

CHAPTER I

Introduction
Citizenship and theatre

Citizenship is the preoccupation of today. As I write these words in February 2010, the *Guardian* newspaper has just launched an online pamphlet on Citizen Ethics, prompted by Michael Sandel's 2009 Reith Lectures, with many figures from public life contributing their views.¹ The Marxist literary critic Frederic Jameson in 2002 lamented the re-emergence of political philosophy 'trailing after it all those ancient issues of constitutions and citizenship, of civil society and parliamentary representation, of responsibility and civic virtue, which were the hottest topics of the eighteenth century just as surely as they are no longer our own. It is as though nothing had been learned from the challenges of the revolutionary century just conclude.'² Jürgen Habermas was, I believe, closer to the mark in dubbing modernity 'an unfinished project' rooted in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.³ Citizenship is a contested term that has resonances for people of many different persuasions, potentially a liberal rallying point, potentially despite Jameson's protestations part of an agenda for radical change. So why has this concept, rooted in antiquity and in the eighteenth century, become again so necessary?

In the first instance, most readers of this book will inhabit a multicultural society where ethnicity and cultural tradition do not marry up with any homogenizing concept of nationhood. The idea of 'citizenship' unhooks the state from ideas of nation, whilst affirming that ethics and feeling cannot be separated from membership of a particular political community. It offers a language through which to address fraught issues like the wearing of Islamic headscarves in schools, or the placement of rehabilitation centres within the 'community'. The term 'citizen' was not a watchword of the American Revolution because citizens by definition have to be citizens of somewhere particular, and unlike centralized France the USA was a

¹ www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/feb/20/citizen-ethics-time-of-crisis

² Jameson (2002) 2. ³ Habermas (1996).

federation of states; it was the Fourteenth Amendment of 1868 that gave the term resonance, asserting that black and white alike, if born in the USA, were automatically ‘citizens of the United States’.⁴

Secondly, the collapse of the Marxist project, to which Jameson looks back, has left a certain vacuum. In my student years it was axiomatic that ‘good theatre’ and ‘subversive theatre’ were synonymous terms, and the promise of alternative ways of living was harnessed to the ideal of ‘alternative’ theatre performed in dark basements. Today the planet has shrunk and boltholes no longer exist. The problem of the future is how we can live together in a world of diminishing environmental resources, where communication technologies have made the boundaries of the nation-state increasingly porous. Citizenship addresses the fundamental problem of cohabitation.

Third is the issue highlighted by the *Guardian* pamphlet, the perceived lack of a shared ethical framework in societies stripped both of religious consensus and of the passions engendered by nationalism. In its printed text, the *Guardian* highlights Michael Sandel’s phrase: ‘The hollowing out of the public realm makes it difficult to cultivate solidarity.’⁵ I shall return at the close of this book to the idea that in a world of media manipulation and personality politics there is no space for any serious public engagement with moral issues. The *Guardian* seeks to position its own forum within this public realm, a realm which includes theatre as we infer from the *Guardian*’s choice of contributors. Jude Kelly tells the reader that ‘art is a fundamental right of every human being’, while Kwame Kwei-Armah declares that when writing for the National Theatre his job is to ‘hold a mirror up to nature’.⁶ I shall not unpack at this point the assumptions that lie behind such statements, beyond asking the obvious questions: what is this thing ‘art’ that like food we have a right to consume? And is theatre primarily a mimetic representation, or is it a social event? The relationship between theatre and the public realm needs historical investigation if satisfactory answers are to be found for the contemporary problem of how theatre configures with citizenship.

Do we need citizenship? Do we need theatre? Let us return to first principles with the help of a nineteenth-century novelist. Leo Tolstoy places the seduction of Natasha Rostov at the centre of *War and Peace* as the pivot upon which the plot turns. Natasha enters the Moscow Opera House as an innocent, and at first all she can see on the stage is artifice: canvas

⁴ See Heater (2004) 70. ⁵ *Guardian* 20 February 2010.

⁶ Kelly’s text in the newspaper version, Kwei-Armah in the online pamphlet.

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

3

backdrops, cardboard sets, an overweight prima donna. Her interest is in Moscow's social elite around her, and her own flesh exposed in an unfamiliar evening gown. The atmosphere progressively catches her up; she forgets her fiancé and surrenders without resistance to the seducer who invades her box. The action on stage mirrors her downfall: the woman carried off and lamenting, the male strutting his dance, a final vision of Hell. The theatre is a space of social performance, and a site of seduction where morality collapses. Natasha ends the novel learning from Rousseau about natural breast-feeding, and avoiding elegant French codes of female behaviour. The novel, not theatre, was the medium through which Tolstoy felt he could articulate truths both about unique individual Russians and about what Rousseau termed the 'general will', the transpersonal force which took Russians to victory against Napoleon. In Tolstoy's novel the aristocrats of St Petersburg are torn between their nationalism and their love for the French institution of theatre. In a Russia defined by its vast rural estates, Tolstoy celebrates the household and the relations of landlord and peasant as a form of society more natural than any aristocratic salon or confraternity of burghers. Although Moscow organically regenerates itself after its burning, we do not find in Tolstoy any notion akin to 'citizenship', for there was, and some would say there remains, no room for this republican and secular ideal in a society shaped by Czarist and Orthodox cultural traditions. Tolstoy's Russia defines its identity in opposition to France, and republicanism is a feature of the French other, an inadequate creed that collapses into Napoleonic imperialism.

Tolstoy's critique of theatre echoes Plato and Rousseau whose thinking I shall examine in the course of this book. His premise is that theatre is a social event which under the guise of cosmopolitanism binds together a certain social class, and its power lies not in any appeal to reason but in its seductive hold upon the emotions. Art for Tolstoy is at root 'a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings'.⁷ Richard Rorty takes a similar view of the world when he contends that the principle of loyalty is always prior to the principle of reason, rationality being but a device to ensure the survival of large groups.⁸ For Tolstoy, ethical values should be formed not in the public realm but in the intimate environment of the home, where novels like *War and Peace* will be read. It follows that it is an illusion for *Guardian*-reading theatre-goers to imagine their experiences will somehow generate a better world, for they attend the National Theatre

⁷ *What is Art?* in Feagin and Maynard (1997) 171. ⁸ Rorty (1998).

merely to be reassured in their pre-existent convictions, and in their social position. Such is the Tolstoyan challenge.

Let us consider in this light a recent National Theatre venture, Mark Ravenhill's play *Citizenship*. A typical review accessed via the National Theatre website records:

I Went To Watch Citizenship Last Night With My School @ The National Theatre. It Was Awesome. The Way Mark Ravenhill Managed To Use Comedy To Show An Actually Quite Meaningful Piece Of Drama Was Really Good. And His Characterisation Of All The Teens Were Pretty Much Spot On. Me And My Class Mates Were Left Comparing The Characters To Other School Mates. Definately A Good Job Well Done.⁹

The spectator treats the play as a reflection of her social reality and transmits by the word 'meaningful' some recognition of thematic content. But it is clear that the spectator is echoing a certain academic discourse, and we have no means of knowing whether this mirroring of reality and sense of a lurking meaning will allow her 'to go out into the world and ask some new questions of it', as Ravenhill hopes.¹⁰ The word 'awesome' catches an emotional reaction, hinting at an experience shared with classmates, perhaps affecting the dynamics of that group. I saw Ravenhill's play when it toured to the Oxford Playhouse, sitting near the front amid a small group of older spectators some of whom had obviously come by mistake. The auditorium behind was filled with teenage groups, mostly female, vociferous in their enthusiastic response and creating a sense of engaged participation and interchange with the stage more familiar to me as a theatre historian than as a patron of the Playhouse.

We can analyse Ravenhill's play on two levels. We can focus on the text, or dramatic content, and consider how the play *represents* teenage sexuality, portrays a world where young people are excluded from the public realm, and satirizes government attempts to teach citizenship via essays on multiculturalism and lifeskills training in motherhood. There is an available academic toolkit which makes this kind of analysis quite straightforward. Much harder to pin down is the performance as social event. What kind of bonding united the auditorium as a whole, or the teenage subgroups inclusive or exclusive of their teachers or youth leaders? Were the teenagers being educated in theatre-going so they will become regulars in later life? Were they all bound for university, aware that they do not themselves sit at the bottom of the social heap but finding cathartic

⁹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyR4u7jDsHY ¹⁰ Ravenhill (2008) viii. Text of the play on 233–92.

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

5

liberation in seeing their sexual anxieties articulated on stage, and social liberation in the shared recognition of those anxieties? These questions confront us when we think of theatre as a social practice, and the answers are far from obvious.

In respect of modern citizenship, Ravenhill's *Citizenship* poses a further question. The play was commissioned as part of the National Theatre's 'Connections' programme, which included training sessions for teachers and directors of youth theatre groups, and it was written for amateur performance.¹¹ How do we compare participation in a community activity with the watching of a skilled professional production? We are thrown back on competing definitions of 'citizenship'. If we impose a local frame upon the term, we shall think of teenage actors exercising a kind of citizenship when they perform Ravenhill's text for their peers, functioning as active members of their community, not passive consumers of culture. On the other hand, if we give the term a national frame, we shall sense something rather valuable in the teenagers' participation in a wider cultural world. Though virtual encounters through blogs and iPhones complicate the old dichotomy of local and national,¹² such networking cannot in my view substitute for the complexity of human interaction generated by a shared physical presence in a public space.

Today this Arts Council policy statement of 1996 sounds quaintly archaic.

For five hundred years, drama has been at the heart of England's creative life . . . England is rightly regarded as a world centre for drama and its plays are exported throughout the world . . . In recognition of this the Arts Council of England spends a large proportion of its funds on drama . . . Just as German culture has found its highest expression in its musical tradition – or the Italian renaissance in its visual arts – so the English genius has been seen above all on stage.¹³

Though Ravenhill is certainly esteemed abroad, government funding of the arts in England can no longer be justified, at least publicly, on such aesthetic or nationalistic grounds, but a play that educates the young in citizenship is consistent with modern political values and is eminently fundable. Whatever Ravenhill may do to satirize the citizenship education provided by an uncaring state, he is trapped in a circle that positions him as part of that education, and the intensity of his writing no doubt reflects his awareness of being ensnared. The National Theatre has to reconcile the twin ideals of democratic diversity and national homogeneity which justify

¹¹ On the context and implications, see Deeney (2007).

¹² See for example Gray (2001).

¹³ Arts Council (1996). On arts policy, cf. Everitt (2001).

its funding, and the director of that theatre, Nicholas Hytner, chooses his words carefully. ‘We want to tell the stories that chart the way the nation is changing. We want to bring front-line reports from new communities and generations, and we want to see the present redefined in the context of the past.’¹⁴ As a front-line report on the state of the nation, Ravenhill’s play happily fits this 21st-century agenda.

Although we may wince now at the rhetoric of 1996, unhooking citizenship from nationhood is not so easily accomplished. Advice to would-be immigrants to the UK sets out the paradox. ‘Britain is a country where people of many different cultures and faiths live. What brings British people together is that they listen to different points of view, they have respect for equal rights and they believe that community is important.’¹⁵ A coherent national identity is deemed at once to exist and to not exist. A 2008 government report by Lord Goldsmith recommended that school leavers in a rite of passage should swear an oath of allegiance to Queen and Country, and that a British national day should be established.¹⁶ These proposals were derided in the press for epitomizing the very antithesis of Britishness – the sort of thing that Americans do and *we* don’t. The national ‘we’ refuses to be eradicated.

No study of citizenship can ignore the phenomenon of national difference. Since De Tocqueville, individualism has been recognized as a distinctive feature of a USA that is at once a state and a union of states.¹⁷ The American rhetoric of citizenship emphasizes inclusiveness, asserting that every minority has its place in a land that is understood to be diverse, and attention to minorities helps to explain why the United States has never generated a ‘National Theatre’ on the European model. The German *Bundesrepublik* is likewise formally a federation, and the term *Staatsbürgerschaft*, the nearest approximation to ‘citizenship’, is federalist in the way it links the state (*Staat*) to the burgher of an autonomous city. Ethnicity rather than political membership has over a long period shaped the sense of being German. Conversely, in France, with its history of centralization and imperialism, Frenchness has long been regarded as a product of cultural assimilation: to absorb French language and literature and relinquish other cultural bonds is to become French.¹⁸ England, with its mixed Anglo-Saxon and Gallic background, and uneasy relationship to Anglophone Scotland,

¹⁴ www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=7083

¹⁵ www.lifeintheuktest.gov.uk/textsite/test_intro_20.html

¹⁶ ‘Citizenship: our common bond’, published 11 March 2008: www.justice.gov.uk/docs/citizenship-report-full.pdf

¹⁷ Bellah *et al.* (1996) is a classic study. ¹⁸ On France and Germany, see Brubaker (1992).

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

7

Wales and Ireland, is currently looking to the United States for a notion of citizenship that accommodates cultural and ethnic diversity, while at the same time it is unwilling to relinquish a more European idea of the 'nation' which implies an element of *natio*, common 'birth'. In an England that still proclaims itself not a republic but part of a United *Kingdom*, heaping moral value onto the term 'citizenship' is a novel project.¹⁹

It is never possible to shake off bonds created by history, even in a republic formed of immigrants like the USA, and the role of theatre in creating communal memories is often an important one.²⁰ I recently had the task of chairing a seminar that brought together an Austrian and a Polish theatre practitioner, and I found the mutual incomprehension revealing. For the Austrian, the Polish work made no sense and appeared regressive in its insistent rhythms and mythopoeic bricolage of classical material. From the Polish point of view, conversely, the idea that we can strip human beings down in Beckettian fashion to the minima of language and body seemed nihilistic. I could only reconcile this clash of principles by looking at national traditions. In a Germanic context, anything that smacks of the *Volk* is suspect because of the way national myths were manipulated by Fascism, and any valid aesthetic must now be founded on minimalism and first principles. In Poland, on the other hand, where the cultural trauma of Stalinism followed two centuries of state dismemberment, religion and folk tradition seemed to rescue Poles from a sense of dehumanization or non-being. An aesthetic based on residues of cultural memory appeared therefore to be a natural form of creative expression. There is manifestly less attachment to nation in long-established nation-states like Britain than in newly autonomous nations, and any account of citizenship needs to take note of this difference. Poland, with its history of incursions from Prussia, Russia and Austro-Hungary, finds sources of solidarity in its language, literature and religious practices that may appear incomprehensible to native speakers of a globalized English language.

Such diversity makes the work of the historian all the more important.²¹ Citizenship is a function of the spatial unit to which the citizen belongs, and that unit can take different forms, including the local community, the city, the city-state, the nation, the republic, and arguably the 'world'. Of all these, it is the 'republic' that has been tied most strongly to the moral ideal of the 'citizen'. While 'democracy', rule by the collective *demos* or public,

¹⁹ For the English political context, see the introduction to Brannan, John and Stoker (2007).

²⁰ On nation and memory, see Smith (1999).

²¹ Useful historical surveys of citizenship include Riesenbergs (1992), Heater (1999), Faulks (2000), Heater (2004) and Magnette (2005).

was an invention of Athens, the ideal of the ‘republic’, which implies ownership of the *res publica* or ‘public thing’, was a creation of Rome. Rome was too big for democracy, and the senatorial class was entrenched in its power, but within the Roman Republic an element of face-to-face encounter and democratic voting was powerful in symbolic terms, offering a moral right to riot when senators forgot that the state ultimately belonged to the people. Emotions attached to a *republic* are not the same as emotions attached to a *nation*, since the one term traditionally implies ownership, the other nativity.²² ‘Civic republicanism’ is today the standard label given to the school of political thought that opposes individualistic liberalism, and includes figures like Michael Sandel.²³

Republics are self-evidently human constructs, unlike ‘nations’ and ‘communities’. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* developed an influential critique of nationalism, from a republican perspective. His argument is that ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.’²⁴ In Anderson’s historical model, ‘imagined’ religious and dynastic communities were replaced in the Age of Enlightenment by ‘imagined’ national communities, powerfully influenced by the medium of print. My own point of departure is different, for I believe we should not undervalue the phenomenological experience of false and genuine communities. Thus, for example, the proposal that all British school leavers should swear allegiance to Queen and Country was widely perceived as a ceremony that would create false community. Anderson’s parenthesis ‘(and perhaps even these)’ points to a philosophical hole at the core of his method: what relationships, then, are not ‘imagined’? By inference we are pointed back to the unique authenticity of familial and neighbourly relationships. Anderson’s historiography focuses upon discourse and textuality at the expense of performance, and he has many perceptive things to say about the impact of print-capitalism, but he is not interested for example in how the reading of a newspaper in an eighteenth-century coffee-house might constitute a performance, creating a small community of minds and bodies within the public sphere. It is, I shall argue, the very nature and purpose of theatre to create communities, and most forms of pre-modern theatre maximized the audience’s awareness that it embodied a community that transcended familial and neighbourly relations.

²² In defence of nation as an ideal, see e.g. Miller (2000), Kymlicka (2001) 203–64. On the tension between republic and nation, see Taylor (2004).

²³ Kymlicka (2002) 294–9, Finlayson (2005) 108–13. ²⁴ Anderson (1991) 6 – first published in 1983.

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

9

British sensibilities have long responded to the dream of connection to a community rooted in time immemorial. Seventeenth-century English radicals, for example, claimed that the people were still subject to a 'Norman yoke' in the belief that somewhere in an earlier and uncontaminated Anglo-Saxon past lay a world akin to Eden.²⁵ Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City*, showed how British writers repeatedly manufactured fakes of country life, but paradoxically he laid bare at the same time continuities in the desire of writers to fight the logic of profit with an ideal of rural community. Material traces of the past visible through his Welsh study window reminded him of an enduring 'structure of feeling' which pitted a communal country life against urban alienation.²⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy from a French perspective argues that historians too easily postulate lost communities, whereas it is actually the experience of loss that constitutes communities. Rousseau is a paradigmatic figure here, inventing the citizen of a free, sovereign community in response to the harsh and godless reality of modern 'society'.²⁷

In 1960 John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy wrote a 'community' play for a Somerset village in which they were living.²⁸ Neither so English as to trouble the Irish D'Arcy, nor so spiritual as to trouble the secular Arden, the story of Christ's nativity seemed to be the perfect vehicle for community theatre. However, the centuries-old nativity play is now in crisis. Defending himself in the right-wing press in December 2007 against charges of repressive political correctness, Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, roundly supported the school nativity play: 'In spite of its growing consumerist tinge, Christmas is a moment when our whole nation can celebrate the story of hope, togetherness and compassion symbolized by the Christian tale; you don't have to be a Christian to share the values of community and family. There is room for everybody at this inn.'²⁹ The rhetoric of 'nation' fuses with the rhetoric of 'community' in this secularizing, assimilationist rhetoric, but however attractive Phillips' metaphor of an inn with many guests may be, British policies of multiculturalism are increasingly hard to reconcile with the idea of 'one nation', as we are reminded when Phillips notes that "Mohammed" is 'the second-most-common name for new babies in England'.³⁰ It was once assumed that modernity entailed the decline of religious belief, but in most parts of

²⁵ Hill (1964). ²⁶ Williams (1975). ²⁷ Nancy (1991) 9–10.

²⁸ *The Business of Good Government*.

²⁹ 'Why be ashamed to celebrate Christmas?' *Evening Standard* 10 December 2007.

³⁰ A doubtful statistic: Phillips perhaps meant London.

the world the case has proved otherwise, with religion very often a foundation for the feeling that one belongs to this and not that community. The secular notion of 'citizenship' has, and has long had, a role to play in providing an ethical counterweight to the metaphysical claims of religion and of nation.

Citizenship was for many centuries not only a secular but also a masculine ideal. Attesting to the value of public life, it implicitly downgraded domestic life, which along with forms of ritual activity comprised the traditional sphere of women. Until the twentieth century, republicans commonly identified the citizen as a man who takes his place in the ranks to fight for his city, while nationalists, because of their emphasis on birth, were more inclined to develop female hagiographies, around figures like Joan of Arc or Good Queen Bess. Though public life continues to be dominated by men, the ideal of citizenship evolved in the twentieth century to underpin the moral case for equality. It was logical enough that advocates of citizenship who had long resisted essentialist arguments about nation and religion should also learn to resist essentialist arguments about gender. Aimee Beringer in 1900 looked back nostalgically to the eighteenth century when women were able to flourish in the 'public' profession of dramatist. In the Victorian period, she lamented, women succeeded as novelists, but had no access to the life experience needed for the stage, so as to 'listen to the heart of the world, and get the echo of its throbs over the footlights'. Today, Beringer concluded, the aspiring female dramatist 'must first become a citizen of the great world, and then serve her apprenticeship to the lesser, that of the theatre'.³¹ Her speech reveals how the eighteenth-century ideal of citizenship was already being used at the start of the twentieth century to demand a place for women in public life, a public life that included the public realm of the theatre. The gap which Beringer takes for granted between the private world of the novelist and the public transactional world of the theatre has shrunk since 1900. More women now write more plays, but theatre is less connected to the public sphere of the citizen.

The republican arguments of the German-Jewish political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906–75) have proved something of a challenge to feminism, since Arendt's resolute attachment to the public realm with scarcely any mention of gender can be seen either as masculinist or as liberating.³²

³¹ Beringer (1900) 368 – a paper read to the Society of Women Journalists. My thanks to Anna Fokas for this reference.

³² Cf. Warner (2002) 58. See Arendt (1958) 8 for her most striking discussion of gender, related to the parallel creation stories in Genesis.

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

II

The difficulties raised by her position relate to the problem of identity, for Arendt appears to downgrade both the inner world and the biological world. Any serious engagement with the figure of the 'citizen' needs to begin with the nature of the person. Michael Sandel as a civic republican challenges the liberalism of John Rawls who built his theory of justice upon a conception of the human subject as bounded and unified. When Rawls perceives society as the convergence of already individuated persons, then according to Sandel he separates our identity as citizens from our identity as persons, for he is more interested in right, and by extension individual human rights, than in wider conceptions of the good life which provided the foundation for classical theories of justice.³³ Rawls' position is characterized as the theory of 'atomism' by Charles Taylor, who insists that 'the identity of the autonomous, self-determining individual requires a social matrix'.³⁴

Those like Taylor and Sandel who see self in collectivist or communitarian terms trace their thinking back to Aristotle's famous statement that the human being is a *zōon politikon*, a political animal. Aristotle postulates an evolutionary process whereby humans moved from households into villages and thence into the polis or 'city-state', arguing that humans have an innate impulse towards partnership, and that humans in isolation are incomplete. Aristotle's conception of pre-history differs sharply from Rousseau's romantic picture of the natural savage who went fishing in the woods in splendid isolation, prior to his corruption by society.³⁵ The polis, Aristotle maintains, 'is both natural and prior to the individual', and his definition of justice is founded not on individual rights but on the basis of what makes a right society.³⁶ He argues in his *Ethics* that 'the good of the individual is to be cherished, but finer and more sacred is the good of the tribe or polis'.³⁷ The theatrical correlative to Aristotle's theory lies in the idea that the chorus is historically prior to the individual actor,³⁸ since it is a deeper human instinct to replicate the movements of others in dance than to step out from the collective and like Oedipus ask who one truly is. A theatrical counterpart to modern atomism can be found in Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, where Goffman uses

³³ Sandel (1998).

³⁴ Taylor (1985) 209. On the tension between communitarianism and liberalism, see Kymlicka (2002) 208ff.

³⁵ See especially Rousseau's treatise on the origins of inequality: Rousseau (1992) 230.

³⁶ Aristotle *Politics* I.ii. Here and elsewhere in this book, translations are my own unless referenced to a translated source.

³⁷ Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* I.ii.8.

³⁸ On Aristotle and the origins of drama, see Depew (2007).

the metaphor of a theatre to distinguish a frontal area of social performance from a secret back-stage area where one can be one's authentic self.³⁹ This metaphor made sense in relation to theatres that might be found on a 1950s American campus, but in the choral mode of Greek theatre the important action takes place in the visible public domain, the sphere of the *zōon politikon*.

Hannah Arendt attributes to Christianity the idea that the essential human freedom is freedom of the individual will, citing Augustine's account of conflicts which took place in the dark chamber of his heart.⁴⁰ In the earlier Graeco-Roman world, Arendt argues, freedom could be exercised only within the political community, and she insists we should not translate Aristotle's *zōon politikon* in the Roman fashion simply as *animal socialis*, a social animal.⁴¹ Aristotle, she maintains, was arguing not that selfhood is a function of social bonds but that self-realization is only possible within the public realm of the polis. Driven by horror of Fascist and Stalinist totalitarianism on the one hand and American corporate capitalism on the other, and against her own background as a stateless Jew, Arendt argues that inner freedom is a function of public freedom. Freedom should be understood by analogy with the performing arts as a performance which requires a certain 'virtuosity', and it must constantly be acted out if it is to be preserved.⁴² Citizenship, for Arendt, is not an abstract moral ideal sustained by an atomized individual, but is a performance practice.

Arendt draws a rather clear line between the performance of the politician in the assembly and the performance of the actor in the theatre, approving Cicero's philosophical ideal of spectatorship which involves no desire to win or make money.⁴³ However, in Cicero's accounts of attending the theatre, we learn how the words of actors were transformed into political statements by the response of the spectators, and sitting in a prominent seat Cicero was never the disinterested spectator he hoped to be.⁴⁴ An active and expressive engagement with theatre was part of public life for a citizen of the Roman Republic. Arendt's distinction between the political animal and the social animal turns out upon inspection to be too clean. Theatre is a messy activity which cannot be reduced to any single category of the aesthetic, the political or the social, but involves the interpenetration of all three.

³⁹ Goffman (1959). ⁴⁰ Arendt (1961) 158. ⁴¹ Arendt (1958) 23. ⁴² Arendt (1961) 154.

⁴³ Arendt (1961) 219, citing *Tusculan Disputations* v.iii.9 (where the ideal is traced to Pythagoras).

⁴⁴ Wiles (2003) 174.

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

13

Arendt argues that where freedom exists, it 'has always been spatially bounded', the product of specific human groups,⁴⁵ and she has no truck with the idea that human rights are natural or god-given and that true 'citizenship' is therefore citizenship of the world. The counter-argument on behalf of cosmopolitanism is well set out by the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, born to an English mother and to a father who was African, or rather Ghanaian, or rather Ashanti. Appiah maintains that he has no difficulty in acknowledging emotional loyalties to different forms of nation, like the Ashanti, and at the same time participating in the democratic political culture of the USA. He welcomes the fact that the USA is not centred on a common national culture, because this allows him to choose his own identity. He accuses theorists like Arendt of being 'overly influenced by the view of politics taken by some in the small self-governing town of Athens in the fifth century B.C.E.',⁴⁶ and welcomes the fact that the USA is a 'state' but not a 'nation' since this allows him freedom to choose who he will be. The corollary of this classically American liberal position is that Arendt's ideal of a public realm shared by all can never be realized. It was Arendt's encounter with the modern USA that made her feel she could not realize herself as a human being without active membership of a more circumscribed political entity. Jefferson, she argues, recognized that 'the Constitution had given all power to the citizens, without giving them the opportunity of *being* republicans and of *acting* as citizens', and regrets that he never fulfilled his plan to embed a system of miniature republics in the form of wards to create a more participatory democracy.⁴⁷ Appiah and Arendt help us focus upon competing liberal and communitarian ideals for makers of theatre: on the one hand, the propagation of universal moral values linked to an assumption that people choose their identities; on the other, the formation of communities bonded by an obligation to participate. Theatre can be played *to* an audience, or it can be played *with* an audience.

The autonomous and bounded individual self flies in the face of all that we learn from modern neurology. The brain has been widely understood as a multiplicity of parallel activities, following Daniel Dennett's demolition of the homunculus, the lonely inner spectator of a 'Cartesian theatre' who views images supposedly thrown up in the mind by the senses.⁴⁸ The discovery of 'mirror neurons' in macaque monkeys in the early 1990s

⁴⁵ Arendt (1963) 279; cf. Arendt (1967) 290–302 on the limitations of 'human rights'.

⁴⁶ Appiah (1998) 101, 107. Arendt is not mentioned by name.

⁴⁷ Arendt (1963) 256. ⁴⁸ Dennett (1992) esp. 107–8.

then revealed, to the excitement of many in the world of theatre, that the human brain is wired to imitate, so that when we sit watching actions in the theatre our bodies experience physical impulses which mirror those of the agent on stage. The tears and laughter of an audience are spread contagiously because that is how the social human brain functions. We cannot help ourselves functioning as part of a collective because that is the nature of the human species.⁴⁹ If we relinquish the idea of the atomized self in favour of a collectivist self, a self that derives from the social brain, then we have to rethink in a rather fundamental way how to describe theatre spectatorship, and we must try to understand audience response in terms of group processes rather than multiply upwards the cognitive processes of individual spectators.

Scholarship in Theatre Studies has made little attempt to theorize the phenomenon of collective audience behaviour. The best book in English on theatre audiences remains Susan Bennett's study of 1990, inspired by the proposition of reader response theory that an 'interpretive community' pre-exists the solitary act of reading. Bennett cites the claim of semioticians that individual spectators check their own decoding against the decodings of others in a theatre audience and adjust accordingly to create a collective response, but is wary of endorsing this account and concludes in rather vague terms: 'It is surely the case that while the theatre audience is a collective consciousness composed of the small groups in which spectators attend theatrical events, it is also a specific number of individuals.' Though the collective response may be homogeneous, she maintains that 'the individual's response to performance undoubtedly constitutes the core of the spectator's pleasure'.⁵⁰ Bennett intuits but is unwilling to conceptualize a transpersonal level of response. It is effectively a modern article of faith that the individual pre-exists the citizen.

To challenge this article of faith we must return to Aristotle, who links the *zōon politikon* to a theory of friendship whereby the friend is a *heteros autos*, which is to say an 'other self' or 'alter ego'.⁵¹ The concept of being self-sufficient or under your own control 'relates not just to your living a solitary life but to one's parents and children and wife, and broadly to friends and citizens, since mankind is by nature a political being'.⁵² There is a rather small quantitative limit to real friends, a larger limit in the bond of citizenship, though the polis itself must be of limited size, with 10 plainly

⁴⁹ See Emery, Clayton and Frith (2008), especially the essays by Gallese and Frith.

⁵⁰ Bennett (1997) 154–5; text unchanged from the first edition: Bennett (1990) 164–5.

⁵¹ Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.ix.10. ⁵² Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* I.vi.6.

too small a number and 100,000 too vast.⁵³ Part of what defines friendship with one's *heteros autos* is the condition that Aristotle terms *synaisthēsis*, co-perception. 'Given that one lives with many, one would choose co-perception with the maximum number; but since this is very hard, it is a necessity that the activity of co-perception should be with fewer.' We notice that co-perception is active not passive, and the term *energeia* which I have translated as 'activity' evokes the energy of an audience. Aristotle sees living together as essential to the good life and thus a moral duty, and he contends that the goal of *koinōnia* or 'community' involves not only working together but also *syntheōrein*, 'co-spectatorship' as in a festival.⁵⁴ Aristotle's active concept of co-perception, which stems from his sense that selfhood is not bounded by the individual, offers a useful foundation for a more communitarian account of theatre spectatorship.

The idea of communal spectatorship emerged again with romanticism. When Goethe visited the Roman amphitheatre of Verona in September 1786, he imagined how the Roman crowd once formed the only backdrop in a space 'perfectly suited for impressing the populace with itself. Instead of functioning, according to the old metaphor of the hydra, as the 'many-headed multitude', Goethe believed that the Roman crowd was 'united into a noble body, induced into oneness, bound and consolidated into a mass, as if it were one form, enlivened by one spirit'.⁵⁵ This experience helped him adjust to the communal spirit of theatre-going in Italy, so different from Weimar. Just outside the walls of the Roman amphitheatre he found an improvised sporting arena created by benches, carts, barrels and knolls, where a crowd of several thousand responded noisily to every stroke of the ball, and the postures of the players suggested to him the classical aesthetic that once shaped performances inside the amphitheatre. At the Opera he could not enter into the mood of the Italian audience, and was reminded of the role he once played as Aristophanes' human hero amid a chorus of birds, concluding 'I feel I shall never make a good bird.' He was happy, however, with his lonely bird's eye perspective from the rim of the amphitheatre at sunset, looking down at tiny figures beneath.⁵⁶ Goethe, like Rousseau, yearned for an experience of organic collectivity while being fearful of losing his selfhood in the crowd, and feeling condemned to personal isolation.

⁵³ Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* IX.x.6, IX.x.3.

⁵⁴ Aristotle *Eudemian Ethics* VII.xii. On *synaisthēsis*, see Sorabji (2006) 236. On *theōria*, see Wiles (2007) 237–9.

⁵⁵ Goethe (1994) 37. ⁵⁶ Goethe (1994) 40–3.

Goethe's ambivalence points us towards two conflicting ideals of the citizen spectator. On the one hand there is the philosopher who stands above the performance space and outside the choral dance, determining his or her autonomous moral actions; and on the other there is the participant who surrenders individual self-interest to the larger organism. It is one of the paradoxes faced by the theatre historian that unselfconscious collective behaviour can only be analysed by the philosophical outsider, by the likes of Goethe standing alone on the crest of his amphitheatre. In Aristophanes' comedy, the chorus of innocent birds has the moral edge over the rationalistic and scheming individual, but the post-classical world has long preferred the perspective of the individual.

Crowd theory was popularized by Gustave le Bon in *La psychologie des foules*, published in 1895 and inspired by memories of rampant crowds in the Paris Commune. Le Bon's thesis is that: 'Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation.'⁵⁷ For Le Bon, the theatre audience constituted an exemplary crowd, experiencing the same emotions at the same moment, only inhibited from action by the fleeting awareness of illusion. Crowd theory explains for Le Bon why readers so often find it impossible to anticipate which texts will work in the theatre, or why a given play succeeds in one country and fails in another.⁵⁸ While Le Bon points to the dangers of the crowd which responds to feelings rather than ideas, he also claims that a crowd may be led to a higher level of feeling than its aggregated individual members could ever attain. The fine moral sentiments of melodrama were no doubt in his mind.

It is hard for us in the twenty-first century to think of audiences as 'crowds' because we tend to forget how different the nineteenth-century auditorium was from its disciplined modern successor. In another classic study of the crowd, Elias Canetti distinguishes a 'rhythmic' crowd, such as he finds in a Maori choral dance or a Shi'ite Mystery play, from a 'stagnating' crowd which simply takes pleasure in its own density. Spectators in the modern European theatre feel only a mild form of crowd pressure which 'scarcely ever gives them a feeling of inner unity and togetherness'. Like

⁵⁷ Le Bon (1960) 27. On crowd theory, see McPhail (1991).

⁵⁸ Le Bon (1960) 68, 52. *Charley's Aunt* is cited as an example of unanticipated success.

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

17

classical concert-goers they are the product of 'a long and artificial training in stagnation'. Canetti remarks that 'there are few phenomena of our cultural life as astonishing as a concert audience. People who allow music to affect them in a natural way behave quite differently; and those who hear it for the first time, never having heard any before, show unbridled excitement.'⁵⁹ This observation applies equally to the theatre, and historians need to keep reminding themselves what a strange creature the modern bourgeois theatre audience has become.

Le Bon's argument was taken up by Freud in his 1921 study of *Massenpsychologie*. Purging Le Bon of his latent racism, Freud fought a rearguard action on behalf of the ego, arguing that the crucial factor in crowd behaviour was identification with a common object.⁶⁰ Freud was fighting collectivist tendencies in Germany that I shall examine in my final chapter. Richard Wagner was one such collectivist who held that it was impossible to be 'free in loneliness' and subscribed to Nietzsche's belief that modern egotism marks a loss of ancient wholeness.⁶¹ He disliked the tiered nineteenth-century auditorium, which forced theatre managers to find a lowest common denominator satisfactory to all social classes, and sought a spontaneous theatre of the German *Volk* where social divisions would be erased.⁶² Le Bon, Nietzsche and Wagner (but not of course Freud the Jew) were read with enthusiasm by Hitler, and Le Bon's ideas about theatre also impressed Mussolini.⁶³ Hitler understood how individuals became suggestible under the influence of mass meetings, where a man entered in doubt and left as 'a member of a community'.⁶⁴ The success of Fascism in inducing the surrender of ego brought crowd theory into disrepute, and Brecht's warning that we surrender cognitive responses at our peril shaped European thinking about theatre for a generation. The swing of the pendulum towards individualism has brought its own dangers, and the idea of citizenship allows us to admit the virtues and indeed the necessity of the collective impulse, as we try to strike the right balance between personal moral responsibility and the surrender of personal egotism.

To recapitulate, I have in this discussion identified citizenship as the nexus in respect of two major oppositions. Firstly, I have distinguished the idea of nation from the idea of a republic, both partially subsumed since Machiavelli by the idea of the 'state'. While national 'citizenship' has only a thin technical meaning, relating to the holding of a passport, republican

⁵⁹ Canetti (1962) 36–7.

⁶⁰ Translated as 'Group psychology and the analysis of the ego' in Freud (1985) 91–178.

⁶¹ Wagner (1892) 98. ⁶² Wagner (1977) 40–3, Wagner (1892) 207.

⁶³ Moscovici (1985) 63–4, 89. ⁶⁴ *Mein Kampf* cited in Berghaus (1996) 60.

‘citizenship’ carries a thicker moral meaning, invoking obligations towards fellow owners of the public thing, the *res publica*.⁶⁵ Secondly, I have distinguished a bounded individual self from a permeable social self. We can start from the premise that we are essentially individuals who acquire our cultural identity through selection and accretion, and are capable of making autonomous rational choices that determine our actions; or we can start from the premise that we as human beings are components of a cultural matrix, so the language we speak, the religion we practised as a child and the music that stirs us become essential parts of who we are, from which it follows that our moral choices are rooted in cultural norms, and theatre must engage us not as individuals but as members of a community.

Étienne Balibar writes of the ‘indetermination’ of the citizen: ‘The citizen is unthinkable as an “isolated” individual, for it is his active participation in politics that makes him exist, but he cannot on that account be merged into a “total” collectivity.’ The citizen for Balibar is a utopian figure who ‘can only be thought if there exists, at least tendentially, a distinction between public and private’. The citizen is at once the constitutive element of an abstract State, and the actor of a permanent revolution, endlessly calling for equality.⁶⁶ It is the indeterminate and contested nature of the citizen which makes it important that she or he be subjected to historical examination.

My enquiry necessarily begins in Athens where theatre and the democratic citizen emerged at the same historical moment, apparently as part of a single process. I shall focus on Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, where Dionysus seeks a playwright to save the city in its moment of crisis, and political discourses merge with aesthetic discourses in a manner that is likely to bewilder the modern reader. I shall juxtapose Aristophanes’ portrayal of tragedy as a means of saving the city with Plato’s claim that tragedy disrupts the harmony of the perfect city. While the cacophonous frogs of Aristophanes’ chorus symbolize a dysfunctional body politic, Plato seeks a choral performance that will not be interrupted by the pain and dissidence of heroic individuals. Choral dancing tied the practice of theatre to the democratic polis through collective and embodied participation, but Aristotle provided a rationale for spectatorship of a more passive kind, writing as a cosmopolitan intellectual for whom Athens was but a temporary home.

The Roman Republic had a much greater impact than democratic Athens on subsequent conceptions of citizenship, until the twentieth century. I shall view Rome through the lens of the Florentine republic, where Livy’s idealization of republican Rome shaped Machiavelli’s vision of a free

⁶⁵ For the metaphor, see Faulks (2000) 10–11. ⁶⁶ Balibar (1991) 51–4.

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

19

Florence, released from the tyranny of the Medici. When forced to become a man of letters rather than an active servant of the state, Machiavelli sought to rebuild the dramatic structures of republican Rome, just as he had sought to reconstitute Roman political structures. He rejected not only the tyranny of the Medici but also the Christian republicanism of Savonarola, and this secularism cut him off as an intellectual from the common population. He refused to allow that traditional Christian morality in the private sphere had any bearing upon the competitive and manly virtue characteristic of the true citizen, while also rejecting Cicero's principle that the good man and the good citizen are one and the same. Inheriting from Rome the idea that comedy is an imitation of domestic life, he worked through the idea that drama has an educative function, before deploying it finally as a source of collective amoral laughter. His pursuit of good citizenship led him to an uncompromising rejection of the idea that theatre should teach morality.

My geographical focus in the next chapter switches to England, and my theme is the shift from citizen to subject once the nation-state ruled by an absolute monarch replaced the autonomous walled city as the frame for political identity. I begin with the Coventry Corpus Christi play, where theatre was intertwined with both urban citizenship and Catholic Christianity. Reformed Christians charged with city government in the Elizabethan age found theatre incompatible with a protestant faith that focused on personal responsibility rather than collective action, and Elizabethan theatre flourished in London because despite the opposition of those who governed the city it enjoyed the support of those who governed the nation. In this context I shall examine how two of the great myths of republican Rome played out on the London stage, amid competing claims on the loyalty of the citizen. The assassination of Julius Caesar was enacted at the Globe by a company that leaned towards court, while the rape of Lucrece, which resulted in the ousting of a despotic Roman monarchy, was played at the Red Bull, a theatre characterized by civic pride. I shall end by turning to John Milton's dream of writing *Paradise Lost* in the form of a tragedy, when religion was again as in medieval Coventry deemed the proper foundation for citizenship, and harnessed to a republican future a different theatrical future seemed possible.

It was in the French Enlightenment that the ideal of citizenship crystallized, as men looked back to the lessons of classical antiquity, and forward to a better and more rational future. The dilemmas of Rousseau lie at the core of this book. Torn between two competing identities, as cosmopolitan Parisian and citizen of the small Genevan republic, Rousseau attempted to resolve the tensions between truth to self and surrender of self to the

community. In his *Letter to M. d'Alembert on his article 'Geneva' in the VIIth volume of the Encyclopaedia, and specifically on the project of establishing a playhouse in that city*, Rousseau argued, against Voltaire, that the establishment of a public theatre in Geneva would only serve to entrench the power of a patrician class which, like the Senate in republican Rome, was locked in a long power struggle with the people. Inspired by Plato's *Republic*, Rousseau claimed that a system of participatory festivals would engender solidarity, while theatre would be socially divisive. Settled in Genevan territory, Voltaire fought for the theatre as a space of free expression, and hoped his plays would implant the radical ideas of the Enlightenment. While Voltaire was interested in dramatic content, Rousseau attended to the social institution of theatre. Festivals, he believed, could be quintessentially Genevan, but theatre would never be anything other than a French institution, generating a cosmopolitan rather than a localized world. Arendt's argument that freedom is spatially limited relates to Rousseau's argument on behalf of localism. In his *Social Contract* Rousseau struggled to reconcile the romantic ideal of personal freedom with the republican ideal of political freedom. He placed proudly beneath his name on the title page the words 'Citizen of Geneva', but soon found himself forced by the censorship of his book to renounce that citizenship. Religion was the crucial faultline that brought about the collapse of his utopian dream.

Voltaire and Rousseau became the twin heroes of the French Revolution, their bodies carried in state to the Pantheon. Rousseau's ideal of the civic festival inspired the projects of Jacques-Louis David, while in the theatre the Roman tragedies of Voltaire celebrated republican notions of 'liberty'. The tension between passive spectatorship and active participation was never reconciled, and in practice the theatre may have provided a more participatory environment than the festival. I shall track the career of Marie-Joseph Chénier, who found himself at the epicentre of the revolution as tragic dramatist, festive lyricist and politician devoted to the cause of public education. In the longer term it was neither Rousseau nor Voltaire but Diderot, the third great philosopher-dramatist of the Enlightenment, whose principles triumphed. Diderot's voyeuristic naturalism was secular, democratic and scientific in spirit, but left scant space for the classical ideal of citizenship.

Participatory happenings, the drama of ideas, the representation of real life . . . Our choices in the twenty-first century have not in essence moved on from those available in the Enlightenment. Our social order continues to be constrained by religions that refuse to be rationalized out of existence, by the dominance of large nation-states and by the gap between

Introduction: citizenship and theatre

21

dreams of democratic participation and a political system that is felt to be disempowering. We have not reached any more settled consensus about human nature: whether we are essentially atomized individuals, or whether it is legitimate to postulate some equivalence to Rousseau's transpersonal 'general will'. In the final chapter I shall examine the collectivist impulse in Germany prior to the Second World War, and the communist-inspired work of the Indian People's Theatre Association in the era of Indian independence, addressing the difficulties that arise when an idea of the 'people' or *Volk* is not attached to an idea of citizenship, but also the power, pleasure and potential of collective action. The post-war swing of the pendulum towards individualism has entailed the erosion of what is variously referred to as the public sphere, the public realm or the public square. I shall argue in a theoretical conclusion that only in this domain can the practice of theatre coalesce with the practice of citizenship.