

THE THEATRE SHOP 10TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

Friday, October 3, 2003

Liberty Hall, Dublin, Ireland

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

MAX STAFFORD CLARK, Artistic Director, Out of Joint Productions, UK

in conversation with

GARRY HYNES, Artistic Director, Druid Theatre Company, Galway

JANE DALY: It is my pleasure, for the keynote session of this year's tenth anniversary Theatre Shop conference, to welcome Max Stafford Clark, Artistic Director of Out of Joint, and Garry Hynes, Artistic Director of Druid Theatre Company, to the stage, to discuss a number of issues around new writing that are extremely relevant to all of working in Irish theatre.

GARRY HYNES: Thank you everybody. I'm very pleased to be here in the company of Max Stafford Clark. Max is a man I've known, had the privilege of knowing for quite a number of years now. He's been one of my own particular heroes in British theatre. He's been a singular figure on the British and international theatre landscape for well over 30 years now. He's been at the cutting edge of all the major developments in the British theatre. He was the Artistic Director of the Traverse in the early 70s. He then founded a company, Joint Stock, which had a major impact on British theatre at the time. He then became Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre, probably the single most important theatre in the English-speaking world for new writing, and led that theatre for 15 years, and then when he left there, founded another company, Out of Joint, which I always think is one of the best names ever, Out of Joint, which has been in existence for what, almost ten years now. He has many connections with Ireland, not just through the writers he has produced but he also went to Trinity here, and has always maintained a relationship with Ireland, but Out of Joint is what brings him here today in that the company is presenting Stella Feehily's new play, Duck, at the Peacock Theatre, as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival.

So I think in terms of the experience of the development of new writing, throughout a time of extraordinary change, the running of companies, the running of major buildings, the international landscape, I think Max just simply has done it all, and whatever he hasn't done, he will do in the future, I have no doubt.

Not only can he conduct dialogues with living writers, he can conduct dialogues with dead writers, which he did very successfully with *Letters to George*, which is an absolutely fascinating book, one of the most unusual and best books on the theatre writing process that I have ever read.

So, Max, when we were talking yesterday about this, I asked you about how much of your work had been involved in new writing, and you said probably 80 per cent. That's an extraordinary commitment to new work, and maybe you could tell us, how did it emerge like that, was it something that you went into the theatre for, new work specifically, or was that something that emerged over time?

CLARK: It emerged over time. I first started directing here when I was at Trinity, but the first major influence was going to the Gate and seeing the work of Hilton Edwards and Mícheál MacLiammóir. I didn't know what it was, quite, but I did know that a director was behind it. There'd be one week when Michael would direct and Hilton would play a small part, or the next week, Michael would design the lighting and Hilton would design the costumes. And it was a kind of high camp aesthetic that controlled the images you were watching, with great aesthetic and great tenacity. And that was the first time I really knew what directors did. But I fell into new writing by accident. I was playing rugby for Trinity and we were touring Edinburgh, and everyone else wanted to talk about the match and get drunk. I went off to the Traverse Theatre and was inveigled into stuffing envelopes, and met Ricky Demarco, who is still a force to be reckoned with on the Edinburgh scene, and became involved with the Traverse that way.

I brought a revue from Trinity over to the Edinburgh Festival, and it was a year when both the Oxford and the Cambridge revues were very poor. So it was the hit of the festival and it transferred to London, and we had no expertise to make that work, so it expanded to twice its length, and Milton Shulman, who was the doyenne of the London theatre critics, said the one good thing about this infantile, undergraduate revue that opened at The Arts Theatre, was that none of these young people will ever be seen near the professional theatre again. So, triumph and disaster within six months of becoming involved with the professional theatre.

But I went back to the Traverse, and their commitment was, unusually in the mid to late-60s, entirely to doing new work. Partly because it was so small— it seated 65 people— and that gave me an involvement with a number of writers, David Hare, Howard Brenton, Caryl Churchill, later on, that lasted me very well.

HYNES: Absolutely, that has been actually one of the significant factors, in fact, that you worked with colleagues again and again and again, so that the writers that were young at the same time as you, like David Hare, you would have worked with David Hare back at the beginning of his career and are now about to work with him again.

What has that been like, that relationship between a director and a writer, in terms of new work?

CLARK: Well, I think writers traditionally have lives like athletes, that are not necessarily long. I mean there is Shaw, Shakespeare, David Hare, writers who've had a prolific output. But many more writers, like Arnold Wesker, John Arden and Farquhar hit that kind of period where they can speak for a time, hit a moment when they speak for that age, and then move on. John Arden has renounced the stage in order to write novels. So the stage is a hot medium, and part of the responsibility of a director who's engaged in new writing is certainly to find new writers, but also to sustain the career of senior writers. And indeed, that's happened in this country and you see Friel, Murphy, Kilroy

writing plays that stand for the different ages that they've been writing for, which is extraordinary.

But Caryl Churchill is a writer who I suppose, more than anyone, has renewed herself. Her own inventiveness, her own theatrical imagination, and her own brain are so astute, that she's always unexpected, and she's experimented with form just as she has with content. And I think that is what's enabled her to renew herself. So she's an example of somebody who has been able to renew her career by always looking for the unexpected.

HYNES: Caryl Churchill, although she has been produced everywhere else, has had a relationship with you, as a director and also with The Royal Court— how important is the support of a theatre to a writer throughout the length of their career? We are all very aware of the theatre that premieres the new writer, but the second and the third and the fourth play are the periods of time where perhaps the writer isn't writing at their full strength. How important is that, do you think, to the writer?

CLARK: I think those relationships between director and writer are very important, and between writer and theatre, and they give a continuity and they give a stability. And, of course, when I started in the theatre, the wealthiest people I knew were the writers, and of course it's still true that Martin McDonagh must be an extremely young man, Conor McPherson— Sebastian Barry earned considerable sums from *The Steward of Christendom*, if not from all his other writing, so writers are at once often our richest friends— and they should pay for the dinners— but at the same time, they're the most insecure. The people who have the salaries and run the buildings and have the security tend to be directors rather than writers.

HYNES: Indeed, yeah, we're interested in writers, but only when they have plays. It's problem when they don't have plays. Can I just talk for a moment about *Out of Joint Stock*? I mean, you actually pioneered a way of working and developing new plays.

CLARK: Well, I talked about Hilton Edwards and Mícheál Mac Liammóir, and I was very influenced by those American companies, Tom O’Horgan who ran the La Mama company, The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, in the late 60s, were the most interesting things. But when I left the Traverse, I was around the Royal Court for a bit, and that coincided with Bill Gaskell leaving. We did a workshop together — I was 12 years younger than him. He was a great figure, he’d run the Royal Court through a very difficult time, and like anybody who has that job, he’d been considerably battered by it, at the same time as having huge successes — with *Saved*, he’d fought censorship, and been responsible for the Lord Chamberlain being abolished, and made huge changes— his production of the Scottish play, *Macbeth*, was the first time the box set, simple staging, was introduced— so he was an enormous figure. But he was kind of jaded, and when I suggested that we did a workshop on a book called *The Speakers* by Heathcote Williams, he welcomed that. I was well aware of the expertise and skill that he brought to it, and we directed three plays together. That was an enormous empowerment — I was in my early thirties, so I’d done some directing, but nonetheless, his astuteness in stagecraft gave me proximity in the rehearsal room to a level of skills that I simply didn’t have. And *The Speakers* was done— I think it was the first promenade production and the action overlapped, and the audience were free to choose which speaker they wanted to listen to.

So we did three plays that we directed together— *The Speakers*, *Fanshen*, and then *Yesterday’s News*, which was a verbatim piece, and certainly the learning curve for me was enormous during that time, and it enabled me, really, to change up a gear and to work with him. So that was very exciting.

HYNES: And that then continued to some extent, for instance, with something like *Our Country’s Good* – it was a long process of preparation for that play.

CLARK: Yes, with *Joint Stock* we did a workshop – because we weren’t paid very much, it wasn’t very expensive to keep rehearsing, so we rehearsed often, we did a workshop for four, six weeks. During that time, you could learn skills that would simply be impossible in a normal rehearsal period. So, in *The Speakers*, the actors learned to

speak, and the actors became very deft public speakers and we went to Speaker's Corner, at Hyde Park Corner, and the actors stood on soapboxes and spoke. You could give an actor any subject, from Delft pottery to traffic wardens, and they could talk for four minutes of complete nonsense on that subject, knowing absolutely nothing about it. And they learned to cope with heckling. And when we opened, anyone who heckled was absolutely demolished because their expertise had become so considerable.

And so in Fanshen, the actors really grappled with Communism, its effects in a small village, and you did learn the power of research, and how vital that was. Of course, when you talk to directors from Russia or Poland or Hungary or Bulgaria, then you realise that the job description is completely different. I remember doing a workshop in St Petersburg and being asked by these students afterwards, 'How long do you rehearse for?' I said, 'Four weeks is customary in the British theatre, but this particular play, five weeks.' The translator translated back, and there was bafflement, they said, 'I'm sorry, I don't understand. Did you intend to say four months or four years?' Then they asked how much actors were paid, and I said, 'Well, £280 a week, but these actors, £350 a week,' and there was a huge laugh, because senior professors in drama get paid \$380 a month, so they knew we were hugely overpaid and ridiculously under-prepared!

But research is vital and I think working with Joint Stock always gave me belief in that. Even though you think you're wasting a couple of days rehearsal— when we did *The Recruiting Officer*, I remember going to Shrewsbury to spend a couple of days. And you do think, 'Can we justify this?' You know, oh, the actors are just having a good time.

HYNES: And they are, as well.

CLARK: They are as well! But having a good time's not necessarily wrong is it?

HYNES: And then, obviously, from running Joint Stock to running a building like the Royal Court, and a very hot stage like the Royal Court. What were the differences?

CLARK: Well, you ran the Abbey. The difference is, the pressure, isn't it? Your output has to be so much more. And if you run a company, it's not difficult to programme the two plays you're passionate about. But if you run a building, you have put on the plays you're passionate about, and then you get to your fifth and sixth choice plays, and you think, 'Well, I think it's a bit dodgy, but maybe the feminists will like it, or maybe it will appeal to a gay audience, or maybe the black audience will come in.' Richard Eyre is a friend of mine — between ourselves, I knew he loathed the work of Steven Berkoff, yet, of course, he produced it when he was at the National, because it's essential that that style and that ingredient should be seen there. But you do become gloomy running a building. Richard's diaries have just been published, I've been reading them, and coincidentally, some of mine might be in the New Year. And they both hit the same tone, a kind of Eeyore-like depression. That every day passes in gloom — it's sort of gloom interspersed with disaster. Every success simply makes the next disaster that much closer.

So running a building is grim. We both — I think I finished at The Court after he'd finished at The National — but he records becoming kind of stir crazy, that time when you're coming to the end of your prison sentence and you can't believe that freedom's around the corner. And certainly, *Out of Joint* has been a liberation, and I go back to the Court without any feelings of nostalgia or longing to be back there.

HYNES: You were there for 14 years. What do you think changed in British theatre in 14 years in terms of new writing?

CLARK: Those 14 years were characterised, first of all, by a kind of long retreat. It was the age of Thatcher and the age of less and less funding. So the English are very inclined to glorify defeat—Dunkirk, English theatre in the 80s— are really all huge defeats which we celebrate because we survived. And survival was the first responsibility for any theatre director. And you knew that you had to cut down down on the amount of work that you did. You were constantly obsessed with budgets, and how you could save— and you knew that if you did insufficient work, let's say, in the theatre upstairs, then the

overheads that justified that building, a separate director, a separate production team, could no longer continue to be justified. So it was a long retreat.

On the other hand, there was a unity of purpose about English writers and directors at that time. I think, at the time, we were all aware of the differences between us, that Howard Barker seemed nihilist, Howard Brenton seemed a Marxist, Edward Bond even more of a Marxist, Caryl Churchill a Feminist Humanist— but I think from Mars, if you were looking at English theatre from a telescope, you'd be aware of huge similarities, that what everybody longed for was the demise of Mrs Thatcher, and that really brought us all together. There was a period after the miners' strike, when really the most coherent opposition to Mrs Thatcher was provided by the theatre, it was almost the only voice of criticism. And when she fell, it was as if our purpose was lost for a moment, we couldn't quite think what else to do next.

But I suppose that characterises plays like *Road*, Jim Cartwright's lyrical evocation of a Northern town in the grip of unemployment.

HYNES: *Serious Money*.

CLARK: *Serious Money*, well, that came about because we'd done so many plays about deprived areas of the community that I said to Caryl that I'd think it'd be great to do a play about people who were really making it. We started an investigation, we did a workshop and the one thing people said was, 'Oh, you'll never be able to crack *The City*, nobody'll understand what's happening.' And the actors' first job everyday was to find a story in *The Financial Times* and follow it through. And one actor picked up this story about chocolate futures in the Cote D'Ivoire, and the French Government was withdrawing transport subsidies to its colonies. So we talked one day to this stockbroker who came in— it was the early days of mobile phones, they were shaped like bricks— and this actor said, 'I just want to ask you a question about chocolate futures. If the French Transport Minister is withdrawing subsidies, doesn't that mean that chocolate's going to become much more expensive in the future?' And the man thought for a moment

and said, 'I'm just going to make a call.' And he got onto his phone and did it. So it was very exciting. And what Caryl captures in that play is both— obviously a kind of moral disapproval— but also the excitement of that world, of people making money, it was just thrilling to encounter that.

And then Ian Dury wrote the music, and when he went out on the floor of the Futures Exchange, business stopped, because all those Essex boys who were busy trading were thrilled to see the patron saint of Essex come out onto the floor.

That excitement of discovery— and I think that's one of the things that theatre does well is present you with another world, that it takes you into a world that you know little about. Don't comment, but I saw Sharon's Grave last night and I thought it was absolutely thrilling, because it transports you into a world that you know little about, and when the theatre does that, it's absolutely at its most exciting. So, in *Serious Money*, we discovered and unlocked a world none of us knew anything about. But by the end of the workshop, actors could speculate on chocolate futures, on anything, could exchange gossip with any City dealer.

HYNES: Which was the better skill— how to avoid heckling or how to speculate on chocolate futures?

CLARK: Well, two of the actors got jobs as runners on the floor of the Futures Exchange, and were earning four times as much as they were by doing the workshop. It was hard to get them back!

HYNES: And then to *Out of Joint*, and this play for instance, *Duck*. How did that come about?

CLARK: Well, Stella Feehily sent me a smaller play, a 20-minute play. It's not *The Royal Court*, which receives between two and half and three thousand scripts a year. *Out of Joint* receive two or three hundred, three or four hundred. But I do have a literary

manager who works one day a week, and she said, 'Read this.' I thought it was very striking, it was a play about a couple in a hotel room. So when I was here doing *Hinterland*, I met Stella Feehily, and she gave eight scenes which were the progenitor of *Duck*, and said, 'I'm writing about violence, I'm not sure how far to go.' I thought that was very striking. We spoke on the phone, had a correspondence, and the play kind of grew from eight scenes to its current 20 scenes. We did a workshop that the Abbey and the Peacock financed, with *Out of Joint*, in January that didn't so much change the direction of the script as confirm the direction it was going in. The storylines were strengthened and went from there. But it is a first play, and one of the things that struck was that I think it would be very difficult to get it on in Ireland, and Stella sent it to *Out of Joint* because we weren't Irish, she didn't want to be rejected people she was going up to audition for the following week, and that proximity was a dis-inducement. But at the same time, it was hard to see how that play would have been produced in Dublin, and The Abbey have been generous in giving us time there. It's a great pleasure to be playing at The Peacock, but it's painful financially.

And it's interesting that the next play we're doing is by David Hare, *The Permanent Way*. It's a new play by him, a documentary play about the privatisation of the railways, and it has a set by Bill Dudley, who is a very expensive designer, so you'd think on the face of it, that the cost of that would be much more to *Out of Joint*. But in fact, *Duck*, at the end of day, will cost us twice as much as *The Permanent Way*, because we don't get the guarantees from the venues. With *The Permanent Way*, we get guarantees, when we tour England, of between ten and sixteen thousand pounds sterling, where with *Duck*, occasionally, we've made us much as fourteen thousand pounds in guarantees, but we've also play for as little as two thousand, which barely covers the running costs. So at the end of the day, *Duck* will be far more expensive.

And we made it clear to the Arts Council when we started off—I think they were very pleased to see a company committed to new work, coming up on the horizon ten years ago, because new work had really been exiled from the repertory theatres, so it was a way of getting new work to the regions – but we made it clear that we wouldn't just do large-

scale work because *The Queen and I*, the adaptation of Sue Townsend's popular novel, was our first production, and they thought, 'Terrific! If you can tour to popular big spaces, that's great.' But I think if you are interested in new work, you also have to do that work which is going to play in studios and sometimes, that work is going to be far more expensive.

HYNES: From our point of view, it's interesting in the sense that you're a company which is committed to new work, and which also tours. It's combination— there's a difficulty here, with touring generally, but the fact that it's actually touring new work— how did that come about? I mean, you also co-produce. The company operates by co-producing, by touring, and with subsidy from the UK Arts Council.

CLARK: We're subsidised to tour, but the Arts Council are no longer as prescriptive about how many weeks you have to tour for. So we tour, I think, this year fifteen weeks. But it could be twelve, it could be ten, it could be seventeen— they don't complain about that or monitor that as closely as they used to. And we do do co-productions, obviously. Historically, my relationship was with the Royal Court, and in the early days of *Out of Joint*, we tended to co-produce with them, but we've co-produced with Hampstead, with the Young Vic, and with the National Theatre as well, and with the Soho Theatre. I think co-producing is important, not just from the financial input, but because it guarantees a London run, and without that, you won't get the actors. And so that's been very important. We tended to bring the product to the theatre and say, 'We're interested in doing this play, would you be co-producers', but occasionally, the Royal Court has come to us with a play and said 'Would you be interested in touring that?'

HYNES: And when the Arts Council fund you, they fund you to tour new work.

CLARK: No, they fund us to tour.

HYNES: Just fund you to tour.

CLARK: We've made it clear our remit is to do new work, but we've also done *The Three Sisters*, *Man of Mode*, and last year we did a double header of *She Stoops to Conquer*, and play about Goldsmith, Garrick and Doctor Johnson by April D'Angelis called *A Laughing Matter*. But our interest is in touring new work, but occasionally doing classics is very important, because you learn so much from them.

HYNES: Was this a new initiative on the part of the Council, you came to them and said 'Look, this is what I want to do' and they responded, or was there a framework into which you fitted in Council funding?

CLARK: No, there wasn't the framework, and when we went to them, to begin with, they were rather discouraging and said, 'You'll be on project grants for three years, we can't give you what they call now a franchise grant,' which you're guaranteed for three years. And it was in fact four years before we got onto a franchise grant. They were very supportive, outside that framework. But the show that nearly didn't happen was *The Steward of Christendom*, where they said 'No, we're not going to give you a project grant for this,' and the officer at the Arts Council said, 'Look, I've got a pot of money, it's £10,000, if that's any help to you, you can have that.' And we did it for that amount of money, and it was very hard to prise a two-week slot out of Michael Colgan at *The Gate*, and very hard to organise a tour for that.

HYNES: Thankfully you did succeed.

CLARK: But then after four years, we did get a franchise grant, and I think five years ago it doubled, and that step up was considerable.

I revived *Our Country's Good* five or six years ago, which is a play I did in the early Eighties, and that was on the school syllabus, on various exam syllabuses— syllabi— and that was deliberately to try and kick start a schools policy and a workshop policy. So, for example, *Duck* is playing Brighton, in a couple of months' time, Brighton and Tunbridge Wells, it's a split week. Now the audience on Thursdays and Fridays will be totally

different from the audience on Saturdays. The Saturday audience will be the regular punters who are subscribers of the arts centre we're going to in Tunbridge Wells, and Thursday and Friday will be almost exclusively a schools audience. And using workshops as a marketing tool may not be educationally politically correct, but it's certainly been an enormous help to us. And now we get bookings for plays where the teachers kind of take it on trust. So *Shopping and Fucking*, which you'd think would not command a big schools audience, teachers would ring up and say, 'Do think this is alright?' and you'd say, 'Well, it does contain sex in this scene, but you know, I think seventeen year olds would be able to cope with it admirably.' And they did book so it's been a huge help to us.

HYNES: I think we should turn it out to the audience at this stage. I'm sure you have many questions.

QUESTION ONE: Did you try and take any of that on board, did you try implementing any new ways of working, and if not, why not?

CLARK: The Royal Court, in my time, did a great deal of work in Russia, and the play by the Presnyakov Brothers, *Terrorism*, and *Black Milk*. Indeed, they have another couple of plays in the pipeline, a result of them having done workshops with writers over there. And the other—the Anglo Irish theatre tradition—I mean, theatre is more important in England and Ireland than it is on most other societies. Theatre is enormously significant in Russia culturally, as it is in our society. And it isn't the same anywhere else, and yet it is completely different. The director really is the auteur, and the writer is a bit like Hollywood, the writer is secondary to the genius, the presiding genius of the director. And the directors run the theatres and are great figures. I've tried to introduce that system in England... totally unsuccessfully. But it is true that what we were aware of, when we were doing *Blue Heart* some time ago, is just in comprehension on their part, that the writer was so significant. And I think we've learned—certainly, I've learned—a lot from seeing that. But you get now plays from Germany and Russia which have kind of lost faith in telling stories through dialogue and through characters, so it's much more

like a novel, where the lines are unattributed, or where the story is deconstructed and broken up. And where experiment seems an end in itself. So it's fascinating that theatre plays such a big part in Russian society, and equally fascinating that it's gone in such a different direction to what we would recognize here. But I'm a Royal Court director, and that means you're very well brought up as far as the writers are concerned, you're taught to believe that the writer is the senior collaborator, and— although you break the rules occasionally— you learn to lose arguments as well as win them, whereas I think Russian directors only win arguments. But the working conditions are hugely different and certainly the experiments that I've had with having longer rehearsal time are enormously rewarding and there are directors that— how long do you rehearse for, Garry?

HYNES: Four weeks.

CLARK: Katie Mitchell is a director who uses every spare second, and that is telling in the work. So if I had more money, I would use it on more rehearsal, not bigger sets.

QUESTION TWO: How do you avoid the challenge or the difficulty of co-opting the creative instincts of the writer? Have you ever had that problem, ever been confronted with that, assuming proprietorship insidiously?

CLARK: Yes, yes, it's a problem you face every time you do a collaboration. I have done plays where the actors just sat there, wondering if they were going to get in the plot at all, and where the first job for the actors was to construct a beginning, middle and end for their characters. And the weight on collaboration was huge. So I think you've got to be flexible, as a director, doing new work. Obviously there's a danger that you can dominate the process, that you can steal the creativity from the writer, and I'm sure I've been guilty of that. But at the same time, I do know my place, that what you have to do is hand the creative process back to the writer.

And obviously, working on *Duck* with Stella Feehily, who's a first-time writer, you could win every debate, you could win every argument, and you have to resolve not to. She was

very vigorous in standing up for her interpretation of the play, and what she wanted to say. So you're more saying, 'Well what do you want to say next, where could this character go, why don't you have a scene with those two characters in? If they're supposed to be friends, why is one of the young women in Duck followed through so much, and shouldn't we have a scene with the other one,' nudging them in that direction, having them write scenes rather than saying what scenes should be written.

QUESTION TWO: With that, do you believe in dramaturgy as a professional activity apart from directing?

CLARK: No, I've been brought up without dramaturgs. I mean, obviously in Germany they work with dramaturgs, and in Australia they do, and I know you do here, a bit. Jocelyn Clarke, who's the dramaturg at the Abbey came in to rehearsals, he had conversations with Stella, and with me, and I enjoyed that very much, but I'm not used to it, and certainly, I suppose, the way theatre has evolved around the Royal Court, is that the director acts as dramaturg, so I'm accustomed to doing that. And I think Duck, with Jocelyn Clarke, was the first time I'd worked with a dramaturg on the piece, and it was instructive. I mean, you've got to keep learning, that's the thing, that's why— David Hare said once, 'Directing is not really a profession for a grown up.' And of course it's true, that you have to keep learning, the moment you think you know it, you're beginning to ossify, so working with a dramaturge was painfully instructive.

MICHAEL CAVEN, OUROBOROS THEATRE: You've said something about this, but I just wanted to pursue the line in terms of the workshop process for a new play, you've spoken about the importance from an actor's point of view, the research, it depends obviously on the piece. What do you feel the process offers the writer, to take a group of actors into the room, and new work, and the writer and the director— what do you set out to help the writer get from that process?

CLARK: Well, firstly it helps the writer by having a group of actors to work for, that there are writers like Sebastian Barry, who writes very much with a particular actor in

mind, and it may be that in the end, for one reason or another, that actor's not cast. But it still helped him enormously to have that actor in the frame. So getting the actor, getting the writer away from the word processor, out of the garret, and into the rehearsal room is the first achievement. The second is that you place a body of research at the writer's disposal, that they couldn't possibly find out by themselves, and that's very enriching, so that at the end of the workshop process, be it three weeks, two weeks, four weeks, they have a body of material that they can draw on. That's invaluable. I mean, there are plays I've done which are pure research, like *A State Affair*, which was the companion piece to *Rita, Sue and Bob Too*. *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* was a play of Andrea Dunbar's that I did in the early Eighties, which she had set on a council estate outside Bradford. The mission of the second play was to go back and visit the same estate 20 years later, after what had been a really huge heroin epidemic, when that fragment of society had fallen even further apart, and talk to policemen, bail hostel wardens, kids, vicar — it's always enormously instructive, I mean, it's basic Stanislavsky, going back to observing. But that privilege of talking to people before you do the play is always surprising. My first afternoon in Leeds, which was where we were based for *The State Affair*, I drew what I thought was the boring job, which was going out with the policeman, while other people were meeting more exotic characters. So I arrived in the police station, and this policeman came up, and he was mixed race, part black, which surprised me, and he said, 'I'm sorry I'm late, I've got to deliver these leaflets to the gay and lesbian pubs in the Leeds area. I don't think the West Yorkshire police have been fully responsible in observing the rights of the gay and lesbian community, so we're very concerned that they know...' and he was so politically correct, post the Lawrence Report, and so charismatic, such a star, that travelling in his panda that afternoon, you saw exactly how the police have changed and how if I hadn't had that afternoon, you'd think they were still, you know, as in *The Bill*. And it's so different from that. He knew everything about the particular patch that he covered. He said, 'Watch this,' and he went up to these kids all grouped round a mobile phone, and they were all dealing. It was like a flock of pigeons, he walked into the middle, and they all took off, and he just grabbed one of them and said— and he was not out to arrest them, he was simply out to find out what was going on, and just the instruction level that you

get from a workshop is— it means you talk with more authority. And you find out those things that are so unexpected.

CAVEN: But do you find you end up at some level rehearsing the play when you should be allowing the play to speak itself— do you find that you're using rehearsal to find out what the play may still mean?

CLARK: No, not really, I mean, in a way, the closing off of a play happens in the last four weeks of rehearsal anyway. Opening up a play happens in the workshop. I mean, I've had the nightmare experience of opening up a play and not being able to put it together again. But if you know that you've got that time at your disposal, then you can always finish it off. I remember, in the early days at The Royal Court, hearing the word that came out of rehearsal. And usually actors would say, 'Oh, it's going terribly well, it's really terrific,' and then what happened when you saw it was that it had not made the jump from the rehearsal room to the stage. So you know you've got that to do at the end of the day. But opening up the process, so that the actors get a chance to research, and the writer can— it seems to me a different job, and you must allow time for that.

ANNIE RYAN, THE CORN EXCHANGE: I was wondering if you can talk a little bit about the actors, have you ever worked with a consistent company of actors, do you come to work with the same group a lot, and do find that valuable in terms of your own methodologies and the research in particular?

CLARK: Yes, I do. I think that the permanent company, or the ensemble, is an ideal, like the light at Daisy's dock at the end of *The Great Gatsby* that recedes before us. You do want to work with the same actors, and it's reassuring to work with people who appreciate your methodology and your way of working. I'm sure you find the same – that there's a nucleus of actors you want. So in *Duck*, there's only one actor I've worked with before, but *The Permanent Way*, that I'm starting rehearsal on next week, I have a company of nine, five I think I've worked with before. And that's the nearest we can get, under our economic and working conditions, to the ensembles that used to be so

impressive in Hungary, Poland and Russia. And when you met people from the Iron Curtain countries and you say, 'Oh, how long have you been working together?' One would say, 'Oh, me only five years, but Stanislav 23 years,' and you knew it was a monastic life that must have been hell at some point, but also lead to work of great depth and great. And emulating that ensemble is all we can do, and try to give a good impersonation of an ensemble, in the five weeks' rehearsal that we have. So working with the same people again is reassuring. I mean, I don't tend to work with stars, but when I have, it's often been enormously rewarding. But the economic conditions we work under mean, you're going to be away from home for six to 13 weeks, that the money isn't that great, although we try and make it as generous as we can. I think we now pay a touring allowance of £250 a week, and salaries of £380. So it's good if you're a young actor starting out— it's not so great if you've got two kids and a mortgage and a house in London to maintain, and you're only going to get home by the British transport system sometime in the early afternoon on Sunday. So all those are factors, but yes, working with the same people is terrific— essential.

LOUGHLIN DEEGAN, ROUGH MAGIC THEATRE COMPANY: You said earlier, about *Out of Joint* that the Arts Council particularly welcomed the arrival of a new writing company, and do you think now that the climate has changed in any way. I ask particularly, I suppose, because here in Ireland, new writing is so much part of the mainstream that there's almost a sense of a backlash against new writing companies, particularly.

CLARK: Well, when we started, which was '94, I think, we toured to Liverpool— in fact with *The Steward of Christendom*. It was like the relief of *Mafeking*, people said, because Liverpool used to have two theatres, *The Everyman* and *The Playhouse*, *The Playhouse* was one of the first repertory theatres, vigorous theatre which had really been in decay, and *The Playhouse* had become an outpost of the Bill Kenwright empire, so *No Sex Please, We're British* had played there forever, I think, and *The Everyman* was down to doing only one or two productions of their own a year. So I remember in the foyer, after the performance in the Liverpool *Everyman*, this woman gripped me by the arm and

said, 'Thank God you've arrived! This is the first new play we've seen in Liverpool for two and a half years!'

So there was a great need at the time we started, you're quite right, that whatever you say about Tony Blair's government, things have got better, that there is more funding available, and things are not as bad as they were. So the repertory theatres are more vigorous: they need new work from touring companies perhaps less than they did. But at the same time, we've formed very good relationships with a theatre like Colchester whose director is very committed to having a permanent company, very committed to doing the classics, can't find room in her remit to do new work for the length of time she would have to programme it in her theatre but is very happy to have us come for a week. That covers the bases for her, that means new work is represented in the programme, without the financial risk it would be if she programmed it herself. So we have found new ways in. It would be wrong to think that we depend on lack of help from the British repertory system, but perhaps we have benefitted from it. One thing that's frustrating though, that leads on from that, is that we only tour where the buildings are, so we never go to Newcastle, we never go west of Plymouth, and we've taken to doing performances without a set, on the floor of schools— it's partly come from the schools and colleges contact we've had. So *The Permanent Way* will do four performances, two in schools, one in Lincoln, one in Cornwall, that we would never otherwise get to. And a trade unions hall in Sheffield, and a church in Hatfield, which is near where one of the train crashes that the play debates, took place.

And we can afford to do that because we do it without the set, and without the complicated get in, that one of the reasons we need a guarantee is because we're dependant on quite complicated sound and lighting technology. But if you say, well, we'll perform in daylight or with whatever lights you can provide, no lighting changes, with full costumes, full sound, and just do it on the floor, like a rehearsal room, and we charge £500 to a school to do that. And on the whole, it's great day for them, because the kids can help with the get-in, you form a relationship with them, you're part of that little community for a day. And theatre studies has been an enormous growth area in the English curriculum – I don't think it fills the place here, does it? But theatre studies has

been one of the effects of Mrs Thatcher's reforms of the education system— it's terrible to be saying something good about Mrs Thatcher, but I can't avoid it— was that the pupils had choice. So if a school was faced with 12 or 15 students who said, 'I want to study theatre studies,' the school had to find a teacher. So they were really panicking— English teachers were coming out of retirement, and so often workshops were very fertile, because suddenly the teacher had access to professional skills, a different kind of input... had two hours off where she could watch, and it created an audience for us. And doing work on the floor of schools without décor is really an extension of that.

JIM CULLETON, FISHAMBLE: I was wondering about the rehearsing process itself, do you find that you usually start rehearsals by doing a lot of discussion and analysis of the script, or do you find that it's good to sometimes get to the floor early in rehearsal or does that change, depending on the play?

CLARK: I always place analysis before instinct, and I do work very much in a Stanislavsky-ish kind of way of breaking the action, breaking the script down into intentions and units, and tend to spend up to two weeks doing that, at the beginning. But it is work that places the brain foremost, rather than instinct, and it can be quite, you know, if you've spent a morning doing that, deadening— so I do alternate with moving it, and also—I'm just thinking back to the most recent play, *Duck*, we spent a lot of time improvising the back story, what happened to the characters before the play begins, stimulating the actors' imagination that way. The play concerns a relationship that's gone wrong, and yet, for both those people, the relationship has been probably the best they've had, in the year leading up to the play beginning. So we investigated the back story, and made clear what had happened between the scenes, and looked at that. But yeah, I do tend to spend the first week and a half at least analysing the text before moving it.

ANNE BARKER, CAMERA PRODUCTIONS: You talked earlier about the gloom that sets in when you were managing a building, and I was just wondering if there was anything that would tempt you to go back to running one?

CLARK: Well, I did an assessment. The Arts Council send out people to assess, it was in Sheffield, probably about four or five years ago, and it was quite instructive, being in a theatre for two days. It was before Michael Grandage had taken it over, so it was in quite a depressed state, and you talked to the accountants, and you became involved in the problems, and on the train down, I did think, 'Oh, I could get rather a nice house in Sheffield, it's rather picturesque round here,' and you did become involved in the problems of it, and how attractive it would be, give me a couple of million, I could sort this out in no time.

So the answer's no, really. I'm very grateful to the people who do run buildings, and obviously a whole new generation of people are beginning to become repertory directors in England, and I think that's terrific, but no, I'm not drawn to it. I'm much more drawn to the idea of the illusion of a permanent company, and Out of Joint doing two plays a year, possibly reviving a third, suits me fine.

BEN HENNESSY, RED KETTLE THEATRE COMPANY: I just wanted to ask you, in relation to the choices that you make, about the plays that you choose for new writing. At the beginning, you talked about the aesthetic that would have attracted you first with Mícheál Mac Liammóir, and a lot of the plays that you've since spoken about have very strong social content, even in relation to the type of touring you're talking about, about going to schools and trade unions halls and churches, there's a very strong kind of social element to the choices that you've made, and I just want to hear you talk about how you come about to make those choices, where you would fall down on them. And to take it a step further: do the audiences that you pitch the plays at have a strong bearing on making those choices, or is it more of a personal choice, a type of play that you creatively would like to be involved in?

CLARK: Well, I think that, running a touring company, you can't control the venues, so you can't control the audience. If we go to Bath we're dependent absolutely on that theatre's marketing schemes. So I don't think, as a director of a touring company, that you can pitch a play at a particular audience. What's interesting is that— I'm not really quite answering your question, but I will do— Rita, Sue and Bob Too and A State Affair

had a much greater percentage of attendance in the North of England than it did in the South: it's a real Northern play. So we played, let's say, to eighty/eighty five per cent in Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, those towns, and probably rather less in cities in the South. So people want to see stories about themselves, and I'm sure that holds as true here as anywhere, and when we did *Serious Money*, people poured out of the City to see the play, they were enormously flattered to see pictures of themselves on stage, no matter how satirical you were being. And of course, it's the same with Restoration drama, all those plays were seen by the people exactly like the actors on stage, and they often leant their own costumes to the actors in order to get them more accurate.

I've never quite had the political purpose that people sometimes associate with me. In those companies like 7:84, that have a clear socialist political agenda, or, say, Gay Sweatshop, that seeks to give a voice to a particular part of the community, I've never quite identified with that. But at the same time, there is a social curiosity and, I think, a determination to lift the stone and see what happens underneath, those creatures scuttling about, and to reveal a world that— I mean, *The Royal Court* has been wonderful in doing 'work plays', and so, *The Changing Room*, or— there are lots of them— plays that are set in the workplace, and I think that was very important in revealing different worlds. As I said earlier, I think that's one of the things that theatre does that is absolutely special, and that no matter how accurate a documentary is on television, or how fascinating a film can be, that revelation of a different world on stage is something that we in the theatre do very well. And looking at different aspects of society is fascinating. Now that sounds worthy, and I'm not frightened of being worthy— I mean, people always say that theatre must be entertaining, but entertainment without instruction is merely bland; instruction without entertainment is simply boring. So you've got to combine the two every time you go out to bat. And combining instruction and entertainment is the job we all face.

HYNES: We are beginning to run out of time so I'll take two last questions.

WILLIE WHITE, PROJECT ARTS CENTRE: *Duck* is a peculiar case which you alluded to earlier on. Here is an ostensibly Irish play, Irish writer, an Irish cast, which has

had a peculiar route to Dublin, and this wouldn't have been the first occasion in which an Irish writer has felt that the route to Dublin is via London or elsewhere. So why do you think that is? Is it that we just produce too many playwrights our infrastructure can't sustain, that we can't develop enough of them at the time, and how do you feel about English people's tax money being spent developing Irish artists?

HYNES: How do we feel about it!

CLARK: I think that one of things that faces an Irish writer is that it's impossible probably to earn a living simply by playing to the Irish market. So any Irish playwright has to crack the market in New York or London, the great English-speaking theatre centres. Sustaining the living of a writer is very important to us, so we guarantee playwrights, I think, £17,500, win, lose or draw. So Stella Feehily will be guaranteed the same amount as David Hare. Probably David Hare will earn in excess of that sum because the royalties will accumulate because it's in repertoire at the National for a longer period, and will play to bigger audiences. But I think, if you do new work, making sure that the writer makes a living is absolutely crucial. I think that it's something I look to learn from here. I think probably *Duck* wouldn't have been produced if it had been simply left to market forces in Ireland. I think that's something you might like to think about rather than me, but I feel fine about the British taxpayer paying for Irish work, that doesn't bother me much. Donal McCann said to once, 'This country gave you your education, it's about time you gave something back.'

HYNES: One last question.

PATRICK LYNCH, BROADWAY THEATRE COMPANY: Some of the plays that you've produced, like *Shopping and Fucking*, probably the most obvious example, created a sensation, and maybe brought a new audience to the theatre, but do you think that in the longer term, it might do some damage to the theatre, because it's so sensitive, the content is so explicit, and new audiences— people who are coming back to the theatre

again might expect that, and you can't reproduce that all the time? Do you think there's a danger of over-hyping new plays— new work?

CLARK: It's not a danger I've worried about too much, I must say. It's true that *Shopping and Fucking*, because of the sensational nature of the title, and because of some of the content of it— it also hit its moment, it's also a very good play, and it absolutely met its time. But when we opened it, it played in a theatre, on the stage at the Ambassador, of 60 seats, and the proximity meant people fainted, people were sick, people had to be passed out over the audience, critics ran stumbling for the exit, unable to take any more. But the success of the play meant it transferred to bigger and bigger theatres, and ended up having two successive limited seasons in West End runs, where it played to audiences of 500, 600, 700. And there, the comedy in the play became much more important, and the comedy had always been there, but 500 people a night laughing, as opposed to 50, transforms the experience of the play completely. And the intensity of the first production suffered in the bigger spaces.

But no, I think that was a phase theatre went through, of violence. It's always interesting to me that sex is more alarming on the stage than violence is. I mean, we're accustomed to violence on the stage— *Hamlet* ends in a welter of bodies. But I remember driving my daughter to school and a young man with a walkman on stepped off the pavement, got hit by a car, went up over the windscreen, and broke his leg, and there was a bone sticking out. I was absolutely in shock for the rest of the morning. An ambulance came, and he was fine. But I could go to see *King Lear*, and see Gloucester's eyes gouged out and say, 'Yes, oh, that was very effective. I'll have a gin and tonic in the interval.' You know, you're not effected by violence onstage, but you are in real life. Whereas sex is hopefully part of all our lives— maybe not the sex experienced in *Shopping and Fucking*— but it's something we encounter on a weekly, if not a daily basis, and yet, see it in the theatre and we're in tremor about it. So, the penis is mightier than the sword is the conclusion. And I think theatre has historically dealt with sex— I do think— it's doing sex onstage— I wish drama schools did sex instead of swordplay, because you need to learn how to handle it, how to handle nudity, whether or not it's the right point in rehearsal to do that. And it's

like a conjuring trick, isn't it, just like swordplay, you know somebody's not killed when they're killed onstage, and you know this couple really aren't having sex when they're supposed to be. So how you do it is that, as a director, you have to address at the right point in rehearsal. Perhaps that's the note to end on.

HYNES: That's definitely the note to end on. Max, thank you for this morning, but also thank you for the continual pleasure and inspiration on your work throughout the years.