person and performer. She walks into the scene flat footed, knees braced and looking uncomfortable in her body. As she climbs the rope, you only see a circus artist on a rope. It is not invested with anything of her and the movements seem mechanical and meaningless. I search for solutions and ask Antoinette to improvise on the rope as the Nigerian mother, speaking a text that she improvises so she can get a real sense of what we are looking for. I push her to embody her work on her rope with her Nigerian cultural context so we have both the skill of the circus artist but also the psychological engagement of the actor with the role. In **Clip 15** the potential of what I am looking for is evident. Antoinette starts to move with ease, not worrying about performing a circus trick but allowing the emotional narrative to drive her actions (see Figure 4 for further illustration). She is seated in her Nigerian cultural context where she is expert and it is this that relaxes her and gives her a fluidity and potential on her equipment that we have not seen before. The ease of embodiment that she feels in her own self is translated into an ease of embodiment in the character.

**Clip 16** at the first dress rehearsal shows the culmination of my work with Antoinette. She works as a circus artist on her rope and as a fully and psychologically engaged authentic person managing to utilise her cultural context in the work. She is slow and graceful on the rope, nothing is forced, and she is able to play the emotional narrative of the scene



**Figure 4:** Antoinette at a point in rehearsals for *The Arrival* where she understands how to bring her Nigerian context to her work. Her face is relaxed and easy. The high energy is gone and she plays gently and effortlessly. Taken by Barrie Lewis (2013).

– the Nigerian mother trying to make peace with her son. The circus disciplines of the rope and Chinese pole give the scene a dynamic that we could not have achieved with a straightforward earthbound textual delivery. The mother tries to reach out to the son from her rope; the son dives down the Chinese pole not wanting to talk to his mother. There is a dynamic in the sequence which interfaces perfectly with the narrative. However it is not just a movement sequence devoid of emotion or humanity. Both Antoinette as the mother and Antonio as the son manage to play truthfully as themselves so they look like real people – a real mother and a real son in conflict – and this has been achieved through careful and repetitive work engaging themselves and their cultural contexts through the rehearsal process. This could not have been achieved without both actors playing honestly and through themselves in a committed way. In this instance this has meant playing through their cultural contexts. Without this engagement, an analytical look at the text would have been meaningless. It is the ease afforded to the actors by playing through their cultural context that has opened up the pathway for a truthful and moving rendition of this scene.

The dress rehearsal at **Clip 17** also shows Jackie, Giselle and Charlie working “as actors revealed through characters and characters revealed through actors” (Mouawad, 2001: i). This comment by Wajdi Mouawad in the preface to his play *Scorched* acknowledges that the actor brings herself and her humanity to a role and it is this mixing of the text, the world of the play, the spirit of the actor and the world of the actor that reveals the secrets within a text. In this complex process which fuses truth and fiction the actor is always engaged and never neutral in the interaction with a text, and the director acknowledges that the personality of the actor is something to be brought forward and not pushed back. Once the actors understand this, they begin to take ownership of the work, they understand that they are in fact the experts and it is not the director who has all the answers. Through engaging with their own worlds and historical narratives, they hold unique knowledge and experience which is the foundation for our project.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This Chapter has shown intracultural praxis in action in the production of a work. It has shown the employment of strategies relying on improvisatory techniques that enable the creativity of the actor to be central to the making of the work. It has also shown that the ideas and strategies presented in this approach were unfamiliar to a large number of the cast and therefore required consistent effort to encourage actors to believe in the value of their own narratives and cultural contexts as central to the process. The examples detailed above bear out my contention that playing with difference as a key part in artistic practice is a rare phenomenon. It is more usual for performers to experience discriminatory practices where difference is ignored and an actor's cultural specificity is negated in favour of casting the actor in the image of a cultural authority that is “invariably white, patriarchal and heterosexist” (Bharucha, 2000: 35). The examples above show how artists were more familiar with the experience where their cultural specificity was overlooked. This was evident in the time needed to encourage actors to fully engage and work with their identities as the key currency in the generation of the content and texture of the work.

Chapter 4 provides a development on the praxis as outlined in the previous Chapters, as it offers a sustained illustration of the methodology at work across the length of a rehearsal process for a professional production. This demonstrates the efficacy of the praxis not only as a problem solving tool on the floor, but also as a complete approach to crafting work. The case study of *The Arrival*, which was a new work developed from an existing script, offers a practical guide for creating work in both arenas. As I have reiterated throughout this account, intracultural praxis is a malleable approach that can be adapted for use when creating and/or producing work in the realist tradition. Although this thesis necessarily details my own application of the methodology, it is a resilient practice that can and should be manipulated to suit many different environments. As the praxis focusses on the ‘Real I’ and attendant pre-textual work, the lessons learned from *The Arrival* can be easily applied to more traditional text-based work. The key task at hand for the teacher or director is to allow the actor to carry the discoveries made through improvisations and other exercises with them on stage as they play *through* cultural context. By combining the practices outlined in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, teachers and directors can implement the intracultural praxis in their own classrooms and rehearsal rooms, no matter the work at hand.

In the following Chapter, I turn to more philosophical, rather than practical, considerations. In it, I look at the potential of a different interplay of race relations in theatre practice. Chapter 5 examines the power of the intracultural project and its ability to act as an intervention nurturing new work from a diversity of voices on a consistent basis. This returns to the observations with which this thesis opened, positioning intracultural praxis as a unique tool in the struggle for more effective and complex representations of minority identities. In advocating a praxis that positions the actor as expert, and offers the actor of diasporic heritage the opportunity to play through their cultural context instead of subsuming it in favour of an imagined mainstream, I am suggesting that this methodology enables actors to contest the centre, to expose the hollowness of the category of ‘neutral’, and finally embrace a way of work that allows them to bring their complete, complex selves to the floor.

## **Chapter 5**

### **CONCLUSION: CONTESTING THE CENTRE**

The mimicry implicit in the postcolonial condition [is] permanently disabling, because of the disorder and inauthenticity imposed by the centre on the margins of the empire [...] Clearly, the dominance of the centre and its imprimatur on experience must be abrogated before the experience of the ‘periphery’ can be fully validated.

(Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2002: 87)

## 5.1 *The Orphan of Zhao*

Throughout this thesis, I have gestured towards the political efficacy of intracultural praxis, in particular by asserting that it can offer artists of diasporic heritages and diverse identities the means to contest the centre of representation. After all, in both Australia and Britain, the cultural industries are still wrestling with issues of diversity to this day, in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The evidence of main -stage and -stream companies' wilful blindness to cultural diversity is damning: as recently as 2012 the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), one of the most high-profile publically subsidised theatre companies in Britain, were involved in a casting controversy. As part of their repertory season, the RSC programmed the classic *The Orphan of Zhao*, considered by many to be the *Hamlet* of Asia. To one reading, this is an immensely significant gesture – an acknowledgement from arguably Britain's premier classical company that the first Chinese play to be translated in the West deserves a canonical place alongside the works of Shakespeare. However, this logic did not extend to casting: from a cast of twenty, only three actors of East Asian origin were cast and even they were cast in only very small roles. As Rogers and Thorpe outline:

Siu Hun Li played a variety of small onstage parts but spoke only one line; Chris Lew Kum Hoi played the Ghost of the Son, and together, they also operated puppets such as the Demon Mastiff dog. Susan Momoko-Hingley played The Maid, a character who sacrifices her life in order to conceal the orphan's location (2014: 431).

Anna Chen went one rhetorical step further, describing the parts played by the British-Asian actors as “dogs and maids” (2012: n.p.). Subsequently, an entire issue of the journal *Contemporary Theatre Review* (Volume 24, Issue 4, 2014) was dedicated to exploring the implications of the RSC’s decisions.

The Royal Shakespeare Company defended their casting decision by saying that while they did audition many actors of East Asian origin, in the end they opted for a colour blind approach, casting the best actor for the role. In using this terminology, the company implicitly invoked Harvey Young’s description of this practice as one which

ignores the appearance of an actor, her ‘colour’, and hires the most skilled performer for each part. It is a practice anchored in the belief that talented actors can play any role and, more specifically, can quickly convince spectators to overlook whatever gaps may exist between themselves and the characters whom they play (2013: 56).

In defending the casting, the RSC also drew attention to the fact that the play sat within a season of work where the same ensemble would play across three plays, where the other two were set in Russia and Italy (Pushkin's *Boris Godunov* and Brecht's *Life of Galileo* respectively), and therefore it would be difficult to cast a predominantly East Asian company to play across the three plays.

The inference in the RSC's defence was that the South East Asian actors they auditioned did not meet the benchmark of talent required and that while a colour blind casting approach was applied to the white actors who *were* considered for the whole season of a Chinese, a Russian and an Italian play, the privilege did not extend to the actors of Asian heritage. As Young's formulation extracted above suggests, colour-blind casting assumes that the body of the performer is a blank slate, capable of any signification demanded of it in performance. This privilege is denied the actor of Asian heritage: instead of being seen as a blank slate, she cannot help but perform her ethnicity each time she steps onto stage. While the RSC casting directors and producers seemed perfectly capable of imagining white actors into a diverse range of roles, it appears that they had much more trouble when seeking to do the same for actors of diverse heritages. There are two potential, inter-related causes here: the first is simply a failure of the imagination, whereby actors of diverse heritages are seen as inescapably Other, and the second is the audition environment itself, which is often not set up to allow these actors to display or embrace their full power and potential (for more details see sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2, above).

*The Orphan of Zhao* casting process was a failure of integrated casting and a stark example of the marginalisation of a community of artists in Britain by a mainstream, authoritative company. I began my thesis questioning why we have not yet moved beyond a largely homogenous theatre culture to something that is far more reflective of the heterogeneous world in which we live. I have suggested that it is because so often actors who are not thought of as coming from the cultural authority are not given the chance to show themselves at their best by being given the permission to work with their cultural histories and narratives. The intracultural practitioner, like the ethnographer, writes stories that create "pockets of critical consciousness [and] discourse(s) of cultural diversity" (Christians, 1997: 11). These performance stories move oppressed people to action, enabling transformations in the public and private spheres of everyday life. Intracultural practice sets out to address the misconception that the centre is synonymous with whiteness and performances therefore

become sites of resistance where “they transform and challenge stereotypical forms of cultural representation” (Denzin, 2003: 118-123).

How could it be possible that the Royal Shakespeare Company dismissed completely the potential of a particular group of people? Why did the Company make assumptions around the individual abilities of the South East Asian performers who auditioned for roles, and then assert that they were not the best actors for the jobs or actors who could perform across the range of plays of the season? Throughout this thesis, I have argued that directors and teachers need to embrace what intracultural praxis has to offer, where the ability to play with difference and recognise excellence in difference empowers the performer. The praxis offers possibility for deep collaboration rather than a limiting framework where the potential of one side of the collaboration is ignored. Diasporic heritage and Indigenous actors must be given the chance to play from a place of knowledge and power no matter the work in which they are cast.

In my work with Tamasha Theatre we excavated stories that empowered enactments of ‘Indian-ness’ and ‘Pakistani-ness’ within the greater British society. Only when we understand how to present empowered enactments of multifarious identities and these enactments find their own place within the ecology, will the cultural industries be able to counter well-worn discriminatory practices around casting and rehearsal methodologies. It is only at this point that we will be able to develop a common cultural heritage and history, and in the reporting and representation of that heritage we will find a more complete version of the truth, one which is inclusive rather than exclusive. The narrative of the nation cannot be defined only by one group. An intracultural practice approach in theatre opens up the space for every artist to take their rightful place in the formation of that narrative:

the movement of art in Britain defines the nature of British society. If this movement is recognised as only that of a certain racial group, then the space of movement is defined only by this group. If the history of art in Britain is the history only of white artists – as it is institutionally recognised and promoted – then Britain is a society defined by these artists. If this is to be accepted, then what is expected from Britain’s non-white population? To remain at the margin of society without any active and equal part either in its formation or definition (Araeen, 2013: 105-6).

## **5.2 Australia: Where are we now?**

Australian mainstage theatre director Lee Lewis wants the canon to be an equal-opportunity employer. In a sophisticated artistic culture such as Australia's, in the early years of the twenty-first century, this ought to be a statement of the obvious. However, after Lewis wrote a 2007 *Platform Paper* in which she made a damning indictment of Australian theatre, asserting the stage was not just predominantly white, being largely populated by Anglo-Australian actors, but “reprehensively white” (Lewis, 2007: 2). The professional theatre industry went into uproar. The scale of the outrage that Lewis generated served only to underline her point, which was after all both relatively banal and well-supported by evidence. The central contention of her paper, developed through her different experiences in the fields of cultural production in Australia and the United States of America, is that “a nation as multicultural as Australia – the population comprises people from 250 different ancestral backgrounds – is conspicuously monocultural in the mainstage theatre” (Lewis, quoted in Westwood, 2013).

While Lewis points to some valiant efforts to address this imbalance, and has indeed dedicated her own professional practice to so doing, the outrage produced by the paper's publication has largely died down – without the lessons in its pages having been heeded by the Australian industry. In particular, Lewis today argues that progress has been made in the years since, but generally speaking, more work has been done and progress made in the smaller and independent companies than at the larger subsidised ones. In part, this is because the professional stage is often limited to employing those actors who have graduated from the major, reputable national training institutions, and therefore without serious attention to the diversity of intake at the training school level, little will change on stage. The intracultural methodology is of crucial importance in widening the embrace of conservatoire-style training institutions to include and empower students from diverse cultural contexts.

More recently Andrew Bovell, one of Australia's most successful playwrights and screen writers, observed in his 2013 keynote speech for Playwriting Australia:

I know that a great deal of anxiety has been created in the minds of the Australian people around the issue of “unauthorized arrivals” as they have been named. And that this taps deep into a national psyche, a fear of unchecked inundation by people who

don't share our values and history. By people who are different to us... This is where we are. This is our country. Now. (Bovell, 2013: n.p.).

In this keynote, Bovell explicitly links the macro-level government policy that has characterised Australia's approach to the Other with the field of cultural production, and argues that the wilful blindness that has dominated the former has led to a kind of artistic blindness in the latter. Bovell contends that the question of "What sort of theatre do we want?" should instead lead us to directly ask "What sort of society do we want?", and by extension "How does our theatre reflect that ideal?" He criticises the Australian federal government and its spending allocation, suggesting that in the absence of any government-driven attempt to broaden discussion in the public sphere, the onus is now on the theatre to do so.

In the stories we choose to tell (and by tell I mean the stories our theatre companies commission, develop and produce) our theatre can give expression to our national conscience by reflecting the society in which we live in all its complexity ...

Australia is not a white nation. It never was. That's just the story that was told.

Australia is a dynamic and evolving society of many colours and many faiths and many ethnicities. It seems to me that the government and its ideological supporters are acting to re-assert a definition of Australia around three points of a triangle – white, Anglo-Celtic and Christian. In this view everything else is placed outside of that triangle as an exception to the rule and everything within the triangle is ruthlessly defended (Bovell, 2013: n.p.).

In a sharp riposte to Bovell's argument, recent cuts to Arts funding in Australia have unfortunately meant the re-assertion of a definition of old Australia: white, Anglo-Celtic and Christian. As Lewis emphasised, progress in the area of cultural diversity is made in the smaller and independent companies – however, it is precisely these companies that have felt the full force of the recent cuts. At the same time, the funding for the Major Performing Arts Group (MPAG) companies, which includes the major mainstage theatre and opera companies of Australia, was quarantined from the cuts. As a result, the great engine room of new writing and story telling risks going dark; at the time of writing, each new week sees news of new closures, of promising careers cut short, and hope of intracultural practice fades still further.

At last count, Australians identify with over 270 ancestries, and speak over 400 languages, yet Australia continues to be represented as a racially and culturally homogenous society, especially in the field of mainstage Australian theatre (Gonsalves, 2011: 72).

The field of cultural production in Australia currently lags behind its British counterpart, but the community of artists who are being excluded on a consistent basis are impatient and are beginning to demand more equity. Praxis can play its part as intervention in this conversation. Bovell suggests

I wonder if a part of the explanation is that we have become too preoccupied by the Western Canon. The great European and American plays. Re-imagined or not, I wonder if the classics take up too much space and too much air on our stages. And even when we cast them from outside the white paradigm it is only a gesture, a political moment perhaps. When we re-visit the classics do we simply continue to draw on a vast history of whiteness that has dominated and shaped western theatre? Does it in effect entrench the privileged position that whiteness holds in our theatre and in our culture? (Bovell, 2013: n.p.).

As I detail in the remaining sections of this thesis, the intracultural methodology actively contests “the privileged position that whiteness holds”, through exposing ‘neutral’ as a politically loaded category. Instead of encouraging all actors to reach for the same old pigeonholes, following the praxis outlined in this thesis, we can begin to empower them to insist on the multicultural stages of the future.

### **5.3 Both/and Modality**

Actors Equity in Britain recently revised their policy on integrated casting and called for greater care and consideration by productions when casting roles where the artist's personal characteristics are relevant to the role, hence trying to ensure that more artists reflecting the character's characteristics, where relevant, are considered at the casting stage. However in the casting directory Spotlight there are too few categories for actors to express nuanced versions of their ethnicity, so where an actor's racial ethnicity is a crucial factor in being invited to an audition or not, actors are not yet able to express the complexity of their backgrounds. We need to get to a position where actors can express their identities as British, British Chinese, British East Asian, or the myriad identity positions that in reality construct any ethnic grouping and then welcome the knowledge and particularity of multifarious identity to a process where it can be a rich resource in the development of work.

As in many other areas of actors' professional lives, signing up to Spotlight requires actors to put themselves into a box. As explored in section 5.1 above, this is not necessarily a problem when that box is big enough to provide scope for a range of possibilities – like, for example, the box 'White'. However, for the actor of diasporic heritage, the box can instead feel limiting. What is called for here is the adoption of a both/and modality, where actors can acknowledge the plurality of their identities. The nomination of one identity need not come at the expense of others; more nuance in the way that casting is discussed and conducted can make available a variety of representational positions. After all, many actors of diasporic heritages feel just as connected to their British or Australian identity as they do to their 'Othered' identity. In forcing artists to make an either/or choice, when a both/and modality would come much closer to reflecting their embodied reality. These implications were explored in a focus group interview conducted in 2013. I extract it in extensive detail here in order to draw out the complex operations of actors' identities:

I have seen a huge difference in my performance when my cultural context was engaged. It came as quite a surprise to me. As I considered myself British, I did not feel comfortable at first with speaking in an accent, or speaking in my native language but it took me somewhere unexpected. I found a deeper, more connected version of myself that I cannot really explain...I think that it has helped me find another way in to creating truthful performances. It has opened me up and made me a more confident performer.

I guess, what it was is that it made me become aware of what I had actually been ignoring for a long time, which is the effect... that the actual physical... of my own physicality, for instance, um, from my own background is so ingrained in me that I hadn't actually realised. So it's... it's... so everything that I had learned, like, from my parents and... what you've been brought up with is subconsciously in you. It's like, in your bodies, in the way you, you are, um, in certain, um, you know, certain...certain situations and certain circumstances. And so when you're using your own cultural context and put in a certain circumstance which you... inherently know, you just know from the... go...and you do not have to act it, you do not have to learn, you do not have to, you know, go and find a way of getting into this character, because it's in you, without realising that it is.

So I have thought the Vietnamese, it's not me: the English part is me. Then after this work, you realize the Vietnamese is a part of you: you can't ignore it, you have to embrace it and the two lives over practice slowly merge. You start to become aware of the difference between English and your own cultural context, you become aware of the difference in tone and musicality, you become aware that you are 'acting' the English part. Then the more you do it (practise it) the more it comes together. I totally believe you can't act or create from anything that is not your whole self, and until you know your whole self you can't sort of move on (Actor C, 03.02.2013).

These observations show how once the actor began to use both parts of herself – British and Vietnamese – she started to feel more connected and more able to work comfortably and confidently. She realised that by denying one part of herself, she could not fully move forward. She began to notice a difference in tone and musicality when she allowed her Vietnamese side in; without her Vietnamese side she was not fully herself and therefore it felt like she was 'acting' the British side of herself. She had denied a part of herself for so long in her work, that she had to *practise* the duality of herself in her work before it felt natural. Tone, musicality, physicality in performance: all the key attributes of the required skills set for an actor are significantly altered when she is given permission to embrace her particular, nuanced, multifarious identity.

The intracultural praxis recognises and acknowledges the complexity and nuance of one's material self. It allows the actor above to be both British and Vietnamese at the same time, it allows her to play with everything that she has in her makeup. She will be the one who determines where one facet of her makeup needs to be called up more strongly than

another. It is not for the director or teacher to determine that for her. It is not for the director or teacher to request that she submerges a part of herself in the creation of a role.

In a very strict sense, it is the actor's mortality which is the actual subject [of any performance], for he is right there dying in front of your eyes... Whatever he represents in the play, in the order of time he is representing nobody but himself. How could he? That's his body, doing time (Blau, 1982: 134).

The intracultural praxis places the actor at the centre, trusting that the actor is the expert of their own personality, it acknowledges that the actor is the very material that is being represented on stage: "her body doing time". It gives trust to the actor herself to manage the enactment of her own selfhood.

## **5.4 Praxis as Intervention**

As Zarrilli reminds us, it is important to critically examine assumptions and ways of thinking each and every time we set about on a course of training or a rehearsal (2000: 3). The intracultural approach where assumptions and ways of thinking which reinforce a dominant culture's power and privilege acts as an intervention, challenging the category of 'neutral' set by the cultural authority – something which is never *politically* neutral. For individuality to flourish, teachers and directors need to move their focus away from a 'one approach fits all' mentality to something that is broad and brave enough to play with difference in the intracultural spaces that they are working in.

Intracultural praxis in training means actors entering the industry will see this approach as the norm and begin to question outdated methodologies that have little provision for individuality. In industry settings where each and every individual is equitably positioned, work of quality from one and all will flow, thus providing equitable platforms for actors of all backgrounds. Once actors train, rehearse, and perform from a position of confidence in themselves and their narratives, work from a diverse range of influences can begin to develop, as actors begin to see that they no longer have to keep their cultural specificity only for their 'home' community. Diverse stories start to emerge on a consistent basis and over time traditional and accepted criteria for assessment of quality start to expand in order to embrace multifarious cultures, ideas and traditions.

The belief that there is only one way of defining taste, only one canon by which to judge what is great art and what is not, has increasingly been challenged over the past forty years. Although there may have been an intellectual tilt towards a more egalitarian view of history and of diverse arts practice, the reins of power, and thus authority, largely remain in the same privileged hands. There are many fields of endeavour that yet have to be fully opened up. There needs to be appreciation by policy makers and funders that much innovation takes place at the margins, yet it is this experimentation with ways of seeing and telling that reinvigorates culture and connects it to present realities (Mahamdallie, 2010: 106-7).

This process is cyclical: as a community of artists grows in power, an audience for the artists' work grows. Gatekeepers are forced to programme more diverse product as audiences begin to make demands demonstrating that they are willing to return to a venue if they see themselves consistently represented. Critics develop their criteria for assessment as new

stories start to emerge and the balance in power between gatekeepers and communities starts to rebalance.

As I have explored throughout this thesis, simultaneous change needs to take place in both the professional industry, and in training institutions. In Chapters 1, 2 and 3 in particular, I drew on interviews with actors of diasporic heritages and diverse identities in which they regularly reported feeling that their cultural context had been excluded from their training. As a result, these actors felt disempowered and reluctant to draw on their cultural contexts in professional audition and rehearsal contexts. When exposed to working with the intracultural praxis, however, these same actors reported that once their individuality and identity was positioned as a legitimate tool in the creative process, they were able to discover a *pleasure to play* and a consequent ease and openness in their performances. This potential power and impact must be extended to actors in their training, in order that they move into the professional industry carrying this power and able to show their best profile in audition, rehearsal and performance. At the same time, industry practice must shift to allow for the expertise of the diasporic heritage actor to be valued, instead of expecting this actor to conform to an imagined standard of ‘neutral’. Using the lessons in these pages, directors and teachers must overcome their reticence to engage with culture, and acknowledge their imperfect knowledge as the first step in empowering their performers and productions to contest the centre of representation.

The key components of the intracultural methodology that can empower directors, teachers and artists to play with and through cultural context to create relevant works for performance are:

1. Setting the culture of the rehearsal room
2. Placing the actor at the centre
3. A multi-lingual, multi-vernacular approach

Key moments in the case studies that illuminate these three components are:

1. **Setting the culture of the rehearsal room** can be seen clearly in many examples in Chapter 4 which documents the production of *The Arrival*. Setting the culture of the rehearsal room can be seen clearly in **Clip 8** which shows the warm and collegiate atmosphere set by the game “Clapping”. **Clip 9** shows the intimate work with an actor

on their cultural context as the tool for discovery. **Clip 10** shows the permission given to the actor to use their cultural context in the making of work for performance.

2. **Placing the actor at the centre** is illustrated by many examples in Chapter 3 in the audition and intracultural master class case studies. The audition scenario invites each and every actor to play with their own cultural narrative in the short space of an audition slot, thus inviting them to be the expert on their terms, not the terms of the cultural authority, second guessing what might be required of them to gain a role. The intracultural master class case study shows the actor at the heart of the creative process. This is visible in all the examples but perhaps most obvious in **Clip 7** where actors of South African and Ethiopian heritage work together with nuance and the particularity of their backgrounds infusing their work with texture and detail. It is clear that they are the only ones in the room who could execute the improvisation and the text in the way they do.
3. **A multi-lingual, multi-vernacular approach** is evident in both the case studies from Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. Example after example demonstrates how actors knowingly and unknowingly often hide or disguise their true vocal attributes in favour of presenting something which resembles an idea of “the perfect actor” or “the perfect student”. Each example shows how damaging and limiting this can be and then in turn shows the power and richness brought forth when actors are given permission to use everything in their vocal history that makes up their linguistic expression.

By developing practice broad enough to afford *all* actors with the conditions to produce work from a departure point of confidence and knowledge, the cultural industries can begin to be enriched by the diversity of all who practise in them. Theatres are spaces where we can be different together. Artists are change makers and all artists must be given the same opportunity as each other to make change. Imagine a world where every night you could see a story, every story different from the one before. Where you could hear a new language, a vernacular where the culture and complexity of a group of people is expressed with depth, nuance and truth. This truth comes from knowing. I want to experience particularity from the expert, from the person who knows. Cook me a curry that is the authentic taste of India – give me the subtlety that only you know, as you are the expert and you have the lived experience.

To return to the frustrations that animated Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, this intervention must take place simultaneously on our stages and in our training schools. For too

long, we have been excluding actors of diasporic heritages before they have even had the chance to find professional success, because our training schools have not been set up to recognise the particularity of their talent, nor to nurture and encourage that talent on the rare occasions that these actors made it through the door. It is for this reason that I have given equal weight to the training environment in this account: if we do not embrace wholesale change here, then the wider intracultural project is doomed to failure. Provocations like Lewis's and Bovell's make noise and then fade into memory; a generation of actors trained to embrace the richness of their multifarious cultural contexts will be impossible to ignore.

Instead of reaching for neutrality, rich idiosyncratic detail is the pearl in the oyster. There is room for an ever-expanding array of cultural contexts and identities in the cultural industries, but these must be nurtured into the centre; it is the responsibility of teachers, directors and performers to unleash talent and potential. Let us move forward now with speed, for the nation will be so much richer for it. No more conversations, no more excuses – the film won't sell, the audience won't come, we will lose our subscriptions. Reject these false assertions, and instead trust that we can provide a platform for everyone, be they bold, brave, shy, modest, or anything in between. This thesis necessarily has detailed my own application of the methodology, but it is a resilient practice that can and should be manipulated to suit many different environments. It is not until practice develops to a point where individuality and difference is seen as the crucible for innovation and excellence that we will make significant and lasting change where the reflections on stage mirrored back to us are truly representative of the society in which we live.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Transcript of Focus Group: Intracultural Masterclass Series Conducted 3 February 2013**

#### **Principal Researcher (KLS)**

Participant A Pakistani Punjabi

Participant B British Asian Indian

Participant C British Vietnamese

Participant D White British

Participant E White British, with Irish heritage, raised in Wales

#### **Key to document:**

Verbal emphasis on a word or phrase is in italics

A raised voice is indicated by block capitals

( ) indicates observed physical movement / change in tone

... indicates a short pause or an unfinished sentence

- Indicates a rapid, unexpected end to the sentence, midway through

/ indicates interjection or overlap

KLS: So is everyone okay to start?

ALL: Yes

KLS: It'll be a conversation but they're quite open questions, so we'll see how the conversation goes. Just feel you can pitch in whenever, we don't have to go around the table. It shouldn't take any more than an hour.

The first question is: How would you describe the curriculum taught to you in your training, in terms of diversity and inclusion? Can you describe the components of the curriculum and say how you think it has affected you as a person and a performer?

B: At drama school we did have quite a range of subjects such as animal studies, improvisation, singing, dancing but not at any stage was my own cultural background brought into focus in any of those classes. But I do have to say I'm a lot more confident now after going to drama school, as a person.

KLS: So in that moment did it occur to you that your cultural context was not being taken into consideration? Did it bother you? Were there any impacts around that?

B: Yes, absolutely, because every monologue that was given out was for Shakespeare things, plays that had nothing to do with Asian actors at all. The school didn't have one, single play that was Asian-based. So, you know, I was always playing white women, which I'm not. I mean, it's OK, it's fine but I did feel it would be sometimes nice, if I had one or two plays that did have Asian actors in it.

KLS: So in terms of you saying you were playing white women, can you describe a little bit, if you drill down a bit into that – if you were playing a Shakespeare, for example, would you consider that in Shakespeare you were playing a white woman?

B: Yes, I guess, because I played Gertrude in Macbeth, I did a monologue. Although I could, I did know where she was coming from because she was talking about death, Ophelia's death and everything; I knew where she was coming from. I suppose in that context, that is universal because people will have the same feelings but at the same time, and also when I did Hillary from the Woman Who Cooked Her Husband; again I knew exactly where she was coming from. But I think that it would be nice like when we did duologues and other plays, it'd've been nice to sort of, you know, put my whole, myself as my whole person, not just half of me because half of me is British and half of me is Indian, it'd have been nice to have my whole personality brought into it.

KLS: So, with your Gertrude and The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband, there was no suggestion ever that you might play that as an Indian woman?

B: Oh, absolutely not! It was completely ignored. Yeah.

KLS: Well, we'll come back to that, more in a little bit of a deeper way, how that didn't aid you or did, well; it didn't aid you in terms of your development.

Does anyone else want to say something terms of curriculum?

D: Yes, it's funny, cause when I did my – I never formally trained as either an actor or a director, other than under you.

KLS: Yeah

D: But when I did my masters, which is ostensibly a masters in how to teach acting, we had –

KLS: Where was that?

D: That was at Central School

KLS: God! I never realised you did that!

D: So what was really interesting about it: We had a group that were from all over the world; We had an American, a Korean, a Canadian, Australians, but it's only just come to me, that despite studying there for a year, cultural context I don't think was ever mentioned *once* in the context of that course.

KLS: So, in terms of how to teach acting, what were the primary colours?

D: Well I suppose you were taught, well what we were taught, were, it was all sort of, you know, named guru styles. So, we would do, we would look at the Stanislavskian approach or the Stasbergian approach, or the Meisnerian approach, or a little bit of Suzuki or Butoh. But there was never ever a moment where, um, cultural context was ever sort of broached as a subject.

KLS: So, did none of those approaches, therefore, do none of those approaches therefore, or the way they're taught, acknowledge cultural context. Because when you're looking at Stanislavski, you're looking at the truth of the performance, but they're still not...

D: Well, I'm sure they *could*, I mean, I'm absolutely positive that any and all of them could be applied in that way. But what I find interesting is, and I literally never thought about it until you asked that question, was that in that whole year, no-one sort of ever said "So, what about an actor's cultural context, how does that, how might that, how might we, as a collection of diverse people who are going to go into this industry, want to broach that?" And it was never, ever raised.

KLS: And it was, sort of, quite a global year intake, were people using their accents, languages?

D: Yes on the whole they were, actually. Um, It was, yeah, we had, I mean, what was interesting was there was a young guy from Korea who taught, um, what...I suppose, to put it generally, he taught one of the western styles of teaching. I can't remember whether it was Stanislavski or Chekhov, it was one of those Russian teachers. But he taught it through his own practice in Eastern movement, in Korean movement, which was *very* interesting. It was never, it was never talked of explicitly. It was just always something that didn't, that just didn't occur to anyone to broach at the time. Neither, you know, neither the students or the teachers to ever say... Because obviously, we're at a drama school where there are... actors from all over the world from loads of different types of contexts of training. But it was never broached as to how that might affect how we... train them. Which I find quite...

KLS: And on reflection now, do you think that had an impact? Positive or negative?

D: Well... I suppose it's interesting because, unusually after doing that, the day we finished the, sort of, formal training there, two days later I was in France, training with Philippe. Where the training was absolutely rooted in that person's absolute, you know, essence. So I, you know, suppose, quite frankly ignored everything I taught and wrote my masters about him. Um, but it's...

KLS: So you went there as a placement? And then went back to the masters?

D: No, no, it wasn't a placement, I just... I ... the benefit of the course was that they allowed you to do, whatever you wanted to study, they gave you time to do that. I didn't like anything we were taught. I just found it...I just didn't find it interesting or helpful or useful and at the time I didn't know why... I didn't know what it was that I didn't find useful or helpful or whatever it was about this way of teaching. I went out to Philippe and went "Oh, it's *this*".

KLS: And can you just describe that a bit more?

D: It's (pause) No I can't really! (LAUGHS) Which isn't very helpful!

KLS: We'll come back to you.

D: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KLS: We'll come back to you. (To Participant C): You want to say something?

C: Yeah, I mean... In terms of my drama training at Drama Studio, I think one of the things that was apparent was that we were all taught to speak RP... um... no matter what your accent was. So it's not necessarily depending on your cultural context, not just me being Vietnamese, but whether you're from Scotland or from anywhere you were, you were kind of encouraged to speak in this uniform accent. Which... if it so, really quite far from yourself, it's extremely difficult to do and... I think, in that sense, you would become, like, a lot more isolated in terms of your confidence or

whatever your, your, you want to bring to the table, I think. Um, I also don't think the teachers were focused on the, sort of, *individual*? More like, kind of maybe, trying to get people to go through a uniform process: "We do this, we do this, we do this and then, hopefully when you go out, you have something that you can maybe use".

KLS: And was there any conversation with the voice tutors, around this "neutral" voice?

C: I think most of the voice classes were all about (pause) the thing is, when you go to drama school, well when I went to Drama school, I had *no* experience of acting at all, so I had nothing to compare it to, I had nothing to, kind of, base what I was learning on. So I was learning everything, kind of ... blank. And just taking everything on board without actually understanding why I was doing it. So the voice classes I did, and I made the sounds, but I didn't actually know, the sound, why I was *doing* that and now I understand why but that's through, like, years of further training; of my own training, um...

KLS: And did those sounds... sound like you?

C: No! It....i....it did *not* sound like me because people who knew me, who came to see, like, end of year performances were like: "You're speaking in a really posh voice, it doesn't sound like you at all." Um... and....and if you're not sounding like you, you know, you're just, you're one point removed from where you need to be/

KLS: And so, what impact did that have on you while you were training?

C: I .... While I was training, I think I was (PAUSE) mostly confused (LAUGHS) through the whole process! No, I enjoyed myself, because you know, I was with people I liked and, you know, and having fun and stuff, but actually I...I just sort of, kind of, *cruised* though it rather than really...I.. I felt a lot of the time that I wasn't good enough.

KLS: Ok, that's very interesting. (To participant A): Do you have something to add?

A: Yes! I've got lots to add! (EVERYONE LAUGHS)

Um, I..I went to ALRA and I did a fifteen month post-graduate course, which is a three-year course, condensed into fifteen months. And the first thing that we did was a devised, improvised piece, based on a fairy tale and we chose Cinderella. And the director was [...] and she, um, was very keen for me to talk about my... culture and my background, but it was also a way for everyone to bond and get to know each other as well, that's why we all kind of did a devised piece at first. So, interestingly, it was around Eid as well and I even brought, you know, a sweet dish for everybody to share, but when it came to the final piece... had (LAUGHS) absolutely nothing to do with my background or culture. But somehow we kind of used ourselves to... develop our characters and our story, which... was about modern-day slavery and so we, kind of had ...two...we had a Russian couple who, um, bring in a girl from Thailand and

mistreat her and we kind of...and then we had...it was all done through a court case and I ended up playing a lawyer, but...somehow my cultural background and other people's cultural backgrounds sort of...came into the division (sic.) of the piece, um... and after that, we did Shakespeare, Ibsen and various different productions in the space of four weeks, um, and one of... when we did Shakespeare, um, I was cast as, um, King Duncan and we were allowed to, um, (HESITATION) devise our own charac...costume as well. So because I was regal as well, I just wanted...I decided I was looking and searching on the internet and then suddenly, I decided I wanted to wear an Achkan, which is a..a, like, formal, formal coat and a...a peacock feather in my ear, but otherwise, when I spoke, I spoke with an RP accent (LAUGHS) but somehow, I...I was an Indian king and my son, then also wore an Achkan, so that was some way of bringing in my cultural background. Um...

KLS: And can I just...was there no...can you, first of all, can you talk a little bit about that moment where you used your cultural context in the devising?

A: Yes/

KLS: /And then, can you just talk about that gap where that disappeared and then when you went to performance, that somehow...wasn't...there, as...if/ I'm understanding it correctly?

A: /It... it did, it suddenly, because we were trying to find a story, we were trying to find a context and somehow, it... suddenly we were transported into an Asian family and trying to kind of trying to explore ideas and stories around it but it didn't sort of... work and then someone decided that it was going to move to Cambodia, that's um, that's a specific now actually, I now in my mind, remember. So one girl, who was actually from Scotland, (LAUGHS), became the ... became the Cambodian and we kind of... explored my Asian background by, I don't know, bringing in food and I was telling stories and... trying to find ideas, but then we kind of, (LAUGHS), moved on to Cambodia...

KLS: So how would you describe your acting personality in the final showing of that?

A: My acting personality?

KLS: Yes.

A: It was... it was my personality in the sense that...um...I played, um...I played a prosecution barrister, um, and it was me but my cultural background had somehow... disappeared.

KLS: But even if it was you, was your cultural background not there? Because if you're saying it was you...

A: Ok, I was an *Asian* barrister, but I still, I know, but it /(inaudible)

KLS: /An Asian barrister?/

A: /But (inaudible) because it was Cinderella, I was... Mrs Godmother (LAUGHS) but...

KLS: But do you feel you were an Asian barrister? And did *the director* feel you were an Asian barrister?

A: (PAUSE) I was a *British* Asian Barrister (PAUSE) Yes, I...I/

KLS: Was there any conversation around that? /

A: /No. /

KLS: Being a British Asian barrister?

A: No.

KLS: And then, when you played in the coat...

A: Yes

KLS: Was there any conversation around... okay, you've got the - you're adorned with the cultural costume -

A: Yes

KLS: Then was there any conversation around the relationship of that costume to...

A: No

KLS: ... the voice and the movement?

A: No. N..not at all, actually. We, we were just given that freedom to create the/

KLS: /Yeah

A: /image of our character/

KLS: /Yeah

A: /but then we were... but then, but then we s.../

KLS: A-a-and so did you have any questions around either of those two situations or, any...or can you talk a little about at all...was there an impact on that, for you? Positively or negatively?

A: It was positive, I think, in terms of, um, the final performance of the object... the objectives that.. I had/

KLS: /Mmmm-hmm?

A: They were fulf – yes, it worked. Um...I can't say I felt...any more Asian, you know, in terms of how I felt as a character, but for me, it sort of helped me as an old Indian man. Um....it kind of brought out..oh, I don't even know how to, um, articulate it, but it-it helped me *develop* my character, I think.

KLS: So- you didn't speak with an old, Indian man accent/

A: /No, but I-/

KLS: /but in your-/

A: /(inaudible)/

KLS: /psychologically, you were thinking that way, yes? /

A: yes, and- and physically ... physically as well.

KLS: Oh, that's *very* interesting.

A: Um... kind of...it was... although Gandhi would never' ve worn anything like that, but in the physicality I was thinking on that level.

KLS: And did the director know that you were thinking on that level and encourage you to do so?

A: No. We didn't have that conversation, actually...

KLS: So that was, sort of, a private development?

A: Yeah, mmm. Um... but then interestingly, all... my background and everything sort of disappeared when we did Ibsen and we did, (PAUSE) other... other modern stuff. But when it came right to the end of the course and we had to choose out monologues and our dialogues for the showcase, I... in my head, I was just bringing things that I really liked. I wasn't thinking about my background, or who I was, or my casting – in fact, none of that had ever occurred to me – and the casting director just sat there, so irate and – well, he wasn't irate – but he was saying: Look, darling: You *do* realise you're *Asian*, don't you!" (LAUGHS). And for some reason, that had just...disappeared...um, and he insisted that I find a dialogue that... *had* an Asian character in, an Asian mum, or something because there was another actor who was also Asian, his background was Bangladeshi, and they wanted us to play – they had in their heads – and we had to find a mother/son... so (PAUSE) it was just, it was – it sounds really odd but in my head, it was a slight sort of – It was a really obvious thing to do but it never occurred to me. So... right at the end, I then went back to my roots and I found, you know, I found a modern play... with a British Asian mum, who...almost had the same values that I do and her daughter, um, wants to... is go –

is wearing a hijab. Um, and in the final showcase I was, I had an Asian accent, I had a Pakista – they wanted me to mi- they wanted it to be thicker, um... but I didn't give it that thickness but i.. that's what I did.

KLS: And... how did you feel? Doing it?

A: It felt very natural, in fact... for both of us, it was probably, everyone kept saying it was the strongest thing that we'd both done. Um... and it was very instinctive and it was (PAUSE) There were so many things we didn't have to think about so we could develop our performance. Um, and...

KLS: So many things you *didn't* have to think about?

A: Yes, *technically*. Um... whereas in the performance, you're constantly thinking technically, in your... the ups and the downs, the lows and highs and things and for some reason, it was just really natural and each time we did it, we did it differently as well, um. So that was an interesting thing for us.

C: Well, um, yeah. I think that's it. I think it's sort of like (PAUSE) Kind of... (Pause) When you go to drama school, maybe you miss that point of – actually, what the first thing you have to do is to be able to... *be yourself*, or *find* a way to be yourself before you can actually, you know, put the layers of all these different characters on top, or whatever you want to do, like, technically, to...to explore. But um, until you have that basis, you feel a bit lost and I think if... well, you know, certainly when I went to drama school, I think the school wasn't equipped to deal with *me*, just as a person. They, they, you know, they had all the equipment, as in... drama training, but to be able to take someone who was *very* different and to fit that person *into* that training was probably a quite difficult thing to do. It's like, you know, squeezing a square into a circle (Inaudible) You know, because from the basis of acting, you kind of have to – it's- you're working towards a truthful performance but you're never going to get there... until you... you know, you have to work backwards on these things.

KLS: So do you think, coming off the second question, there would have been advantage for all of you and, you know, you can comment on the actor training for the colleagues in your class. Would there have been advantage in exploring texts from your own cultural heritage?

A, B &C: Yes! Yes, definitely!

B: I think with me, because we had to bring in scenes from plays and I brought in lots of Indian scenes, um, but none of them were ever picked for me to do, to perform. I brought lots in and um I thought it could be a blind casting: I asked black girls, white girls to be my daughter and none of them were ever picked. And then there was a young Indian lad but I don't think he wanted to do anything Indian, so I never asked him. But I brought in so many plays, I brought Rafta Rafta, lots of them, the Waiting

Room, but none of them were picked for me to perform and I really wanted to play an (LAUGHS) Indian woman, because that's what I am!

KLS: They weren't picked by who, though?

B: Well, they had to, the teachers had to pick – the two artistic directors would've picked which scenes were going to be performed at The Cockpit Theatre and none of the ones that I brought – I brought in loads of Asian plays but they didn't pick any of them.

KLS: And... what was your understanding of that? / Why do you think that happened?

B: /Um... (SIGHS)... I don't know really. I mean, in the end, I played, um... Madame Arcati from Blithe Spirit, which I really loved, cause I went completely O.T.T. on my costume, um, but I really wanted to play an Indian woman, which I never got to do at drama school at all. Which was a shame! I wanted to do at least *one* in *something*! But they just never picked any of my scenes.

(PAUSE)

C: (UNDER BREATH) Yeah. (VOICED) It - it's weird because when you go to drama school, you want to be able to play... what you're *not*? *Almost*? I dunno, like, as, as a...an actor, you know, I was like: "I want to train to be able to play anything" and so, even, even before, like, being me, I'm like "I want to be able to do all of *this* sort of stuff. And be able to do it well," but essentially, I couldn't even, *you* know, you have, like, you have to be made aware of yourself, if you're, well if you're actually coming to it blank, it's almost like someone has to make you aware of who you *are*? Because, actually, most of the time, you, we don't know.

KLS: What? Even before you play all those other things that you want to play?

C: Before you even start, I feel like you need to be made aware of, you know, you as a person, as in like.../

KLS: /So, if that didn't happen for you in your training, then, like, how were you *training*? Did you feel/

C: /Like.../

KLS: /like you were slightly training blind?

C: Yep, train.../

KLS: /Did you?

C: Well, like, like, like, like just do- going through the... movements and not actually ever... um... feeling like I ever hit anything, like, I never felt like I really sort of... got

there. Like, *got* to a place where I literally felt I understood this, it was more like, it, it was more like: "Okay, I've, I've, I've, I've done that". You know?" I've performed this part, but now we're going to move onto something else." (LAUGHS)

- D: It's just so nonsensical, now you think about it, because all, like, so many of these – these, you know, sort of real - *really meaty characters* that everyone likes sinking their teeth into - and I say this as someone, you know, who's male, White & British - aren't any of those things *anyway*. (BECOMES VERY EMPHATIC) You know: Hamlet's *Danish* and Macbeth is *Scottish* and Ibsen and Stanislavski- *they're Russian!* (CALMER) And – what on- And they've become part of our cannon and we sort of go (PHYSICAL, UNSPOKEN GESTURE)... So why is it - would it make *any* more sense for someone who's British to play (...) you know, *Nora* than someone who, someone who is Indian? (EXTREMELY EMPHATICALLY) I mean – it –*It's absurd! It's ABSOLUTELY absurd!* I don't understand- I don't understand it. Because those two cultures are – having said this, I'm working with someone who's Norwegian at the moment – they're so – there's enough – there's, there's just as much of a gulf between the British Culture and the Norwegian one as that of *ANYWHERE ELSE!* And yet, those things, because they've just sort of, over time, seeped in and seeped until: "Oh it's completely fine!" That, you know, I'll just say off the top of my head, Sheridan Smith is in... "Oh and of course, it makes complete sense". But no one would ever go: "Oh, let's have an Asian actress cast in that part," because suddenly *that* would be *weird?* (EMPHATICALLY) *What?* I don't - *It makes no sense!* I mean, *WHY does that make any sense?!* None! *Whatsoever! / I just don't understand...*
- C: /No, no -It doesn't make any sense. I mean, I saw the Russian version of Uncle Vanya and it was so *funny!* And it was so *big!* (GESTURES WITH HANDS) Like, *massive!* And, like... you know ... you just suddenly understood! Like, because that's how the Russian's are, you know, (inaudible) life and they do, and you know, they're *drunk* all the time and, and then, and then you get a British version of, like, that's *completely different/ so it's...*
- D: Yeah, really small, conversational...
- C: So it's...
- B: I have to say that we were encouraged to, like, when we did the Mystery Plays and we were all angels and I did say to Judith Bent: "Can I wear a Sari?" and she said: "Oh yes, *absolutely* – you can be – you can wear a sari, you can be an Indian angel". So we were encouraged - they encouraged us to like, wear our costumes but it was the only thing was West Yorkshire, um, Yorkshire accent and everything was sung in Yorkshire accents and none of my Indian-ness came into it, except for the clothes that I was wearing.

KLS: It's a similar experience to your/ - (participant A)'s experience. You're allowed to wear the costume.

A: /Yeah/

KLS: So has the - that experience you've had in your training – can you just talk a little bit about how it has or has not been mirrored in your, um, professional work? And perhaps give examples of where, perhaps, you have been able to explore your cultural identity in your professional work? First of all, talk about where the, where that experience of your training training's been mirrored – has it been mirrored in your professional experience?

(PAUSE)

B: Well, um, what I found, being two years at drama school, even more determined to do more Indian roles than ever before, because I felt like I was denied that at drama school and I really wish that I could have at least done a little scene from an Indian play, and not having any plays in the *whole school* that were for... I mean, they had one, I think they had two plays for black people and everything else was for white people and I'm thinking... And, and they always encouraged people from ethnic backgrounds to come to the drama school, they were very *proud* that they had such a diverse group of people, but when it came to actual, sort of, you know... it just, it just... there was nothing there really.

KLS: So that's driven you to try and *carve out* work for yourself as an Indian woman, as an Indian woman in the profession?

B: Yes, because that's what I feel what I am and that's what I'm going to be cast as initially until I get to be successful then I can maybe do different...you know, different roles. But initially, everything I'm going to get is gonna be as an Indian woman. Really, anyway, I think until I get to be a lot, very professional and very successful. So, and also like what, what ... (GESTURES TO PARTICIPANT C)

KLS: (Participant C)

B: (Participant C), was saying about, um, knowing who you are? That is so import- until you know who you are and what your identity is – identity is, you *cannot act*. Because I had to go through a process where I was seeing a-a vocal coach privately and she said to me: “That you have actually got to be who you are”, because being married to someone who's not Indian – who's a Greek Cypriot for, like, 34 years, I did find that I'd *completely* lost my identity. I was this Greek man's wife, um, my children don't speak my language, I sort of completely ignored my *whole* Indian-ness. And then suddenly she sat me down and she said “You have got to go back to what - your roots, you got to”, I just suddenly was like: (EXCLAIMS) “*Oh my god!* I've been so unhappy and I know why now!” and so I had to really discover *myself* and my

own identity to be able to act, as well. You've got to know who you are, what you want, what makes you tick, what makes you *happy*...everything.

C: Yeah, I mean I think it's extremely confusing as a... someone who... for anyone who grows up- who grows up in a different community. Um, especially if your home life is of a certain culture and then everything else is of a different culture. I think it's very hard, hard to know where you... *sit*, where you *are*. And in my professional work, actually, I think, in terms of *television* and screen work. It was very focussed on... well, it was never focussed on my being *Vietnamese*, (LAUGHS) it was more focussed on me being from East Asia, so I would play Japanese (LAUGHS), Korean, Chinese, I mean anything *but* myself – *Still!* Actu –you know maybe it might be, um, *that* is also difficult as well, I think, that you're not, you know... it's all, it's how you look, it's your skin colour that dictates what you play, um, and that was when, that was when I was first made aware of who I was mostly, because people were saying: "Well, you're... your, you, you know. That's how you look, you need to sound like *this*." So, um and up until then, I just, you know, in my head, I was exactly the same as everyone else. I think.

KLS: So your experience at drama school wasn't, wasn't *mirrored* when you came into the profession, but in the profession, in a way, you're being typecast as an Asian – East Asian person?

C: Yeah

KLS: No specifics around that?

C: No.

KLS: Um, but you're not, you're not being ca- you're not getting/...

C: /I would nev-/

KLS: /...the Ibsens, the Chekhovs, /

C: / I would n.../

KLS: /A... and your cultural context not being acknowledged? So it's very/

C: /Yeah. I would never ever be prob..... I would...very...yeah... *very rarely* seen for anything unless it was... (VERY QUICKLY) East Asian.

KLS: Mmmm.... Anything else to say, um, on that?

A: Um, I thought of... I just remembered something else from your first question (LAUGHS). But, um... well, I just... well, since I , since I graduated last year I've been quite lucky but what I, the roles that I have played have been Pakistani Asian women, and um, I... in Citizen Khan, I played a Pakistani Asian woman, I sent her

up. And, you know, I was channelling one of my aunties, but it was, she was a slight stereotype, but ... in that respect, am I mirroring? Is it mirroring, I don't know. I'm being type – I don't know if I'm being typecast, either, But I'm playing *that* role, um, and the other thing I've been doing is working with new writing and I worked with, um, [...] who was trying to talk about her experience as British Asian Woman and played a character who's trying to arrange her own marriage, but for me, that role was a little – and even in that story – it's a very old story, but it's one that people are still interested in, um, because it's a bit – it fits the stereotype, it's not new, um. But those are the roles I've been playing *so far*. Um...

KLS: So, can you also tell us a little about when you play from your cultural context, which it seems to me many of you didn't at drama school, um, can you, I mean, you have discussed it, you've touched on it, but we'll just do this slightly more drilled down a little bit, is, can you just talk a little bit about the, um, effect it has on your work and your process if you're playing from your/

C: /From your cultural context?

KLS: Yes. From your very specific cultural context. And, you know, that might have only happened, you know, you/

C: /Once! (LAUGHS A LOT)

KLS: Well exactly! So, it might have happened in very few experiences. It might have only happened when you were training?

C: Um (STILL LAUGHING)

KLS: With *me*, for example/

C: /Yeah!

KLS: (inaudible)

C: Yeah. I think it's only happened when, well, with you and possibly with Anna when we did the, um, with Anna when we did the um, scratch piece.

KLS: Yes.

C: Um... I found it extremely exciting, actually, working from... from my own cultural context. And actually, it opened a whole, new world to me, which I had not really looked at... because I was too busy trying to be in this... in this *other* place. Um... Yeah. It was, it was...

KLS: So what did it open up for you? Could you try and describe that?

(PAUSE)

C: I guess, what it was is that it made me become aware of what I had actually been ignoring for a long time, which is the effect... that the actual *physical*... of my own physicality, for instance, um, from my own background is so *ingrained* in me that I hadn't actually realised. So it's... it's... so everything that I had learned, like, from my parents and... what you've been brought up with is subconsciously *in* you. It's like, in your bodies, in the way you, you are, um, in certain, um, you know, certain...certain *situations* and certain *circumstances*. And so when you're using your own cultural context and put in a certain circumstance which you... inherently *know*, you just know from the... go, from the go-and you don't have to *act* it, you don't have to learn, you don't have to, you know, go and find a way of *getting* into this character, because it's in you, without realising that it is. And, and I think that's why I maybe sometimes struggle with a British text, or a British way of *being* because that's not me. I'm not English; I'm not an English person. So for me to play like a, you know, a middle-class, English girl, I'd have to... physically...*learn* all of that.

KLS: So if you are in an ensemble and you are not being asked or encouraged to play *from* and with your own cultural context, what does that... *how* does that make you feel in an ensemble? In a company?

C: Um...Gosh, it's quite hard to articulate, because the thing is, like...um, I think what... everyone always wants to get to the same place, which is a place of... a...a...a truth, of being able to play something honestly and truthfully. And so when you're in an ensemble, you ... I think eve...if you... you know that everyone wants to get there. Um, if the person in char...if the director or whoever is in charge of that ensemble is unable... is unable to see that there *are* differences in the ensemble or if they are unable to see that, you know, someone is *struggling* with um a certain, um, something that they're supposed to be doing, it's extremely hard to get to that place, it's ex – it's very hard to get to a place where you can...perform, um, without... feeling like you're not doing your job, you know, you're not... does that- does that explain it?

KLS: (*Sounds of agreement*)

C: Um, so, so, so in other words, like, no matter what it is, whether it's your cultural context or whatever, it has, it has to, there has to be a way to get there, there has to be a way to get someone out of... themselves.

KLS: Mmmm, ok, great.

D: It's... (SEARCHES FOR WORDS) It's about working, when, when we work within that cul...and using that cultural context.

KLS: Yes. First of all, just the question that you still haven't yet commented on is, is about, you know, the, the training environment, how perhaps it's mirrored or not mirrored in the professional environment,. And then, in a sense, observations that one is making

around when, when people are, um, assisted, um or encouraged to *use* their cultural context – what is the impact of that?

D: I mean, I think, well, what really struck me during that last question was, and again this, this is a *personal* thing, is that... um... so much of the root , I suppose, of the current training is this idea of *character*. And I think that for *any* cultural context, possibly *outside* of the... the sort of, the sort of, you know, the white, European men that created those training *formats*, that, it will, it al – always inhibit, not deny, but *inhibit* a cultural context and so... actors are being trained using these methods and using this terminology and using this dialogue which is inherently unhelpful. Because... what's really interesting is this, this sort of conversation, which is going... is going: "Well, well I work for *myself*" – and that's great – "and I play this character that's really... um and I..." And you're sort of there going... and there's this disconnect with... the actor is really, like, when they find like "ah, I'll be myself and..." and *that's* the actor, that's the *person*, then and "then I'm playing these characters" and then you're sort of there going... there, there's this *disconnect* because all the training is spun around... I mean somewhere where I was...um, working, they have a whole... *module* that I was... absolutely traumatised... and they call it *transformation* and they have to *literally*...transform themselves into *other people!*

C: (LAUGHS)

D: And I was just like: "why would you....why would you *do that*?" But, I...I... couldn't eve – they were going: "Oh well, you know, it's to play *characters*" and I was like: "Yeah...but you're... you're...why would they want *other people* cause they've... they got *you* in the drama school, why would they...?". I found it so weird-I honestly couldn't get my head round it after working with – this was last year – um...so, I think there's – I think there's *that*. That all the training and all the sort of methodology and all the pedagogy and all that sort of... behind the training is about... *that* and then at the same time, they're doing exactly *that* - they're saying: "Oh, we want all these people from different backgrounds coming in" and then they sort of go: "We don't know what to...*do* with... *that*." Because actually, we – none of our training, kind of, the teachers' training is *useful* to... to... do anything with *that*, I think. I dunno, that... that seems a lot of the time... In terms of *working* with it as...as a director (HESITANTLY)...it's...it's...I dunno... having...be-before... training with you on – on-on the actor director lab...I-I sort of mainly worked with young *people* and, um...they have, sort of, an - what is it – like an integral sense of who they *are* because there...hasn...they haven't had years of – and you know – no one is *trained*, you know, I – I – I picked up working in *youth theatre* just by *doing* it, like, you just got chucked in one day into a Saturday class and you just started doing it because you *had* to. Um, you play this game because, you... that's what you, know, da de da... Um and the young people have an *absolute* sense of... in a weird way, they have an absolute sense of who we are, even though, of course, probably at that time in our

lives, none of us probably think we do. But, I think drama schools have a sort of way of... *muddying* that. Sort of making it – making it harder, because everyone becomes *trained* and the training is *this*. And then when you *work* with an actor, using their cultural context, it- it's like: "Oh, why is...why is – why do people not *do* this? It's so much better."

KLS: So what do you mean when you work with an actor using their cultural context –"it's so much better?"

D: You... I think, what it is- or what you *see*, I suppose, is – what you *see* in the actor is a... a sense of... *c-clarity*? Of what they're doing? Or sense of – a sense of an essence of *them*, I suppose, in the performance. Which is... and therefore, that is more interesting to watch because they're not...they're not *playing* somebody else, they're just doing *them*. Dunno, themselves *better* - that's a horrible way of phrasing it! – um, but you know you see *them*, you see them and... all the best performers, you know, from whatever cultural context ; Those are the best performers when you see... we see *them* but just saying somebody's ... somebody's lines, we see *them* doing this, *them* doing this and, you know, as performers age, become more experienced and you.. and they really settle into...um, you know, themselves, or they get to a point in their career, where they don't have to, you know, they don't have to...um; they can pick and choose whatever scripts or whatever they work on. You can see that they're just doing a *version* of them... a version of – not a version of *themselves* but... they know themselves so well, they just waltz into and it's, it's *that*. And it's brilliant to *watch* when you see those things because it... you want to see what – I dunno – for *me* as a director, I'm interested in seeing...*now*, I say this after I've done the...my training, I'm interested in seeing what *that* actor does with whatever role that is because... *before* the training, I always had an idea of "What would *I* like this role to be? And can you *do* that for me, please? Um...bec/

KLS: /(inaudible)

D: /ause I-I-I *think* this character's like *that*?! Could you do that? Ohhhh, but you're Vietnamese! Could you just *not* be Vietnamese? Could you just do what I *think* it is, which is probably going to be someone from my context, which is White British and probably a male as well, even though the character's female" Whatever it is. And I've had to almost *stop thinking* and going: "Um, well, these are the *lines* – what would you do? Which is *real*- it's desperately hard, cause absolutely *everything* is geared towards..., you know, a director having a vision and then doing it, like ev-every form you fill in for.., every appli- I'm sorry for going on – but like every director's... thing that you fill in is like "What's your *vision* for this play?" and I don't (BECOMES EMPHATIC) ...I don't know! I haven't done it! I haven't got in a *room* with anyone! How would I possibly *know* what doing *that* show with *that* cast would be like versus doing *that* show with...or that text or that idea with *this* group of people would be like? They'll be *different pieces* because those people will bring... completely different elements of *themselves* and different...different humours and different

(NON-VERBAL NOISES) – all that sort of stuff. But everything is geared towards: “Write down what *you* think should happen and ner-de-der”. And everything is written like that and I, it’s cause you have to play the *game* and you *have* to write things like that, cause if you go: “I don’t know, I haven’t done it yet” you just get tossed to the bottom of the pile as the director, everyone goes: “Oh, shut up! What’s the *idea*? I want to see the idea first” Everyone wants to see the idea first, rather than doing this thing where, um: “Oh, What could *you* do? Cause, I don’t know, cause there’s this *role*, there’s this beautiful... I loves these lines and things but how would *you* do them? Oh, great! Just more of *that!* Do more of that! Do more of that! Oh, fantastic!” And that’s *brilliant* and that’s actually what a director *should* be doing rather than: “Oh, I have this idea, just do *that*”. It’s so boring. It’s just so *dull!* What - I don’t understand why people... *insist* still on doing it, but- /

B: / I have to say - sorry to interrupt, but I have to say that is very true cause a lot of the stuff we did at drama school, like the *scene* would be done, sort of thing, very second year , or something with different actors and the director would *always* insist on doing it *exactly* the way he did it two years ago and these are different *people*, they’re different *actors* who can’t do what you did *two years ago!* It a different per – it’s a different set of actors! It’s ridiculous! /

D: /That’s not training that’s/

B: /And if we didn’t do it that way, he used to get really *angry!* And you’re thinking: “Well, you know, that’s – that’s not how it should be done.”

D: No.

KLS: So, can you talk a little bit about, um, when, when, yeah – how does using your cultural heritage in your work affect, very specifically, this is a very specific question, affect your *vocal* delivery?

B: Oh my god yes! I definitely noticed that in, um, the Greek Tragedy Masterclass! I mean, normally I was always told, um: “The voice! The voice! Always support! Support!” And when I did the, um, Greek tragedy masterclass with (KLS) and she said to me: “Do it in your own... in your, um, Indian accent” everything just *fell* into place. I didn’t have to think about *anything* – it all just *came* out and it was just *wonderful!* The *breathing* and the *voice* and you just... I didn’t have to think technically about anything; it just *completely* fell into place. Just by, like, doing the piece in-i-in my own- well, in an Indian accent, which is how I used to speak before I learned to speak English when I was five and then when I came here I sort of tried to get rid of my Indian accent when I was ten and, um... which was a really *terrible* thing to do but... I did, just to fit in at school with everyone else, um, but yeah, but then speaking with an Indian accent was- just felt like *me* – that was *really* who I was – that was me. Really felt great, it really did.

C: I think it was... it was – you know when I said about, you know, all these voice classes and the breathing and *centring* yourself and *everything* – that, I'd, we'd, well, you do at drama school and you're *doing* it, but actually you don't understand *why* you're doing it and one of the reasons you're doing all this breathing, *breathing* and centring yourself is to try and get you to this place of *complete relaxation* and, um, being who you *are*, being... being *you*, right? Well, that's the idea, *I think* - this is my understanding of it. And so the-/

KLS: /Isn't it... isn't it... isn't it... isn't it maybe to get to a *neutral* place?

C: A *neutral* place?

KLS: Is it... Is it... Is it... Is it- Are they there, in your opinion, are they there to get to *you*, or are they there for you to get to *neutral*?

C: Okay, the, the-the most - the teachers, well, you know, not *all* teachers, but *most* teachers are... the idea is to get to *neutral* but I...the i/

KLS: Neutral?

C: Neutral. Which is... which is...you... I don't even know what that is – *middle* place – I don't know what that is. But in *my* head, what actually i... the...the exercises, a lot of the voice and breathing exercises, I think, are actually to get you to be...to bee...um... relaxed enough to be you...be *you*, so-so...so for instance, we did this cultural context exercise where I used my own accent, and you, you know; you're suddenly... *there!* And that's why I feel like it suddenly centre – it's like a...kind of, a...

KLS: Shortcut?

C: Shortcut! To- to get to this place, which you could spend like hours, breathing on the floor (LAUGHS)

KLS: (LAUGHS)

C: So...but you know, th- that's how I understood it, that it's al- almost, like, when sometimes... in a *scene*, when you're in a scene with someone and, actually, you're *completely* in the moment and it's completely, like – it's like a dance and it's like, you're... you're... you're *there!* That's the p... that's... that's... that's the *magic place*- that's the magic place that sometimes, you know, *being* yourself, being able to get, take a shortcut, you know to...to yourself, can get you there quicker.

A: Um, vocally... you find a quicker connection with the words: That's what I find. Um... and... *that's* what it is really, vocally, and *I think* you're not *working* on it vocally, as well. Because once you're... once you've accessed that part of you're and you're...you're using the accent and you've become... then everything else is very

*instinctive.* And you develop your text as well. That's what *I've* found. You find things... much quickly um, I think when, when you...

KLS: Sorry – yes, go on.

A: Um, going back to what *you* (INDICATES B) were saying, I had the same experience when *I* grew up. You – I grew up in Cambridge but both my parents spoke with Pakistani accents so I had a Pakistani accent. So I went to school and I couldn't pronounce my Vs and I was talking about "West" and "Wicky" and... and then I had because... then I..I had speech training and various things and I developed my RP accent as well. But when I'm emotional, or even when I was at drama school, they'd say: "(PARTICIPANT A), you do *sort of* slip into a Pakistani accent". So it comes naturally to me, so when I'm at my most relaxed, I probably have that intonation, or...or lilt, or whatever it is. Um, but I, um, going back to your question, I think...I think, I *even*... when I'm... when I'm working on a text and things and things are a bit difficult with... um, the, my co-actor, then sometimes, I just instinctively, we, we muck around and... do it in different ways like... (CHUCKLES) *Coronation Street* we'll do it like this, or, we'll do that and then... or we'll do it in a Pakistani accent and we'll do it. And somehow... when you're playing and you've...somehow discovered something and it...it almost refreshes what...what you're doing initially, so... it's something that... your technique, it's quite interesting for *me* because it's something that I did playfully *anyway*? Um... and there was something else I meant to mention with the first question you had on the training. Um... we have cabaret every Christmas at college and I developed a stand-up character in a burqa and with a Pakistani accent and everything and... then a few months later, we were doing the Greek play and I got the messenger character but I just didn't get the tutor character and I don't know how it w – what the problem was but I just wasn't connecting with the words, I couldn't find the character and blah, blah, blah and then suddenly... the director just went: "Oh for God's sake, just do it in that character you did for cabaret!" and then I *did* and it was really bizarre, but somehow (LAUGHS) the character came to life! But obviously, you can't do it in a Pakistani accent but it was a way of accessing, um, your cultural context was a way of accessing the character.

KLS: But then you didn't do it in your Pakistani accent?

A: No, but he just... he just... it was his way of, um... bringing it out and -/

KLS: And then when... when it went back to without the Pakistani accent, was it still working?

A: It was v... fresh, yeah. So... that was what was interesting for me and I wanted to mention it before, but I think vocally you connect quicker and you... your process- it is a shortcut and then you... even in the...other work that I... even with the other characters that I did with an accent, you find yourself... playing more with the

character, you... it frees you up! I think that's the way, it's the only way I can describe it.

KLS: I mean, I'm quite interested with this relationship that some of you've been touching on between the... your...the artist – *you* as an artist, your *fine* artistic response seems to be more fine, more fine-tuned, more *possible* when your cultural context is in play. I think that's... for me, that's very, very... you know, in a way, maybe that's my enquiry, that's *very, very* interesting – how – *where*, where does the artistic parallel, the artistic *response* reside? Um... does anyone want to talk about this word *neutral*? Does/

A: /Yes/

KLS: /anyone else have a response to that *neutrality*? Neutral?

A: Well, you were just talking about the vehicle exercises and the voice thing, again it is.., I mean you find you just don't know what you're doing/

C: /(LAUGHS)/

A: and you're... you're being forced to physically do things that... but the thing is, it's developing you and somehow it all clicked for me in one of my performances when... I did... I did a monologue, I – it was in the play – then we were given feedback and the voice teacher went: "You were *so* centered!" It something I felt – very instinctive, relaxed it was d – and now I know what the whole *thing* is, is to get you int... It's *basically* to get you into... the neutral thing is... to get you into a place where you... I think of the words!

C: I think it's the word "neutral" – is it, is it that, is that what they're trying to do/

B: /I think it's... I think it's.../

KLS: Was this word used, "neutral", in your training?

(ALL AT THE SAME TIME)

A: /It was more..../

B: /It was never said in my training/

C: /It was! It was!

E: (NODS)

KLS (TO PARTICIPANT E): It was used in your training, was it?

C: Well, we went to the same school.

KLS: Yeah, *you* can say something, it's fine!

E: Oh!

KLS: Yeah, yeah

E: It... it... What frustrated me most was... there was a perception of my – nobody asked – of my background, because of my accent and a perception of mmm- my heritage because of my accent and it was always presumed, when we started, that I was always: “Oh look, it’s Rita from Educating Rita” or it’s a really *trashy* person, who’s probably going to get pregnant before she’s left school, kind of thing and then I *did* get to play the charac- like, I got to play Nora. But what I found frustrating was I couldn’t use *my* voice (LAUGHS)/

KLS: /In Nora?/

E: / to be Nora in A Doll’s House, or I couldn’t use it in Shakespeare and one of the things they always said was “whenever you do... a high-class character you do this weird... *high-pitched* thing” and it’s like because I’m thinking so much about you want me to sound *refined*. I dunno what refined sounds like, because I’m *not* from a really working-class background. My *parents* are, but I’m not so I don’t have experience of that *actually* and I can relate more to Nora than I can to Rita, as it happens. But as...as... they were like: “Well, as soon as you open your mouth, you know, and sound like...*that*...” It’s like when I brought my Shakespeare to you and I was... and you said: “Do it in your *own accent*” and it was like: “Oh, ok! This makes a million times more sense, now!” And the idea of neutral, like, you’re not...I’m not (PARTICIPANT E), they don’t want (PARTICIPANT E), they want this empty...mannequin kind of... to walk into the room.

KLS: And when you say you *couldn’t* – they just, what? They just wouldn’t *let* you use your voice as Nora?

E: They, they just it was like...it “ She’s upper-class, she needs to have an upper...” but it’s like – she’s Norwegian, she’s from a hundred and fifty years ago (LAUGHS)

KLS: So did you, you tried to have that conversation?

E: I- I didn’t cause I didn’t have the conf- cause I just assumed that, you know, when you’re... you’re doing this, you obviously know more than me, and I’m, I’m not bad at RP but at the same time a d – It’s like: “Oh well, Manchester, you *must* be poor – I mean tell that to Hillary Devey! She’s got the strongest accent (LAUGHS) I’ve ever heard in my life and she one of the *richest* people in the c- most powerful people in the country and nobody would say to her: “Well, obviously you popped a few out and got a bit lucky” no-one would say that to her because they know her (LAUGHS) background.

KLS: Yeah

D: There's also this belief that an audience won't buy it, it's just rubbish/

E: /(COUGHS)/

D: /If someone walks on as... you know, Lear and speaks in an accent and says, you know: "I'm King Lear" and then does whatever they do... the – I think an audience who's intelligent will go: "Alright, fine". I think... I think ther... I think, I think there's an implicit lack of trust that people won't buy it. Obv...I, I personally, I don't know, maybe they won't. But I think also this word "neutral" I think is... is an *unhelpful* word; I think like "Centered" or "Grounded" or... might be better, cause neutral is... I'm not sure there is... there is *never* a neutral, cause it's always – my neutral will be different from your neutral, different from your neutral because there isn't a *neutral* voice... it's always...it's like, like, there's like a neutral body/

A: /Yeah, we.../

D: /because your body will- is always... like, there's always a, you know, a *thing* there, isn't it? There's always a tension or how it was - /

A: /Yes. Cause, for us, neutral was always in your... was...was in your alignment and that's how... that's when neutral was used. It was never used *vocally*. It was used physically.

C: But I...I guess that's the idea, the neut- the neutral the idea of neutral implies... it's... it enforces this idea that an actor should be able to do anything. So, you know the reason, the reason wh- that you get into a neutral point, so that you can go from this neutral point...*anywhere*, which is complete *bollocks*, but, um, that's what they... they... they're selling that t ... selling that to you as an actor, like, you know you, you "If you're neutral, then from here, you can then build on yourself" But essentially, a neutral point is... I don't know what it is... it's sort of...

KLS: So were you two in the same year?

C: Yeah.

E: Yeah. I mean the... the – what they want you to be is *open*, I think that would be a better phrase altogether/

C: /Yeah, I agree/

E: Just... you, you know, don't...don't bring your... I think probably what they're trying to say is: "Don't bring your mood from outside in here, just be open to whatever happens in the class" but "neutral" has this kind of thing being this... faceless thing...

A: Like a neutral mask!

E: Yeah!

C: I do question though.../

B: /We were always told...we were always told to centre, that if you're centred, you can do anything, you're really relaxed and then you can just perform. That's what we were always.../

A: /Yeah?

B: /told. Centred, that's the word that we always used.

A: That's when you can get the optimum performance. That's... that's what it was.

KLS: Ok, so there's "neutral" but there's also some sort of quite interesting, something, something sort or similar, but different happened to you two in the same year. So, whereas you weren't... your... Vietnamese heritage was never really-/

C: /yeah, and I was forced to, um, speak RP in *any* role (LAUGHS) I was play-/

KLS: *Your* own heritage was sort of, in a sense ... people felt they knew it *better* and they immediately-/

E: /Yeah/

KLS: /- you know the, the ethics of representation around that were... were sort of rammed home quite quickly, in, you know, this is how, this how... this is the representation of *your* voice.

E: Yes.

KLS: Yes. Mmm, so, that sort of nuance of... difference, um, seemed a long way, away.

C: Yeah, We were all sort of put in the same... made to kind of *do* the same thing: All Shakespeare was done in an RP accent, no matter where you were from.

E: Unless... unless you were a comedy bu... there was one thing I *do* remember, um, that, um one of our colleagues is... Irish, Northern Irish, and she... tried to do something in an RP accent and because she was playing the (LAUGHS) servant, they went: "No, use your *own* voice for that." And I... that upset me, I don't know why, but it rea- cause it upset her, I could see it upset her and they went: "No, we put you in the servant role so you could *be* Northern (LAUGHS) Irish! Because if you were, you see... if you were-/

A&C: (LAUGH)

E: /-Desdemona at this point you'd have – you *couldn't be Irish!*"

(LAUGHTER)

D: I'll bet they wouldn't say that ab- they wouldn't, they would *never* say, they – there's that difference, isn't it? They sort of feel they can say that because it's part of *our* history. They'd never say oh, um to a um to a black, British actor: "Oh, you can use your black accent now, cause you're a servant!"

C: (LAUGHS)

D: God, can you *imagine the outrage*?! But, but that is *sort of okay*, because you're, because, because we're all part of the European f – like, you know, you know, that sort of... or, or: "It's OK, it's alright, you can use your accent because you're Northern and therefore, therefore, you might be, you might be a serv..." Why? That...but that is, it *is* it's, it's an *appalling* form of, um, prejudice, which, which is, is, is completely prevalent. But in, it's also it imprisons the audience in hearing the same things over and over and over again and I think, I was... in that last sort of thing, I was being... I'm not sure who our current drama school... or what industry our current drama schools are training us for... because I think they're, sort of, training us for an industry that's sort of.. which was... is about fifty years ago, I'm not sure that, that – everything is sort of- you know, the last twenty years has sort gone a-a-a mile a minute in terms of the diaspora around the world and you know, the, the rise of television and the internet and all these different things and I'm not sure that *anyone's* caught up ...yet, at, at all and, you know, I think all... you know... any institution's that last thing to change and I think I think people are, are desperately struggling to go: "Well, well, how- how do I how do I *do this*?" because, you know, when the RSC, you know, does their, um...

C: Orphan of Zhao! (LAUGHS)

D: Ummm, you know, "How-How I'm I going to fit *that* into a...? (SIGHS) It's okay, we'll just put a couple of East Asians in the cast and that'll do it." You're sort of going (EXTREMELY ANIMATED): "*WHAT?! What? Wha-*" I just...it, but it, it, I think that it, it *entraps* the audience, it *traps* our audience in, like, a blinkered, sort of: "We will only ever see, you know, *these* sort of people doing *these* sort of roles". And that sort of thing, I think's just...it's – you wouldn't, you wouldn't.... they never would have said that to... yep to any black British or, um, you, you know... people who have, somewhere in their cultural history been a servant or a slave because people would have been in absolute outcry. But it's OK to say it to someone who's Irish. I find that... I can't! It's just *disgusting!* It's *Appalling!* *Appalling!* /

A: /When I was at school, many, many years ago and I wanted to do acting the careers teacher told me that: "Darling there's no *point* because there are *no* parts for short, Asian females!" And, um, so I desperately always tried to do *any* acting I could at schools. But, in the Greek plays, me and the Sri Lankan girls al- always ended up playing the servants which was a non-speaking role. And when the teacher *wrote* a

play for us all, um, she gave me the choice of playing either the, um, the bus driver or Mr *Umbungawalawala*.

(SHOCKED SILENCE)

A: (LAUGHS) So that's, that's why I didn't go straight to drama school after...

KLS: Great! Anything else? Anybody wants to – feel that they want to say that they haven't said? That's a really very, very good conversation, very, *very* interesting. Speaks very directly to what I'm looking at.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Transcript of interview with actor Martina Laird Conducted 3 February 2013**

#### **Principal Researcher (KLS)**

INT Actor Martina Laird.

#### **Key to document:**

Verbal emphasis on a word or phrase is in italics

A raised voice is indicated by block capitals

( ) indicates observed physical movement / change in tone

... indicates a short pause or an unfinished sentence

- Indicates a rapid, unexpected end to the sentence, midway through

/ indicates interjection or overlap

KLS: So basically, the first question is: How would you describe the curriculum taught to you in your training in terms of diversity and inclusion? And can you describe the components of the curriculum and say how you think it has affected you as a *person* and as a performer?

INT: Um, Obviously, you mean my, particularly, my acting training and not any other education?

KLS: Yeah

INT: Um, my acting training was very traditional based, in so far as, I went to Webber Douglas Dramatic Academy and um, it's... um that was I- I left in about 92. So round about 1990, 1991, I can't think when it was. 1990, I think. Um, going straight from university... um and I partly went because there was a shorter course offered I'd... I'd done four years at university and, you know... Um, so I went – that was my kind of... criteria, at the time and it had a good reputation etc, so, it was less about *what* was offered on the course, to be fair/

KLS: /Mmm/

INT: /Um, I – and what I found... in hindsight – I mean I got there, I was just ecstatic to *be* there, you know, I was- I wasn't critical of it at all, I mean/

KLS: /No, no and it was/

INT: /I was so happy to be there-/

KLS: /one year course?

INT: It was a two-year course.

KLS: okay so a two year... a two-year course.

INT: Which I think is a good amount of time.

KLS: Yes

INT: And... and I was just fascinated at the voice teacher and...and...and the *speech* lessons and that she could *tell* that someone was using whichever side of their *mouth* and... you know, all this kind of stuff. Um, so, I was in heaven. Um. In hindsight, I *feel* that we were not given much variety in approach to *acting*. Um, I feel that when I- what I mean by a traditional approach was that... somehow it kind of prepared you for a *rep* career. Um... which, certainly we know is dead now, and was pretty much dead in 1990. Um... So that kind of... of approach to the industry. I feel I was *lucky* that once I left I started to be exposed to different kinds acting, different kinds of theatre, different kinds of theatre practitioners and the *London* scene, um... and that there was so much variety. And so, yes, I don't feel that it was diverse in *any* way –

the training I was given, but subsequently m...my own *effort* to expose myself to different things that were going on, I feel, um, *supplied* me with what I needed to become-/

KLS: /And the one method that was taught: Was it a sort of Stanislavskian method of acting?/

INT: /Yes! (GIGGLES) I would hardly say it was even particularly that;/

KLS: /Right/

INT: / it *really* was technical. So, I think – you ask what is-was great is that, um, I feel *technically* confident, I can get up on any size arena, I won't feel at a loss, um, I suffered *terribly* from sh – I don't know if this is relevant – I suffered ter-terribly from short breath and in fact I...lost my voice during my audition – I was breathing so badly, I couldn't continue. I was so *nervous*, I couldn't continue to make a *sound*, um , and *that's* been cured. Um, etc. And so, it was people knew – who were *good* in their *fields* and know what they were doing, but it was *very* technical that...that way. Um... as much as I feel: "Well, my fascination is not necessarily that of a technical actor," I also appreciate that fact that I can do both.

KLS: And, um, in terms of, um, your training; were there any texts that you, um, explored from your own cultural heritage?

INT: No, not at all

KLS: And do you have any view about that: Would that have been useful, um... at the time did you have any thoughts around that or in hindsight did you have any thoughts around that?

INT: Um... at the *time* I didn't have any thoughts around that because, like I said, I wasn't particularly *aware* of what else was... possible in –in- in training. I thought that that was it. That this very traditional R.P., um, training was, was what one should expect. Um, they... *did*, um, they did encourage people not to *lose* their accents of wherever they came from but to lose them while you were at drama school kinds of thing, you know, they said: " You need to speak in RP in order for it to become part of you and for that kind of truthfulness to become spontaneous in, in a different accent and, and all this kind of stuff. But they did sort of go: " Oh, but – but your own sort of accent woul- will be of benefit to you" but we never... exploited those *at all*. Um...

KLS: So really, they said your own accent would be of benefit to you-/

INT: /Eventually/

KLS: /-in the profession?

INT: In the profession. Yeah.

KLS: Okay. But in a way they didn't...

INT: They didn't use that or cultivate it or that in any context within the training. Um... so...

KLS: So did you have any questions around that, or were you curious about...um, how will it be of benefit , do I need any tuition about this, or...

INT: Um... no. Um, I guess, I *know* I'm lucky 'cause I come i- I come, I come from Trinidad so I've grown up around a culture that is my own. Um... It's, I – I always feel that it would be a different experience being a *black* person born in Britain to then subject oneself to that kind of (CHUCKLES) *erasing*. Um...a-and –and then come out and go: "Ok, well *now* who am I? How do I explore that and how do I make that relevant?" But *I* never had any concerns around that because my cultural upbringing and my -and my continued cultural stimulation has always been to do with my own culture, so... I wasn't *worried*. *I was* worried about how I would fit in to a working industry in this country *being* Trinidadian and not being...of an... an actual *British* person.

KLS: Ok, so this is really interesting. So I'll talk about in the industry in a moment. So, whe- when you use that term "*erasing*"...

INT: Mmm-hmm

KLS: Can you talk a little bit more about that? You're talking about the e-erasure of *difference*...

INT: Ah-ha

KLS: In your – at drama school? Is that correct?

INT: Mmmm, mmmhmm. Absolutely. So, I, along with everybody else, would be working on...um... George Bernard Shaw texts, or... um, *Irish* texts, or... or, you know, whatever kind of standard *British* classic there was, you know like... *Hobson's Choice* or some something like that. Um... I think... my year was full of quite strong, *Northern* personalities amongst the students as well. And, actually, I think they suffered *worse* than I, um, when it came to criticism and um, and, being dealt with quite heavy handedly, um, about accent and things like that. Um... I remember a couple of the *guys* being reduced to tears, um... er, so, so even *that* difference is- is *planed* off to create a sort of... *unified* surface... um whoever you are.

KLS: And, um, -what in- in terms of this sort of um, you know, unified, unification, um, in way... sometimes, I call it *neutrality*...

INT: Mmmm

KLS: And the boy reduced to tears – um... what do you *think*? Why is the boy-why is the boy reduced to tears? Why is that *artist* ... reduced to tears? What, what's... what's being...what's sort of *happening*, what's been robbed or... Is he having so much difficulty...um... Yes! What level of difficulty did you *all* experience coming to this *neutral*, you know, what did you have to do to come to neutral?

INT: Yeah, I think... I think there *was* a level of difficulty for him. I think the *reactions* were... um quite, as I said, *heavy handed*, but I think there was also that sense of impossibility in *him* of... of – in those *two* guys of fitting *in* to... whatever image it was, was being fed to us that, that it wasn't going to happen and that... um and there's a tr- there's a *way* that some places have of breaking you down. I- I always *heard* of that and I could never *see* what the method was, cause you can't see it when you're in it. Um... I think part of the problem – I don't know if it's part of the problem of the *school* or being on a *two* year course – was that they often forgot to build you *back up*. Um... and so a lot of people who left that course, left feeling quite *insecure* and, um, and *without* the self-confidence that I have subsequently *witnessed* in certain graduates. I can *tell* from working with graduates what *school* they went to by how, how they () themselves, how they *feel* about themselves, how they put themselves across. Um... sometimes it *really* evident where they've been... Um... and- and I think that will have stood out as well with *our* school is that, there's - there... one remained – I it might be *humble*, but it's also *insecure*.

KLS: And tell me, in terms of then, you were sort of saying, going into the industry and managing yourself as someone from Trinidad um..., *or* as a black British actor where there had been some erasure at... college. Can you talk a bit about... *that* and your experience, your *own* experience and in other experiences you've seen?

INT: Yeah... um... (SEARCHING) I guess the... It's... it's really difficult to explain – the, the... Trinidadian-ness or *other-ness*, I think, um... *surmounts* even accent. Um... there... there is/

KLS: /Of course/

INT: /There is something *else* that people – like I, like I said I can tell where a graduate's been to school. There's something that people can *tell* about you that means you're not of... whatever environment, um... you, you, you er, find yourself in. Um... so what happened, I'm just trying to think, what happened when I gradua- I was very *lucky*, I got an agent straight off... before leaving... college and... And, yes, most of the parts tended to be somebody... *exotic*, the word *FEISTY* was *continually* in character descriptions. Um... um, which eventually kind of manifested itself into being loud and badly behaved was kind of what, feisty seems to have been, looking at the characters I sort of got. Um... (PAUSE) And, *generally* asked to... to um, to *bring* my Trinidadian-ness *with* me.

KLS: Mmmm

INT: Which is *interesting*... and *good*, except that the parts tended therefore to be quite the *same*. Um, and also, then, very limited.

KLS: And how did practitioners who were asking you to bring your *Trinidadian-ness* with you, how did they then work with that and with you?

INT: Um...

KLS: Or did they leave it just to you?

INT: No... it, it wasn't left *entirely* to me, obviously there was also – there was this, kind of: "Can you bring it but don't make it too strong. [LAUGHS] Um, so no-one c- otherwise no one will *understand* you, or, you know, whatever". Then there would be things that *I* would feel – eventually I would be like: "Oh god, I can't take another, kind of... *bolshy*, *one-dimensional* ... character". I mean, we're *actors* and we can play *whatever* but at the same time, I didn't feel myself located in those, in those characters. Um, I'm trying to think – like when I went to the RSC, um, I was cast as a *maid* and for that *reason*, it was okay to be Trinidadian. I was also cast in like *Troilus and Cressida* and that was required to be *RP*. Um, I think I did it, I don't know [LAUGHS] how... how it was. Um, but the *maid* again, was that sort of surly, cheeky ...you know... woman with a head wrap and a *desk* strapped to her back... and... and what have you. I think I was *two* maids while I was ... at the RSC.

KLS: And so, um, and when you were doing, um... your *RP*, um... in terms of the rehearsal room and the director working with you... um... your *RP*, now what, what did that *mean* in the rehearsal room? Were they asking you to be... um did they *work* with you as a Trinidadian actress at all or did they sort of say: "In this moment you're a sort of *RP, British* actor?"

INT: Yeah...

KLS: What- what- how... could you talk to me a little bit about that?

INT: Yeah, I think that would be the case. The *RP* characters would be part of a world that somehow... colour... it's hard to know what other people see, because, to me it would be a world where colour wasn't relevant, so you'd have one brother was this colour and that brother was another colour and that – in a sort of Shakespeare production like *Titus Andronicus*, look – sorry, *Troilus and Cressida*. Um, and to me, I don't have a problem with that colour *blind* casting ... that's how we do it... um you have a Chinese daughter played with an Indian mum, whatever, we don't... it's – it's about the *piece*. So that was not a problem for me. I *do* think, however, that the audiences were far more... um... *resistant* than I realised. So I've had a friend recently who was cast – a *black* friend of mine who does a lot of theatre work and she was cast as King Lear as um, one of the daughters and um, in the *interval* I was outside in the, in the foyer by myself, milling around and... I heard people going – *laughing*, like, really *guffawing* that... they're saying: "Well [PUTS ON DEEP, RP VOICE] you think he

would notice that he had a *black* daughter” and this is *last* year, this is 2012!

[LAUGHS] So, so that was quite a *shock* to me that that was the case and people kind of having to come up with the *reasons* why one of the daughters was black. And so it was, “Wow, you sat there for how *long* during this production, not focussing on the production but trying to figure out how many *wives* he had in order to have a black daughter” and it’s like, *odd*. So I think, I was perhaps living a bit more of an idyll at the time/

KLS: /Right/

INT: /than maybe audiences *were*. And you do get *on* as one of...

KLS: And in terms of the rehearsal room practice though/

INT: /Yep/

KLS: /in that sort of colour blind...Shakespeare production,

INT: Yeah

KLS: When, when the director is working with you, um... how – even though they’re asking you to do RP – how directly are they still though, responding to *you* as a person from a Trinidadian culture?

INT: Um...

KLS: Or, now that you’re in RP, is that part of you just/ ignored

INT: /You, you are *expected* to... to be *versed* in everything, um... *technique* wise, that everybody else is in the room, so you’re dealt with in *that* level . You’re expec... Like my Trinidadian-ness will *often* be referred to by whoever’s directing me; there will be little *quips* about it, or... things about my accent, sort of, um, one would say *fondly mimicked*, or whatever. Um... but, but no, I think they’re still *aware* outside of the actual *part* as me as a Trinidadian, but *within* a rehearsal context and a *directing* context, then... mmm. Yeah, one’s not asked to bring... one’s self... to that. So I *have* been turned down for a role that, for instance, that was *essentially* [PUTS ON DEEP VOICE] in *my* opinion, [IN OWN VOICE], written *for* me, um... because the director said “Well, she’s too strong and she’s too exotic”, um... and, um and um... things like that I, I think it *also* comes to a *class* thing in the this country, so... so as much as at drama school you might have been encouraged to never forget your own accent, those things might have been handy when you weren’t playing a certain class, to play a certain class, you have to be *RP*. Um, so for instance, I went up for a job, a TV job, to play in a *comedy* the mother of a mixed-race boy, who goes to somewhere like Oxford, one of the Oxbridge colleges and.. the - while I was doing it, I was just talking *perhaps* like I am now, which is neither very Trinidadian, nor very *British*. It’s kind of [GIGGLES], someone who’s been here for twenty-seven years! Um... and the

*director*, a young guy, stopped me and said: “Why are you putting on a *slight Jamaican accent*?” And I was like: “Well, I’m *not*, I’m *from Trinidad*”. And he was going [SLIGHTLY ANGRY VOICE]: “Oh well, could you *not* do it?” So I... tried to not do it, but it was... it kind of threw me um... and afterwards, unbeknownst to him, I knew someone *very well* who worked at the production, she let me know that the reason given for me *not* getting it... was because of my *slight Jamaican accent*: In his *opinion* if he had *me* playing the *mother*, it would not be believable that I has a *son* going to an Oxbridge college and people would *think* that he had *deliberately asked me* to put on that accent and that it would reflect on *him* and his choices. So *that* was the reason *specifically* that I didn’t get that part, was that someone who spoke like me couldn’t possibly have, just a matter of course, couldn’t have a child at Oxbridge. Um...

KLS: Interesting

INT: Yeah. And that also is quite recently. I feel what happened in that situation and what happened again *recently* was that I was that I was doing my *acting* things and had my *brain* my *mind* in family mode, so I was talking to a family member, so my accent immediately goes... *stronger*, Trinidadian. Then it becomes that... So if it becomes something too complex and too layered, where you want to bring your own *truth* and your own heart speak to it, then, um, you’re not allowed to *do* that in your own accent, without that... Without having connotations that they don’t want to take responsibility for.

KLS: And is that – does that not present you with quite a lot of... um, *difficulty*, negotiation... I mean, particularly in, let’s say, a Shakespeare; say if you’re playing something... um... you know, a-a *big* role and you need to bring this word that you use, *heartspeak* , which is a great, excellent way to express *that*, I know exactly what you mean. If you want to bring that and you are not being asked to, or given the opportunity to bring yourself, even though it’s in RP, which I believe is possible. What sort of difficulty does that present for you and what negotiations do... do you have to do *yourself* to sort of work that jigsaw out?

INT: It’s um, it’s a difficult one that I think has only... I’ve only been enlightened to quite recently, because of the production of Moon on a Rainbow Shawl that we did last year, um... and I had people looking at me and going: “Oh, you were so great in that role, it was obviously *you!*” And I thought: “Well no, no part of me is a middle-aged woman with a... baby on her breast and... another one struggling and a drunken husband and living in a tenement yard and, you know, it’s not me any more than any other character I’ve played is me, so interesting that *you* will allow that *this* is me and not any of the *other* things that I – I ‘ve attempted.” And I think to – to understand from the point – *that* point of view, um, what the *experience* was for me, is exactly what you’re talking about, was that it was the first time was able to bring *everything* without worry of, of – of would it... *fit*, would it *belong* to the world that was being represented? Um, and I was able to draw and honour all the women I’ve experienced

or the... sights that I've seen, growing up, or, you know, the stories I've heard. All the things that British actors are able to do in *all* of the roles that... that they attempt because it *will* fit, it *will* be seen to... to *reflect*... the world as, um... as, as desired so, that was, that was a *learning* experience to me of what that can feel like and yes, my task must be to do that in RP. Um, cause I'm an *actor*, I should be able to do that in *polish*... or whatever, you know, if – if that's what's required, um –

KLS: But, being in a way, if you're allowed-/

INT: /Absolutely/

KLS: /in RP to bring yourself. If you're asked to be in RP and not bring yourself,/

INT: /yeah

KLS: /then you can't, you can't do that... alone.

INT: And I think that's what's not been examined. Um, and to, to be fair to me, not to be too hard on *myself*-

KLS: No, it's not

INT: Um, so...

KLS: So, do you think it's possible?

INT: I would like to explore it, which is *kind of* one of my remits for this, um, company I'm trying to... put together. Not in a – not in a big, serious company way – but we call ourselves *Cascadura* and our first thing has been this Three Sisters: The *Trinidad* Sisters that I was telling you about. And, um part of what I express as I would like this to be a space to do... is.. to explore *exactly* that; whether one *can* bring a classical, *European*... training and dimension.. and *mix* that and *marry* it with *all* the things that are in us, that make us identifiably Trinidadian as a *company* of people. Um, cause I think that there's a fair exchange to explored there and, um, I've expressed that in my desires for, for this *group*. Um...

KLS: You mean a fair exchange, as opposed to a one-way exchange?

INT: Yeah! Exactly! I don't see it as one way at all, I see it... possibilities as bringing something to... *this* country as much as to Trinidad. Um, and *Cascadura*, being of course, the name, based on the [EXCLAIMS] *legendary* fish in Trinidad where they say if you eat curried cascadura, you will always return to Trinidad. So we are... a group of artists, *trained* in this... the techniques of *this* culture, but who come from a West Indian background and how do you bring that together? So, when we were doing Trinidad Sisters, we found that there was *so* much that was *British* about these characters. Of course, it's set in 1941, when Trinidad was still a *proud* colony, um,

but at the same time, it was *completely* different because one moves differently; one's *centre* is located differently.

KLS: Mmm- hmm

INT: One... *touches* differently, um...

KLS: And... what do you think is the potential impact, if *practice* developed to that point where our rehearsal rooms *allowed* people to be who they were, even if they were being asked to use, perhaps, a - a more neutral accent/

INT: /Mmm, hmm/

KLS: /and, therefore, this *erasure* of difference wasn't, sort of a quiet conversation in the room. What – what do you think is the potential *impact* of that... practice developing?

INT: I feel it's the only way forward for this country, if I can be *quite* so bold! Um, I think, when I look at Britain today... and I look at... Britain post-Olympic Ceremony and the *pride* that was *surrounding that experience*, [ALMOST A WHISPER] it was *amazing!* It was *magnificent!* Only possible, I think, in *Britain*. Um, and... unaware that previous to that, one often hears, *whispered*, an expression of *concern* about British identity being swallowed and lost. Um... and what *is* British identity? At the same time, as an actor, and I've been *teaching* acting, I look around at a lot of the acting that's... coming out of schools and things. And I describe it as *beige* acting. Um, it is that levelled off, *safe*, rather quite bland, contained- *potentially* it's not *always*. And when someone *breaks* that, it's so exciting and I think that exactly what you're talking about, in a context of theatre, is the way for Britain to be exploring a *new* rhythm and identity of what *is* British. Because whatever grows here, grows in the crucible of *Britain* – will *only* develop in Britain; *could* only develop in Britain. But taking all the ingredients together, if we *allow* Northern people to bring their *northern-ness*, whatever *that* is, you know, however that's expressed, other than the verbal. Um, same way with the *Trinidadian*: If you're not speaking in a Trinidadian accent, are you *still* Trinidadian? Of course you are. Um, but *how*? What *is* that, etc? If we bring that together, we *will* create a new *sensibility*, I think, that *is* British but that is still able to work on the one sound that is British.

KLS: Yeah, I agree with that. Do you think there are many people who... who... who... do you think there are many people who *think* like that? Who *can* do that? Who have a practice that can *work* with that... complexity?

INT: I think there are people who *can* do it. I'm not sure that they *are* doing it, I don't know. I *honestly* don't know if it's happening, or if anyone else has those particular concerns. I always thought with the RSC...um... they do... don't get me wrong, they... they *are* at the front for... diversity in their company members and, you know, and, and those kind of things what - that they stand for. I *still* feel it's - and maybe they are fixing this because they – or they are addressing this because they, I know,

have recently started a *longer* contract, although I'm not sure how much that suits actors really, um, but I always thought that there is an opportunity there to *develop* something new because they *do* have actors from all over Britain. I was there at the same time as some *amazing* Irish actors, um, or northern actors, um... and... it; as much as there was a - a great *learning* on the vocal technique with people like Cicely Berry, um, etc, that were, that were there, there wasn't a focus on *developing* an *acting* style; there wasn't a focus on the *acting*.

KLS: Mmm

INT: And it's still very possible to have people getting up in one production and *acting* in *many* [LAUGHS] different productions on the same stage. Um, and I always thought that that was a loss of an opportunity to *examine*...um... something. What, what would they come up with? I mean, not for me to say; these people are *experts* in their fields, you know, um, so it's not for me to say what they would come up with, um, but I would – but I felt the focus...could- could be *maverick* in, in that way – pioneer something new.

KLS: And the RSC with Cicely Berry and all that and a lot of the vocal training/

INT: /Mmm?

KLS: /is the, um... was the, um... was the training still pushing towards a... neutral sound, or a *one* sound?

INT: Yes, um... however; Cic Berry's work, what I *like* about it is, um, and quite *individually*, is very much about trying to find a physical *root* to your sound, so that your strength and amplification comes from, um, a-a-a *muscular* and much more... *fierce* kind of place, which is a way around that... that-that *plastering* over of things. It – it *allows* you to try and- to- to bring body and sound together in a different way. So I think there's that possibility there, but a *lot* of it is still about... and necessarily, *of course*, about vowels and, you know, *where* you locate your, your resonance and...

KLS: And so you're, sort of, you're being – you're sort of, you know, you're generous in giving the RSC the benefit of the doubt, I mean: How do you think; given the way you're talking about the RSC; how do you think that this, sort of *debacle* around the casting of The/

INT: /yeah/

KLS: /Orphan of Zhao came about?/

INT: /yeah/

KLS: How – how can that be possible?

INT: It should *not* be possible. It's – it's quite outrageous. I have no – I have no defence of *that*. I know that what was said was that because they work in a repertory *system* you can only have a certain number of *actors* that didn't, um, weren't *castable* in the rest of the rep, but that's nonsense; *why* aren't they castable? Um, why *wouldn't* they be castable? Why *couldn't* you have, that year, a higher Chinese, um, proportion of your rep because one of your main productions was *Orphan*?

KLS: Well, I think also, I think basically, you know, *behind closed doors*, they also say: "We can't cast a Chinese person: We don't think they're very good. We don't think that south-east Asian actors are any good". Now *why* do you think the RSC would *have* that view around that community of actors, because, you know, *I've* worked that community of actors and they are *phenomenally* good.

INT: Well, they come from a *long* and proud tradition-/

KLS: /So, they're going to be *phenomenally* good. Now *why*, *why* does the RSC have this in their minds? Why do they think they're not good?

INT: Um... If that *is* the case, if that is the *claim*, then it's... it's *shocking*, it's... it's outrageous, um... and I think it comes back to – to... perhaps being about not being good at representing *us*. Um... as opposed to not good at *acting*, um, and -and what one expects to see up there. It also should *not* be any... *this* is what I'm saying about the RSC *should* be a place where one is developing *acting* technique and *style*, not just delivering, um... *verse*, um.. which is important, *but* were that the case, *were* you to have in place, um, um a *methodology* and... um... and an *infrastructure* that – that *was* about theatre and theatrical acting, that sh- that wouldn't be an excuse, you'd just go: "There *should* be *no* experienced actor that you shouldn't be able to bring in and explore... um... and bring *out* of them something blossoming.

KLS: So, do you think there's a... what stops the practitioner at the RSC... exploring and making that communication *with* the south-east Asian actor? Or maybe with the actor which is less familiar to them than others? What – what, what is it that *stops* them doing that – because... it, you know, you and I are having this conversation and we're completely agreed: For you and me, that would be *completely* natural, it would be very *unnatural* not to do that.

INT: Mmm. Mmm-hmm.

KLS: But what... but I'm always amazed that the norm, the natural seems to be *not* to do that – what do you think it is that... *prevents* that?

(PAUSE)

KLS: In a way - that *two-way* exchange?

INT: The two-? Yeah. I think... [SIGHS] ... the... there - there *isn't* a two-way exchange. There... there is a weird myopia and I...I [SIGHS] and what comes across as *arrogance*... from ... British establishment. Um... I don't think that they've even reached a point, yet, where they are *truly, truthfully* dedicated to including their own *working class*, far less other to – to any further degree. And... I think... that this is to the detriment and danger of the *state* of theatre and acting here. Um... there... the *international* reception of British acting is that they *want* and *expect* what is served up to them, which is certain, what I call *beigeness*; a certain *safeness*, um... and that so far seems to be paying the... and so you get practitioners like Peter Brook who have to live abroad in order to do what *he* does, which is more inclusive and challenging, and um... I think... that even acting *style* there it – it is still quite *retrograde*: One can talk with acting students here about... um, acting *theorists* from *fifty years ago*, that they won't have heard of, you know, it's Sanford Meisner is a *new name* in this country, which is quite incredible, you know: Suddenly everyone's doing *Meisner*. Um, which, I'm not mocking; I think it's a great thing to do; but it's quite incredible how *resistant* we are to the idea that we have anything to learn from anybody else in this country. Um... the resulting effect on someone *working* within that industry is quite *lonely* then, that one continues to be seen as a bit of an oddity, or... or, you know, sucking on your insides to try and fit into the... into the hole, you know? Um... so... but like I'm saying, I think it affects so *much* of this *nation* and the nation's view of *itself*, that is has a 1 – it has to start waaay back: Grassroots level um... which is funny because the - this country *has* a tradition of working class theatre, art etc in the sixties and seventies –/

KLS: /Mmmm/

INT: /fifties, sixties, seventies, which/

KLS: /We've/

INT: /has disappeared!/

KLS: /lost that.

KLS: Yeah, when you talk about; just to finish; when you talk about the nation's view of *itself*, yeah, what sort of, what *harm* do you think is being done, in terms of... um, you know, in-in the *theatrical*, on a theatrical platform? If we're looking at *stuff*, which... perhaps isn't... retro – doesn't seem – *is* retro, is not seeming to *include* people's heartspeak, you know, across the range. What... what – what-what-what impact is that having?

INT: Well, I think it's having a *terrible* and *dangerous* impact, I think that the visions are becoming more and more *entrenched* but entrenched now... entrenched (PAUSE) according to a sensibility of some sort of [LAUGHS] *feudal* kind of system, To not be too melodramatic about it, but in a world that is *not* feudal and, therefore, will be met

with *anger* and – and resistance – *hopefully*. Um... but, for instance, um, the – doing the Trinidad Sisters... um... I was lucky to... have to include a couple of *young* British actors; black, British actors; who are just... *lovely*, young men – *intelligent*, *open*, *sensitive* and who generally plays, you know, “man on the road”, “Gangster on the road” or whatever “number five” and... and I could *see* in them, growing already, that sense of isolation and... and... and [WITH DEAD CERTAINTY] *loss*. Um... I think what another danger *related* to that, is that what happens is that you get whole sections of *our* society that... are not *encouraged*, or *facilitated* or *given* the vocabulary or... *platform* to examine *life*. To truly appreciate *their* living as something worth reflection, worth dissection, worth *celebration*, um... and *that* is to *rob* the majority of people of their humanity. And when you rob people of their humanity, then you get *inhumane* behaviour. Um... and I hope it... I hope it's not seen as melodramatic to say that this *movement* in theatre can lead to that, but I do believe... it's not *just* theatre, it's art, it's *everything* that's suffering the same, um... the same phi – philosophical um... j- what do you call it? Sort of going backwards? Um...

KLS: Regressing

INT: Regressiveness, yeah. So, *that* I see as dangerous and you are – one is in danger of sm – missing *several* generations, um... which is *also* scary. It's not like: “Oh, well, once we can get this addressed it'll be *fine*.” [LAUGHS] No it won't! *That* won't be fine, cause you'll have missed several generations' understanding of *themselves*.

(PAUSE)

INT: On a... on a m- on a scale of *magnificence*, you know, um... and they *are*, they are magnificent and i – and because we're saying here that it's not *even* just about *accent*; it's about even when you bring who you *are*, there's... you're still perceivable as *different*, you still... there'll be something different in your *gesture*, in your *gaze* in your... whatever! Um... then the message is continually driven *home* that your very *essence* is not acceptable... um... you know. And that's... what a *harmful* message to deliver to a young generation.

KLS: And, can I ask you: Where are you *teaching* acting?

INT: I'm teaching at the Weekend Arts College; I'm teaching on their diploma course/

KLS: /Oh, Ok/

INT: /and their young people and I'm reaching at Arts Ed at the moment and Arts Ed... [YAWNS] It was Arts Ed that asked me – they were *wonderful* – they said to me: “Come up with a ten-week course; anything you want; and it's called *Acting Choices*.” That's all they were going to tell me; that's the name of it. How do you teach people to make acting choices? And so I *throw* a lot of stuff at them; at the students; and say: “Look, I want you to try *all* of it and I want you to, at the end of the

day, go ‘Well, these are the bits that make me feel like I’m doing the acting *I* want to do and so become my *own* actor at the end of it all.’” But it’s *interesting* that there’s always the *same* class: I’ve done it – this is my second year of doing it now, so it’s *four* groups I’ve done it with but it’s always that same class that... um – the point in the course- the same *point* in the course – that’s what I mean – that... um.. meets with...with *resistance* and quite *emotional* resistance and *that’s* the bit where I ask them to bring themselves.

KLS: And what-/

INT: I’ve had people *walk* out the class. I’ve had people *sit* in the class and *refuse* to do it-/

KLS: /To bring them-/

INT: /To just be themselves *in* the context of the scene that we’re doing. To respond, *as* themselves to someone they *know*. As if talking to a *selected* person in their life that they know.

KLS: And do you think that’s because they, their – that the other training around that is just- /

INT: /It’s just... it’s just about *acting a-*/

KLS: /Character?

INT: Yeah, some *character*.

KLS: That’s *great*

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Written responses to Intracultural Masterclass Series Completed in 2014.**

Two separate responses are included here:

- Actor 1, pp. 166 – 168.
- Actor 2, pp. 169 – 172.

**How would you describe the curriculum taught to you in your training in terms of diversity and inclusion? Can you describe the components of the curriculum and say how you think it has affected you as a person and as a performer?**

Minimal. We were majority female with very few men. I remember a voice class in which a Vietnamese actress was told she had to learn RP, it seemed we all *had* to learn RP and this was quite limiting. We didn't experiment and play about in other accents and voices which would have freed us up. I found this made me more closed and self conscious as a performer. It is only five years after leaving drama school that I am free to experiment and play around with accents and languages and see the benefit.

**Where do you think the exploration of texts from your own cultural heritage might have found a place in your training? Would it have been useful to explore texts from your cultural heritage and others?**

Simply being told: go and find a monologue from a Jewish girl and work on it. Perhaps I should have done that myself and been more proactive but I wasn't aware that this would have an affect on me – drawing on my heritage. I would have loved to work in my Aberdeenshire accent which I only did after training. Playing with texts from other cultural heritages would have been wonderful but this goes hand in hand with being led to being an open actor. As I was terribly closed at drama school then I expect I wouldn't have been very good when exploring other texts!

**Can you talk about how your professional experiences have or have not mirrored your training experiences? In your professional work, can you give some examples of when you have been given the space to explore your cultural identity?**

I have been workshopped in a Scottish accent before but this wasn't really to draw on my cultural identity but to try another accent that I had. I have often worked in French professionally and had to explore that cultural identity but this has been with a more European theatre company and the relationship between the body and music has been explored as well – a very open space to work. More recently I have worked in Spanish but this has been through clowning which I wouldn't have done if I hadn't started to get to know Kristine's method.

**How would you describe the environment of the majority of training and rehearsal rooms that you have worked in?**

The training post drama school has been confident and honest – concentrating on skill and honing it. The rehearsals rooms have varied greatly – often down to how much confidence the director has and how open he or she is. It is only recently that I am really choosing the right directors to work with and can totally see who I want to work with.

**Have you ever explored your cultural identity/heritage in your work as a performer?**

Yes, as mentioned above, when working in Avignon, France.

**More specifically if you have a first or second language which is not English, have you ever used it in your work as a performer?**

Yes, French in France and UK. Spanish only recently as a result of Kristine's method.

**If you have answered yes to the two questions above can you describe in detail the effect this exploration has had on your work as a performer?**

Spanish: find a real sense of daring comedy, go much further with characters and with the audience. Feel can really tease and play with them when in Spanish.

French: am very open but again very different in French. Feel grounded in French and gives me ability to draw on emotional well with speed. When working in French work feels more precise, passionate, vocal range is lessened, distracts from worrying about physicality which is positive. Gives me a quality of confidence.

**How does using your cultural heritage in your work make you feel as a member of a group?**

Slightly alienating at first. Last two weeks have been working in French with other actors asking why I could speak French and was I French etc. Too many questions about it then after a while they started to comment that they loved that part of the play and there was affection for listening to the monologue as they said that although they didn't understand it all, it was comforting! I therefore felt less 'different' and didn't care at all about going into French.

**How does using your cultural heritage in your work affect your vocal delivery ?**

See above.

**Many practitioners, teachers and directors talk about the “neutral” body, the “neutral” starting point. What is your response to starting as “neutral” ... if you have experienced this approach in a rehearsal or training situation what affect has it had on you ?**

I didn't get it until I did a workshop with Kristine. I now understand it as 'open' but...I did two workshops with Kristine before understanding what that meant and how to get there.

Breathing out, relaxing almost, not trying to hard and playing properly.

**On reflection of the work you did in the Tamasha masterclass do you see much difference in your performance when your cultural context is engaged and when it is not engaged?**

I think so, yes but I'd like to watch the video to really analyse it. I feel less self-conscious and all my focus seems to be on the other person so I am able to listen and respond without inhibitions.

**How would you describe the curriculum taught to you in your training in terms of diversity and inclusion. Can you describe the components of the curriculum and say how you think it has affected you as a person and as a performer?**

My acting training at drama school was extremely traditional. It involved classes in voice, movement, and acting amongst other things that were designed to prepare us for the industry. The voice classes in particular were focused on training in ‘Received Pronunciation’ and eliminating any sounds that were counter-productive to this goal. The limited number of acting classes, mostly focused on the technique of actioning the script rather than any physical exploration.

The year was divided into blocks: each block working towards a performance of a specific theatrical era. Contemporary, 1920s comedy (bizarrely Noel Coward or farce), Ibsen and Chekhov, Restoration comedy, Shakespeare comedy and Shakespeare tragedy. Nearly all of the above required you to use RP. In amongst this, we also had training in period etiquette and dancing.

As a British Vietnamese student, very new to acting, this curriculum was not helpful to me. I did not, at the time, have the experience or the knowledge to realize that my particular needs were not being taken into account. I was brought up in a Vietnamese household, and so my speech and my understanding of the rhythms and tone of RP were far behind many of my fellow classmates. I also had very little acting experience, and had come to drama school to learn how to act.

Unfortunately, the training seemed to view acting as an innate ability to speak and connect to the very English text, and so it just pushed you through the various blocks without ever addressing the real problems that lie underneath. There were some of us who did not have this for nothing.

There was no mention of my ethnicity/background during my training, apart from the fact that it got in the way of my speech. All the performances seemed to be set in England, and all the students were made to fit this vision. There was no training in the use of your own voice or cultural background. The result of this is a feeling of inadequacy and frustration. By the end of the year, I felt less able to act than at the beginning of it.

In a way, you could view the training, as blind to differences in not just colour, but background and regional accents too. If our own voices were used, this made up a tiny amount of the year and it was seen as something that did not need practice. It was only at drama school that I was ever going to be able to play the roles that were given to me during my training. If I had known how to play them well, I would have enjoyed doing so. But the school was not set up to be able to help me do this and so my acting suffered.

**Where do you think the exploration of texts from your own cultural heritage might have found a place in your training? Would it have been useful to explore texts from your cultural heritage and others?**

I think it's extremely important in drama training that there is a process of finding out how to be yourself in order for you to then build on this solid foundation. Exploration of texts from your own cultural heritage and others would have gone a great deal to help, not just the understanding of your own background, but also to the understanding of your fellow classmates. Reading and connecting to text is a more organic experience if the text speaks to you, and having text that is closer to you to begin with can help open the doors to connect to more complex language. There can also be a confidence that comes from being good in a text, and that is much more likely if it is tailored to you. For this reason, I think it should be introduced early on in the training so that it builds real confidence in each individual student, which they can then carry through to the rest of their training. There is definitely a place for this during the time at drama school. We live in a very global society, with many drama schools taking in students from varying backgrounds. This should be reflected in the curriculum.

**Can you talk about how your professional experiences have or have not mirrored your training experiences. In your professional work, can you give some examples of when you have been given the space to explore your cultural identity?**

The professional world is unforgiving. I was not ready as an actor after my drama training to take on what was out there. As I had ignored my cultural context in drama school, I continued to try and ignore it in the professional world. This of course did not work. From my appearance, I found that I was being asked to play roles with East Asian accents that were not my own. I had also never done this and so had to learn very quickly. And as for Shakespeare, I could not compete with the 'true' Shakespearean voice. In rehearsal rooms, when I was able to make it into one, it was also always RP. RP is like the wash that goes over everything and I found that it stops spontaneity and truthfulness if like me, you had still not discovered what your true voice was first. The subject of my own individual cultural identity has very rarely been approached or discussed in the professional sphere.

**How would you describe the environment of the majority of training and rehearsal rooms that you have worked in?**

I have found rehearsal rooms and the majority of training similar in their approach unless the director or teacher has their own personal way into a text, which they share with the participants. I have been lucky since I left drama school as I have sought out places that have helped me connect to who I am as an individual in order to become a better actor. But the majority of places ignore any differences in cultural backgrounds in terms of the acting. I feel that it is something that scares most people, as they have no knowledge of how to approach it and it's better and safer to believe that it's 'PC' to treat everyone the same.

**Have you ever explored your cultural identity/heritage in your work as a performer?**

Yes I have. I was lucky to be introduced to Tamasha theatre company and Kristine who first made me aware of the power exploring my cultural heritage could bring to my performances. It also led me to work more creatively in other areas, and also woke me up to the lack of work out there created with this in mind. Opening the door to this world has also worked its way into how I work in all texts. It helped me bridge the gap between me, and the text, without there being any ‘acting’ or falsity involved. I have also produced and performed my own work, where I drew heavily from my cultural background.

**More specifically if you have a first or second language which is not English, have you ever used it in your work as a performer**

Yes I have. I have used it in a devised work with a fellow Vietnamese Artist as well as my own written performance. I found it extremely powerful, not just for me personally, but for the audience. I have also performed to a Vietnamese audience, and they responded so positively it reminded me of how much the industry ignores minority groups. You connect so much to stories that resonate truthfully with you, and so much that is on TV and stage is foreign to a lot of people.

**If you have answered yes to the two questions above can you describe in detail the effect this exploration has had on your work as a performer.**

I feel that I have already done this as I’ve gone along, but I will reiterate that I have found it indispensable. It had helped me as a performer on many levels. It somehow grounds me, and creates a new resonance, and levels in my voice. It has also opened up to me the beauty and depth of my own cultural background that I spent my life, growing up in Britain ignoring. I have found a new avenue to creative work that stems from me. I think that this exploration has helped me find a place in the diversity spectrum, and a place that I am proud of.

**How does using your cultural heritage in your work make you feel as a member of a group?**

I think it brings openness in the group as it reveals more of your self to the group. There is a curiosity that is inherent, or at least should be inherent in actors. Everyone is different, and everyone has a story. I think exploring this in a group setting can only be a good thing. This brings everyone together, and creates a better space for open and honest work.

**How does using your cultural heritage in your work affect your vocal delivery?**

It does seem to open a door to a different register in my voice. The use of a different language means that it has a slightly different tone to it. It can sometimes be fuller and rounder than

when I speak in English. Work in this area has helped me bridge a gap in my vocal delivery. I have put it in my toolbox of techniques I use to create my performances.

**Many practitioners, teachers and directors talk about the “neutral” body, the “neutral” starting point. What is your response to starting as “neutral” ... if you have experienced this approach in a rehearsal or training situation what affect has it had on you?**

I really don't think there is such a thing as neutral. There is a state of readiness to work, and a focus that is, and should be demanded in a rehearsal room, but I don't believe that we can start from a blank space, if we are ever just blank. I have been in rehearsal rooms where the director has demanded ludicrous actions from the actor, where they have to go from neutral to an extreme emotion then back to neutral several times in the space of less than 5 minutes without much reason apart from putting the actor through hell. It shows me that the director has not a clue about acting and how to direct actors to get a truthful performance. You are never neutral in life, so how can one be neutral on stage is a mystery to me.

**On reflection of the work you did in the Tamasha masterclass do you see much difference in your performance when your cultural context is engaged and when it is not engaged?**

I have seen a huge difference in my performance when my cultural context was engaged. It came as quite a surprise to me. As I considered myself British, I did not feel comfortable at first with speaking in an accent, or speaking in my native language but it took me somewhere unexpected. I found a deeper, more connected version of myself that I cannot really explain. Carl Jung put forward a theory called race memory, which I found interesting reading after my experience of engaging my cultural context for the first time. I think that it has helped me find another way in to creating truthful performances. It has opened me up and made me a more confident performer. I now only use it when I am stuck, or it is needed for a particular piece, but it is now always an option. The Tamasha masterclass really did, without being too dramatic about it, changed me as a performer for the better, and I am truly grateful to have taken part in it.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Transcript of Focus Group: Intracultural Masterclass Series Conducted 4 March 2014**

#### **Principal Researcher (KLS)**

GB: Gloria Bose, second year student and masterclass participant  
SC: Shakira Clanton, second year student and masterclass participant  
TL: Thuso Lekapwe, third year student and masterclass participant  
JR: James Raggatt, second year student and masterclass participant  
CW: Charles Wu, third year student and masterclass participant

MF-N: Metasebia Fenwick-Nevin, second year student absent from focus group

OB: Oliver Burton, second year student and research assistant to KLS

#### **Key to document:**

Verbal emphasis on a word or phrase is in italics  
A raised voice is indicated by block capitals  
( ) indicates observed physical movement / change in tone  
... indicates a short pause or an unfinished sentence  
- Indicates a rapid, unexpected end to the sentence, midway through  
/ indicates interjection or overlap

KLS: OK, so. This focus group conversation, and referring to the DVD [filmed recording of the intra-cultural masterclass conducted by KLS in September 2013] is part of my PHD in intra-cultural actor training. I'll get Meti [MF-N] to fill this questionnaire out, which is fine, cause some of the UK people are just filling out the questionnaire. We were going to do it over Skype, but I thought it was just going to be too tricky so we decided not to do that.

So it's a very informal conversation, but I will prompt you with some questions. And you know, just answer openly and honestly. I mean if there's any question you don't have to answer, it's nothing intimidating but you know, it will be quite an interesting conversation and the more we run it as a conversation the better. OK, everyone understands?

*[General assent]*

Wonderful—

OB: Do you want me to contribute, not having been an original participant, or do you want me to keep shtoom?

KLS: Um... uh, that's a good question, Oli. You could make a contribution—

OB: I've watched it *[the recording of the masterclass]* obviously—

KLS: Yeah, you could make a contribution. I don't think there's anything wrong with that, you're part of the focus group. Yeah, OK, cool.

So, first question I want to ask you, and these are not all related necessarily, well they probably are related to your training. I mean I have run these focus groups before with industry asking them how their professional experience mirrors their training in terms of diversity and things like that. Anyway, this is obviously apropos mostly of training. So in the first instance, I'd just like all of you to think about this: how would you describe the curriculum taught to you in your training in terms of diversity and inclusion? And, just to sort of tease that out a bit, it might help you to think about describing components of the curriculum and saying how they speak to any sort of diversity and inclusion questions, and how those components that you've had in there (or maybe the components that you haven't had in there) have affected you as a student, as a performer?

CW: I think this place *[NIDA]* is quite colour blind, but not in a bad way. They probably don't make mention of our ethnicity or our individual cultural backgrounds. Not that they're ignoring it, but they, I think it just doesn't register as a consideration to them, in the sense that it's not something they have to cater to, or make arrangements for or make concessions for. It's just you know, it's your hair colour, it's how tall you are, what your weight is...

TL: Yeah. They'd claim that they treat us all equally, if that makes sense.

KLS: So when you say there's no reference to, let's say if we're talking about cultural identity, we're talking about cultural, racial and sort of societal determinants as well. It's quite a big term, it's not only ethnicity. So when you're saying "that's not referred to here," and you said, "but not in a bad way," can you just tease that out a bit?

CW: I suppose, when you're thinking as an actor, when you're given like a scene from *Streetcar Named Desire* and you're playing Stanley, that Stanley doesn't necessarily have to be Black or White or Asian, it's just the character you've been given. And your work as an actor will be judged by what you bring on the day and not what you would realistically do.

JR: As opposed to...

CW: As opposed to—

JR: —the industry, where that would be—

CW: Yeah, yeah that's it.

KLS: But in terms of your sort of saying, you know, we wouldn't sort of say Stanley was Black, Asian or whatever, but in terms of referring *to* your cultural identity or *using* your cultural identity within the rehearsal process as you've experienced- has that happened in your training?

CW: Obviously it's only happened with you, Kristine.

GB: Yeah.

CW: But in saying that—

JR: Are you talking about this in terms of working with you or independently of you?

KLS: Both, so you're talking both.

TL: In saying that, in first year if you recall when we did Chekhov, Reece came in and he asked me to do an exercise where I had to translate one of...

CW: What character were you playing?

TL: Damn, forgot his name...

CW: *Cherry Orchard*, was it *Cherry Orchard* that we did?

TL: Yes... Anyway... so the exercise was to translate—

CW: *Seagull*, it was *The Seagull*.

TL: Yeah, *The Seagull*!

KLS: Konstantin you were playing, were you? Or Medvedenko? Trigorin?

CW: No, it wasn't that.

TL: Konstantin, yeah Konstantin. And I had to translate one of his speeches into one of my first languages right, and see how that worked. And then that was included in the showing. And that did help, you know. I dunno, there was much more— but I felt as if I was really

doing something else there. It was a different experience in a way and whether I could bring that. ‘Cause, you play from a neutral perspective, like if you come and you change a language, you’re already playing a different field. For me, personally, I find that I’m accessing who I was as a kid, right, and where I grew up and my own interpretation. And I’m taking what the play, what we’re trying to, the world we’ve created in the classroom and putting it in the context of where I grew up, with that language. So I felt it was foreign, but it worked for me, so I felt as if like, everyone else is playing *that* and I’m playing *this*. I’m sitting in the role, it felt alright, but it wasn’t serving anyone I don’t think.

CW: That’s also one particular thing that an outside tutor brought in to do.

TL: Yeah.

CW: It’s not something, I guess apart from you [*Kristine*], no one here on the permanent staff has that outlook.

KLS: So, can I just ask you then, in the curriculum where you have worked with me and we have used your cultural identity in the creation of something, which is you as a whole person, how has that impacted on you as a performer? Has it impacted differently?

SC: I would say that, for me personally, when I first got into NIDA I had this whole, “I’m not going to be...”, I had the wall up where I’m not going to be seen as... I’m not going to be seen because of my skin colour or just because I’m Indigenous Australian. ‘Because I’ve had a, you finally, you kinda put a block up- you don’t want to be boxed or judged. And then having the experience with you [KLS], and breaking down those barriers is also... It is a part of me and who I am, as a person and as an artist and I can draw stuff from my cultural experience and use it in my work. So that has helped me, in that regard.

KLS: And can you just talk a little bit about how it’s helped you, how it’s made you feel or...

SC: Not being ashamed. Not being ashamed to say, “Yeah, I’m an Indigenous Australian. Yeah I’m Native American, I’m African American.” Not like I was before. But being able to freely express ideas into other works and say “Aw, can we- traditional ways if we did this or in my culture this is what it’s interpreted as,” expressing those ideas in other works, such as movement, or voice, you know, the way we, if we’re mourning or stuff like that.

KLS: And how does that make you feel as a performer?

SC: Oo [*laughs*]. Um, it’s a two way street to be honest, ‘cause outside in the industry, I don’t want to be just playing those typical ‘black fella’, ‘poor Indigenous girl’ roles, ‘cause I know I’m more than that.

TL: There’s not that many of those characters.

CW: Yeah.

SC: But that’s the sad thing, there’s not that many roles for Indigenous artists. So I need to create my own works. That’s what it’s taught me, that I need to create more works for my generation and the generation to come. Which is good, it’s boosted my confidence, in that regard.

GB: It's. For me, it's a tool that I thought would never get used at NIDA. So when you came along and asked me to use my Fijian and Samoan culture, that was confronting and liberating at the same time. It was something that I could also use in a contemporary Australian industry. It doesn't mean that I have to save my Samoan/Fijian culture for just for Fijian or Samoan audiences or for Polynesian audiences, it can be used in front of an Australian audience.

SC: We can also create our own... I'm going to be changing, once I get out of this... Once I get out of NIDA, my challenge to myself and to my mob is to change the Australian perception of Australian Indigenous people.

GB: But it can also be applied to *Oedipus*—

SC: Yeah, 'The Greeks'—

GB: Yeah, that's what we did [*with KLS in Term 2 of 1<sup>st</sup> year*] and it can be applied to what you do with us...

KLS: [*to JR*] Do you want to say anything?

JR: Yeah, I do. The thing, for me, being introduced to this work was a realisation that it's not... I didn't see it as a tool. I mean it is a useful tool, the way we were working but it was more that it is actually an essential part of me as a person and therefore as an actor. So, being a white Australian from North Queensland, coming down to NIDA where there are very different social viewpoints, different accents. And being someone who aspires to be a type of actor who works in the industries down here and in England, I find myself getting trapped in a very idealised image of how I need to behave and speak and be if I want to be that kind of actor. And, it was a good, a really big lesson last year, over the past year to approach that with, while maintaining a strong sense of self and reminding myself that my background, my social-cultural background is part of who I am as a human being and that I can't shut that off in order to be this thing that I aspire to. And that I don't *have* to shut that off to be the actor that I aspire to. Now, I mean, that's because of a whole lot of judgements that are put, that you get coming down here. I'm sure the way people would treat me or think of me would be very different if I, [*affects a broad Australian accent*] "Spoke like this all the time and said, 'I'm from Townsville,'" and if I dressed in board shorts and thongs. It would be those kind of things, those kind of physical and representational things change and have changed. But they will always be there in me as a person. And so I have to embrace that and use that, because if I don't then all of acting will be as shallow as the façade which I place upon myself in every day life.

SC: So true.

KLS: Very well put, all of you. Do you [*TL*] want to add to anything like that, because you said something about when you used your first language in the Chekhov it was very much associated with your childhood and who you were as a child. So in terms of what James is saying, in that in a sense, he realised that he still wanted to connect to, let's say where he came from, albeit more recently. Does that have any resonance with you?

TL: Yes. Well, I think when I'm acting, basically, or sort of trying to get into a character, there are times where if I'm naturally who I was as a kid and my past life does echo, like it's

there just naturally. I don't need to think, "Aw OK, I need to be South African, or I need to be this," 'cause as time goes you travel around the world and you just evolve into a different person and you have to fit into different societies. I find that it's just a skill that an actor needs, in a way. But I don't let go of that, I just think sometimes... you don't want to lock yourself and be like, "OK, I'm always going to go back to that technique, or how I got into that." But I think, if you see a character, like maybe you're playing Macbeth and you come from a country where spiritual healers is a big thing, people believe in that, there's witch doctors, you can use that. That idea that, "OK, there is someone who can actually tell me what's going to happen," that fear that you naturally had as a kid, to really help the character drive the ideas and make it much more clear. But there's times where you just have to go, "OK, where I grew up won't really fit here, let me try this," and just be bold and jump. You know, just do something different to who you are as a person too, as an actor.

KLS: OK and can you just talk a tiny little bit about then using 'your self' in the Brecht [*referring to the in-class presentation of The Good Woman of Szechwan during TL's 2<sup>nd</sup> year*].

TL: Yes, OK. Well that was interesting because I found the improv games we played really helped in the sense that they made me get into a character that I hadn't really touched in a long time, you know what I mean? Like I hadn't spoken in language in front of my classmates in ages. That is something I can naturally do where I was born and my brain itself thinks quicker [*clicks fingers*] when I do that. Which made me think, "maybe am I always translating things when I hear it?" And, I was much funnier [*agreement from all*], I thought I was hilarious for once in a while.

KLS: You were hilarious.

TL: I was just like, there were so many surprises and that's where you kind of have to be observant and just go, "OK, so how do I take what I did there into some of the different stuff?" Like Shakespeare, if you're going to do a Shakespeare, how're you going to do that?

KLS: And did you feel that that had any impact, or did it alter at all your position in the group, with your year group?

TL: No.

KLS: No, OK that's interesting.

CW: Not at all, I don't think so at all.

KLS: No, no, I'm just really interested to hear this. And do you [*CW*] have anything to say about...

CW: I'm a rare case, English is my mother tongue. What I did for that show [*working in a Chinese accent*] was an approximation of what I thought, you know, yeah. It wasn't myself but it's something I knew a lot about so I could. At the very least, if it wasn't someone I used to be or someone I pretend not to be, at the very least it came from knowledge. So there was truth in that sense.

KLS: And as an actor was that...?

CW: It was fun. It was fun because, it's almost like a leg up, like I, you know, "don't question me on this [my performance, because I have first hand knowledge that you don't]."

*[All laugh and agree.]*

KLS: That's an interesting thing to say. And can I just ask, when you [Thuso] did you Chekhov in your language—

TL: Yes...

KLS: Did that mean in the whole thing you were in Zulu or...

TL: No, no, no.

KLS: Just this one section.

TL: Yeah, just this one section. And I had Jess Vickers standing opposite me *[CW laughs]* while I'm speaking another language and she'll just be like, "yeah, OK," just go with it—

KLS: And for the rest of the part you were, what? In English?

TL: Yeah.

KLS: With an accent or not?

TL: Um...

CW: No, nah, you were just speaking as is.

TL: Yeah, as is. No accent.

KLS: So, what did you understand to be the point of you just with that small text...?

TL: Um, I found... one thing was the physicality. It unlocked something else for me.

KLS: But then that unlock, could you tease it out across the whole performance?

TL: Yeah.

KLS: You were able to tease it out across the whole—

TL: Yeah.

KLS: — so that was acting as a slight sort of anchor, to tease out across the performance.

TL: Yeah, that small exercise allowed me to understand exactly where, if I was back speaking English again, what was really going on too. I just carried what I felt then somewhere else.

KLS: OK, that's very interesting, great. And do you feel you did that with the Brecht, or was it something slightly different?

TL: Nah, same thing.

KLS: Same thing.

TL: 'Cause we shifted from one class to another, so we were doing *Waiting for Godot* and that just went so well together [SC laughs]. Like, I went from there into the other class and yeah, things just made sense. I was speaking English, but it was all there.

KLS: Ah that's interesting.

OB: I'd actually like to pick right up on that. Because there's a really interesting example with what happened with you guys [SC and GB] and I'd just love to hear you guys discuss your experience working with Kristine on 'The Greeks' doing this work and being in the Chekhov [The Seagull- the year after TL and CW], which I suppose and I hesitate to put the term on I guess but had probably a very conventional colour blind casting—

GB: Definitely.

OB: What was your experience?

SC: Hmm, well. Discussing KLS' anchor, it helped that we were able to do 'The Greeks' first. But it's like Thuso saying, you find that information, you draw back on something in the text and it brings back memories of part of who you are or your childhood or grieving. I've got sisters so for me the Chekhov wasn't as hard I guess in a way. Because I could really relate with Gloria, in regards to we both have something in this cultural background... I hope I'm making sense.

OB: When you say not as hard, what do you mean? Do you mean not as hard as it would have been without having done the work with Kristine first? Sorry, just to clarify that.

SC: It helped a lot to do the work with KLS first, to break down those barriers and to not have that, "I'm in Chekhov because I'm a good actor, I'm not, doesn't mean about what colour my skin..." You wanna...

KLS: But how did the work with me break down that barrier for you to then think, "I'm in Chekhov because I'm a good actor", what's the connection?

GB: I don't know if I... I'm actually not conscious of the fact that if I took your work into Chekhov...

KLS: Maybe you didn't?

GB: Actually I don't think I did, what I connected to my character in Olga—

JR: At the time I think we were too new...

KLS: No, I'm surprised you'd say that—

GB: Yeah. I connected with Olga because she had duty and I know that from being an older sister that I had to have a duty over my brothers and sisters. So that's what I connected with, to that. That's what my pull-in, my key, my—

SC: Family...

GB: ...Yeah, was that.

SC: The barrier I would say for me, would be more... it's what we I guess as actors do, we use something that we're so connected with...

TL: Past experiences.

GB: That's right.

SC: And for me that's family. So, it was, I guess, the door was a little bit more open to be allowed to access those, that part of me, in regards to, I've got sisters so in cultural—

KLS: So the suggestion was there that you could in fact use your own self and your own sisters in that.

SC: And cultural-wise, when we're all gathered around and yarning, yarning-time and just drawing that, and having women's business and stuff like that. So that allowed a little window at the time.

OB: I guess what, perhaps, just to throw the cat amongst the pigeons a little bit. I was interested in the fact that in Kristine's play of 'The Greeks', there was a world in which people of different colours all had equal habitation, because it was decided that that was a function of this place. It was set in South Africa and everything made sense. Whereas, as far as I was aware, it was never discussed, that kind of old archetypal question of, "how come, you know, one of the sisters is white and one of them is black?" So I wondered if that ever affected you at all?

GB: It was joked about in the class *[SC laughs]*—

SC: Three black sisters—

GB: —well we weren't, it was never, we weren't—

TL: Look at this Shakespeare play, like to play every one's Dad, with a white kid coming out...

*[General laughter]*

CW: Me, Thomas Pidd, you...

TL:...mixed bag...

CW: ...it made no sense!

GB: It was joked with but then, I think—

SC: I guess that comes to the terms of not wanting to be type cast just because of your skin colour, but also having that...

GB: But that's the question that even in my year 10 plays that I was doing at high school, why it's "ok, Gloria will be the mother or"...

SC: Use your imagination audience!

KLS: OK, so can I just pick up on this work 'neutral'? So what do you mean, and you said it, but perhaps everyone can give me their view on this, what do you mean when you say, "NIDA expects us all to be 'neutral'"?

CW: I don't think... it's not an expectation.

TL: Yeah, there's no expectations. I think naturally, if you're maybe lost or don't know where you should play from, you play from a neutral place.

KLS: And what is neutral?

TL: Um...

KLS: What is neutral for an actor?

TL: ...how would I define, where I play from...?

CW: I... you [KLS] said neutral, so you...

*[General laughter and agreement.]*

TL: Yeah that's what I'm thinking...

JR: Can I chip in?

KLS: Yeah, chip in, chip in.

JR: I think part of it has to do with the absence of habit. Wanting me to come from a place without doing that thing, the thing that I always do as an actor. Which for everyone is going to be different, something they might do with their hands, an inflection in their voice, a sing-song quality. So I personally feel like part of it is connected to that. So it's almost like, "stop acting at me, stop acting at me with those things that you do when you act and come at me as a person, come at me with openness," I suppose.

KLS: So in a way you're sort of saying that neutral is the same as openness and truth.

JR: Yeah.

CW: Yeah, I'd agree with that.

JR: Yeah. You're building on rather than trying to get rid of the things that are getting in the way—

KLS: But within that neutrality no one's asking you to shave off your accent?

JR: No. But then I think that often, internally, that for me translates to that. So, as an actor it translates to you as person because those things again are quite inseparable, at times...

KLS: Oh I see.

JR:...So when people are saying, "when I come to NIDA and I feel like I need to be neutral," that's because I feel like that happens in the classroom a lot. And so you sort of, I know I often transfer that to myself as a person.

KLS: And do you think if the word neutral, if it was a different word, you wouldn't necessarily try to get rid of some of your accent and stuff? You could still, "OK, I'm getting rid of," I love the way you described that, "habits of how I come to the stage as an actor. So I'm just coming with truth." But if the word was different would you then also, and the truth is also "my voice"...

JR: ...What's the question?

KLS: If neutral was not the word—

JR: If neutral was not the word—

KLS: If it was a different word—

JR: would it still be the same thing? Ah, look I think so. Because it's not necessarily about the word's original meaning, but what we are applying to it in this situation. But at the same time, 'neutral' could also have an effect on the way we perceive that. I'm not sure. I mean, what alternatives are there?

CW: I've never heard the word in a room before, but if I did I think I would take it as, "just be yourself. Don't try to be a character, don't try to play what you think this character is. Don't be an old man, don't be a young kid. Just come in, as you are, and say the lines."

TL: Yeah...

CW: I would never dream of them saying, if I was doing an accent, of it meaning, "could you just speak a little more like I do." I'd never take it as that.

SC: Yeah.

KLS: No, no, ok, no, exactly.

JR: 'Cause then you get into the question of what 'neutral' is.

TL: Yeah that's where I was going/, cause you define your own

KLS: /Who's neutral?

GB: /Yeah that's it, who is neutral?

JR: I kind of hit on NIDA's version of neutral, I'm an acting student...

KLS: "Who's neutral?" is a very good question.

TL: Habitual habits, is your habitual... being open is being open.

JR: But what is it that... So then is everyone's neutral different according to what habits you have to strip?

TL: Yeah.

GB: Or NIDA's 'neutral'.

KLS: So can I ask you now, I'll get on to the actual Masterclass that we did, but just... in your training have you done text from your own cultural heritage? Or from a cultural heritage that has a synergy with yours? And if so, what have they been and what has the impact been on you in that moment? And do you think it's useful?

TL: In my whole journey at NIDA, not really. But, in third year yeah, 'cause you get to pick your own texts. So that's when you can really just say, "OK, now it's time, I want to see what I've learnt. I want to take a text back from home and apply the skills I've learnt and see what I can do."

KLS: Is that in a production or in a monologue?

TL: No, monologue a monologue.

KLS: OK, but not in a production?

TL: No, God no.

KLS: So you're not determining the productions?

CW: As in a production that they decide, as in their season that they decided?

KLS: Yeah. Well he's saying, "we can just choose our own texts," but you can't choose your production text.

TL: Yeah, no, no.

CW: And even if, everything we choose is still going through a filter and season—

KLS: For the production. Yeah, OK. So, you're saying when you have made your choice, OK fine, you might've done, but up to making your choice you have not done anything from your own cultural heritage?

TL: Nup.

KLS: And do you think it would have been, what's your view on that? Would it have been useful or not, or, would it have been an added value?

CW: Probably it might be useful for either you *[TL]* or me, and unhelpful for /other people.

TL: /others, yeah.

SC: mmm, that's true.

CW: Which is, you know...

KLS: Although they get their texts all the time, ha! So why might it have been useful?

CW: I mean... I don't feel very close to my cultural context, so I'm maybe not a good judge on this...

KLS: But you said it might be useful?

CW: It might be useful, anything might be useful. Any show I do will benefit me. I'm not in a position to say, "Oh if I do this text I'll do a better job—"

KLS: OK, so could be added value?

CW: Sure, yeah.

TL: Yeah. I dunno. The exercise itself could give you something else maybe. A bit of confidence in you as an artist, maybe. I dunno. Because you're always doing stuff that's like, plays that are Anglo, nothing that relates to who *you* are as a person. But then again, like I feel as if I'm speaking from a person who's come from a different country so this is very different.

KLS: That's the conversation.

TL: Yeah.

SC: We were blessed to do *Random* [*by Debbie Tucker Green- an in class presentation directed by KLS and performed by SC, GB and MF-N in the 4<sup>th</sup> term of 1<sup>st</sup> year*], which was...

GB: *[joking]* Speak for yourself!

SC: *[joking]* "Well I was blessed..." No, *Random* for me was a big breakthrough in regards to finding different values of myself as an artist.

KLS: So *Random*, for you... How would you describe that text in relationship to yourself?

SC: Um...

KLS: I mean it wasn't from your cultural heritage...

SC: No it wasn't, it was Jamaican, Caribbean/Jamaican, Caribbean/English/Caribbean [*laughs*]. But, the grieving, the loss of someone close... And I guess everyone can relate to grieving, everyone can relate to a loss. But the way it was written, I could relate to it in regards to my culture and how we grieve and when a mother finds out her son is dead, what she does.

KLS: So there was a synergy in the Afro-Caribbean way it was written?

SC: Yeah.

KLS: OK.

SC: Just the rawness of it. I really enjoyed being able to show that side. Yeah, bringing that to the table.

GB: Well *Random* was for me not my heritage, but it was the first Black character I've ever played/

SC: /yeah.

GB: / in my whole acting training, career, anything, if I'm not devising a piece myself. But it was the first Black character that I ever got to play and yeah it was... I would play any character to my fullest, whatever. But it was just, nice to play a character that was Black, that was my skin colour, that I could be cast as in the industry.

OB: How is it different?

GB: Just for the fact that I could, that it could be a part that I would play in the industry...

*[general agreement and support]*

KLS: So you need that experience at school because you don't necessarily think you're going to be cast as Olga, but you might be cast as the Mother in *Random*?

GB: Yeah.

TL: Yeah and there's times where you're playing from... Like you're in so many different plays, but you'll never get cast at NIDA in a play where you have to play a Black person. But luckily enough, *In the Blood* [by Susan Lori-Parks, one of the upcoming 2014 3<sup>rd</sup> year productions, directed by Dominic Mercer] an African-American play, we've got something good there. But you know, if you don't get that chance, I've seen a lot of actors that are Black, but can't actually play a really good Black character. I look at them and I'm like, "wow, OK, you're really distant from that now. Because you've always been trying to play what your idea would be of an Anglo or a White character in your head." If that makes sense. Without being racist! Does that make sense?

KLS: So you're saying, what, in Australia, or..? What you're saying, "I've seen a lot of Black actors...?"

TL: Yeah in Australia.

KLS: OK. At NIDA or in the industry, or both?

TL: Um, both.

KLS: That's interesting.

OB: I'll never forget, and forgive me for paraphrasing you Gloira but the moment in one rehearsal in *The Greeks*, when Kristine said something to the effect of, "what are you doing to your voice, what have you done to your voice?" You said, do you remember what you said?

GB: Yeah, I'm whitening it up.

CW: Wow.

OB: Yeah.

GB: And... I say that because, because my whole thing with you [KLS] was to [show you] "what I think an actor is and that's how I'll portray it. Like that's what I'm demonstrating right now, is Gloria this actor, so I will talk like this because they all accept me like that." That's what I had to come in with. That's how I came in. And so, your training has kind of, those habits that I've had...

TL: Which sadly to, like in the industry, if you don't sound like that people are just going to look at you down and just, "what am I gonna do with you?"

GB: Yeah.

TL: Yeah.

GB: Like I have to actually sound like you—

TL: Like if you [CW] came in with a really Asian accent, like into a room, everyone's going to go like, "OK right what do we have here?" [CW laughs] The way you sound now, people are just like, "OK, right." There is a bit of racism being there.

SC: Aw yeah of course! [with a broad Australian accent] "It's Austraya"

TL: Like if we cut the bullshit, there is, you know what I mean. You do have to change that—

SC: It's Austraya, Austraya's so fucking rude.

KLS: So, but then, can I just ask you... you've used the word racism- is that being mirrored here?

CW: I dunno, that's a strong word. You know...

TL: Maybe discrimination? Discrimination, how's that?

KLS: Bias?

TL: Yeah—

KLS: Bias.

TL: We'll use code words...

KLS: There's a bias.

TL: Cauliflower or whatever you guys want to call it.

*[Laughter]*

GB: Pollywaffle.

TL: Yeah, pollywaffle.

SC: I think with NIDA, I don't think it's... I think, 'cause I... OK, I came to NIDA and I went and asked Jeff [*Janisheski- the head of Acting at NIDA*], I'm like, "Can you be honest with me, I don't know if it, but it was..." 'Cause I've had people go, "Oh, the reason you got into NIDA is because you're black, so you can tick off the boxes for funding." I'm like, "Aw, OK, so I didn't get in because of my talent." So I went —

CW: Who...

SC: Yeah I know...

CW: Who would say that?

KLS: Yeah, but that's ridiculous gossip stuff.

SC: No, yeah but just family and the perception that some people have of NIDA.

KLS: OK.

SC: So I asked Jeff—

GB: I got the same thing...

SC: Yeah. "I need to ask you this personal question." It's like, "No, everyone here is based on talent so we don't look at your skin colour, we look at how you are as an artist," and I think that's what NIDA, what you were talking about Charles. It doesn't have that.

*[There is a momentary interruption in the audio, which obscures GB's words]*

OB: And while I think that is absolutely the case, I think one of the beautiful privileges for me of being part of this system as a member of the dominant Anglo culture is being given the opportunity to work in an engaging way with other people's cultural context. And being given the language to do that without feeling like I have to kind of preface everything with a kind of uh... *[General laughter]* So there is that very interesting argument which is that yes I firmly, and I can say this with complete truth, that everyone in our classes I believe is there because they absolutely deserve to be. And yet, I am so glad that there are people of colour in that class—

SC: Yeah.

OB: Those two things have to sit together. And I'm not sure what we make of that.

CW: And I think it would be very absurd if we found a year with 22, 23 White Australians—

SC: I know.

CW: That would be, there would be, you know—

SC: Like what is wrong with you—

CW: That wouldn't happen, it actually wouldn't happen.

KLS: No, not now.

CW: No exactly. So there is a consideration, you know. It's not a complete, let's take 23 random people who may or may not, you know.

KLS: There is absolutely a consideration of that, because actually if you are not focusing and considered around that you can without knowing it sort of... your eye is biased towards, to some extent, somebody who's reflecting you back. And you know, the dominant group of people on the audition panel are Anglo.

CW: Yeah.

KLS: Yep. So there is a gaze on that. Yeah that's absolutely right.

SC: *Wadjela...*

KLS: Do you *[JR]* want to say anything about texts?

TL: Still on about that... *[SC laughs]*.

JR: You know, funny enough, I have not played an Australian character at NIDA.

KLS: Mmm.

SC: Aw yeah that's true.

JR: I've done one Australian play scene, and in it I was playing a Romanian [*from Louis Nowra's 'The Jungle' during Term 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Year*]. I did it as an Australian though. But that's very interesting, I never thought about that before. Partly because the dominant theatre industry here is English speaking.

SC: Yeah.

JR: I mean in terms of the big companies. They're producing some new Australian plays but most of them are quite English themselves anyway if they're being produced by STC [*Sydney Theatre Company*]. That's really interesting...

OB: And I've had something of the opposite experience because in a weird way, being English/Australian, and I guess because of the work I've done up to this point, I have a weird sense of feeling comfortable, almost a weird ownership of something like the Shakespeare canon. So those feel like, even though they're played, they might be set anywhere... And I think it's down to voice. I think I've been told and I think it sits in me that my voice at it currently habitually is, to pick up on that point, makes sense in those plays.

GB: Mmm.

OB: And so it's very easy to sit into that, I think.

JR: Yes, yeah.

OB: You know, if I pick up from what the rest of the table has said, there's a certain privilege I enjoy that everyone else doesn't seem to.

KLS: So, would it be beneficial for you [JR] to do an Australian text, do you think?

JR: Uh, if it was as good as the English texts that we work on—

SC: That's true...

CW: If they let you choose...

JR: — but that takes us into a whole other conversation about Australian playwriting at the moment.

KLS: Yeah, yep, OK.

JR: But, you know, they're out there. There's wonderful [*Ray*] Lawler, you know *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, some wonderful [*David*] Williamson and [*Louis*] Nowra plays that haven't really been looked at and I think there should be a place for them yes. But it's a bit harder because there's less texts out there from Australians that are as brilliant as England and America, which have generally longer histories of writing. Whereas ours is yet to reach the stage where we know what we want to write about, I think.

KLS: Hmm, very interesting.

CW: I did find it funny, last year, it was a running joke with the 2<sup>nd</sup> years at one point where you have *Cosi* [by Louis Nowra, directed by David Berthold] and *Kasimir and Karoline* [by Ödön von Horváth, directed by Jeff Janisheski] and look at all the people in *Cosi* and look at all the people in *Kasimir and Karoline*...yeah...

[murmurs of agreement.]

TL: And I'm slowly watching it too, because I want to see who gets cast in Michael Gow's play [*upcoming commission in term 4 2014 with 3<sup>rd</sup> year actors*] too, which is another Australian—

CW: Yeah, yeah...

TL: — And Jeff's new play, which is Japanese, but it's really Australian.

CW: *Kandahar Gate* [by Stephen Sewell, directed by Jeff Janisheski, staged in Term 2 of 2014 with 3<sup>rd</sup> year actors].

TL: You know...

KLS: Sorry I've missed something, what are you saying?

CW: To put it bluntly, all the White people were in *Cosi*, no ethnics in *Cosi* and all the ethnics were in *K&K*.

KLS: Oh God, sorry, right, got it.

[Laughter]

CW: Did you see it?

KLS: Yeah no, I did, but I didn't register.

TL: Really?

KLS: Yeah.

TL: OK, fair enough.

CW: We weren't, you know...

TL: It wasn't a thing, I just thought...

CW: We found it funny, is what it was really.

TL: I just found it interesting, because you know...

CW: I just wanted to know if there was a conscious decision they had made...

JR: Or an unconscious...

CW: Yeah or an unconscious like, “Aw, I guess we just ended up with...”

TL: Yeah or, “We casted this first but then somehow all the...”

KLS: That's very interesting.

SC: You [TL] were the violent Black guy.

[*There is a momentary auditory interruption, which obscures TL's reply*]

KLS: So in terms of the intracultural masterclass we did, with that sort of international community of artists, can I just ask how, what did it make you feel, how did you feel about that, how did you feel about doing that work with four actors from the UK? Did it impact on you at all as performers?

JR: It didn't impact on me as much as some of the other work we had done.

[*General assent*]

GB: I think I got, oh I'm sorry were you finished?

JR: Uh, yep.

TL: Cut it, sounds good!

GB: What I loved about it was acting across from Thuso. Like that was great because I, there aren't any ethnic guys in my year. So it was great to work across someone, also in the year above me, also with more training than me but also someone who was, who was ethnic as well, like I could... And also you were playing my brother as well and you...

JR: Maybe part of it—

KLS: We also had that wonderful thing between you [TL] and Metti [MF-N].

GB: Yeah and that was beautiful to watch, like I loved that.

JR: Connected with that, my experience with it was solely with someone from London and I didn't have any acting with you guys. So what got for most of it was just the cultural context that was being given to me by that person. Whereas, doing it here face to face, I also know everything else about that person, in general. And so I know a bit more about where that context comes from and where they are now. Whereas, not knowing that person at all, not knowing where they're from other than, “this is what they're saying to me,” in their improvisation about their context. So, maybe that has something to do with it because all I was getting was that. Whereas with this other knowledge about people I know it may have been different and maybe that's why, I dunno.

KLS: What do you think the impact is of the wider audience, many of them were students, seeing those improvisations between you [GB] and Thuso, between you [SC] and Metti,

which presumably were quite fresh for them because they wouldn't have seen that before in their own year group?

SC: Well, it was more of when James was doing it and Joel third year [Jackson] was just like, it was great to watch people being themselves, bringing out their cultural background, cause that's OK for me, 'cause we do sometimes go, "Oh, acting, put the mask on," what Oli was saying, or the habitual habits.

JR: We act, 'The Actor'.

SC: Yeah, yeah. So it was great to see, well that's what I got from one, from Joel, that's what he would say.

KLS: Did it have any, was there any meaning for you in the fact that... did any of you feel, "Oh this is interesting, I'm part of an international intra-cultural community of artists who have worked in this way or who understand how to work in this way"? Did it validate in any way the work that we'd done together in the class, when it went beyond the walls of NIDA and went way out to UK?

SC: Yeah, it was a lot easier in regards to, they were speaking their languages and we were speaking ours in that communication in going with it and not trying to 'act'.

KLS: Was it surprising?

TL: That there were other actors out there having the same, experience?

KLS: Well was it surprising to do that, was it surprising?

*[General negative response.]*

KLS:...but actually experiencing it, was it surprising? No.

CW: No.

GB: I think just I—

KLS: I found it extraordinarily surprising, I did actually.

GB: — I think working with the Indian culture and also with the Spanish culture, that was interesting to have flavour, different kinds of flavour up in the air. That was pretty good.

SC: And hearing, who was it, she was—

KLS: Tuyen *[Do].*

SC: Yeah, Tuyen. How she came, which I really enjoyed, 'cause I had the kind of experience, how she came in, "Oh I didn't want to do this, oh I can't really speak my language." And then unfolding it and breaking down those barriers. It goes back to, "this is who I am. There's not enough stuff written so I'm writing my own works," which was really great to hear.

KLS: Yeah.

TL: She's cute.

SC: 'Course she was. But there was one moment where... *[general laughing]* The Spanish guy also...

KLS: He's gay.

*[Laughter]*

SC: Aw, why? *[laughs]*

TL: Yeah we're all out.

*[General laughter]*

SC:...The feedback session in regards to, when I was doing the stolen generation *[improvisation]* and how it was like, "Oh I don't think we're ready for that," I think Dave, David?

GB: Fenton, yeah that was David Fenton *[The head of Performance Practices at NIDA]*.

KLS: They said they drew a breath.

CW: Wow.

SC:...It got me really passionate in regards to, "yeah of course you're not ready for that because Australia is so backwards and it has put it under the carpet and this is what I want to, this is my voice, for my people that I want to express a lot more of, which goes back to there's not enough parts written out there."

KLS: That are telling the multifarious stories that there are.

CW: Yes.

SC: Not the tip-toed version, the actual truth.

KLS: Yeah, yeah.

TL: There's just not enough stories. I was talking to a few directors over the weekend, they were saying the same thing. It's like the movie *12 Years a Slave*, like it's about slavery. But when you think about it, how many movies have you seen about slavery. It's been talked about but are there as many movies as they make it out to be?

SC: Yep.

CW: No.

TL: It's the same thing here. I find some of the psychology it's like, yes the Indigenous community has talked about that they've been mistreated and all that but is there any art that's, history, that's recording this?

SC: "Aw no, we did that *Rabbit Proof Fence*..."

KLS: I know, my husband [*Felix Cross*] was asked to comment on that in UK and in the paper he said, you know they said, "What do you think about Chiwetel [*Ejiofor*] being up for an Oscar and being lauded about this that and the other?" And he said, "What I think is it will be much more significant when you know, it's not a pivotal 'Black Slave Archetype', and then we're really talking about him and his work." So yeah, you're right.

OB: I'm actually, it's probably a slight digression, but I'm really interested in your opinion Thuso about the Mandela film that was just made. Because I know there was a lot of controversy that they cast an American as Nelson Mandela when the local industry has a hell of a lot of great South African actors. So in a cultural context kind of question, is his [*Idris Elba*] experience of being a Black man in a different country, but nonetheless, is the colour the essential factor that allows him to play a part, or is there a nationality and a connection that goes deeper to your country that would have made a South African actor access perhaps a deeper level? Does that question make sense?

TL: Yeah it does, it does. We had Tom today who was teaching us screen test for two days and we spoke to him about it. And he sort of made a similar example. Well, it comes back to the idea that if you get a South African actor to play the role, he might fulfil the world but at the end of the day, will it sell? And will the world want to go see that actor do it, right? Whereas, there's an actor in England, trained, really good, you can bring him in, just one actor, right, to just take the lead. And then you hire crew from South Africa and it's just a starting point. And another thing to, you're not saying a White person's going to play Nelson Mandela, you're saying a Black person's going to do it, because there isn't that much work for Black people anyway. So, yeah, I agree with what they did, 'cause at least the whole world got to see the story, I'm happy. You know, it sells, in the end.

KLS: That is so driven by commerce.

CW: Yeah that's business.

TL: That's business.

KLS: That is absolutely business. But you know, it would take a brave. But, but, people have to start somewhere. When Forrest Whitaker was originally... well, Chiwetel. When Stephen Frears took a chance on Chiwetel in *Dirty Pretty Things*, now look where he is. Now they may never have done that, you know someone's got to take a chance. Same with Forrest Whitaker. When he had one of his early, early films, I mean... At some point, someone's got to take that, "I believe in this guy, I believe in my talent, you know, he's not a box office record but..." Otherwise what happens is... It's like Miranda saying to us, or it's like Shari [*Sebbens*] in a way. I mean after *The Sapphires*, every time there was an Indigenous female, it was her.

SC: Shari?

KLS: Yeah. Every time. Because it's lazy. Because then they just go, "Oh," then they just, *[bangs the table]* like that. And then there's no looking around and there's still a huge community of wonderful Indigenous...

SC: Yeah that's true.

KLS:...Aboriginal girls who could do those parts, but no Shari's going to get it, for another five years.

OB: I think, the commercial point notwithstanding, which I think is spot on, and the fact that the story gets told is better than it not being, I'm still interested to drill just a little bit deeper and ask the question: Is there something unique, (and let's stick with the Mandela example because I think it's useful) is there something unique about the South African Black experience that is not the same as the experience of another person of colour elsewhere? Because, I mean, even just my experience there recently as, from somebody with the alternate skin colour on the other side of that horrendous conflict, I was very struck by the idea that whatever an African-American person experiences day to day, they haven't lived under apartheid...

KLS: Oh yeah, well of course there is and it's all about nuance isn't it?

OB:...So that's what I'm curious about. So there's this interesting possibility of *essentialising* the experience of people of difference. And I'm just curious to know, as you go deeper and deeper and deeper...

CW: I think so, but then you can start talking about playing characters who have experiences that you might not have shared, that's just another thing that actors- I mean I've never...

KLS: No, no, but it's part of the same story of, is the Aboriginal woman always going to be shown as, you know, the pregnant woman whose husband's bashing her up? Are we always going to hear *that* story?

SC: Not when I'm finished! *[laughs]*

KLS: No exactly. So it's like, the thing is, if you only ever hear the one story about a race of people, that story gets stuck in people's mind and that is the narrative that then comes out of that country.

SC: It's also, Australia is so, there's been so many directors or writers who want to tell a different story but it's still... Like for *Redfern Now* when it first came out, having different views of mental health and stuff like that, why isn't it on a Channel 7 or Channel 9? Because Australia is not ready. Australia does not want to accept the history of what happened to the Aboriginal People and the Stolen Generation. Of course there was an apology but just something more, like media. My Grandma came from the States and she just like, "why are there White people on TV?"

KLS: I mean, what I find here is—

TL: It's coming though, that's the thing about—

SC: I know but—

KLS: But how long are we going to have to wait?

SC: Exactly.

TL: Three years, I reckon. Three years baby.

*[General laughter and joking.]*

KLS: I find there is so much conversation here at high level around ‘diversity’, and there’ll be forums and this that and the other, as though it’s absolutely, “but why, what’s going on?” You know, I think, “It’s not bloody rocket science, just do it. Just do something. Just do Something!” So I’m actually doing three things outside NIDA this year, you know obviously all in the realm of diversity. I just sort of thought, “well I’ll do it, I’ll just do it, because no one else is doing it.” It’s just like, “Kristine, can you come up and help us mentor some people on a diversity scheme,” and I just think, “well, what’s in a mentor? Give them a bit of money and tell them to do some work.” I mean for God’s sake, it’s awful.

SC: Like Miranda *[Tapsell]*’s playing *Love Child* at the moment, and I’m like, “that’s fantastic, that’s deadly,” but her character is, “Oh I’m a half-caste.”

GB: Yeah she’s half-caste.

SC: Can’t you just be a full-blooded Black Fella? Why does there have to be one White parent and one Black Fella parent? Why can’t—

KLS: Because she’s lighter skinned.

*[Supressed laughs]*

KLS: What? It’s true.

*[General laughing and jokes]*

SC:... My sister *[Reena Clanton]* had a few words when she was playing Wentworth. She’s like I don’t want to be the typical, “why aren’t there any roles? Because I’m so frustrated being asked to play the typical pregnant or getting beaten or have an alcoholic problem.” There’s more stories than that, there’s more to us than just that.

KLS: I mean, look we’ll wrap it up, but this is why I feel in a way, and you’ve said it in a way... I do think it’s very interesting. What I’m looking at, if intra-cultural work is sitting at secondary school or higher education level, so the *suggestion* that you could play from your cultural context is there and you are getting texts from a canon of work that has a synergy with you, you will have I think a greater education around, and the thoughts will be stimulated around, what sort of work you might want to make or be in when you get out of college. I think if the conversation and the practice is never on the table then, as happened recently in the third year *[2013 NIDA graduating actors]* when I went and did some work with them, I mean they just wouldn’t, “Don’t ask me to play a Greek! You know, don’t ask me to play a Greek. My God, no, no, no, no, no...” I mean I was just really, I thought it was

strange. And I thought it was unfortunate, ‘cause I said to Christian [*Chrisiou*] I said, “but there’s such an incredible story there. *Stories*. Thousands. And who’s going to tell them? And why don’t you tell some of them?” But he wouldn’t, he wouldn’t touch it. I thought it was very interesting.

TL: What do you call that? What do you define that as, when someone does that?

KLS: Um, well, I think what had happened with them, to be honest, I think... They said, “don’t ask me to play a Greek, I think that’s offensive.” So I had to quickly garner myself and say, “you know, look, let’s have a bit of an intra-cultural conversation here.” So I think what happened was in first year somebody said, “Can’t you play Greek girl with that Effie [*stereotypical Greek-Australian character from Acropolis Now*] accent or...” (what is that, is that right? Effie accent?)

GB: Yeah Effie, yeah, yeah.

KLS: So, which obviously was silly thing to say. And I think they all got a bit like, “Don’t treat us as some sort of, you know, just the ethnicity with the effie accent,” fair enough so they got very scared. But what was really interesting was... so I finally got Christian to do this really brilliant improvisation set in a Greek restaurant in Melbourne, he was a brother. And it was absolutely fantastic, him, Rupert [*Raineri*] and Michael [*McStay*], I mean it was just amazing. Anyway, he was just like loose and fluid and I just said, “well, you know, he sort of knows who he is there, isn’t that wonderful...” Anyway about three improvisations later I said to him, “OK, now could you get up and play this ..., you know just come as yourself.” And he said, “Do you want me to be Greek-Australian?” I said, “well come as yourself.” He said, “What? As a Greek-Australian?” I said, “Come, come as yourself.” And he said, “What? As a Greek-Australian?” And I said, “Are you Greek-Australian?” And he said, “Yes.” I said, “Well, come as yourself.”

TL: As a Greek-Australian?

[*General laughter.*]

KLS: I thought, “Oh my God. Who had he been coming to the floor as?”

SC & GB: Mmm.

TL: Just an Aussie...

KLS: I thought it was like the most extraordinary exchange I’ve ever... I just thought it was like, extraordinary.

OB: It’s this extraordinary, horrendous privilege that people who look like me, and my gender as well it must be said, get. Which is that I can play *any* man and you guys have to, will always be playing people of your colour.

KLS: Yeah, so to some extent he was saying, “don’t, don’t type-cast me.”

OB:... Don’t make me that...

KLS: But then the other terrible side of that is he never came as himself.

OB: Yeah.

KLS: So sort of like, God, who is he on stage as...?

SC: Putting the mask on...

KLS: Who did he think he was? I mean, it's like that girl at RADA [*Royal Academy of Dramatic Art- UK*] who said to me once (we had a thing like this) and we had a conversation and she said, "Yeah, you know I was cast as Juliet in Romeo and Juliet," with a very famous director who came in for third year RADA. And she said, "...and in the seventh production I was on the balcony, you know, doing the balcony scene and I suddenly thought, "Oh my God, am I Black or am I White?" And she was like, doing the lines thinking, "I don't know if I'm White or Black here."

CW: Wow.

KLS: Isn't that Wow? So you know these are very interesting conversations...

TL: "I'm Charlie Wu!"

*[General laughter]*

KLS: Anyway look, anything else to say? I'm conscious everyone needs to go. Thank you so much, it's very generous for you to give your time and your articulate responses. We'll get your permission release forms done, thank you. And we'll write it up, you can have a look if you want, it's interesting. Thank you so much.

## **APPENDIX E**

**DVD (included in hard copy)**