An Investigation into How Engagement with the Context and Processes of Collaborative Devising Affects the Praxis of the Playwright:

A Practice-as-Research PhD

Volume 1

Karen Morash

Submitted for the Degree of PhD

October 2016

Goldsmiths, University of London

Department of Theatre and Performance

This thesis is available for library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signed,

Karen Morash

Abstract

An Investigation into How Engagement with the Context and Processes of Collaborative Devising Affects the Praxis of the Playwright:

A Practice-as-Research PhD

The central research inquiry of this dissertation is how the experience of working within a collaborative context, employing the processes of devising, affects a playwright. It springs from the presentiment that the processes of devising are significantly different than traditional playwriting methodologies and have the potential to offer short and long-term benefits to both playwright and collaborators. A central focus of the dissertation is the figure of the writer-deviser as a distinctive artist with a particular skillset developed from both devising praxis and standard playwright training (which traditionally does not emphasise collaborative theatre-making). This dissertation therefore examines the historical and contemporary context of the writer-deviser in order to provide a foundation for the presentation and exegesis of my practice-as-research: a play written via the devising process and another play written as a solo playwright.

The Introduction to this dissertation serves the function of presenting the central research query and associated areas for exploration. It outlines my methodological approach, placing it within the context of the discourse on performance-related practice-as-research, whilst identifying a gap within this discourse of the treatment of the playwright.

Chapter One presents an overview of devising in its historical and contemporary context. The chapter also functions to identify positive aspects of devising which may aid a playwright's development, and, alternatively, pinpoint problematic issues associated with devising.

Chapter Two provides an overview of pedagogical approaches to playwright development. Original research is presented via a playwrights' survey on training and

experiences of devising. Pedagogical approaches which may aid the writer-deviser are identified, and areas of weakness revealed.

Chapter Three defines the concept of the writer-deviser, incorporating challenges to the dramatic/postdramatic and text/performance binaries. This is achieved through commentary on historical and contemporary examples of writers working in a collaborative context.

Chapter Four further develops the figure of the writer-deviser through a case study of Bryony Lavery, providing a close analysis of two scripts created using devising methodology, and one written as a solo playwright.

Chapter Five presents the exegesis of practice-as-research section of this dissertation, with reference to the devised play *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* and the non-devised play *Playground*, which are presented in a section entitled 'Playscripts'. An outline of the process of both productions is provided, linked closely to the discourse of the preceding chapters of this dissertation. Based on a comparison of the two processes, findings are revealed and suggestions for other writer-deviser practitioners and devising companies are presented in a Toolkit. The conclusion reflects on the argument of the dissertation and its realization within the playscripts, and highlights areas for further investigation.

Acknowledgements

As is appropriate for a study of the writer-deviser, this dissertation represents the work of an individual, whose endeavours would not have been possible without the collaborative support of a large group of people.

I have been most ably guided by the advice, encouragement, knowledge, and good humour of my supervisor, John London, whose enthusiasm for high standards of research and writing has benefitted this dissertation enormously. I have also benefitted from the advice and assistance of other Goldsmiths faculty members and students, including Maria Shevstova, Osita Okagbue, Anna Furse, Robert Gordon, Göze Saner, Mike Richards, Christopher O'Shaughnessy, and Shamea Mia. I am also grateful for the encouraging engagement with my work provided by my examiners, Cass Fleming and Duska Radosavljević.

My research has profited greatly from the generosity of a number of practitioners and companies who allowed me access to their rehearsal rooms and/or personal insight into their processes. These include: Anna Furse and Athletes of the Heart; Stella Duffy and the members of the Chaosbaby ensemble; Tom Espiner; Scott Graham; Improbable Theatre; Kate Cayley; Susan Leblanc, Alex Mclean, and the members of Zuppa Theatre; and Miriam Margolyes. In particular, I am indebted to Bryony Lavery and Caryl Churchill, not only for providing me with information on their artistic practices, but for continuing to inspire, provoke, and engage me with their work.

In addition, I am highly indebted to the actors, directors, and designers who worked on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* and *Playground* (credited within each playtext). Their talent, willingness to work in less-than-optimal conditions, and generosity with their time and creative input, not only made these two productions possible, but have left a lasting imprint upon my work as a playwright. I am also highly appreciative of the support, advice, and flexibility offered by Catherine Boyle and Sue Dunderdale, my colleagues in Head for

Heights Theatre Company, as well as the dramaturgical support and script-reading services of Charlotte Pedersen, Nicole Martorana, Isabel Stowell-Kaplan, Lauren Cushman, Colette Beard, Tony McEwen, Christy Meyer, Kate York, and Pip Swallow, as well as Ilenka Jelowicki's casting expertise and assistance.

As a mother of two young children, I was reliant upon, and am extremely grateful for, the childcare, work space, and general support provided by: Sarah Moon and the Shoreham Parish Council, Penny Watkins, Sally Hamlyn, Sarah Clarke, Shirley Russell, Ann Eve, Amy Larkin, and, in particular, my wonderful extended family, including Claire Morash (who also provided dissertation-reading services), Judith Moore, Jane Hancock, Fred and Linda Morash, and Carole and John Buchanan.

Most importantly, my gratitude for the sacrifices made by my husband, Rick Moore, and my daughters Elsie and Zoë, to enable me to complete my PhD work over the course of six years, is unending. Their love and encouragement have made this dissertation possible.

Contents

Tables, Charts, and Images

Introduction

As the methodologies of devising and postdramatic theatre are becoming more prominent in Western theatre and performance, playwrights, such as myself, are looking for pathways beyond traditional, largely Aristotelian, techniques for developing scripts, and into the development of a more holistic approach to theatre-making. The central research inquiry of this practice-as-research (PaR) dissertation is how engagement with collaborative devising praxis affects a playwright's work, both immediately, within the collaborative context, and long-term. It is the 'how' in this query which is important; this is not a positivist research question testing out *if* devising praxis affects change, against controllable variables. Rather, it begins from an understanding, developed from the observation of other theatre practitioners, but also from my own praxis, that devising methodology does have the potential to change writing methodologies. The purpose of this dissertation's practice elements and its associated research is an exploration of aspects of devising which have the potential to positively expand a playwright's practice, along with potential drawbacks. This query also addresses problematic issues connected with devising which can be addressed through the involvement of a writer trained in traditional script-writing methodologies. It represents the writer/devising company relationship as symbiotic.

The dissertation presents a new designation, applied to myself as an artist and others undertaking similar praxis: the writer-deviser, a playwright who has knowledge of traditional dramaturgical strategies but, through experience of working directly with actors, directors, and other theatre artists, is also able to employ performative methodologies within her text derived from collaboration.[1] This dissertation also argues that the effects of devising go beyond the original collaboration and leave an imprint on a playwright's non-devised practice. Whilst it employs Hans-Thies Lehmann's definitions of dramatic and postdramatic,

[1] The feminine form of pronouns will be used for writers throughout this dissertation, as I, a female playwright, am at the centre of this investigation. The usage of 'her' and 'she' is also a small rebellion against the current overrepresentation of men within English-language professional theatre.

the argument challenges this binary through the examination of the writer-deviser, who exists in the liminal space between Lehmann's two spheres.[2] In addition, an important thread running throughout this dissertation is Bruce Barton's distinction between the *context* of devising – the collaborative group – and the *processes* of devising, which is further delineated in Chapter One.[3] Though the two are generally dependent upon each other, the focus on the effects of devising on the writer that go beyond the original collaborative context emphasises the need for a theoretical division between the two areas of consideration.

Methodologies and Structure

The first word of the subtitle above is necessarily plural, as there are a number of different methodological approaches represented within this dissertation. Whilst this may be the case for many dissertations at doctoral level, it is, as my exploration of the literature on practice-as-research (PaR) methodological texts below reveals, particularly apt for practice-based research, and even more so for the specific requirements of my research query, which stands as a hybrid of traditional text-based research methodologies and increasingly popular studio-based approaches. In so following, the process of working through my research inquiry is emblematic of much performance-based practice itself: particular epistemologies are formed as the practice develops, rather than set in stone before the commencement of research, and must exist in the service of the practice, rather than the practice serving pre-existing epistemologies. As Baz Kershaw argues: 'practice as research in the performing arts pursues hybrid enquiries combining creative doing with reflexive being, thus fashioning freshly

[2] Whilst Lehmann's theorisation emerges from the context of German theatre and performance, his inclusion of a number of non-German practitioners, such as Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, and Robert Lepage, along with Karen Jürs-Munby's introduction to his text, which places Lehmann's theories within an English context, make it an appropriate framework for the analysis of non-German work: Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

[3] Bruce Barton, 'Introduction: Devising the Creative Body', in *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising*, ed. by Bruce Barton (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008), pp. vii-xxvii (p. viii).

critical interactions between current epistemologies and ontologies.'[4] On the other hand, as highlighted below, the process of exploring the role of the playwright within the devising process, both generally, and with specific investigation of my own practice, cannot be simply feeling my way in the dark, despite the fact that there are few precedential examples to follow. My chosen structure for investigation is the result of careful consideration of what frameworks can: a) provide a foundation to establish an argument for the important role of the writer-deviser, and b) are useful in the examination of my own work as a springboard for continuing discourse.

Practice-as-research, although recognised across various academic disciplines, is still relatively nascent as a formally recognized approach to the completion of a doctorate.[5] In the last two decades there have been a number of texts which seem simultaneously to suggest methodological approaches, whilst arguing that PaR epistemologies are situated within ever-shifting paradigms. As Robin Nelson states, the 'literature is dominated by the presentation of case studies which do not always bring out clearly what constitutes research (as subtly distinct from professional practice)' and 'do not typically aim to illuminate a generic methodology distinguishing the approach of practitioner-researchers nor offer an exemplary pedagogy to support the development of new practitioner-researchers'.[6] This, naturally, has implications for the assessment of PaR, both at the level of doctoral examination, and for greater institutional accountability to national assessment strategies, such as the Research Excellence Framework. At the same time, there has been a shift within postsecondary educational institutions, with an 'attack on the separation of academy and profession', which

[4] Baz Kershaw, 'Practice as Research: Transdisciplinary Innovation in Action', in *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 63-85 (p. 64).

[5] Practice-as-Research in theatre and performance was formally recognised via Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) as an avenue towards the completion of a doctorate in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s, in part due to the report submitted in 1996 by the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD) PaR Working Group: Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter, 'Introduction' in *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research*, ed. by Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. xv-xxiv (p. xvii).

[6] Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 4.

has resulted in a number of theatre and performance departments emphasizing '*making* rather than *writing*'.[7] As such, departments who offer a PaR route to PhD not only attract a wider range of applicants, but are training potential future staff members who can offer studio-based teaching, alongside more traditional academic approaches. The construction of my dissertation is reflective of my own background (explicated in the following subsection) as both an academic trained in text-based research and a theatre industry professional; it exists both to further the discourse on the playwright's role in devising and to suggest avenues for further exploration; but it also serves as a stepping-stone in a hybrid academic/practice-based career.

So nebulous are the definitions of what constitutes a PaR, that even the appellation itself is contentious. Some texts refer to 'performance as research' (often with the acronym PAR, as opposed to the PaR of practice-as-research); Baz Kershaw's working group, attempting to create a methodological taxonomy, used the acronym PARIP (practice in research in performance).[8] The usage of the word performance can be problematic, not in the least because of the general contentiousness of its parameters, but because there can be an implicit suggestion that performance is something which is done by performers (as opposed to, say, writers), and that the product is something which cannot be documented in text. Practice-as-research is broader, cross-disciplinary, and, importantly for this dissertation, allows for the participation of researchers such as myself who are not, in the strictest sense of the word, performers. However, despite the general usage of practice-as-research in the United Kingdom, there still remains a bias towards performance in discourse on the definitions and procedures of PaR within theatre-based disciplines. Mark Fleishman states that, whilst definitions of PaR are at best 'provisional', there 'is a general consensus that PaR concerns research that is carried out through or by means of performance, using

[7] Simon Jones, 'The Courage of the Complementary: Practice-as-Research as a Paradigm Shift in Performance Studies', in *Practice-as-Research in Performance and Screen*, ed. by Ludivine Allegue, Simon Jones et al (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 19-32 (p. 22); his emphasis.
[8] Riley and Hunter, 'Introduction' in *Mapping Landscapes*, p. xvii.

methodologies and specific methods familiar to performance practitioners'.[9] This has implications for the positioning of my own methodological approach as writer, not performer.

Many PaR methodological texts focus on the ephemerality of the practice and the resulting difficulties in documentation.[10] Some, such as Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, repeatedly emphasise the studio-based nature of the research, and there is a noticeable lack of methodological case studies involving playwrights.[11] The only PaR case study focused on a writer that I could locate was by a novelist, who documented the process of writing an autobiographical novel as doctoral thesis.[12] The text *Creative Writing Studies: Practice, Research and Pedagogy* does consider practice-led research within various strands of creative writing, but not, significantly, playwriting,[13] which appears to exist in a no-man's-land between theatre-based practice and creative writing. In addition, Jon. D. Rossini has written a chapter documenting approaches a dramaturg might take to PaR, focusing on how one might work within non-devised production processes. However, as explored in Chapter Two, the practice of dramaturgy is distinct from the practice of the writer-deviser, and Rossini's chapter, with no evidence of the creation of original writing by the dramaturg, emphasizes this distinction, and therefore has little relevance as a template for my investigation.[14]

Of course, a writer can have a studio, and one could call the act of writing a play a form of performance, but overwhelmingly there appears to be an anti-text-as-research-product bias within performance-based PaR methodological discourse. This may be the result of the writers' and editors' efforts to make the case for PaR as legitimate form of research in

---

[9] Mark Fleishman, 'The Difference of Performance as Research', *Theatre Research International*, 37 (2012), 8-37 (p. 8).
[10] For example, see Ian Watson, 'An Actor Prepares: Performance as Research (PAR) in the Theatre', in *Mapping Landscapes*, ed. by Riley and Hunter, pp. 84-90 (p. 84).
[11] *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Inquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2007), p. 2.
[12] Gaylene Perry, 'Historical Documents, Arts Reveals: Creative Writing as Research', in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Inquiry*, ed. by Barrett and Bolt, pp. 35-45.
[13] *Creative Writing Studies: Practice, Research and Pedagogy*, ed. by Graeme Harper and Jeri Kroll (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2008).
[14] Jon D. Rossini, 'Dramaturgy: Conceptual Understanding and the Fickleness of Process', in *Mapping Landscapes*, ed. by Riley and Hunter, pp. 237-43.

an academic arena which privileges positivist discourse and documentation. Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe describe the 'traditional' epistemological process, from both quantitative and qualitative paradigms, as consisting of 'naming the research problem, controlling variables, disciplining the data and specifying findings'.[15] They, along with others involved in PaR methodological discourse, reject this formula, which provides largely text-based evidence, for practice-as-research. Nelson points out that, even within scientific research, positivist approaches have become problematic, as have hermeneutic epistemologies in the humanities, due to the recognition, developed in the twentieth century, of an 'unavoidable interrelation between objects and the subjects who observe them'.[16]

This does, however, make the positioning of my own practice, which, by nature of its being focused on the processes of writing, and in which a significant element of the presented research is in the form of a written script, problematic. Furthermore, as the role of the writer-deviser is one which has received very little attention, ground must be broken in terms of documenting the sometimes conflicting influences on the writer-deviser; the breaking of this ground involves a large degree of traditional scholarly research. As such, I need to borrow from both PaR models and more traditional academic approaches, and the structure of my work is reflective of a 'multi-modal' approach, favoured by Robin Nelson, which includes 'different modes of writing, ranging in principle from the poetic to the traditionally passive academic voice, alongside other practices'.[17] This includes action research models (discussed in the introduction to Chapter Five) and the adaptation of traditional aspects of doctoral dissertations such as the literature review. Nelson suggests that a review of all related literature is not necessary as the PaR approach is 'open and interdisciplinary and thus less dependent upon a specific body of knowledge requiring mastery'.[18] He suggests that a

[15] Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe, 'Acquiring Know-How: Research Training for Practice-led Researchers', in *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, ed. by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 211-28 (p. 211).
[16] Nelson, p. 50.
[17] Nelson, p. 66.
[18] Nelson, p. 34.

practice review, whereby the researcher identifies and examines examples of other practitioners working in the same area, can be useful. Given the above-stated hybridity of my approach, I have incorporated both a selective practice review (in the case studies in Chapters Three and Four) and also an examination of the leading texts on devising praxis and playwright training in Chapters One and Two respectively, since the information contained within these texts allows me to locate my own practice within an ecology, whilst simultaneously informing the practice undertaken for this dissertation.

Thus, Hazel Smith and Roger Dean's suggestion that 'academic research can lead to creative practice' resonates with the particular demands of my research inquiry.[19] Under the umbrella of PaR, Smith and Dean allow for further designations, including 'research-led practice', which seems a particularly apt label for the work conducted for this dissertation, as traditional research and creative practice often occurred simultaneously, and the writing of both the devised script and the non-devised script were influenced by the research on devising and traditional modes of scriptwriting I undertook.[20] As Smith and Dean argue, the potential impact of traditional forms of research is often 'underplayed and under-conceptualised' by other PaR methodological texts in their effort to emphasise the value of creative work.[21] They also refer to 'practice-led research', suggesting the two approaches complement each other and that researchers often incorporate both strategies in one project.[22] Indeed, the discoveries made in studio whilst devising, or at my computer desk whilst script writing, often helped to direct my eye whilst undertaking traditional text-based research. I picked out information, for example from instructive textbooks on the practice of playwriting (see Chapter Two), which best served the particular requirements of my practice-based projects. In addition, by using 'led' instead of 'as', this opens up possibilities for multi-modal

[19] Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, 'Introduction', in *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice*, ed. by Smith and Dean, pp. 1-38 (p. 2).
[20] Smith and Dean, p. 7.
[21] Smith and Dean, p. 9.
[22] Smith and Dean, p. 7.

strategies. However, as the terminology suggested to me by the Graduate Office of my institution (Goldsmiths) is 'practice-as-research', that is the wording which will be used throughout the work. Nevertheless, it should be understood that, underneath this designation lies the Mobius strip of research-led practice, and practice-led research.[23]

Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson suggest that PaR could be considered an 'antidiscipline', where 'intuitive messiness and aesthetic ambiguity are integral'.[24] Susan Kelly (providing another example of PaR discourse which foregrounds the performer and ignores other types of practice), claims that documentation is primarily 'corporal, that is, retained in her body'.[25] Simon Jones claims that PaR 'flees textual practices' and, ontologically, it is '*outside of judgement*'.[26] However, the fact that a PhD by PaR is something which must be measured by individuals not involved in the practice cannot be avoided. As Kershaw and Nicholson state, 'flexible research ecologies' must exist wherein 'tacit understandings, inferred practices and theoretical assumptions can be made explicit and can, in turn, be queried and contested'.[27] In other words, although it is impossible to place parameters on what constitutes PaR and there are a multitude of approaches to documentation and structure, it is important that the researcher is rigorous in providing evidence of research processes and findings in a way that is useful to academics, and, arguably more importantly, other practitioners. Nelson states that this evidence is 'likely' to include 'a product'; 'documentation of process'; and 'complementary writing'.[28] This final element is called the 'exegesis' by Barrett and Bolt, and they claim that a 'dialogic relationship between studio practice and the artist's own critical commentary in the writing of the creative arts exegesis is

[23] Within my own institution (Goldsmiths), the hyphenated practice-as-research has been traditionally used, so I will follow this format.
[24] Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson, 'Introduction: Doing Methods Creatively', in *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Kershaw and Nicholson, pp. 1-16 (pp. 2-3).
[25] Susan Kelly, 'Medium', in *Mapping Landscapes*, ed. by Riley and Hunter, pp. 142-44 (p. 87).
[26] Jones, p. 30; his emphasis.
[27] Kershaw and Nicholson, p. 2.
[28] Nelson, p. 26.

crucial'.[29] Nelson also rejects the need for a research question, which is at the heart of traditional dissertations. Instead, he points to the need of a 'research inquiry', which should be 'evident in the practice', but should also be made tacit, even if it constitutes little more 'than an "artist's statement" which indicates the line of inquiry upon which the candidate wishes to be assessed', particularly as 'PaR typically affords substantial insights rather than coming to such definite conclusions as to constitute "answers"'.[30] The investigation should be assessed on its 'articulation of "liquid knowing"', and how it resonates with the 'harder know-that of established conceptual frameworks'. In a similar way to the complementary modes of Smith and Dean's 'practice-led research' and 'research-led practice', Nelson argues that traditional, 'hard knowledge' and 'liquid knowledge' complement each other and should 'not be seen as two sides of a binary divide'.[31]

As such, the title of this dissertation is not a question. Rather, it points the reader to the query at the heart of my practice and the text-based research which informs it: how engagement with devising methodologies affects a playwright, both immediately and long-term. Although, as previously indicated, it does not sit comfortably within other documented models of PaR due to the written nature of its 'product' and the necessary weight of its 'complementary writing', its methodological structure has been designed in a way that best responds to the stated query, providing evidence of rigour in placing the work in a lineage of devising and playwriting, whilst at the same time revealing the lack of documentation of the figure of the writer-deviser. And, most importantly, the research undertaken and overall structure of the dissertation are 'distinctive in relation to [my] work and future versions of it'.[32]

---

[29] Barrett and Bolt, p. 5.
[30] Nelson, pp. 27 and 30.
[31] Nelson, p. 60.
[32] Arthur J. Sabatini, 'Approaching Knowledge, Research, Performance and the Arts', in *Mapping Landscapes*, ed. by Riley and Hunter, pp. 114-21 (p. 117).

Chapters One to Four represent the research which provides a foundation and lineage for my practice, and informs the practice, whilst being also, as stated above, led by the needs of the practice. Chapter One presents a portrait of devising as it exists now, particularly in the United Kingdom and North America. It establishes a vocabulary of praxis, which will be used in Chapter Five's practice-based exegesis, and, through a survey of texts on devising, confirms that it is a well-established practice, whilst also revealing the general neglect of attention to the role of the playwright within many texts. By teasing out some of the theoretical approaches to devising, it sets a precedent for future chapters to consider methodologies and working contexts as separate, but intertwined considerations. In following with the literature on PaR methodologies, the logic of the placement of this chapter before Chapter Two (on playwriting) is reflective of the fact that, as a writer, devising came first; the section of my practice devoted to devising also chronologically took place before the section devoted to solo playwriting.[33]

In developing a strategy for analysis for the previously unmapped role of the writer-deviser, it became apparent that an examination of the training a writer takes with her into a project was necessary, because, like all collaborators, writers arrive in the devising room with the imprint of previous experience and learning, and this imprint affects how they approach the collaboration and processes of development. Not only is there little documentation of the writer-deviser, but there is scant critical discourse on how writers in general are trained. Therefore, in order to understand myself as an artist and the tacit knowledge I take with me into both collaborative and non-collaborative work, it became apparent that pedagogical approaches to playwriting must be examined in Chapter Two. This required a large degree of primary research, including surveys and interviews, along with an assessment of a number of pedagogical texts on playwriting, in order to ascertain in a broad way the traditional methodologies of playwright training, whilst at the same time revealing a lack of focus on

[33] See 'Autobiographical Trace' in the present chapter for an explanation of my personal creative timeline.

collaborative praxis, which is linked to a perceived binary between text and performance. Chapter Two, like Chapter One in regards to devising, also serves to introduce a traditional vocabulary of praxis for playwrights. As stated above, the research for Chapters One and Two was undertaken at the same time as their representative projects in Chapter Five; the information contained within them was determined by the needs of the practice whilst at the same time influencing and enhancing the work I was undertaking.

In continuing the thread of extending existing academic discourse whilst providing myself with an appropriate foundation for the critical reflection on my own praxis, Chapter Three focuses closely on the role of the writer-deviser, a category in which I place myself as an artist. It is important personally and professionally to note formally that, although the name is one that I have conceived, the praxis of writer-devisers is historically well-established, though under-documented, and many artists who fall under this category have held considerable influence over my own work.[34] In documenting some examples of contemporary writer-devisers and the companies with which they work (a form of Nelson's practice review), I argue for the continuing and, potentially, growing significance of the role of the writer-deviser. Additionally, given that the companies mentioned are all those whose work I know, having been a spectator, workshop participant, and/or interviewed featured practitioners, the sketches and case studies presented establish the methodologies and vocabulary I carry with me when I embark on writing projects. The choice of companies and practitioners is not meant to provide a wide-ranging portrait of the contemporary situation of writers-devisers, for it would be impossible to do so. Rather, they are employed both to secure an argument for the existence of the writer-deviser, and to provide examples for me to

[34] As the term 'writer-deviser' is my own, it is unlikely that those artists documented in Chapters Three and Four would describe themselves as such. However, like those writers who were placed within the parameters of Theatre of the Absurd, but never used this qualification themselves, the usefulness of a term to describe a particular approach is not generally determined by those whom the term describes.

draw upon when reflecting on my own work. This approach means that I 'know the backstory of [my] work and experience other people's practice as professional artists typically do'.[35]

As I am a writer who has been influenced by traditional playwright training largely based on Aristotelian models, and by collaborative theatre making, it is useful to include an intensive case study of a writer-deviser with readily available scripts who has had similar experiences. Bryony Lavery, an artist whose work and methodologies have greatly influenced my own, and who has received little academic scrutiny, despite an impressive body of work and openness about her writing, is an ideal choice. In choosing two scripts (*Stockholm* and *Kursk*) devised by two companies with differing methodologies, it is possible to suggest a diversity of results from devising. The inclusion of a non-devised script (*Frozen*) corresponds to my argument of the long-term effects of devising, and also provides a comparative example for my own non-devised script in the practice section of this dissertation (Chapter Five). This close textual analysis, set within the context of the collaborative workshop, and employing the information presented in the preceding chapters, sets a precedent – in the absence of other academic precedents – for the examination of my own devised and non-devised practice in Chapter Five.

Chapters One to Four are situated so as to paint a cumulative contextual portrait of my own practice; starting with the broad brush-strokes of devising and playwriting in Chapters One and Two, to a defined examination of the figure of the writer-deviser in Chapter Three, to the detailed examination of the work of a specific practitioner in Chapter Four. Chapter Five exists as the exegesis of my practice; it sets the working context of the writing and production of the devised script *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* and the non-devised script *Playground*. These contexts are examined using the vocabulary and frameworks established in the preceding chapters, and highlight discoveries made during the process of writing the plays (which, as mentioned above, included text-based research into devising and playwright

[35] Nelson, p. 31.

training). The exegesis of the two projects (both process and product) elucidates how the individual processes aided or hampered my development as a writer, thus revealing findings that are important for my own continuing practice whilst also suggesting new areas for pedagogic development and the professional practice of other writer-devisers; a 'Toolkit' of suggestions, based on my own experiences, is included. Appendices are included to provide evidence of some of the primary research undertaken for this investigation, with the hope that this information may prove useful to other researchers.

As Haseman and Mafe state, it has been 'necessary to devise and refine a distinctive research strategy with its own methods which are drawn from the long-standing and accepted working methods and practices of the creative disciplines'.[36] This is partly because I was exploring territory – that of the playwright engaged with devising practice – which has largely gone unexplored in discourses of devising and those of playwriting. Thus, I developed a framework which corresponded closely to the needs of my own professional practice, with the hope that it might prove useful for other writer-devisers, not to mention those engaged in the pedagogy of these practices. I write full-length scripts, at times collaboratively, and at other times non-collaboratively, and it was this practice which I wanted to investigate; the majority of working playwrights also write full-length scripts. It was therefore important to me that my research was set firmly within the working practices of professional theatre rather than the experimental hothouse of the university-style laboratory, which produces (often) short work for limited audiences. This is not to say that this work is unimportant or does not produce significant findings, but it is not a context which was useful for my particular research query. Gaylene Perry, commenting on the experience of writing a novel as PaR states, 'I wrote as I learned and I learned as I wrote',[37] and this is also true for my experience; the Mobius strip of this particular PaR dissertation is set within the ecology of professional stage writing, and in coming to an understanding of my own practice, I can offer considerable

[36] Haseman and Mafe, p. 212.
[37] Perry, p. 39.

insight into the working practices of other writer-devisers. As Haseman and Mafe state, these practices 'can be understood primarily as the knowledge, tacit or otherwise, of how something is done within the context of a professional and cultural framework, a contingent activity that makes or establishes meaning or significance'.[38] As such, it is useful to present an autobiographical trace to provide a personal and professional context for the practice undertaken.

Autobiographical Trace

As suggested in the previous subsection, the parameters of a PaR dissertation are often determined by a particular researcher's background and the professional experience one takes into the process; Nelson states that 'standpoint epistemologies' lead researchers 'to reflect upon their ideology and values […] in relation to the cultural practices of the object of study'.[39] Whilst, as discussed above, methodological rigour is essential, the paths a practice-researcher follows are determined by the particular needs of the enquiry, and the enquiry itself has been determined by the researcher's own interests. Therefore, it is useful to include an autobiographical trace to identify aspects of my background which have influenced the particular structure of this dissertation, particularly as it does not fit easily into documented PaR models.

Many children devise, in that they use play and improvisation to make up short, informal, performances within a group, which are then presented to family, friends, or teachers, and I was no exception. However, I was unusual in that, from a young age, I often wrote scripts (or forms of scripts), sometimes even documenting material after the event that had been devised. This interest continued throughout school and university, where I wrote as a solo playwright, and also instigated devised pieces, including one at the University of

[38] Haseman and Mafe, p. 214.
[39] Nelson, p. 53.

King's College where I organised a group of female writers and performers to undertake workshop improvisations and write scripts based on their observations. It has always seemed natural to me that a playwright would want to collaborate with other artists from an early stage and find inspiration for writing from their collaborators.

However, as a GCSE and 'A' Level Drama teacher (1997-2002), following British exam syllabi, I became immersed in the enforced binary between the interpretation of text (in the form of scripts) and the development of collaboratively-made work produced out of improvisation; the module structure seemed to imply one did scripts separately from devising. At the same time, whilst regularly attending theatre performances, both as critic (with the North London Newspaper Group for newspapers such as the *Islington Gazette* and *Muswell Hill Journal*) and casual audience member, I noticed that the forms of theatre which most piqued my interest suggested that their origins did not lie in traditional Aristotelean structures, but in performance derived from collaborative creation.[40] In order to explore this observed tension, I undertook an MA in Text and Performance, jointly taught by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) and King's College London, following the 'Writer's Pathway'.

As explored in Chapter Three, the naming of a particular academic course and/or department is significant, and indeed the 'performance' section of the course, taught by RADA and closely focused on skill development (in acting, writing, and directing), was taught as distinctive from the 'text' section, which focused on theory and analysis of play scripts. Indeed, even though, as part of my playwright training, we looked at work by Caryl Churchill and Bryony Lavery, there was very little reference to their experiences in devising; it was my own curiosity about their work, again following a hunch that their particular artistic style might have origins beyond traditional playwright experiences, that led me to the

[40] It is a central tenet of this dissertation that, for an informed spectator or reader, there are generally recognizable aspects which suggest a production has roots in devising. Chapters Three and Four contain case studies with textual analysis which point to some of these aspects.

discovery that they had both engaged with collaborative practice. Meanwhile, in the 'performance' section of the course, we were required to work collaboratively to produce two separate pieces of short performance. Although collaborative work is not without challenges (as explored throughout this dissertation), I found the experience of hearing the ideas of other artists, and testing my own out in the flesh, to be creatively satisfying and exciting. When I completed my Masters' dissertation project, a script researched and written on my own, I missed having the input of collaborators.

Thus, I decided to embark upon a doctoral thesis which would allow me to explore how my own writing practice could be developed by engaging with devising praxis and to test out the longer-term effects of having exposure to the skills and developmental activities of other artists, such as performers and directors. It was therefore essential to me that the practice undertaken was closely linked to my existing practice (writing scripts intended for professional production), whilst providing a foundation of text-based research that would, as indicated in the subsection above, inspire changes to this practice. This dissertation fits into broader research goals of exploring alternative, and, arguably more effective, approaches to playwright development; I am hoping that my research will spur further discourse and practical experimentation, both personally and within the greater theatre and performance academic community.

Exclusions

The scope of this dissertation is broad in that it addresses both devising and playwriting praxis and requires a fair degree of primary research in order to respond effectively to the stated research inquiry. Therefore, though my research touches on a number of important areas of study in theatre and performance, it is not possible (within the space of a standard doctoral thesis) to explore all these referenced areas in depth. It is useful to indicate for

potential readers areas of scrutiny which are largely excluded from analysis, but which may offer suggestions for further exploration.

Firstly, there are geographic limitations. The focus of this dissertation is predominantly on English-language devised and traditional playwriting methodologies in the United Kingdom, with occasional reference to practice in other countries, particularly the United States of America and Canada. This is not to imply that devising practice is restricted to these locations, but is reflective of the fact that, as a practice-as-research dissertation, my investigation must be rooted in the areas which have been the most influential for my own practice: I have worked and studied in both the United Kingdom and Canada, and the influence of American devising methodology and playwriting pedagogy in both these locations has been substantial.

Secondly, although theories of collaborative practice and of the ensemble often overlap, it is not possible to undertake a specific examination of the various facets of ensemble practice, including those focused on the psychology of the ensemble. Chapter Three contains a number of examples of playwrights who do work with ensembles; however, it is only in rare cases (such as Forced Entertainment) that writers are long-term members of these groups.[41] Indeed, it is important to point out that a collaborative context of devising is not necessarily the same as an ensemble context; as referenced in Chapter One, there are certain conditions which define a group as being an ensemble, and not all collaborative groups operate under these conditions. Barton's division of context and process is particularly pertinent here, as similar/shared processes may lead to a conflation of ensemble and devising

[41] Some playwrights, such as Bryony Lavery, undertake multiple collaborations with the same company. However, they are not considered core, long-term members of the ensemble. Indeed, in the text *Encountering Ensemble*, despite many examples of ensemble practice, there is scant mention of (living) playwrights/writers working with companies, and the only evaluative statement about the involvement of a playwright is in the history of La Compagnie des Quinze, who 'recognised that the presence of a writer would greatly assist the process of creating and structuring their performances'; Mark Evans, 'The French Ensemble Tradition: Jacques Copeau, Michel Saint-Denis and Jacques Lecoq' in *Encountering Ensemble*, ed. by John Britton (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2013), pp. 111-25 (p. 120).

practice, but the group context is not necessarily the same. Whilst a collaborative context is central to my research, and ensemble practice may be obliquely referenced, not all, or even a majority, of writer-devisers operate within a well-formed or pre-established ensemble. As will be explored in Chapter Five, there is a strong argument that the people assembled to act, direct, and design my two plays were not ensembles. Therefore, a close examination of this area would prove a distraction from the central inquiry. However, given a general absence of the figure of the playwright within examinations of ensemble praxis, this is most certainly an area for further exploration.

Similarly, though I am a female playwright, and my gender is interwoven into my practice, both as a focus for my writing, and how I am situated within a collaborative context that is influenced by the gender of various participants, I am unfortunately not able to include a detailed investigation of devising praxis and gender. Feminist theory, as it pertains to performance, is an important area of investigation for me personally; it is closely connected to the work of important writer-devisers featured in this dissertation such as Caryl Churchill and Bryony Lavery, and I have written about gender and devising praxis elsewhere.[42] Thus, to avoid repetition of material already published, and to maintain a focus on the central inquiry, feminist approaches to collaborative performance-making cannot be included in depth.

Finally, although Chapter Two does make a differentiation between the dramaturg and the playwright, and Chapter Three touches on issues of performance writing, with my own specific practice as a writer-deviser central to this inquiry, I cannot investigate the role of a dramaturg within the devising process, nor propose borders where playwriting ends and performance writing begins (these borders would arguably not be useful at any rate). I do not

[42] My chapter 'Bryony Lavery: Nerves of Steel and a Forgiving Heart', examines Lavery's work within a feminist context; *Women, Collective Creation and Devised Performance Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance: The Rise of Women Theatre Artists in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries,* ed. by Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 207-220.

define myself within the practice of this dissertation as a dramaturg and I would not categorize the two pieces of work produced as performance writing. Taxonomies of dramaturg/playwright and playwriting/performances writing are, again, an area of interest for me, and the work produced for this dissertation has created threads of thought for further exploration of my identity as a practitioner.

Chapter One

The Development of Devising as a Methodological Approach to Playmaking

Introduction

Devising, collective creation, collaborative theatre: these terms, variations on a theme, have become an entrenched part of the academic and cultural dialogue on contemporary theatre and performance. The nomenclature tends to be linked to specific national usage: Duška Radosavljević states that devising should be understood as 'specifically British', whilst Canadians at times employ 'collective creation' (from the French *création collective*), and Americans prefer the word 'collaborative'.[1] Whilst the semantic nuance of each term is a source of continuing debate, the increasing prevalence of these appellations in academic texts, as the subject of conferences, in popular newspaper reviews and previews, and everyday discussions of theatre, indicates that this type of theatre-making is not simply a passing trend.

In the United Kingdom, devised productions have appeared in prominent regional theatres, and on London stages such as the Royal Court, the National Theatre, and in the West End. Theatre Workshop's *Oh! What a Lovely War!* (1963) at the Wyndham's Theatre, and Improbable's *Shockheaded Peter* (2002) at the Piccadilly Theatre are two of the most famous examples of West End productions. Companies associated with devising methodology, such as Complicite and Kneehigh, regularly perform to full houses.[2] Devising methodology is used in schools, and is now such an integral part of British post-secondary

[1] Duška Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 65 (devising as British); Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 2 (American usage of collaborative).

[2] Emma Rice, former artistic director of Kneehigh, was appointed artistic director of the Globe Theatre in 2016, and her first season of programming included Kneehigh's *946: The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips* <www.shakespearesglobe.com/wonder> [accessed 3 August 2016].

teaching of theatre and performance that there is an underlying anxiety that the methodology is in danger of becoming 'a standardised set of devices that may have lost its bite'.[3]

As discussed later in this chapter, some argue that devising or collaborative creation is one of the oldest methodologies for creating performance. However, its growing prominence within an industry traditionally dominated by playwright-originated drama is indicative of a shift in approaches to performance-making. This chapter serves as a critical assessment of devising, providing a comparative analysis of recent academic commentary and an exploration of the debate over definitions, history, cultural relevance, and practice; it also addresses the lack of attention within dominant discourse to the role of writers within the process. In so doing, the chapter identifies the common characteristics of devised work, both in the processes undertaken in development and performance, and the collaborative context in which it exists. The survey, taxonomy, and discussion contained within this first chapter are crucial both for my main PaR enquiry, in that they provide a foundation for the examination of the playwright's role in this particular methodology of play-making, and because they situate my research within the ongoing, and constantly-developing, dialogue about devised and collaborative work.

Definitions and Previous Work

Baz Kershaw identifies one of the earliest references to devising in a theatrical context: 'in *Love's Labour's Lost* Act IV scene 3 Shakespeare has Ferdinand say "let us devise some entertainment" as a wooing tactic.'[4] Unless Shakespeare was incisively prescient about twentieth-century theatre-making, it is likely that he was using the verb in its traditional

[3] Julia Wilson with Helen Manchester, *Teaching Post-Dramatic Theatre in Higher Education* (2012) <www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/disciplines/ddm/PALATINE_DevAward_Wilson_Manchester_2012.pdf> [accessed 25 July 2013], p. 6.

[4] Baz Kershaw, SCUDD Online Messageboard (19 July 2011) <www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind1107&L=SCUDD&P=R37967&I=-3&d=No+Match%3BMatch%3BMatches&m=14301> [accessed 30 July 2013].

sense: the act of using one's imagination to make an abstract creation, such as a strategy or play. This example, however, emphasizes the natural connection between the concept of devising and that of creating performance, and elucidates why it has become a popular term for the type of theatre-making where the 'entertainment' comes from the application of collective imaginations to a performative structure. The *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* defines it as:

> An approach to making performance and theatre that depends crucially on the participation of all the producing group in all or most stages of the creative process, from conception to presentation. [...] It often features unpredictable working methods, such as improvisation or co-authorship and the exchange or blurring of creative roles, but there are probably as many ways to devise a show as there are groups devising.[5]

The emphasis here is on the collective context of devising and its variable working methods. Because of the general usage of the term amongst theatre-makers, critics, and academics in the United Kingdom, and the inclusion of the idea of collaboration within its definition, this dissertation will use the term 'devising' and its various permutations to describe the kind of theatre making at the core of this investigation. To give a more detailed definition, when the term is used in the following pages, it refers to a category of performance which is developed collaboratively, using a variety of predominantly improvisational practices. Whilst it may be based on original text, including script, the performance text is not (significantly) in place prior to the development period.

As the term will be used repeatedly throughout this chapter, it is also important to define what is meant by 'performance'. In line with Richard Schechner's definition of 'performance text' (though disregarding the use of the word 'text' for clarity), it refers to

[5] Baz Kershaw, 'Devising' in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, ed. by Dennis Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 364-65 (p. 364).

predetermined representational action presented in a space designated as a stage (whether or not it is architecturally recognized as such) which is observed, formally or informally, by an audience.[6] An RSC production of *Hamlet* falls into this definition, as does a pre-rehearsed mime produced in the street for a sole member of the public.

The history of devising will be explored in the next subsection. However, if one was to use publications on devising practice as indicators of its temporal positioning as a methodology of theatre making, it would appear that it is a relatively recent phenomenon. Apart from a handful of journal articles, devising did not receive formal academic attention until 1997, when Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* was released.[7] Furthermore, given the infrequent appearance of playwrights within the literature on devising, one might assume that writers rarely engage with the practice. As Chapter Three highlights, the participation of playwrights in the devising process is neither unusual nor new. This therefore begs the question: why are playwrights generally overlooked within the discourse on devising? In many ways, this mirrors the absence of the writer within the discourse (including case studies) on theatre/performance-based PaR methodologies, and, I would argue, is closely connected to a perceived binary between what is considered traditional theatre, and performance (a category into which devising is often placed).[8] As is explored below, in an overview of texts which address devising, the practice is often, particularly within the first texts to emerge, identified as new, and, at times, niche; it is generally thought to be one which challenges traditional methodologies of theatre making. As such, writing (and, as will be explored in Chapter Two, particularly Aristotelian models of dramatic writing) is recurrently associated with traditional methodologies, wherein a writer creates a script, and a director (or theatre manager) interprets it, instructing the actors how to

[6] Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 227.
[7] Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1997),
[8] This discussion is further developed in Chapter Three.

perform the written words. I would argue that it is the playwright's strong association with this form of producing performance which has led to the exclusion of the writer from many of the leading texts on devising (and PaR methodologies), rather than an actual absence of playwrights within the process.

In undertaking a review of the dominant texts of devising, I am exploring what the texts tell us about the development of devising, both as practice and subject of academic discourse, in order to set the scene and introduce vocabulary for a focused investigation of the writer-deviser in Chapter Three. This review also allows me to introduce particular frameworks which I have found useful within my own analysis (for example, Bruce Barton's division of context and process, and Syssoyeva and Proudfit's historical division of first, second, and third waves of devising). I am also, importantly, using the theoretical framework of identifying the absence (or, in some instances, the presence) of the playwright within the texts; given that many of these texts are influential, and used by both students and practitioners, this is an important area to address. The texts are presented chronologically, for the practical purpose of cross-referencing, but also to observe developments in the discourse on the practice, including the treatment (or oversight) of the writer.

As stated above, Alison Oddey's 1997 text *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, was one of the first in English to recognize devising as a separate category of performance which required critical attention. Oddey, both a practitioner and an academic, defined a devised theatre product as something which had 'emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration'. She further refined this by claiming devising is:

> a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that emanates from assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals' contradictory experiences of the world. There is [...] an emphasis on a way of working that supports intuition, spontaneity, and an accumulation of ideas. [...] The process reflects a multi-vision made up of each group member's individual perception of that world as received in a series of images, then interpreted and defined as a product.[9]

The most significant words within these definitions are 'collaboration' and 'process'. For Oddey, devising is not something that can be done by an individual in isolation; it is dependent upon the input of multiple individuals. However, in a series of questions about devising which she feels remained unaddressed, she queries whether devised theatre must 'always be considered as a group activity, for instance, if a solo performer collaborates with another artist, but is not part of a company'.[10] It is important to note that the framing of this question still eliminates the possibility of an individual deviser: for example, a writer, working alone, who uses improvisational techniques to come up with ideas would not be considered to have devised her work. Additionally, for Oddey, devising is not defined by its product (i.e. a performance within a theatrical space for an audience), but rather how that product was made; this remains one of the basic tenets of devised theatre, including that which includes a playwright as part of the process, and explains why the examination of process is at the heart of my exploration of the role of the writer-deviser. Writing in 1997, and with particular emphasis on second-wave devisers, it is of interest within my stated theoretical framework for this literature review that Oddey does include an examination of writers within the devising process, though this is certainly not a dominant feature of the text.[11] She identifies a number of companies (such as Gay Sweatshop, Joint Stock, and Lumiere and Son) and briefly references the problematic idea of rights and ownership for

[9] Oddey, p. 1.
[10] Oddey, p. 3.
[11] See the discussion on Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit's texts below for an explanation of the theoretical division of historical devising processes into 'waves'.

writers.[12] Although this discourse is limited, it does recognize the historical presence of the writer within devising processes. It is therefore significant, that, although many of the theorists following Oddey reference and respond to her text, only a few include writers in a significant way within their analysis.

Surprisingly, though the practice of devising was well-established at the time of Oddey's book, there has been a dearth of commentary on the topic until recent years. The only publications which directly referenced devising in their titles until 2006 were Dymphna Callery's *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre, Exploration and Exercises in Devising, Mask-work, Play, Complicite and Total Theatre*, published in 2001, and Tina Bicât and Chris Baldwin's *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*, published in 2002. As can be garnered from the word 'practical' in both titles, these act as manuals with suggestions for exercises to develop group synthesis and create work, rather than providing extensive critical analysis on the cultural and professional implications of devising, though Callery does investigate the historical roots of the practice. As such, Callery, Bicât, and Baldwin do not reference Oddey's text in a significant way, nor provide specific definitions of devising.

Callery is resistant to the notion that a playwright can be involved in the devising process. Though she points to a recent move towards 'companies with a track record in self-generating work' tackling 'classics and commissioning new work', she later states that few 'companies employ a writer' as the 'post-modern distrust of language seems to have spread into a distrust of writers'.[13] Given the fact that some of the earliest devising companies (such as the Open Theatre, founded in 1963) employed writers, and text continues to feature largely in devising practice today, Callery is inaccurate with this statement. It does, however, correspond to the text versus performance binary explored throughout this

[12] Oddey, p. 49.
[13] Callery, pp. 162 and 179.

dissertation, and is suggestive of the beginning of a trend, identified both within theatre-based PaR methodological texts and the literature on devising, to treat the processes of playwriting as something separate from performance-making processes.

Bicât and Baldwin, in an oft-echoed sentiment, introduce their manual for devising by declaring: 'There are few, if any, rules for this sort of work.'[14] Whilst they do emphasize the collective nature of devising, they provide insight into a shift that was occurring in the arena of devising at the time of writing. Though Oddey recognizes that there was an 'increase in more hierarchical company structures', both she and Callery believe that devised theatre is the product of a collective imagination, rather than the resultant work of solo inspiration.[15] However, Bicât and Baldwin state: 'The seed of a devised piece always sprouts first in one imagination, and it is usually, though not invariably, the director's.'[16] The absence of the writer within this proposition is significant, particularly given that, within non-devised theatre-making structures, it is often the writer credited with the original concept for a production. On the other hand, this acknowledgement of a hierarchy is indicative of the move towards recognizing individual contributions within the collaborative framework, and the structure of their book therefore focuses on the role of specialists within the collaboration, including, significantly, the writer.[17] However, Bernd Keßler's chapter 'Playwriting', contains advice that, apart from acknowledging the usefulness of actors to generate source material and read through early versions of scenes, treads a fairly traditional

[14] Tina Bicât and Chris Baldwin, 'Introduction: Collaborative Invention', in *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*, ed. by Tina Bicât and Chris Baldwin (Marlborough: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2002), pp. 7-9 (p. 8).
[15] Oddey, pp. 1, 9.
[16] Bicât and Baldwin, p. 8.
[17] This somewhat foregrounds Bruce Barton's distinction between collaborative context and process (examined below), though the text is predominantly written in a way which does not identify the two areas as separate considerations.

path of pedagogical advice for writers; he states that it is the 'probably the playwright who will bring the story together in a unified whole on paper'.[18]

There is a four-year gap following these texts, before a flurry of academic publications attempt to codify what was, by the time of Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling's 2006 book *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, an entrenched practice both within fringe and commercial theatre in the United Kingdom, and the international festival and touring circuit. Heddon and Milling point out that, despite devising being 'so prevalent, so present', up to the point of writing, 'very little critical attention' had been paid to the practice, and their text is an attempt to answer some of the questions Oddey had posed nearly ten years previously.[19] In response, they provide their own definitions of devising. They state: 'devising is best understood as a set of strategies that emerged within a variety of theatrical and cultural fields, for example in community arts, performance art/live art, or political theatre.'[20] The term 'set of strategies' is vague, and allows for the inclusion of processes associated with playwriting, though playwrights do not feature heavily in the text, apart from the acknowledgement of certain writers' involvements with companies, particularly (and following Oddey) those companies formed along politically ideological lines in the 1960s and 1970s.[21] Heddon and Milling continue with Oddey's assertion that devised theatre from the 1990s onwards no longer necessarily implied a lack of defined roles and hierarchy within the collaborative framework; they state that by that point, 'collaborative creation may have come to mean something rather more akin to traditional theatre production' and that even in the 1960s and 1970s, collective creation often 'involved the use of a writer-figure in the rehearsal room', although, as stated, the role of the writer-deviser within the process

[18] Bernd Keßler, 'Playwriting', in *Devised and Collaborative Theatre*, ed. by Bicât and Baldwin, pp. 63-74 (p. 69). See Chapter Two for an examination of trends, and identification of traditional methodologies, within playwriting pedagogy.
[19] Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 2.
[20] Heddon and Milling, p. 2.
[21] For example, Michelene Wandor's involvement with Gay Sweatshop: Heddon and Milling, p. 113.

goes largely ignored in their text.[22] Thus, we have a refinement of the concept of collaboration connected to devising processes: a group in which all participate in the process of developing new work, but contribute according to their specific talent/professional background; this has particular implications for writers, and (implicitly) recognizes the potential for a playwright's specialist contribution within a collaborative context.

In the same year (2006), the English translation of Hans-Thies Lehmann's highly influential text *Postdramatic Theatre* was published. Though the German edition had been released in 1997, and was well-received in continental Europe, Karen Jürs-Munby's translation, with an introduction which specifically referenced British devising practice, was not published until nine years later. Commentators on devised and physical theatre had previously noted the dichotomy between traditional, text-led performance and more physical theatre, which tended to reject notions of playwright-dominance. However, Lehmann articulates the 'relationship between drama and the "no longer dramatic" forms of theatre that have emerged since the 1970s'.[23] He argues for a distinction between 'dramatic' theatre, which is 'subordinated to the primacy of the [literary] text' and 'postdramatic' theatre, which is rooted within a 'concrete problem of theatre aesthetics'; this division has ramifications for the position within contemporary theatre-making of the playwright, who is often associated with the 'dramatic', and therefore consideration of *Postdramatic Theatre* is important within the theoretical framework of this literature review.[24]

Lehmann admits that dramatic theatre is still popular, and a brief glance at production listings in the West End and on national stages would confirm this. Nonetheless, the new forms of theatre which he terms 'postdramatic' have 'marked the work of some of the most significant directors and companies of our time'.[25] It is important to note that postdramatic

[22] Heddon and Milling, pp. 6 and 7.
[23] Karen Jürs-Munby, 'Introduction', in Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-15 (p. 1).
[24] Lehmann, p. 21
[25] Lehmann, p. 19.

theatre does not represent a rejection of written text. Rather, it is considered as 'one element, one layer, or as a "material" of the scenic creation, not as its master'.[26] Equally, the postdramatic should not be understood as existing '"beyond" drama, without any relation to it'.[27] Lehmann lists a number of stylistic traits common to postdramatic theatre which have particular implications for playwriting practice within devising. These include: parataxis/non-hierarchy (one element of the performance, for example text, is not any more important than another element); scenography (a visual dramaturgy which is not subordinate to the text, which freely develops its own logic); and physicality. Whilst not all postdramatic performance is devised, and Lehmann does not specifically use the word 'devising' within his examination, it is unusual to witness a devised performance which does not contain at least one element which falls under Lehman's definition of the postdramatic.[28]

Lehmann's theories have not gone unchallenged. As Liz Tomlin argues: 'his own focus on the "dramatic" as the postdramatic's "other", too often encourages the division of theatre practice into an either/or binary configuration.'[29] This has implications for the writer-deviser, who often comes into the process of devising with a background in dramatic forms. Chapter Three will further examine this dichotomy (along with the perceived 'new writing' versus 'performance' binary) and its relevance for the playwright who wishes to engage with devising.[30] Though not all of the texts which follow address his theories, the theoretical division between text and performance features prominently, and is closely connected to the diminishing figure of the playwright within considerations of devising practice.

A year after the appearance of the English translation of *Postdramatic Theatre*, Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson, and Katie Normington's *Making a Performance: Devising*

[26] Lehmann, p. 17.
[27] Lehmann, p. 44.
[28] Lehmann, p. 86. Word limits do not allow a greater exploration of these characteristic traits; Lehmann defines them in great detail, along with other identifiers.
[29] Liz Tomlin, *Acts and Apparitions: Discourses on the Real in Performance Practice and Theory, 1990-2010* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 51.
[30] See p. 10 for a definition of the writer-deviser. The designation and its implications will be further refined in Chapter Three.

Histories and Contemporary Practices was published, recognising that (in a departure from Oddey and Heddon and Milling), whilst devising is often 'associated with the innovative and experimental', it has achieved 'popularity on an unprecedented scale'.[31] Refusing to plant their flag in the taxonomical debate, they state: 'it would be misleading to suggest that this umbrella term signifies any particular genre or a specific style of performance.'[32] This is more a commentary on product rather than process, and the implication is that devised productions cannot necessarily be distinguished from those scripted using traditional, solo-playwright methods of writing, contradicting Lehmann's suggestion that there are identifiable aspects of postdramatic theatre (a category with which, as previously discussed, devising is often associated). As my examination of Bryony Lavery's work in Chapter Four and my own practice as documented in Chapter Five reveal, not only is the imprint of devising left upon the final product, but on a playwright's non-devised scripts. Interestingly, they do state that devising 'is widely regarded as a process of generating a performative or theatrical event, often but not always in collaboration with others'.[33] This is a significant departure from the previously-examined commentators who saw devising purely as a group activity, and means that solo performers can be included within their definition, though there is no recognition that this definition might include a solo writer. However, they concur with the assertion of Oddey and Heddon and Milling that there is no particular methodology to follow when devising and that it should be described as '*processes* of experimentation and sets of creative *strategies*' (emphasizing the plural), which defy 'neat definition or categorisation'.[34] This gives rise to the question, if devising can be both a solo and a collaborative effort, and, if there are no specific methodologies employed, is the only identifiable feature of work categorised as devised a lack of a complete script at the beginning of the process? Given the nebulous quality of their taxonomy, it is particularly

[31] Govan, Nicholson, and Normington, p. 3.
[32] Govan, Nicholson, and Normington, p. 4.
[33] Govan, Nicholson, and Normington, p. 4.
[34] Govan, Nicholson, and Normington, p. 7; their emphasis.

significant in regards to the theoretical framework of this review that playwrights feature even less than in previous texts,[35] despite the fact that writer-devisers were members of well-known historical devising-based collaborations. This corresponds to the observation of a discourse on devising shaped by notions of a division between text and performance.

In *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising* (2008), which examines devising from a predominantly Canadian perspective (and is therefore particularly relevant to my PaR investigation, given my cultural background), editor Bruce Barton's commentary responds to the definitions of the practice which have come before. He specifically takes umbrage with what he terms the 'superimposition of context and process', which began with Oddey and was continued by Heddon and Milling, and Govan, Nicholson, and Normington.[36] Barton argues for a separation of the terms devising, collective, and collaboration: 'collective = shared purpose and motivation, *ideology*; collaboration = self-imposed framework and structure, *context*; devising = adopted strategies and rules, *process*.'[37] The implication of this semantic division is that, whilst collaboration is frequently the context for using the particular strategies associated with devising, it is not necessarily so, and a devised work should be recognized as a product of certain processes rather than simply as something created by a group. On the other hand, he claims that in practice, 'no absolute separation of these two aspects [process and context] is possible or desirable'.[38] This framework is particularly useful for the examination of my own practice, in that I consider how the collaborative context of work influences the processes of work, rather than treating them as one and the same. It also is applicable to the examination in Chapter Five of my non-devised

[35] The authors briefly discuss Joseph Chaikin's collaboration with writers within the collaborative context of the Living Theatre, and Gay Sweatshop and Monstrous Regiment's understanding that playwrights are 'integral to the actors' dialogue'; Govan, Nicholson, and Normington, pp. 38 and 52.

[36] Bruce Barton, 'Introduction: Devising the Creative Body' in *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising*, ed. by Bruce Barton (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2008), pp. vii-xxvii (p. xvii).

[37] Barton, p. viii; (Barton's emphasis).

[38] Barton, p. xvii.

writing, as I am able to discuss how the context of work as a solo playwright affects the processes undertaken, and the resulting product: the script of the play *Playground*.

Keeping in mind the theoretical thread of this review of texts, the writer is not entirely absent from *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising*. Barton, who is also a playwright himself, although, fascinatingly, does not discuss his own experience as a writer at length in this volume, touches on the involvement of writers in his own chapters, and there is a chapter co-written by director Alex Maclean (whose company Zuppa Theatre features in Chapter Three of this dissertation) and writer Rob Plowman, that provides conceptual notes (as opposed to a concrete documentation of process) for *Radium City*, a production in development. However, in line with the majority of texts on devising, there is no systematic examination of the role of the writer, both within the context of collaboration and the processes involved with devising.

Barton's assertions did not receive notice within the British academic discourse on devising until specifically referenced in a 2013 article by Alex Mermikides.[39] Nevertheless, beginning in 2010, there was a series of texts which provided examples of process, examining how certain companies approached specific projects within the context of the editors' interpretation of the concept of devising. With *Devising in Process*, Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart focus on the shifting cultural relevance of devising, rather than debating specific definitions.[40] They do categorize devised work as 'post-structuralist' (with no reference to Lehmann's theories) and claim that it 'becomes an escape from representation and closed fictional frames', marking, as others before, the dichotomy between devising and what is seen as traditional, text-based forms.[41] There is little theoretical consideration of how the role of the writer may have evolved in line with devising practice, and they state that the involvement

[39] Alex Mermikides,'Brilliant Theatre-Making at the National: Devising, Collective Creation and the Director's Brand', *Studies in Theatre & Performance*, 33 (2013), 153-67 (p. 153).
[40] Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, 'Introduction' in *Devising in Process*, ed. by Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 4-27; there is no mention of Bruce Barton's theories in this text.
[41] Mermikides and Smart, pp. 6-7.

of a writer (Fin Kennedy) within a collaborative context (Red Room's creation of *Unstated*) makes 'for a process that has more in common with the orthodox script-led practices that the collective sought to challenge'.[42] However, despite this suggested binary between performance and text-based practice, *Devising in Process* is significant in that it features case studies of companies (Theatre O and Red Room) who work with writers. It is not coincidental that the case studies all feature companies based in the United Kingdom; this suggests that text-based theatre is still a dominant force in Britain, an observation which is reflected within a British devising ecology which often incorporates writers

Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal Processes, edited by Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender, was released the same year as Mermikides's and Smart's text and incorporates a similar approach of close examination of the working processes of specific companies/practitioners, though the case studies are more international in scope, and writers feature in very limited ways.[43] In opposition to Mermikides and Smart, it omits the word 'devising' in its title, even though all the companies featured are closely aligned with the devising process, and the authors use the term within their introduction. It is also the first of the texts addressing this type of work to reference Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic. These two factors are interconnected in that they indicate some dissatisfaction with the limitations of the term devising, and display a desire to embrace notions, such as the postdramatic, which may be broader in scope for usage in classifying the work featured in the text. It should also be noted that, as indicated above, whilst Mermikides and Smart feature chapters on companies who work closely with writers, the productions detailed in *Making Contemporary Theatre* do not feature significant input from playwrights. Arguably, this is an indication that there is less scope for a writer's involvement in non-British postdramatic

[42] Mermikides and Smart, p. 12.
[43] Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender, 'Introduction: Witnessing Postdramatic Theatre-Making' in *Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal Processes*, ed. by Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 1-38

theatre, and aligns with the observation of the general side-lining of the writer in devising discourse, particularly discourse which has an international focus.

Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance (2013), by Duška Radosavljević, also responds to Lehmann's theories (amongst others), claiming that, in a postdramatic landscape, the binary oppositions of text and performance are no longer relevant. This is especially useful when examining devising which incorporates a writer for, as Radosavljević points out (in opposition to the majority of books on devising), the usage of text, whether it be a script or an original text which is adapted, is now a common practice for those who devise, and 'companies previously associated with devising as a method have increasingly found themselves collaborating with writers'.[44] In fact, as stated above, Radosavljević argues for a rejection of the term 'devising', stating that its

> implied binary opposition to text-based theatre tends to create confusion among continental Europeans, as work on any pre-written text in many European mainstream theatres customarily involves a collective and an improvisational approach in the process of rehearsal.[45]

Radosavljević's text, as the title suggests, does not focus solely on devised work; there are chapters on bringing classic and 'new writing' theatre texts to the stage. A discussion which posits devising and adaptation within the same chapter is structured to make clear that, for Radosavljević, and many twenty-first century performance makers, the distinction between text-based theatre and devising is blurred; this is particularly pertinent for the focus of this dissertation on the writer-deviser, who must work in the liminal space between the two approaches to making theatre. She is one of the few contributors to the discourse on devising

[44] Radosavljević, p. 60.

[45] Radosavljević, p. 62. However, given the ubiquity of the term within British and North America, and the absence of alternative terms (particularly given Bruce Barton's objections to 'collective creation' and 'collaborative theatre' as methodological descriptors), this dissertation will employ the word devising.

to systematically address the figure of the playwright embedded within an ensemble; significantly, this is not done in the chapter designated for a discussion of devising and adaptation, but in one titled 'New Writing: Moving into the Twenty-First Century'.[46] Whilst this placement, along with her extended metaphor of the playwright-as-composer, emphasizes the blurred categories of text and performance, it positions the work of the writer-deviser (my term) amidst that of other (non-collaborative) playwrights, rather than devising companies.

At the time of writing (2016), the most recent books to participate significantly in the academic conversation on devising are Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit's companion texts *A History of Collective Creation*; *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*; and *Women, Collective Creation and Devised Performance*.[47] The books work together to argue that collective creation or devising praxis (they use the terms interchangeably) since the beginning of the twentieth century can be placed within three waves; the first text documents the first two waves, and the second the third wave in which, they argue, contemporary performance practice should be placed. The third text examines the symbiotic relationship between female theatre makers and devising, arguing that not only has the contribution of female practitioners to collaborative theatre making been significant (and overlooked), but it has provided women with access to an industry which has been traditionally male-dominated.[48] Syssoyeva and Proudfit reject the definition of devising methodology as: was there 'a play in the room before everyone got started?' Instead, they choose to ask: 'What is it that particular group chooses to contest, change, or reveal through

[46] Radosavljević, pp. 103-118.

[47] *A History of Collective Creation*, ed. by Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*, ed. by Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); *Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance: The Rise of Women Theatre Artists in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[48] As mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, I have a chapter in the text, entitled 'Bryony Lavery: Nerves of Steel and a Forgiving Heart'; *Women, Collective Creation and Devised Performance*, ed. by Syssoyeva and Proudfit, pp. 207-220.

collective praxis?'[49] This rather broad query posits that all that is required for devising/collective creation is a group who wishes to make a piece of work, leaving the door open to include a number of practices, including that of the writer-deviser. Indeed, one chapter in each book details the involvement of writers within collective praxis.[50]

The texts outlined above represent significant contributions to the discussion of devising history and contemporary praxis in that they provide specific and detailed analyses of devising methodologies and develop the discourse of their predecessors, although not all take sufficient notice of the full range of texts which fall under the discursive umbrella of devising. Other books such as *Vies et Morts de la Création Collective/Lives and Deaths of Collective Creation*; *Challenging the Hierarchy: Collective Theatre in the United States*; and Theodore Shank's article 'Collective Creation' in *Re:direction*, also offer useful commentary, particularly on the documentation of the methodologies of particular practitioners and companies, yet they have by and large flown under the radar of other commentators.[51] Whilst not specifically focused on devising within a collaborative structure, Liz Tomlin's *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014*, contains information on a number of groups which intersect the writing/performance binary, which is significant for the analysis of the writer-deviser in Chapter Three.[52]

---

[49] Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva, 'Introduction: Towards a New History of Collective Creation', in *A History of Collective Creation*, ed. by Syssoyeva and Proudfit, pp. 1-10 (p. 5).

[50] Scott Proudfit, 'Shared Space and Shared Pages: Collective Creation for Edward Albee and the Playwrights of the Open Theatre', in *A History of Collective Creation*, ed. by Syssoyeva and Proudfit, pp. 157-170; Roger Bechtel, 'The Playwright and the Collective: Drama and Politics in British Devised Theatre', in *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*, ed. by Syssoyeva and Proudfit, pp. 39-50, and my own chapter, as referenced above.

[51] *Vies et Morts de la Création Collective/Lives and Deaths of Collective Creation*, ed. by Jane Baldwin, Jean-Marc Larrue, and Christiane Page (Boston, MA: Vox Theatri, 2008); Mark S. Weinberg, *Challenging the Hierarchy: Collective Theatre in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992); Theodore Shank, 'Collective Creation', in *Re:direction: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, ed. by Rebecca Schneider and Rebecca Cody (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 221-35. Syssoyeva and Proudfit reference *Vies et Morts*, *Challenging the Hierarchy*, and *Re:direction* throughout their texts.

[52] *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014*, ed. by Liz Tomlin (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015).

There has also been a small number of texts which attempt to document the process of devising from the inside (as opposed to the outside-eye framework espoused by the majority of texts reviewed above), providing first-hand accounts from practitioners and primary evidence in the form of notes, journals, and examples of performance text. *Theatre in Pieces: Politics, Poetics and Interdisciplinary Collaboration, An Anthology of Texts 1966-2010*, is one such resource, in that it contains script/performance texts for a number of well-known devised production (including *US*, by Peter Brook and the Royal Shakespeare Company), along with commentary on the processes involved in creating the text.[53] This is particularly useful for the purposes of the investigation of the writer-deviser, although general commentary on the role of the playwright within devising is limited. Fevered Sleep's *Invisible Things* similarly documents the devised production *Infinite Line: Brighton*, though in greater depth in that, in being written and edited by company members directly involved in the process, it offers an extended first-hand account of the devising process, including notes, diaries, and photographs. It has little to offer on the role of the writer-deviser, however, given that a playwright (Cathy Turner) was only a minimal part of the process during the research and development period.[54] In addition, *Trial: a Study of the Devising Process in Reckless Sleepers' 'Schrödinger's Box'*, documents the re-devising of a piece of work, but the act of writing text features only minimally, and a writer is not credited.[55] Significantly for the theoretical framework of this review, whilst these insider accounts of devising provide valuable insight into both the collaborative context and the specific processes of devising, there is no account which gives a writer-deviser the opportunity to provide an account of her involvement in devising practice first hand. Therefore, the documentation of my work on the

[53] *Theatre in Pieces: Politics, Poetics and Interdisciplinary Collaboration, An Anthology of Texts 1966-2010*, ed. by Anna Furse (London: Methuen Drama, 2011); the text's examination of the development of *US* is discussed in Chapter Three.

[54] *Invisible Things: Documentation from a Devising Process*, ed. by David Harradine (Winchester: Fevered Sleep and the University of Winchester, 2011). Synne Behrndt documents her involvement as dramaturg in the chapter 'Shaping a Dramaturgy' (pp. 122-143), but script writing is not discussed.

[55] Andrew Brown et al, *Trial: a Study of the Devising Process in Reckless Sleepers' 'Schrödinger's Box'* (Plymouth: University of Plymouth, 2007).

devised play *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, contained in Chapter Five, fills a gap left by the texts outlined in this review, and will hopefully encourage the inclusion of the writer-deviser within future texts on devising and collaborative praxis.

The majority of texts I have cited do not attempt to establish a lineage of devising, but present illustrative case studies to provide commentary on the development of the methodology. Yet, to understand devising at it exists in the early twenty-first century, and particularly how a writer-deviser might fit into a company structure, it is important to examine the various influences which have fed contemporary devising, particularly, given the English-language emphasis stated in the Introduction to this dissertation, in a British and North-American context.

History

As can be expected from a contested concept without a definitive list of attributes, the history of how devising came to be a culturally and academically significant category of performance is rather nebulous. Taking the definition of devising within this dissertation under consideration, it can be argued that this process of theatre-making, involving collaboration and without a written performance text as a starting point is, in fact, the most traditional of methodologies, and existed as a practice long before the rise of the playwright; as Clive Barker says, 'devised theatre has always been there'.[56] *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* states that 'devising was at the heart of many early ritual practices', and Lehmann concurs, stating: 'theatre [as he defines it] existed first, arising from ritual [...]. Even if this physically semiotic, motor practice already represented a kind of script before the

[56] Clive Barker, 'Foreword', in *Devised and Collaborative Theatre*, ed. by Bicât and Baldwin, p. 6.

advent of writing, the difference with respect to the formation of modern literary theatre is still apparent.'[57]

Indeed, as David E.R. George argues, the 'priority of text over performance represents a brief phase in the recent history of western drama and has never presumed such a place in Asia'.[58] One can infer that early performance must have been collaboratively devised; even if a particular individual came up with an original concept and had mentally detailed specific performance moments, without the ability to present a written script to be followed precisely by performers it is inevitable that the final product would be the culmination of the collective's interpretation of the concept. It is only with the rise of written script that the idea of a solo playwright emerges. However, this is not to say that devising did not occur in playwright-dominant theatre; as Walter J. Ong argues, texts (meaning written texts) 'have clamoured for attention so peremptorily that oral creations have tended to be regarded generally as variants of written productions or, if not this, as beneath scholarly attention'.[59]

The roots of devising, as it exists in its twenty-first century context, are multifarious and interwoven. A number of commentators situate the birth of contemporary devising within the modern, avant-garde artistic movement beginning with the Futurists, which grew into what is now known as performance or live art.[60] Others place its beginnings in the growth of French mime, or radical political theatre of the 1960s, and still others see the influences of practitioners such as Artaud, Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, and Eugenio Barba.

In a discussion on the United Kingdom online messageboard of SCUDD (Standing Conference of University Drama Departments), based on a question posed by Duška Radosavljević about the origins of the term 'devising' in relation to theatre practice, Trevor

---

[57] Baz Kershaw, 'Devising', p. 364; Lehmann, p. 46.
[58] David E.R. George, 'Performance Epistemology', in *Physical Theatres*, ed. by Keefe and Murray, pp. 26-30 (p. 28).
[59] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 8.
[60] For a brief history of avant-garde performance, see RoseLee Goldberg's influential text, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

Griffiths provides documentary evidence of the word in Midlands Arts Centre theatre programmes from 1965-66: '*Hang Down Your Head and Die* was "devised by David Wright"; *The Last Crusade of the Five Little Nuns*: "an improvised passion play" was "devised and directed by Mike Leigh".'[61] Stuart Bennett claims that it emerged from both the Theatre In Education (TIE) and community theatre movements of the 1960s and 70s; relevantly to this investigation, he states that in both cases playwrights were generally involved in the work.[62] In the same discussion, Kathleen McCreery and Tony Coult both pinpoint TIE as a source for the term, and Duška Radosavljević provides evidence that it came into formal usage during 'the inception of TIE work at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry [between] 1965 and 1980'.[63]

The TIE and community theatre movements, with their emphasis on non-hierarchical collective improvisation to create work, had their foundations in the radical politics of the 1950s-70s. Whether these political theatre-makers, focused on breaking down social constructions, empowering marginalized groups (for example, women, racial minorities, and lesbian and gay communities), and challenging authority, are the direct descendants from the modernist avant-garde artists, is some source of debate. As Govan, Nicholson, and Normington state, devised performance in its contemporary context 'does not constitute a coherent movement or a distinct cultural ambition, and consequently there is no single or continuous history for the richness of its influences and artistic practices'.[64] However, it cannot be denied that these radical theatre-makers adopted some of the practices of the avant-

[61] Trevor Griffiths, SCUDD Online Messageboard (19 September 2011), <www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind1109&L=SCUDD&P=R22514&I=-3&d=No+Match%3BMatch%3BMatches> [accessed 30 July 2013]. Incidentally, Mike Leigh went on to become, arguably, the film-maker and theatre director most famously associated with devising in the United Kingdom. The question posed by Duška Radosavljević was, 'Could someone let me know when the term "devising" was first used in relation to theatre and by whom?', and a summary of the responses can be found in Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making*, pp. 65-66.

[62] Stuart Bennett, SCUDD Online Messageboard (27 July 2011), <www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind1107&L=SCUDD&P=R56329&I=-3&d=No+Match%3BMatch%3BMatches&m=15295> [accessed 30 July 2013].

[63] Radosavljević, p. 66.

[64] Govan, Nicholson, and Normington, p. 13.

garde for development of work, including text-based processes. For example: 'Surrealists further developed the use of "chance" procedures, such as automatic writing, to try to express the functioning of thought [...] — the mistake and the accident, for example.' The usage of similar improvisational techniques is 'frequent in contemporary devising'.[65]

In fact, although the history of devising is somewhat convoluted, in some cases a line can be traced directly to contemporary devising companies. For example, the influence of Artaud and the early avant-gardes extended to the experimental work performed at Black Mountain College. This work included one of the earliest happenings, constructed by John Cage, and inspired by his reading of *The Theatre and Its Double*.[66] Cage then went on to teach at the New School in New York, where his students included Jackson MacLow, George Brecht, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, and Allan Kaprow. Kaprow is most famously associated with the series of so-called 'Happenings' in 1960s New York.[67] Within the same artistic environment, Julian Beck and Judith Malina founded the Living Theatre, also influenced by Grotowski and Artaud.[68] Malina and Beck developed a process which strove 'for unification in reuniting actor and spectator, in abolishing the distance between them both spatially and temporally', and often involved usage of scripted text and collaboration with writers.[69]Actor Joseph Chaikin emerged out of the Living Theatre to found the Open Theatre in 1963; in his book *The Presence of the Actor*, he credits Malina and Beck and Grotowski (amongst others) with holding a high degree of influence on his work.[70]

[65] Heddon and Milling, pp. 11-12.
[66] Govan, Nicholson and Normington, p. 24.
[67] Goldberg, p. 127. See also *Happenings and Other Acts*, ed. by Mariellen R. Sandford (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005).
[68] Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre* (New York: Horizon Press, 1972), pp. 100 (Grotowski), 53 (Artaud), and 56 (list of 'sponsoring committee' including John Cage).
[69] Biner, p. 99.
[70] Joseph Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor*, 2nd edn (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1991), pp. x-xi.

Writers (such as Megan Terry, Jean-Claude van Itallie, and Michael Smith) took part in Open Theatre workshops. Though the relationship of the writer to the workshop was 'elusive', the methodology was consistent:

> The writer is defined not by the fact that he has written a script on which the work is based, as in the case of traditional production, but on the fact that he *will* write a script related to the work which the troupe is improvising. […] one can look back and say that the writer structured the workshop investigation to make it understandable to outsiders. In doing so, he asserted his own personality and vision, to the extent sometimes of radically altering the actors' private investigation.[71]

Thus, we have evidence from the second wave of devising of the incorporation of the writer-deviser into the collaborative context of a prominent company. As will be seen in Chapter Three and the case study of Bryony Lavery in Chapter Four, Chaikin's structure for incorporating writers into the devising process is one which has been emulated by many practitioners.

Other names frequently cited in the history of devising include Jacques Copeau and his descendants Étienne Decroux, Carlo Mazzone-Clementi, and Jacques Lecoq. The focus of their work tended to be physical exploration through improvisation, and there is little documentation of their engagement with writers; Copeau placed strong emphasis on observing and emulating 'children at play' and promoted an 'alternative theatre, one in which the writer would come last rather than first'.[72] This is not to say, however, that the writer, whilst absent from historical discourse, was necessarily absent within the processes of the artists cited. Certainly, their contemporary descendants, such as Complicite and Théâtre du

[71] Robert Pasolli, *A Book on the Open Theatre* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1970), p. 36.
[72] Jacques Copeau, *Copeau: Texts on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by John Rudlin and Norman H. Paul (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 156 (children at play), and p. 150 (alternative theatre).

Soleil, regularly work with text generated by writers.[73] Likewise, the influence of Grotowski on devising methodology has also been substantial. According to Govan, Nicholson and Normington, 'Grotowski's admiration for Artaud's non-literary poetic theatre and his holistic approach to creativity within actor training led many practitioners to reject the dramatic script in favour of more spontaneous and improvisatory practices'. These practices were then disseminated by other influential practitioners and companies, including Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook, Gardzienice, the Wooster Group, and Richard Schechner, via his Performance Group.[74] It is important to note, however, that despite the 'mistrust of language' espoused by this group, many of them, including Artaud, Grotowski, and Meyerhold, worked with playtexts.[75]

In the United Kingdom, Theatre Workshop, founded by Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl in 1946, arguably exerted the greatest influence on the collaborative theatre sector, although some would say the Theatres Act of 1968, which abolished the need for scripts to be reviewed by the Lord Chamberlain before performance, was also a defining moment in the history of British devising.[76] Coming out of the Workers' Theatre Movement, Littlewood and MacColl used the teachings of Stanislavsky, Brecht, Meyerhold, and movement theorist Rudolf Laban, combined with a political, collective sensibility.[77] Their production of *Oh What a Lovely War*, according to Robert Leach, 'may have been the single most influential play of its time, inspiring decades of "documentary" playmaking as well as a generation of radical theatre makers'. Incidentally, this, their only production fully devised without a pre-existing script, was the source of tension over authorship, which Leach claims is 'probably an unavoidable upshot of the Theatre Workshop method of work'.[78] The majority of their

[73] Jon Foley Sherman, 'The Practice of Astonishment: Devising, Phenomenology, and Jacques Lecoq', *Theatre Topics*, 20 (2010), 89-99 (p. 90).
[74] Govan, Nicholson, and Normington, pp. 32, 34.
[75] Mermikides and Smart, p. 9.
[76] Heddon and Milling, p. 19.
[77] Robert Leach, *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the Making of the Modern British Theatre* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), pp. 26 and 50.
[78] Leach, pp. 145 and 160.

productions originated from a script. However, Littlewood used games and physical exercises to both develop the text and aid the actors to create a physical representation of it. Additionally, despite its 'democratic ideals', Littlewood and MacColl (until his departure in 1953) effectively held the reins of power.[79]

Littlewood's methodologies influenced companies such as the People Show, Joint Stock, and John McGrath's 7:84, and have been disseminated through texts written by Theatre Workshop member Clive Barker, and via the East 15 Acting School, founded by Theatre Workshop alumnus Harry H. Corbett. Robert Leach even goes so far as to argue that a style of theatre commonly known as 'Brechtian' in the United Kingdom is actually more a legacy of Theatre Workshop: 'it is important to remember that Littlewood's theatre was working in this style in Britain years before Brecht's ideas had infiltrated British theatre.'[80] Regardless of the veracity of this statement, the tendencies within British devising companies towards a loosely hierarchical structure (typically dominated by a director) and a willingness to work with playwrights and written text, can be traced back to Theatre Workshop's enduring influence.

Such an outline is simplified, largely dependent on written discourse, and focused on the presence (or absence) of the writer-deviser within the process. There are inevitable omissions due to the fact that first-hand textual documentation of devising processes is still a nascent practice, and existing publications provide only a limited selection of companies/practitioners who use devising methodology. For example, Cassandra Fleming's research examines the historical significance of practitioners Michael Chekhov and Suzanne Bing, not only to the actor training with which they are traditionally associated, but to the development of devised theatre (particularly, in Chekhov's case, aligned with his involvement with the Chekhov Studio in the United Kingdom at Dartington College between 1936 and 1938, and in the United States [Ridgefield, Connecticut and Hollywood] from 1939

[79] Govan, Nicholson, and Normington, p. 48. See Chapter Three for an examination of Theatre Workshop within a writer-deviser context.
[80] Leach, p. 209.

onwards).[81] As Fleming states, their inclusion within the literature on devising is 'inadequate', which is particularly troubling given the clear correspondence of Chekhov's beliefs to the discourse on writer-devisers.[82] He states: 'The author of the new theatre will be a person who creates the words for the play, not in the solitude of the study but working with and among the cast. […] We must know what it means to be a member of the theatre — it doesn't mean to be the servant of the designer or the author.'[83]

What this limited history indicates is that, although devised theatre is often presented as new and radical, it is in fact a well-established practice, both as a methodology to develop work, and also as a recognizable performance genre with features that reference the work of companies and practitioners who have gone before. As Heddon and Milling state, many companies, such as Forced Entertainment, are 'cognisant of their historical roots'.[84] The majority of young companies who embrace the devising process will have seen work by established devisers, or have been taught the methodology as part of their school or university drama training. Virginie Magnat confirms devising's status as no longer radical, stating 'postmodern devised theatre does not claim to position itself outside dominant cultural formations'.[85]

Contemporary devising, then, should be examined, not as an oppositional strategy to traditional culture and forms, but rather as a methodology with both historical context and identifiable processes, which can include authored scripts; in Lehmann's postdramatic theatre there remains an important role for text. As Radosavljević states:

---

[81] Fleming, pp. 318-20.
[82] Fleming, p. 297.
[83] Michael Chekhov, 14 January 1937, Exeter, Michael Chekhov Studio Deirdre Hurst du Prey Archive, MS Series 1: Notes and Transcriptions, A: The Actor is the Theatre, vol. 2, 1977.
[84] Heddon and Milling, p. 197.
[85] Virginie Magnat, 'Devising Utopia, or Asking for the Moon', *Theatre Topics*, 15 (2005), 73-86 (p. 74).

> In the twentieth-first-century context of increasingly globalized theatre-making, we must recognize that the divide between text-based theatre and devised performance is no longer tenable; these methodologies increasingly inform and transform each other [...].[86]

As such, whilst this dissertation does utilize Syssoyeva and Proudfit's broad historical delineation of (twentieth and twenty-first century North-American and British) devising into first, second, and third waves, it also recognizes the blurred edges of these divisions, and that devising has, and continues to be, interwoven with text-based theatrical practice.[87] Thus, an examination of the writer-deviser, who straddles these categories, is imperative. In detailing the collaborative context in which a playwright might function, and processes which she might encounter, a foundation is provided for a detailed examination of the writer-deviser in Chapter Three.

Context: Collaboration and Company Structure

Although many of the politically-motivated companies of the 1960s and 1970s embraced the ideal of a democratic, cooperative structure where 'all skills were equally valuable', the reality of working life in a theatre company did not always correspond to this ideal.[88] Playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie, who worked with the Open Theatre, provides an insightful example:

> Joe [Joseph Chaikin] and the actors comprised the visible arena of work from day to day, and there was the myth that everyone was equal, that the pieces were created by everybody. It may have been a necessary myth, to facilitate the actors' commitment to the material. Yet it was a myth. Joe was very much the head.[89]

[86] Radosavljević, p. 62.
[87] Syssoyeva, 'Introduction', pp. 7-8.
[88] Heddon and Milling, p. 111.
[89] Jean-Claude van Itallie, Joseph Chaikin, and others, 'The Open Theatre [1963-1973]: Looking Back', *Performing Arts Journal*, 7 (1983), 25-48 (p. 34).

Often, companies are founded without any kind of hierarchical structures or designated roles of actor, director, performer or designer. As Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment explains: 'We didn't know what people were good at, so we all kind of had a go at performing, we all had a go at directing, and we did three or four shows that way.' As they became more experienced, they realized that certain members were more adept at particular roles, and Etchells eventually stepped away from performing to direct and write.[90]

Alongside the tendency for collaborators to fall into the roles where they feel most comfortable, there are external pressures which can lead a company to adopt a more traditional structure. As Mermikides points out: 'economic and market forces have forced contemporary mainstream devising companies to adopt an organizational model in which the director has priority [...] and in which the director's "brand" represents a marketable commodity.'[91] A good example of this is Complicite, whose work is no longer viewed (or marketed) as the product of a combined effort of a collective, but as the singular vision of a director, Simon McBurney.[92] Similarly, though well-known playwright/directors Mike Leigh's and Anthony Neilson's work is based on material generated from actor-improvisations, the plays created are said to be 'by' Leigh and Neilson, rather than the performers, and the productions are marketed on the strength of their names; Chapter Three provides a more detailed examination of Leigh's and Neilson's work as writer-devisers. Funding mechanisms also seem to push companies towards a more hierarchical structure; many small-medium sized companies rely on Arts Council project-based grants, which means they are not able to maintain economically a stable pool of performers and technical personnel.[93] Instead, there is usually a core group of a few individuals, who then bring other

[90] Heddon and Milling, p. 202.
[91] Mermikides, p. 158.
[92] Complicite's production of *The Encounter* (2016; I observed a performance 19 February at the Barbican) was a one-man show, featuring McBurney.
[93] Mermikides and Smart, p. 15.

personnel in to work on a project-by-project basis. In many cases, at least one of the core team is considered to be a director; rarely is it a writer.[94]

Jane Turner argues that, in a postmodern/postdramatic landscape where the idea of author has been usurped to some extent by the reader, 'it is odd that such theatre is often attributed to a director'.[95] It does seem that, in its desire to move away from traditional text-based structures, contemporary devising has merely replaced one dominant figure — the playwright — with another, the director. Although he does point out that the director has become a dominant force in dramatic theatre as well, Lehmann states that 'a directors' theatre […] is arguably a precondition for the postdramatic disposition (even if whole collectives take on the direction)'.[96] As highlighted above, the director is often the originator of the core concept of a devised production, although some, like Simon McBurney, claim that they start with 'no preconception of what the show might be'.[97] Regardless of whether s/he begins with a concrete idea for exploration, the devising director indirectly authors the content of the piece through setting tasks, suggesting games, and providing 'acute and innovative observation, suggestions and organization'.[98]

This does not mean that the spirit of shared responsibility for work is lost completely. As Bruce Barton argues, the director's authority is 'liberated through a heightened group awareness of its arbitrary status as a consensual function within a collaborative equation'.[99] Directors experienced in devising emphasize the importance of working with individuals who

---

[94] Playwrights tend to be hired (much like performers) on a project-by-project basis. Some examples exist of a core team member director also taking on writing responsibilities, such as Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment.

[95] Jane Turner, 'Acts of Creative Vandalism? Plane Performance Deconstruct the Canon', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 23 (2007), 208-18 (p. 216).

[96] Lehmann, p. 52; the idea of a 'director's theatre' (or *Regietheater*) is a particularly Germanic concept, however, the status of the director within English-language theatre has risen in English-language theatre to the point that some directors' names are used to market plays, for example, Katie Mitchell, Sam Mendes, or Ivo van Hove.

[97] Mermikides, p. 161.

[98] Bruce Barton, 'Mining "Turbulence": Authorship through Direction in Physically-Based Devised Theatre', in *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising*, ed. by Barton, pp. 136-51 (p. 143).

[99] Barton, 'Mining "Turbulence"', p. 136.

are comfortable with the process. As Mike Leigh explains: 'My job, apart from anything else, is to build an ensemble composed of actors who all come from such a secure place that they can work together [...].'[100]

Indeed, many directors choose to work regularly with the same performers and writers, and these collaborators often speak of the importance of a shared language. This is a core tenet of ensemble practice, which alludes to the idea that members of a group have similar artistic reference points, which may have been developed through working together over a long period of time, watching the work of other artists, or having a similar history of training. Having a 'shared language' means that there is a type of shorthand and/or vocabulary for artistic practice, which members of a particular collaboration can immediately access without long explanations or physical exploration. Definitions of ensemble are contentious: Peter Brook says that we 'can all instantly feel what it isn't. No one can say what it is', whilst Rose Burnett Bonczek and David Storck argue that an ensemble is a group where all the members 'are in pursuit of a common artistic goal', where it is crucial that the 'greater focus be on *each other*'.[101] However, it is generally accepted that an ensemble is a group invested in long-term working relationships. The Director's Guild of Great Britain and Equity define 'ensemble theatre' as something which:

> occurs when a group of theatre artists (performers, artistic directors, stage management and the key administrative staff) work together over many years to create theatre. Other artists (such as writers, performers, directors, designers, composers, choreographers, etc) will be brought in on an occasional basis to refresh and develop to the

[100] Bert Cardullo, '"I Call My Films Subversive": A Conversation with Mike Leigh', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 39 (2011), 14-29 (p. 18).

[101] John Britton, quoting correspondence with Peter Brook, 'Introduction', in *Encountering Ensemble*, ed. by John Britton (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2013), pp. 3-48 (p. 3); and Rose Burnett Bonczek and David Storck, *Ensemble Theatre Making: A Practical Guide* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 7 and 12; their emphasis.

> work of the ensemble – although the focus will remain on its permanent personnel. [102]

It is significant for the central query of this dissertation that playwrights are placed within the category of 'occasional' members, and, as revealed in Chapter Three, it is indeed unusual to find a playwright permanently embedded within an ensemble. This may be due to a general sense, as identified by Brad Krumholz, that 'ensembles that create their own performances also frequently generate their own text, as well' and that 'authorship on the part of the actor is encouraged'.[103] It may be that the presence of a playwright threatens this sense of authorship (and ownership) held be ensemble performers, though it seems there may be benefits for both playwright and ensemble of having a long-term relationship, which may be in line with the general advantages of a writer being involved in the devising process (which are specifically detailed at the end of Chapter Five). The question of why it is unusual for a writer to be permanently embedded within an ensemble is an area further development and reflection; however, as stated in the Introduction, this particular investigation is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Regardless of whether the specific context the writer is working in can be defined as an ensemble, a collective (which, following Barton, generally implies a type of political outlook), or merely collaborative, as explored in Chapter Three and my practice-as-research in Chapter Five it is highly beneficial for a playwright to have a good understanding of the methodological approach of a company and/or director before work begins, although this can at times be challenging to establish when the playwright is not a core company member. Perhaps most importantly, a well-made ensemble/collective/collaboration helps members to withstand the inevitable 'prolonged periods of uncertainty and abstraction' during which the group must have confidence in their director's ability to 'propose, foster and distill from the

[102] Britton, p. 5.
[103] Brad Krumholz, 'Locating the Ensemble: NACL Theatre and the Ethics of Collaboration', in *Encountering Ensemble*, ed. by Britton, pp. 212-21 (pp. 218-19).

group's explorations of those elements that serve and enhance the [...] emerging narrative'.[104]

This can be difficult for a performer inexperienced in devising. There is a certain paradox for the actor-deviser in that they are given responsibility for creating character and narrative, yet ultimately must resign control of these aspects to the director, writer, or to the exigencies of the group as a whole. Clive Mendus, who has worked with Complicite on numerous occasions, provides insight into the challenges for a collaborative performer:

> I remember one of the actors who joined us for the show asking, 'How would you describe the way the company works'? And I said, 'competitive co-operation.' The idea is to compete for the quality of the show and your own work and to co-operate in order to do it. Often, in a situation like this, you have to hold on to the monster inside you who says, 'I haven't got enough to do and I'm not getting enough focus.' You have to say, 'No, I can serve the ensemble and it is the overall success of the piece that will provide satisfaction.'[105]

The concept of the actor-as-creator as opposed to the actor-as-interpreter is an attractive idea to many performers, but not all have the confidence and fortitude to offer up, in a very intimate way, their life experiences, reflections, and creative insight, and allow what they have given to be reshaped, ignored, or used by a writer or director in a way which they did not originally intend.[106]

Though collaboration can be challenging, it is a natural activity for human beings. As developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello has proven, unlike other primates, from a young age human beings are 'more motivated to work to solve problems collaboratively with

---

[104] Barton, 'Mining "Turbulence"', p. 145.
[105] Clive Mendus in conversation with Maria Shevstova, 'Competitive Cooperation: Playing with Théâtre de Complicité', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 22 (2006), 257-67 (p. 265).
[106] The issue of ownership in this respect is an important one, which is dealt with in more detail in this chapter's subsection 'Devising Now: Issues and Viability'.

others than they are to work to solve problems alone'.[107] There is, of course, the argument that all theatre is collaboration, as it requires people to work together. Devised theatre, however, is collaboration in Tomasello's sense in that, although the final product has been guided by the hand of the director, it is a record of a process involving a number of individuals working together and producing something which could not have been made by a person working alone. As such, the processes involved are highly connected to the concept of collaborative creation.

Process: Identifiable Mechanisms

Is it possible to distinguish a devised performance from one that originated with a script? In some cases, especially where a writer has been involved from the beginning and has produced a performance text, the origins of a devised production may not be immediately obvious to those unaware of the processes, especially as this type of theatre is now so ubiquitous that audiences no longer find it particularly unusual. On the other hand, it is rare that such a production does not contain specific features which can be traced directly back to devising methodology. Process inevitably affects product, and whilst it has been established that there is no one pathway to be followed whilst devising, there are certain practices that translate into a production being identifiable as devised, even when a writer-deviser has been involved.

Stimulus

All theatrical productions require a starting point or a stimulus. In dramatic theatre, this is generally an idea which has occurred in the imagination of the playwright, or in the case of commissions, a requirement for a writer to respond to a brief from a producer or director. The starting point for the performers would be therefore the script, once the writer has produced it.

[107] Michael Tomasello, 'Cultural Learning Redux', *Child Development*, 87 (2016), 643-53 (p. 648).

In devised theatre, the origins of work are diverse, and sometimes inconsequential. As Tim Etchells explains:

> A starting-point could be anything — a record, a second-hand suit of a particular kind, a list of different kinds of silence. [...] It was important that no one did their homework too well — that no element of the theatrical language might substantially precede any other — so that any element could lead.[108]

This approach works best within an ensemble who regularly devise together and have the aforementioned 'shared language'; their motivation will often be simply to create another piece of work, rather than a piece of work specifically about something. Material can also be generated within an ensemble context by things that have been previously discarded or used for different purposes in previous performances.[109]

Nonetheless, it is more common for a group of devisers to be assembled to respond to a particular concept, object, event, or text. As director Ker Wells explains: 'the making of a new work […] is often, at least initially, not so much an act of conjuring something new magically into existence, but rather of turning and adapting, combining pre-existing ideas, images and other elements to reveal something new.' [110] Though, as highlighted above, Simon McBurney insists that Complicite shows do not have identifiable origins, as evidenced from productions such as *A Disappearing Number* (2007) and *The Elephant Vanishes* (2003), there is a definite starting point from which the work develops (mathematics, and specifically the collaboration between G.H. Hardy and Srinivasa Ramanujan for the former, and the short

[108] Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 52.
[109] Pete Brooks, '*Hotel Methuselah* by Imitating the Dog and Pete Brooks', in *Theatre in Pieces*, ed. by Furse, pp. 123-53 (p. 125). Please note that titles of performance texts contained in larger volumes will appear in italics in this dissertation to denote their status as stand-alone pieces of work.
[110] Ker Wells, 'Work With Your Hands', in *Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising*, ed. by Barton, pp. 209-16 (p. 211).

stories of Haruki Murakami for the latter).[111] Rather, McBurney's lack of preconception refers to the overall structure of the piece, and additional content related to the original concept.

Improvisation

Once the stimulus is in place, the devisers usually embark on a period of research and development. The work undertaken is dependent upon who is part of the collaboration. For example, if a choreographer is involved, a good deal of the work will focus on exploring movement. Likewise, a playwright may have suggestions for activities that will aid in the generation of text. The element in these activities that is common to all devised productions, is the use of improvisation as part of the developmental process. Though some choose not to use the word 'improvising' — Tim Etchells says that 'for years' the members of Forced Entertainment rejected the word, instead saying they were 'messing about, having a bit of a run around in the space, playing around' — there are inevitably moments in the research and development process where performers rely on their imagination and memory to create unscripted work. This improvisation is usually determined by certain parameters, such as a given scenario, rules (for example each individual is only allowed one word at a time, a technique used by Improbable), or using the Viewpoints system's 'gridlines' to ensure the performer is focused on developing a specific quality of physical interpretation.[112] Although, as Augusto Boal has shown in his approach to Legislative Theatre, where participants come from all social classes and skills backgrounds, anyone can join in with improvising, it is a

[111] Mermikides, p. 161.

[112] I attended Improbable's 'Making It Up' workshop 11-16 July 2011 at the Jerwood Space. Viewpoints is a system (expanded by Tina Landau and Anne Bogart from Mary Overlie's original methodology for choreography) which focuses on physical and vocal Viewpoints, which performers develop whilst moving on a grid system of straight lines and right angles. They include: spatial relationship; kinaesthetic response; shape; gesture; repetition; architecture; tempo; duration and topography; pitch; dynamic; acceleration/deceleration; silence; and timbre; Anne Bogart and Tina Landau, *The Viewpoints Book* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005), pp. 4-5.

skill which must be learned through practice, and, as Chapter Three reveals, can be incorporated into the script-writing process.[113]

It is important to note that live improvisation is rarely used in performance; as Alan Filewood states, improvisation is 'a tool of collective creation, but it is not the substance'.[114] Rather than the improvisational work created by the performers being quoted verbatim within a production, it is often used in an exploratory fashion, which then inspires a script derived from 'the emotional tonality of the sounds and movements of the actors'.[115] It is, as Clive Barker points out, very difficult to 'repeat in performance what I had done instinctively in rehearsal', and, as discussed in Chapter Three and the commentary on my practice-as-research in Chapter Five, it is often problematic to compose scripted dialogue and action directly from improvisation.[116] However, as performers often use their bodies as much (or even more) than words in improvisational development, a recognizable quality of devised performance is a preponderance for physical expression; this includes an emphasis within scripts on moments of physicality. Indeed, in opposition to dramatic theatre, physical expression, as well as other visual aspects of the staging, generally share equal footing with dialogue in devised work (Lehmann's parataxis), creating a more holistic performance, where the audience is obliged to find meaning within a variety of signifiers.

Research

Research undertaken by individual collaborators outside of the rehearsal room is also a common feature of devised productions. As Dymphna Callery says, research is 'a collective responsibility'. She continues: 'It is from research, whether book-fed, style-fed or life-fed,

[113] Augusto Boal, *Legislative Theatre: Using Performance to Make Politics*, trans. by Adrian Jackson (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 45.
[114] Filewood, p. 3; improvisation is often used in comedic sketch performance, for example, the Comedy Store Players in London, however, this is generally specifically marketed as live comedy and/or improvisational performance, and audiences are aware of the improvisatory elements.
[115] Joseph Chaikin, 'The Open Theatre', p. 31.
[116] Clive Barker, *Theatre Games* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 3.

that theatre is made.'[117] This differs from non-devised work, where the bulk of research is undertaken by the writer before writing begins. As can be seen in the case study of *Cloud Nine* in Chapter Three, sharing the responsibility of research can result in a greater diversity of resources and perspectives. This research can include: reading texts associated with the central concept of the piece; finding music linked to the piece; undertaking experiences that will inform and inspire work; and observations of human behaviour or particular events/practices.[118] It can also include physical research, where a performer investigates gestures and vocalizations; arguably, this would be difficult for a writer to achieve.[119]

Discussion

Clive Barker claims that most actors and directors 'resent discussion during the active rehearsal period'. He continues: 'Conscious thought and discussion have little place in a rehearsal; they get in the way of work.'[120] Personal observation and statements from other practitioners reveal this to be somewhat inaccurate, although, as detailed in the examination of my experience as a writer-deviser on *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* in Chapter Five, my director discouraged discussion. For many practitioners, including writer-devisers, reflection, in the form of group discussion, is an integral aspect of the process from the earliest, more casual discussions about content, form and casting, to analytical conversations once a production has begun its run. Discussion is at the heart of collaboration, but can also be one of its most difficult aspects, as it requires participants to be critical about their own work and that of their fellow collaborators; this includes critical assessments of a writer-deviser's script whilst the playwright is present. As Joan Schirle states, insistence on '"being nice" does not necessarily

[117] Callery, p. 165.
[118] For example, the company devising *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill* (detailed in Chapter Five) went on the actual train journey dramatically portrayed in the production, and participants in the *Chaosbaby* development workshops (in which I participated 21-22 July 2012) observed tango dancers as part of their research; see Chapter Three for more information on *Chaosbaby*.
[119] See p. 163 for an example from *Origin of the Species* of an actor's physical research influencing writer-deviser Bryony Lavery's script.
[120] Barker, *Theatre Games*, p. 23.

serve the work'.[121] On the other hand, as discussed in Chapters Three and Five, the writer-deviser can benefit from having a group of informed editors (in the form of actors, directors, and designers) from the earliest stages of work.

Structuring

One quality identified by Lehmann, and frequently observed in devised productions which could fall into the category of postdramatic, is a non-linear, fragmented structure, which results from its genesis in improvisation, research by a number of individuals, and discussion. Postdramatic, devised work can often be identified by its inclination to provide an audience with a collection of scenes loosely connected (by theme, image, character, or physicalization) that, even when presented in a chronological pattern, do not necessarily follow on from one another. For example, in Robert Lepage's works such as *The Dragon Trilogy* (1985, restaged 2005) or *The Far Side of the Moon* (2000), scenes which move the narrative forward are followed by physicalized moments meant to evoke a certain emotional response within the viewer. These various moments build upon one another until the conclusion is reached, creating a cumulative effect which Lehmann terms 'synaesthesia'.[122]

This phenomenological effect is the by-product of the fragmented nature of collaborative devising; when there are multiple ideas, images, memories, and methods of physical representation being employed in the development of a piece, the product will inevitably reflect its multi-voiced foundations. Significantly, as discussed in Chapter Two (but nowhere else within the dominant discourse on devising or playwriting pedagogy), this does not correspond to the Aristotelian concept of unity, which is generally emphasized within courses and pedagogical texts for playwrights; therefore, working within devising methodology may place a traditionally-trained writer in unfamiliar territory, and open them up to alternative structural approaches.

---

[121] Joan Schirle, 'Potholes in the Road to Devising', *Theatre Topics*, 15 (2005), 91-102 (p. 92).
[122] Lehmann, p. 84.

On the other hand, the presence of a writer-deviser trained in structural technique can help the devising company maintain coherence in the piece. Though, as previously argued, devising is now considered to be a mainstream theatre practice, there are often criticisms levelled against the methodologies and products of collaboratively-created work; a lack of coherence is a common complaint. It is therefore worthwhile to examine problematic areas of devising, particularly those which may affect the writer-deviser, as this will provide a foundation for the examination in Chapter Three of the contemporary context in which writer-devisers operate, as well as my own practice-as-research work in Chapter Five.

Devising Now: Issues and Viability

Devising, by nature of its collaborative context, can be difficult; as Norma Barnes writes:

> However, to devise for joy alone? Oy. It can be absolutely harrowing, this process of devising collaboratively. It can wreak havoc on individuals, on friendships, on the gestalt of an otherwise harmonious ensemble or community.[123]

What makes devising so 'harrowing'? An oft-stated contention within devising groups is the issue of ownership of the work, both legally and ideologically. As discussed above, certain directors, despite declaring that the work produced has been devised with performers and other collaborators, claim the work as theirs; the same can be true for playwrights who use the activities observed in the workshop to aid in the development of a script. Indeed, the Theatre Writers' Union (now known as the Writers' Guild) went so far as to state that authorship belongs to 'the person who physically writes down the material of the script,

[123] Norma Bowles, 'Why Devise? Why Now? "Houston, we have a problem"', *Theatre Topics*, 15 (2005), 15-21 (p. 15).

whether group devised and conceived or not'.[124] This definition, whilst recognizing the tendency for a script to be produced when a writer is involved in devising, is still rather problematic as: the writer may have constructed various written aspects of the performance but may not have assembled the entire script; on some occasions, the record of performance is not a traditional script, but a written recollection of a performance by someone who has observed it, who is not necessarily a writer; and, most importantly, what is written in the script may represent significant input from others, not just the playwright.

Peter Harrop and Evelyn Jamieson state, in regards to ensembles, that members need to 'achieve a shared identity and heightened sense of ownership in the process'.[125] The word 'process' (and the omission of the 'product') is significant, hinting that while group members should feel some sense of control and identification with the processes undertaken to create work, individuals cannot claim ownership of what results from these processes: a staged performance. Not only does ownership/authorship have implications for the personal and emotional investment the various collaborators have in a piece of devised work; it also has financial implications. As Helen Freshwater points out, it is very important to establish from the beginning who owns the copyright and rights to future performances, for this is potentially a lucrative source of income.[126] Many performers participate (especially in fringe theatre) in creating a devised piece on a profit-share or Equity minimum basis, which can mean they earn very little, despite putting in a great deal of work beyond the usual task of performing lines already written. The contentiousness of this issue was recently revealed in a public discussion on the online messageboard of SCUDD, where a practice-based researcher who uses devising methodology discussed her involvement in a copyright dispute with an actor who, after participation in an early stage of development on a devised project, demanded 'joint copyright

[124] Lizbeth Goodman, 'Devising as Writing: British Women Theatre Writers and Educators Demand Contractural Status', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 126 (1990), 17-19 (p. 18).
[125] Peter Harrop and Evelyn Jamieson, 'Collaboration, Ensemble, Devising', in *Encountering Ensemble*, ed. by Britton, pp. 167-69 (p. 169).
-[126] Helen Freshwater, 'Delirium: In Rehearsal with theatre O', in *Devising in Process*, ed. by Mermikides and Smart, pp. 128-46 (p. 128).

and a life-long right to perform one of the parts'. When the researcher refused this request, the actor hired a solicitor specializing in intellectual property, and succeeded in blocking the production from further development.[127] The issue of ownership is clearly an ethical and legal grey area and, given the increase in prominence of devising, is one that requires urgent attention, particularly for the writer-deviser, for whom sales of printed scripts may represent a significant income. Again, this is an issue commonly overlooked in the dominant discourse on devising.

Another problematic area for devising is the issue of how to provide a record of performance that can stand as a legacy for future generations who were not able to be physically present when it was performed. From the perspective of an academic researcher, the lack of methodological documentation of devised productions, particularly those featuring writer-devisers, has provided me with limited examples to draw upon within my argument. Performance is phenomenologically ephemeral in that it is impossible to provide an accurate representation after the fact of something so reliant on both physical expression, and a particular audience member's reaction. However, dramatic (using Lehmann's definition) theatre is able to provide a record, in the form of a script, which can be obtained, read, and re-performed (albeit in a necessarily altered version). It is difficult for devised theatre to do this, especially if there is no script in place, or the script differs greatly from the performance; this, arguably, can be linked to devised theatre's perceived lack of prominence (despite its mainstream status), as it 'does not encourage the promotion, status, or existence of the work'.[128] Equally, process is integral to product in devising, but it is difficult to represent after the fact. Anna Furse's *Theatre in Pieces* does create a 'text', by combining scripts/textual representation and photographs/sketches with commentary from participants and observers, but (with the possible exception of *US*, for which a full script exists) it would still be difficult

[127] Evi Stamatiou, email to SCUDD, 19 July 2016, accessed via <www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind1607&L=SCUDD&P=R3157&I=-3&d=No+Match%3BMatches> [accessed 9 August 2016, and used with Stamatiou's permission]

[128] Oddey, p. 21.

to re-stage accurately the majority of the work presented in the book, especially because, as Heddon and Milling state, memories 'of process are also unreliable'.[129] Whilst the difficulties of documenting devised work are recognized within academic and methodological discourse, the capacity for the writer-deviser to ameliorate these issues is not. The presence of a writer-deviser, who, along with creating a script, can sit apart from the action and make and assemble records (in various formats) in order to provide a lasting documentation, allows for widespread dissemination and discussion of that company's work.

The supposed fragmentary and multi-layered composition of devised work is often a source of frustration for a number of critics and observers. Arnold Wesker complained the first two hours of *US* (which were devised by the company, whilst the second half was written by playwright Dennis Cannan) were 'all wrong, ill-sorted, badly juxtaposed, too loving it'.[130] Reviewing Forced Entertainment's *Bloody Mess*, Dominic Cavendish writes: 'you might as well seek to piece together a novel out of a pile of litter as endeavour to discern a coherent dramatic structure in this fragmented assortment of cockeyed happenings.'[131] Gillian Hanna of Monstrous Regiment, a company famous for employing devising methodology (though generally whilst working with a writer), claims that their attempt to do a devised adaptation of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* without the input of a playwright resulted in a production that was 'incoherent', because 'too many people had a hand in writing it'.[132] Dymphna Callery, an experienced deviser, claims that:

> frequently the textual aspect of physical-based devised theatre — both the words and structuring that are the writer's craft — is its Achilles heel. Performers are trained in the poetry of space, but not in the poetry of language and the rhythms of structure.[133]

---

[129] Heddon and Milling, p. 23.
[130] Arnold Wesker, 'Open Letter to the Team', reproduced in *Theatre in Pieces*, ed. by Furse, pp. 83-85 (p. 85).
[131] Dominic Cavendish, 'When the Title Says it All', *Telegraph*, 4 November 2004 <www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3626580/When-the-title-says-it-all.html> [accessed 18 July 2013].
[132] Heddon and Milling, p. 113.
[133] Callery, p. 179.

These examples are indicative of the type of criticism commonly doled out (sometimes justifiably) to devised theatre-makers, especially those who work without a playwright: their performances suffer from a lack of structure, can be too self-interested, and because of the representation of many, as opposed to a singular point of view, lean towards incoherence.

There are voices which contest these assertions. Allan Filewood states that in devised theatre it is the '*quality* of imagination that differs, for the skills that go into the construction of a play do not differ radically [from that of text-based theatre-making]'.[134] Whilst it can be argued that Filewood in fact means 'quantity' rather than 'quality', as the combined imagination of a group does not necessarily trump that of a single, particularly brilliant, playwright, it cannot be denied that devised work, by nature of its construction, contains a greater amount of 'imagination' in that it will inevitably showcase a multitude of creative ideas from different participants, and this multitude is more likely to resonate with an audience made up of diverse personalities. Mermikides and Smart state that the structures of devised work challenge 'modernist processes of meaning so that the work becomes an escape from representation and closed fictional frames [...] and throws the onus of making sense of the work onto the audience member'.[135] This connects back to the idea of Lehmann's synaesthesia, and suggests that what might be incoherent for one person, can have meaning and coherence for another; Dominic Cavendish followed his complaints about the inchoate nature of *Bloody Mess* by admitting, '[...] yet, little by little, something valuable accrues'.[136] It can also be argued that in our postmodern, fragmentary world, where our attention flits from the artificial to the natural, from the electronic to the human, and where we are bombarded with hundreds of conflicting messages each day, that devised theatre is an appropriate and germane form of performance. And yet, as text, spoken word, and narrative remain an

[134] Filewood, p. 2 (Filewood's emphasis).
[135] Mermikides and Smart, pp. 6-7.
[136] Cavendish, 'When the Title Says it All'.

intrinsic part of our fragmentary world, so there remains an important role for the specialist writer-deviser within the collaborative context of devising.

Conclusion

Just as there is no definitive response to a standard devised production, so too is there no definitive conclusion as to how devised theatre, as we understand it today, emerged. Postdramatic theatre, a disputed category, but nevertheless one into which the majority of devised theatre falls, is an emerging force, to the point that aspects of the postdramatic (and the devised) are being increasingly seen in mainstream theatre.

It is important to be clear what is meant by the word devised in a performance framework; Bruce Barton's complaint about the conflation of collaborative context and process is useful. Whilst the two are inextricably entwined, it is essential to understand that a devised performance is the result of both the methodologies used to generate material, and the variety of people, holding a variety of skills, who have been involved. The background to devising which has been presented in the preceding pages serves both as an analysis of how and why devising practice exists in its contemporary form, and as a foundation, in conjunction with Chapter Two, from which to examine the writer-deviser's role in depth in Chapters Three and Four, allowing for the examination of my own practice in Chapter Five. As mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, the research for this chapter was undertaken at the same time as my involvement with the devised play *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, and influenced the development of the production, in terms of shaping my understanding of the collaborative context, and prompting me to consider how certain processes influenced the writing of the script.

This chapter has also revealed the general neglect of the writer-deviser within devising-specific discourse; as playwrights have been involved in devising since its

emergence in the twentieth century, this is a significant oversight and has led not only to the side-lining of the writer within the discussion of devised work, but to the false perception of a defined dramatic/postdramatic binary, with the writer generally being associated with the dramatic. As this discussion develops, it will become apparent that, whilst it is relevant to examine devising in its postdramatic context, the traditional dichotomy between text and performance, is, as Radosavljević and others argue, becoming increasingly problematic. This leads to a discussion in Chapter Two on the lack of devising methodology within traditional, textual approaches to playwriting pedagogy, and the effect of this absence upon the playwright.

Chapter Two

The Pedagogy of Playwriting

Introduction

In her call-to-arms essay, '"Make a map not a tracing": From Pedagogy to Dramaturgy', Liz Tomlin writes on the training of playwrights: 'In the key developmental stages of pedagogical processes which focus solely on the literary, the "stage" itself is too often, it seems to me, inexplicably absent from proceedings.'[1] There are a number of formal pedagogical pathways available to aspiring playwrights, including: university courses; how-to books; playwriting workshops; and one-off masterclasses. However, as this chapter reveals, the focus within these formal pathways is predominantly literary: students are taught aspects of a script such as structure, characterization, and dialogue, with scant exploration of the inherently performative and collaborative nature of drama. Chapter One highlighted the fact that devising is now considered mainstream. Nonetheless, there is little recognition within traditional playwright training of collective creation, or alternative methodologies for creating a script. Aristotle's teachings on dramatic writing remain a dominant force within standard pedagogy, and whilst they are not without merit, they do not fully equip a playwright for participation within a theatrical landscape with increasing postdramatic and collaborative tendencies.

This chapter examines the general absence of devising within standard playwriting pedagogical practice and explores why this is problematic for playwrights. It is related to my central query of investigating how collaborative devising affects the playwright in that it identifies the general tools writers take with them into the devising room, and gaps in

[1] Liz Tomlin, 'Make a Map Not a Tracing: From Pedagogy to Dramaturgy', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23 (2013), 120-27 (p. 121).

playwriting pedagogy which can be addressed through involvement with devising. At the same time, this chapter also identifies aspects of standard pedagogy which may address some of the problems commonly associated with devising. It therefore allows my PaR work in Chapter Five to be contextualized within standard British and North American pedagogical practice.

To ascertain the efficacy of the various types of playwright-training, and as a counterpoint to the history of devising in Chapter One, it is important to look at how playwriting pedagogy has developed. In terms of formal tuition and instructional texts, the training of dramatic writers is a surprisingly recent phenomenon (given that evidence of written scripts reaches back to the Ancient Greeks), but one which is rapidly gaining pace. It is also an area which thus far has largely evaded academic scrutiny. This chapter presents original research and analysis: apart from a single edition of *Contemporary Theatre Review* (volume 23, 2013), which included articles on trends in playwright-pedagogy, there has been no attempt to provide commentary on this field of learning. Additionally, apart from Steve Waters's and John Ginman's separate articles within the aforementioned journal, which provide a small and selective analysis of contemporary pedagogical texts, there has been no attempt to examine critically the how-to texts, despite the selection of books growing to such a large number as to make a comprehensive literary review almost impossible.[2] Therefore, there is a great deal of groundwork required in terms of primary research, and this chapter in many ways functions as a provocation for further investigation into the processes of training playwrights.

[2] Steve Waters, 'How to Describe an Apple: A Brief Survey of the Literature on Playwriting', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23 (2013), 137-45; John Ginman, 'The Vital Importance of Being Present: Writer Development for Theatre in a Mediatised Age', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23 (2013), 128-36. References to 'pedagogical texts' throughout this dissertation specifically refer to texts which provide instruction on how to write plays, or how plays are written; 'pedagogical writers' are the authors of these texts. 'Pedagogical' is used interchangeably with 'instructional' and 'how-to' in order to avoid repetition.

During the initial stages of research, and in conversation with agencies which support playwrights, it became clear that there is very little empirical research on the efficacy of playwright training in general, and the inclusion of collaborative methodologies in particular within typical pedagogical frameworks. In order to avoid subjective generalisations about playwrights' experience with training, it became necessary to develop a foundation of primary research upon which an assessment of training could be built. Beginning with a survey of playwrights which reveals trends in training, and areas where writers feel they have received inadequate tuition/experience, the foundation is set for an examination in this chapter of formal, university-based playwright tuition, and the pedagogical texts which would-be writers can consult. Apart from references to Aristotle, it is surprising how little knowledge contemporary pedagogical writers display of those who have gone before them; in the course of researching this chapter, a number of how-to texts from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were uncovered which are entirely absent from twenty-first century bibliographies. In some cases (for example, Charlton Andrews's 1915 book *The Technique of Playwriting*), these early texts seem more cognizant of the practicalities of collaboration with other theatre artists than their contemporary descendants, in that the advice given is more focused on introducing the playwright to the business, particular roles, and inner workings of theatre than the dramaturgical development of work.[3] Although Sarah Sigal, in her doctoral examination of the collaborative playwright, claims that 'books about the practice of writing for performance' are 'not particularly relevant', this dissertation argues that the instructive material they include, as well as what is occluded, is highly pertinent for a study which examines the multifarious influences upon the writer-deviser.[4] Following Robin Nelson's suggestions for a selective approach to reviewing literature, and in line with the review of devising texts in Chapter One, the works selected for commentary in this chapter are chosen

[3] Charlton Andrews, *The Technique of Playwriting* (Springfield, MA: The Home Correspondence School, 1915).

[4] Sarah Sigal, 'The Role of the Writer and Authorship in New Collaborative Performance-Making in the United Kingdom from 2001-2010', unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, Goldsmiths, 2013), p. 36.

because they are well-known and used by other scholars and practitioners (which is significant for a PaR investigation). In addition, the presence or absence of references to devising provide context for the positioning of my own work as a writer-deviser, and other writers who engage with devising processes.[5]

The chapter concludes with some key scriptural considerations for writer-devisers, with commentary on how various pedagogical texts address these issues. Whether a writer is involved in devising or not, questions of structure, action, character, and dialogue are essential, and justifiably addressed in the majority of texts. Yet, the topics of physical representation and collaboration, which most theatre practitioners would recognize as being important considerations, are only covered by a small number of instructional writers. Those who do explicitly refer to devising, such as Steve Gooch and Micheline Wandor, are generally dismissive of the benefits for the writer.[6] As a result, and as revealed by my research presented here, many playwrights acquire these skills via other theatrical jobs such as acting or directing, or after the fact, when they are thrown into the ring of collaboration with little preparation. Whilst some UK universities (such as Royal Holloway and Goldsmiths) are now incorporating aspects of collaborative theatre-making into the curriculum, there is very little on offer for the playwright who is not an actor, director, or designer, but wishes to learn about devising methodology.

In following on from Chapter One by displaying the other side of the writer-deviser coin, this chapter identifies the general focal points of writer training, and also reveals what particular skills a playwright takes into the rehearsal room which other collaborators may lack. This lays the groundwork for the specific exploration of the writer-deviser in action in Chapter Three. Additionally, this chapter anticipates my reflection in Chapter Five on my own experiences of training as a playwright, and how they have influenced the writing of my

[5] Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 34.
[6] Steve Gooch, *Writing a Play*, 2nd edn (London: A. & C. Black, 1995); Micheline Wandor, *The Art of Writing Drama: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 2008).

non-devised script *Playground*. Chapter Two, therefore, presents new research in the field of playwright pedagogy, along with presenting an essential link between training and my own practice.

Trends in Contemporary Playwright Training

In order to understand the choices playwrights make when constructing scripts, it is important to consider the influence of training, both formal (degree and non-degree courses) and informal (advice from other practitioners, experience in the rehearsal room), as well as pedagogical texts, which run the gamut from informally-written books about the practicalities of writing, such as Angelo Parra's *Playwriting for Dummies*, to more serious, dramaturgical texts such as David Edgar's *How Plays Work.*[7] At the time of writing, there were no statistical data available outlining the training experiences of playwrights; I therefore constructed and delivered a survey to gather the necessary information.[8] This data provides a foundation for commentary on how devising figures (or does not figure) in conventional playwriting pedagogy.

Playwrights were queried on aspects of their training, as well as further questions on their experiences of devising. There were 88 respondents in total, though some chose to opt out of certain questions. The majority of respondents had undertaken their training in either the United States or Britain; small percentages had trained in Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and Israel.

Responses were as follows (displayed as percentage of response):

[7] Angelo Parra, *Playwriting for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011); David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2011).

[8] The survey was conducted online during December 2013-May 2014. Anonymous respondents were sourced from organizations such as: the Writers Guild; various writers' agencies in the United Kingdom (for example, New Writing South); personal contacts on Facebook; and the 'Playwrights' group on linkedin.com. All respondents identified themselves (in Question One) as playwrights or 'a professional writer, who sometimes writes stage plays'.

Figure 1.

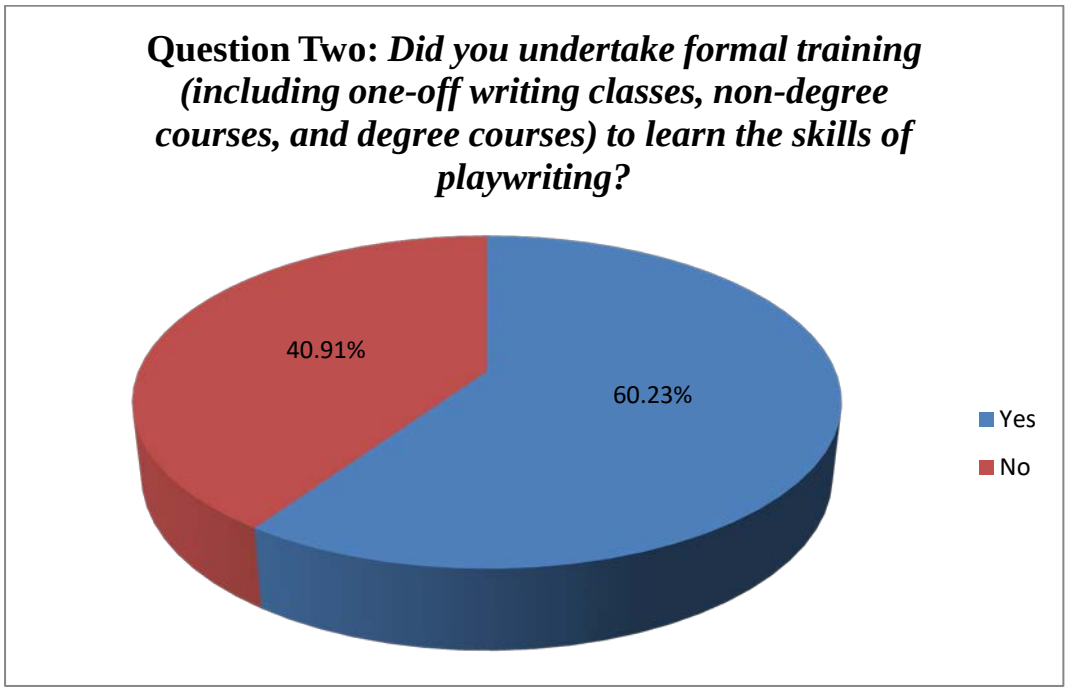


Figure 2.

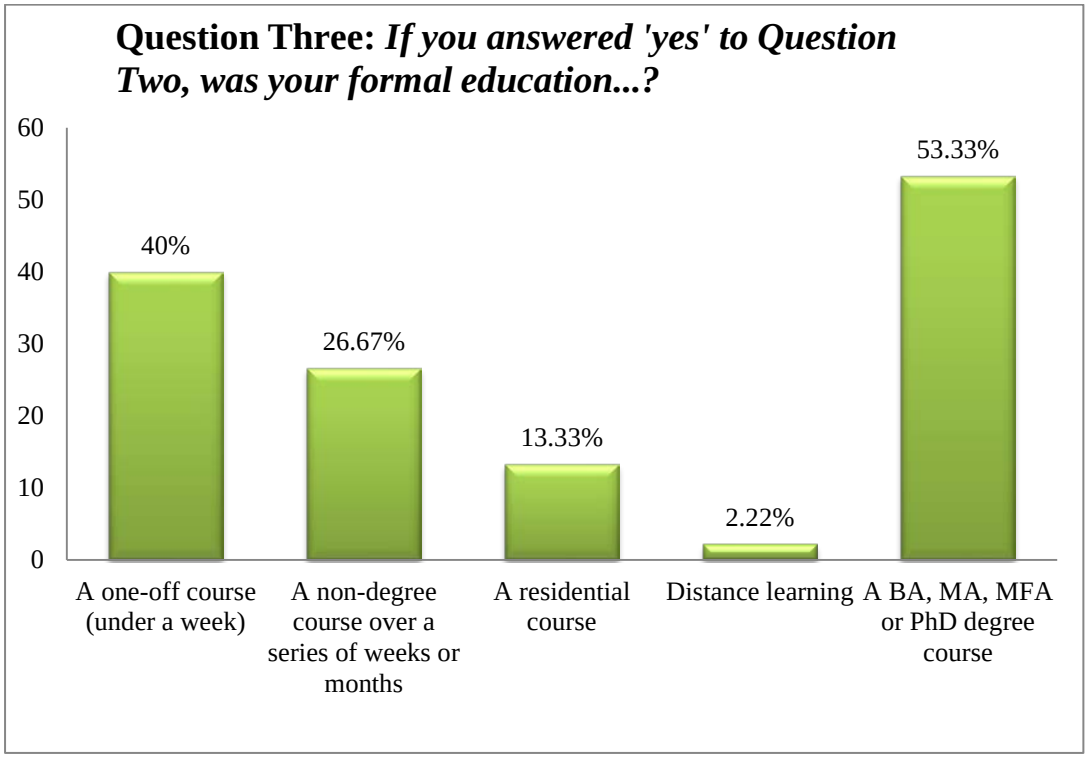
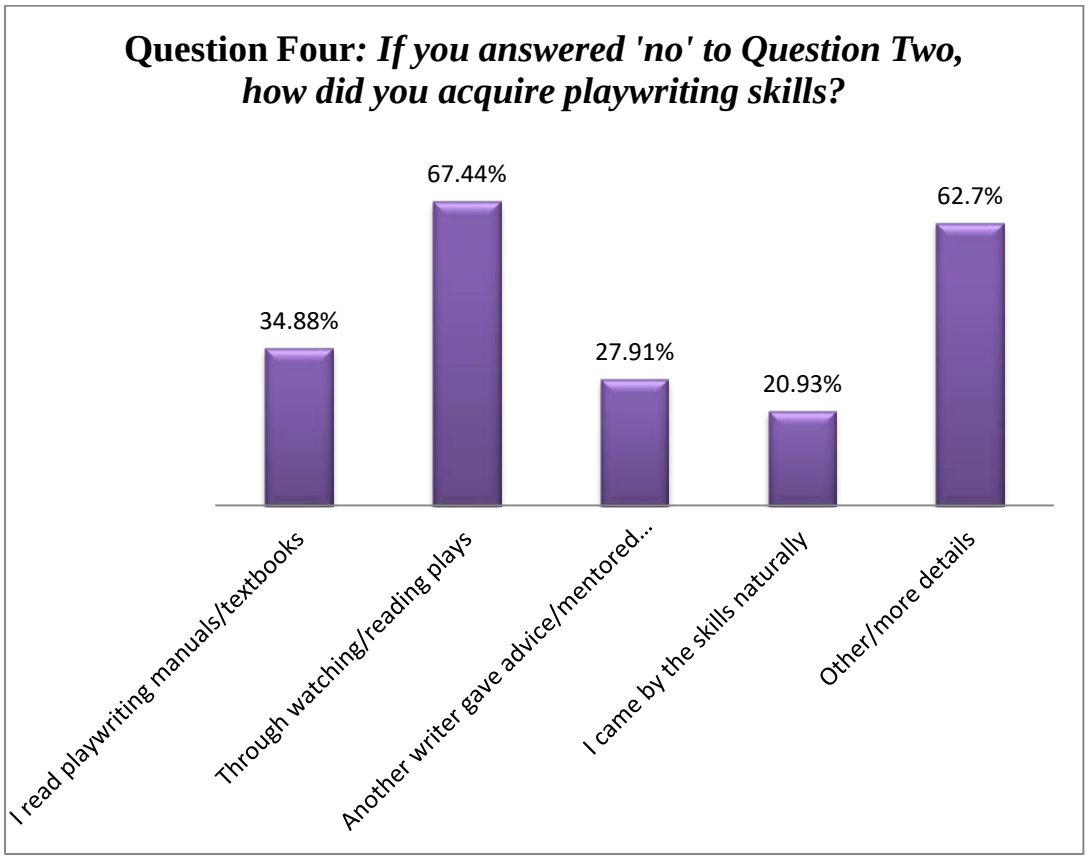


Figure 3.

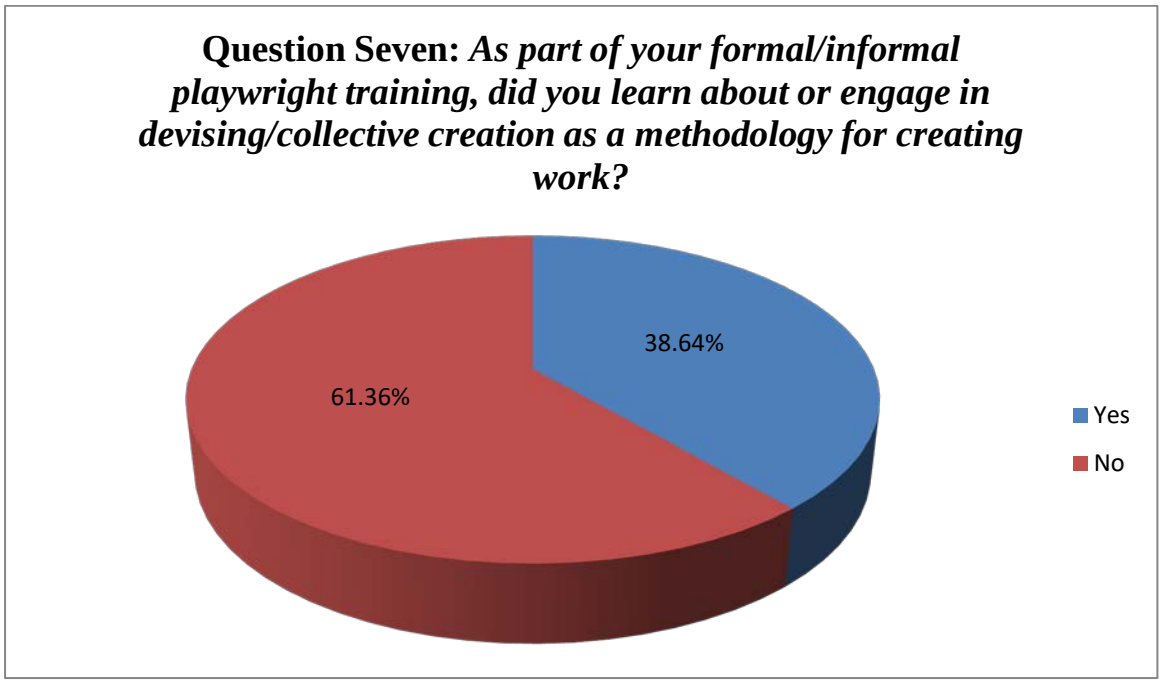


As can be seen from the above responses, a majority of playwrights have undertaken formal training, but of this group, most have followed degree-level courses (respondents were allowed to choose more than one answer). Therefore, the influence of university teaching upon English-language playwrights is substantial. For those who have not undertaken formal training, few (just under 21 percent) ‘came by the skills naturally’; some form of study, observation, or professional guidance was involved in their development as a playwright. Survey participants who had not undertaken formal training were given the option to provide further details of how they developed their skills. The majority (77 percent) replied that they were actors, producers or directors, indicating that their training was of a practical nature. This is significant; as will be discussed later in the chapter, many courses and playwriting manuals offer little experience of, or advice about, working with actors or directors, yet for many this hands-on knowledge is essential for their development as a writer for the stage.

Playwrights were also asked, 'As part of your formal/informal playwright training, did you read or consult any books/manuals (print or online) about playwriting?' and were given the opportunity to provide details. The majority (66 percent) had read at least one how-to guide; of these, the most commonly cited were: Robert McKee's *Story*; *Poetics*; David Edgar's *How Plays Work*; *The Secret Life of Plays* by Steve Waters; Alan Ayckbourn's *The Crafty Art of Playwriting*; and *Playwriting: A Practical Guide* by Noël Greig. As these texts are clearly an important tool for many playwrights, it is essential to examine the advice provided within their pages, and what suggestions (if any) are provided to guide a playwright who might be interested in devising, as well as general advice about collaborating with other theatre-makers.

When specifically queried about their training experiences with devising/collective creation, playwrights responded as follows:

Figure 4.



Playwrights were also asked, 'Do you feel your training adequately prepared you for collaborating with other theatre artists?', and instructed to provide details (rather than a 'yes'

or ‘no’ response). Those who had a positive response mainly suggested that it was their own experience working in the theatre (as opposed to formal training) which was responsible for their understanding of collaborative practice. For example:

> ‘I’ve been in the theatre my whole life, so I brought a long history of working with other theatre artists to the table when I began writing plays.’

and

> ‘I don’t see how anyone could write for actors without being an experienced actor.’

Comments from those who did not feel adequately trained in collaboration included:

> ‘Most training was about writing only, and not about these relationships.’

and

> ‘No. Only after my MFA was over did I start working with directors. Entirely unprepared for my first full-length production.’

and

> ‘No, perhaps other writers a little, but certainly not actors, directors or designers.’

There was indication that some training institutions did provide opportunities to explore collaboration, although in many cases it did not fulfil the needs of the student:

> ‘Only partially. The collaborative component was relatively small.’

and

> ‘Yes. It would be more helpful if I understood more language [*sic*] of designers.’

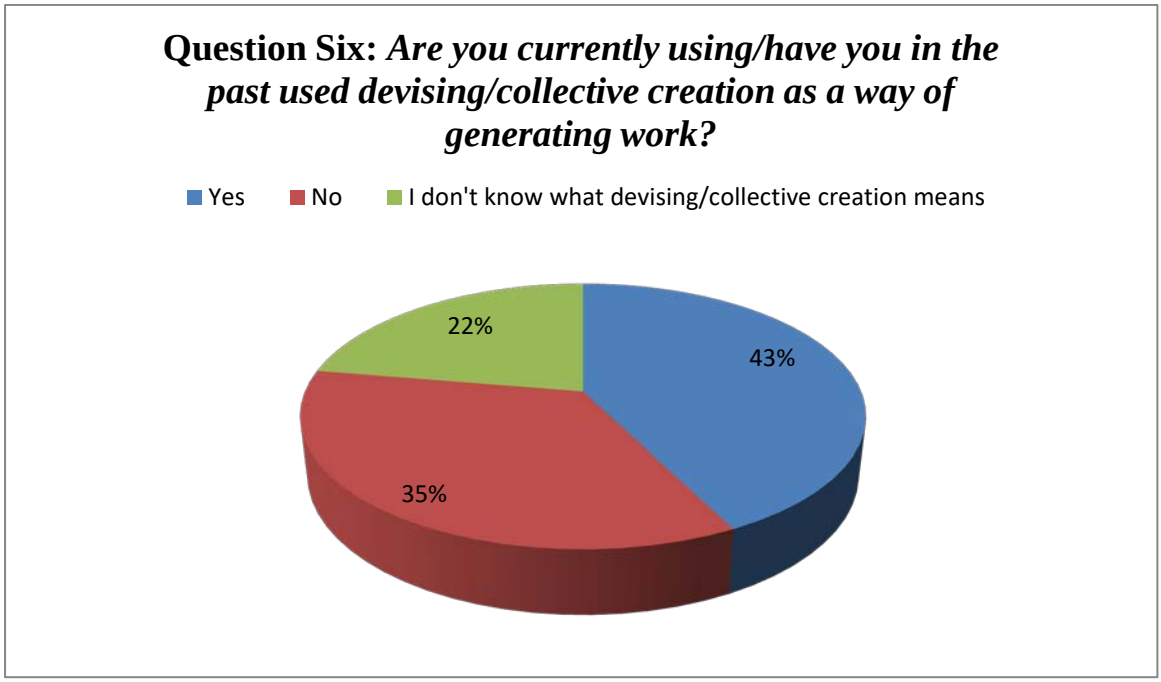
and

> ‘I do see the value in devising theatre and wish I had formal training in it.’

There were a small number of responses (six percent) which indicated that training had included collaborative work, for example: ‘Yes, as my primary training was in devised/collaborative methods.’

What can be concluded from these responses is that, whilst some institutions do offer exposure to devising and collaboration with other artists, many do not, and playwrights who do not have previous experience as actors, directors, or designers can feel ill-prepared for collaboration. This is particularly concerning when one considers the response to the following:

Figure 5.



A greater number had used this methodology for making work, indicating that training providers should provide preparation for playwrights in this area. Alternatively, that 22 percent of respondents did not understand what is meant by the term 'devising/collective creation', even though (as established in Chapter One) it is now an important part of the theatrical landscape, is a strong indication of a lack of emphasis on this methodology within formal playwright training and pedagogical manuals.

With this data in mind, we can proceed to examine the specificities of playwright training as it exists today, using its rather short pedagogical history to place current teaching practice (formal education and instructional literature) in context. This will allow us to query whether playwrights are being prepared adequately to engage with devising methodology specifically, and collaboration with other artists generally.

Towards a Pedagogical History of Playwriting

Despite written evidence of playwriting which extends back to the Ancient Greeks, there is little indication of formal instruction of writers, beyond texts such Aristotle's *Poetics* which combined literary analysis with potential rule-making for writers.[9] Aristotle, and the dramaturgical analysts who followed and built upon him, included no documentation of organized lessons or classes in playwriting, in the same way that students within educational institutions were taught subjects such as rhetoric.[10] Indeed, the history of postsecondary, formal teaching of Creative Writing in general is a short one: it appeared as a distinct subject in American universities in the 1920s.[11] In the UK, according to Micheline Wandor, 'the principle of writing instruction has never been an intrinsic part of university English Studies'.[12] There is evidence that a small number of progressive schools (such as Bedales and Dartington) encouraged students to write and make plays, but did not focus explicitly on playwriting as a skill.[13] Though, apart from Michael Chekhov's work with his Studio, we have no direct evidence of writing and devising being taught concomitantly; this informal, collaborative approach to the teaching of play-making suggests that the basic practice of collective creation existed in certain classrooms before a more strict pedagogy of playwriting

[9] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The text is discussed in the section 'Pedagogical Literature'.

[10] As will be discussed in the following pages, 'dramaturgy' and 'dramaturg' are contested terms, however, the usage of the word 'dramaturgical' in this dissertation will refer to the classical understanding of the descriptor, still prevalent in the United Kingdom, of a type of analysis which attempts to understand the specific qualities of a dramatic text, and how this translates into performance, in order to 'clarify the transition from *dramatic writing* to *stage writing* (Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 123; his emphasis. It should be noted that this definition is culturally-bound, and the understanding of what is 'dramaturgical' is not consistent from nation to nation.

[11] Wandor, p. 29. Script writing is often included within the (literary) pedagogical category of 'Creative Writing', generally associated with university English departments; whether or not it is better aligned with Theatre departments is a topic for further investigation.

[12] Wandor, p. 30.

[13] Wandor, p. 34.

began.[14] How (as the evidence of the survey above would suggest) did the process of teaching playwrights become methodologically removed from practical collaboration with other artists? The answer lies in the formal establishment of playwriting as a taught course on American university campuses.

It is expedient at this juncture to make a distinction between the teaching and practices of dramaturgy and playwriting, though there is not a strict binary between the two. Kara Reilly states: 'one can argue that teaching the craft of playwriting is actually the act of dramaturgy.'[15] On the other hand, a number of institutions, such as Goldsmiths and the University of Glasgow, teach playwriting and dramaturgy as part of the same Master's degree, allowing students to specialize in one or the other. In professional theatre, a dramaturg can be brought in to help a playwright develop work. Theatre companies who use devising methodology may choose to work with a dramaturg to assist in compiling and providing structure for work they have developed, rather than a playwright hired to create an original script (although many playwrights also work as dramaturgs). This would indicate that, although closely connected, playwriting and dramaturgy are different in application.

Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt provide a useful definition of the word 'dramaturgy' as it applies to the dramaturg's job:

> Essentially, we are using the word to describe the composition of a work, whether read as a script or viewed in performance. Whilst it is a term for the composition itself, it is also a word applied to the *discussion* of that composition. In other words, when we are engaged in (doing) dramaturgy, we are looking at the composition or dramaturgy of a work.

[14] Cassandra Fleming, 'A Genealogy of the Embodied Theatre Practices of Suzanne Bing and Michael Chekhov: The Use of Play in Actor Training', unpublished PhD thesis (De Montfort University, 2013), p. 245.

[15] Kara Reilly, 'George Pierce Baker: A Century of Dramaturgs Teaching Playwriting', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23 (2013), 107-13 (p. 108).

Dramaturgy is the dramaturg's 'field of expertise'.[16] Although playwrights will naturally be interested — and trained — in dramaturgical issues, they have a wider remit within a production (such as the writing of original text), which is why a dramaturg's specialist understanding may be of use to a playwright. Magda Romanska asserts: 'Everyone can be a playwright (or, at least, everyone can write a bad play), but not everyone can be a dramaturg (that is, not everyone will actually know how to fix it).'[17] On the other hand, the role of the dramaturg is one without strict definition, and it is being recognized that, in line with new forms of performance becoming more prominent, the parameters of what a dramaturg does are expanding, and can overlap with the job specifications of writers, creative producers, literary managers, marketeers, and others.[18] In addition, the expectations of what a dramaturg does seem to differ from country to country. In Germany, the dramaturg is part of a theatre's management team, and curates new projects, but also acts as an editor of literary source material and works with the director to observe and comment on rehearsals.[19] British dramaturgical practice has historically focused on the relationship between the playwright and the dramaturg (sometimes called literary manager), though the role is now extending beyond new writing.[20] In some countries, such as France, Spain, Poland, and Russia, the word *dramaturg* can be conflated with playwright.[21] This could, arguably, be a matter of semantics and translation, rather than a suggestion that the jobs of playwright and dramaturg are the same. For example, Pavel Rudnev explains that the 'Russian word *dramaturg* indicates the person who writes plays, not necessarily an affiliate of the theatre' as dramaturgs in the

[16] Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt, *Dramaturgy and Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 4.
[17] Magda Romanska, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, ed. by Madga Romanska (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1-15 (p. 1).
[18] Turner and Behrndt, pp. 11 and 122.
[19] Bernd Stegemann, 'On German Dramaturgy', trans. by Johannes Stier, in *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, ed. by Romanska, pp. 45-49 (p. 45).
[20] Turner and Behrndt, p. 3.
[21] Romanska, p. 1.

German sense do not exist in Russia.[22] Therefore, a more accurate translation of the Russian *dramaturg* into English is playwright, not dramaturg.

However, in the interests of maintaining a focus on the central query of this dissertation, arguments about the specificities of what a dramaturg does must be put aside to focus on the issue of how the job of a playwright can be distinguished from that of a dramaturg. Turner and Behrndt state that the need to make a distinction between dramaturg and playwright is 'particularly pressing' in collaborative contexts where both playwright and dramaturg are part of the creative group, when some of the functions generally attributed to playwrights, such as 'notating, shaping, and structuring work' become the function of the dramaturg.[23] The central, and, for the purposes of my investigation, most important, difference between the two is the playwright's significant contribution of original, authored text. This text may, as in the case of writer-devisers, have been inspired by the research and development work of collaborators, but, in the same way that a performer creates and authors an original performance, a writer creates and authors a script. As Turner and Behrndt state, the dramaturg 'brings textual, compositional skills' but does not '"author" or necessarily even write any part of the performance work'.[24] In developing Romanska's argument that not everyone can be a dramaturg, whilst nearly anyone can write a bad play, not every dramaturg has the original voice required, and/or desire to be a playwright with the ability to produce professional-quality work (though certainly, many dramaturgs are excellent playwrights, and many playwrights are effective in the role of dramaturg). Therefore, though this is certainly an area for further debate, for the purposes of this dissertation, once an individual, defined as a dramaturg within a collaboration, contributes a significant amount of original text to a production, she becomes a writer (without ceasing to also be a dramaturg).

[22] Pavel Rudnev, 'The New Play Dramaturgy in Russia', trans. by Jessica Hinds-Bond, in *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, ed. by Romanska, pp. 62-64 (p. 62).
[23] Turner and Behrndt, p. 173.
[24] Turner and Behrndt, p. 11.

In terms of pedagogical approaches, the same theoretical information may be used to teach ideas of structure and dramatic presentation, but the playwright uses this learning to shape and inspire her original work, whilst the dramaturg uses it to develop the work of others. The playwright often also learns non-dramaturgical aspects such as redrafting and marketing their work. Thus, there is a pedagogical focus on the playwright as an individual artist, whilst the dramaturg is required to think of him/herself as a collaborative artist.

Formal, postsecondary instruction for playwrights began in the twentieth century. Bernard Grebanier claims the first identified school of playwriting was founded by William T. Price in New York at the 'turn of the century'.[25] Whilst Price's concept of the 'Proposition', an analysis of the structure of action within a play, still exerts influence on pedagogical writers such as Robert McKee, this is the extent of Price's legacy. Instead, it is George Pierce Baker who is generally credited as instigating formal training for playwrights in 1914, with the establishment of his 'English 47' class at Harvard.[26]

According to Norman Holland, when Baker 'announced his playwriting course, the theatre folk of Broadway were vastly amused to learn that anybody could be foolish enough to think that playwriting was a subject to be taught'.[27] However, there was some dissatisfaction within the industry with the crop of emerging playwrights. Manager 'Mr Savage', quoted by Baker in his book *Dramatic Technique*, said, in answer to the question, 'Do the great majority of these persons [playwrights who had submitted work] know anything at all of even the fundamentals of dramatic construction?' that, 'the managers and agents who read the manuscripts unanimously agree in the negative'.[28] These inexperienced playwrights were lacking an understanding of basic dramatic composition; apprenticeship and observation

[25] Bernard Grebanier, *Playwriting* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowall, 1961), p. 85. The only other mention of Price's school I have found is in the *Cambridge Guide to American Theatre*, ed. by Don B. Wilmeth and Tice L. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 383, identifying it as the 'American School of Playwriting'. As there is no date identified for its founding, it is not clear as to whether Price's school predates Pierce Baker's course at Harvard. Little else is known about the structure of Price's classes.
[26] Reilly, p. 112.
[27] Norman Holland, *Playwriting* (London: W. & G. Foyle, 1953), p. 10.
[28] George Pierce Baker, *Dramatic Technique* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), p. iii.

of professional theatre practice did not equip them with the necessary knowledge of structure, action, and character. A parallel can be found with members of companies who make work collectively, but struggle to shape the material they have generated into a coherent and dramatically satisfying form (as will be examined with reference to Monstrous Regiment in Chapter Three).

In 1919 Baker published *Dramatic Technique*, and in 1926 he set up the now-famous graduate playwriting programme at Yale, and from there, formal education for dramatists blossomed in America.[29] Though Baker's early classes involved pupils' developing work in a 'student run laboratory theatre', the playwrights were at the 'centre of the process and had ultimate artistic control'.[30] Baker believed that a playwright must learn the craft through 'the three great Masters: Constant Practice, Exacting Scrutiny of the Work, and above all, Time'. This approach, more academic than practical, meant that the playwright looked to 'successful dramatists who have preceded him' to engender a basic understanding of the requirements of drama, before producing and sharing the work (generally with other playwrights) inspired by study. [31]

This model was not without its critics. In 1939, at a time when playwriting courses were being offered 'with conspicuous success in universities', Kenneth Thorpe Rowe argued that it was imperative that playwriting 'is properly a laboratory course'. Production 'should be an integral'.[32] John Gassner argued in 1957 that he 'would feel more reassured about the curriculum if the student who majors in playwriting were also required to *minor* in one other speciality such as directing, design, theatre technique, literature, or theatre history'.[33] He points out that playwrights, including 'Shakespeare, Molière and Ibsen' had experienced hands-on training in theatre practice, 'got from the theatre directly as actors and stage-

[29] Wandor, p. 30.
[30] Reilly, p. 112.
[31] Baker, p. iv.
[32] Kenneth Thorpe Rowe, 'Playwriting in the Liberal-Arts Curriculum', *College English*, 1 (1939), 244-54 (pp. 245 and 250).
[33] John Gassner, 'The Meaning and Scope of Playwriting Study', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 9 (1957), 167-176 (p. 174).

managers', and without this experience 'the graduate-playwright may not come to know an essential part of his art until he has had several plays produced professionally'.[34] As the survey above outlined, this lack of collaborative experience continues to be problematic for trainee playwrights.

Equivalent to the reliance on famous dramatists of the past, it is significant to note that many of the leading American institutions currently teach students via 'gurus': highly experienced and renowned playwrights who lead ongoing workshops (as opposed to one-off masterclasses) and critique work. For example: Paula Vogel teaches at Yale; Mac Wellman is the Distinguished Professor of Play Writing at Brooklyn College; David Henry Hwang is course leader at Columbia; and Christopher Durang and Marsha Norman run the Playwrights Program at Juilliard. These playwrights, most of whom did not themselves complete playwriting degrees, will have practical knowledge of collaborating with other theatre artists (though most do not actively engage with devising methodology) and can pass this information on second hand to students. However, secondary learning, especially when it comes to the particular performative skills of actors, is not as useful as first-hand observation of how performers physically work with text. Christopher Durang, one of the few gurus to undertake an MFA himself, makes this point when discussing his time at Yale (where students work collaboratively with other theatre artists):

> I felt […] that the actors' comments helped me with my writing more than the comments from my fellow writers. My fellow writers have their own personas and, at their worst, would basically tell you how they would write it, while the actors usually were just about telling you when they were having trouble going from moment to moment.[35]

[34] Gassner, p. 173.

[35] Marsha Norman and Christopher Durang, 'Juilliard's Nick and Nora Charles', in *Playwrights Teach Playwriting: Revealing Essays by Contemporary Playwrights*, ed. by Joan Harrington and Crystal Bain (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2006), pp. 69-90 (p. 88).

In Britain, Creative Writing as a taught subject was slower to take hold, and specific courses on playwriting even more so.[36] This could be due, as Steve Waters argues, to the oft-touted myth of the 'natural playwright' who 'doesn't need to read or think much about what they do because their plays ooze out of them effortlessly'.[37] Alternatively, the focus on literary criticism rather than the practical application of writing skills in British universities (meaning that writing was treated as a trade rather than something worthy of a degree), combined with the powerful repertory system, could explain the delay. Playwrights learned their trade on the job, writing for the thriving amateur sector, or within professional theatre, under the strict supervision of managers who might be concerned more with the practicalities of the stage and commercial sustainability than with the application of dramatic theory.

Towards the middle of the twentieth century, there was the development of small-scale theatre collectives in the UK, which provided a similarly practical training experience for playwrights, though in a supposedly non-hierarchical setting.[38] As David Edgar explains, these companies, 'some led by writers', nearly all had 'systems of play-making which involved actors, directors and designers collaborating in research and development'.[39] With the growing popularity of companies such as Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment (both late 1970s-1980s), which 'collectivized' the research and development of work, 'but not the actual writing', playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, David Hare, and Howard Brenton were featured on mainstream stages. These writers, through experience of working directly with other theatre artists, gained a very practical understanding of theatre. This ethos was reflected in the establishment of the Writers' Group at the Royal Court in 1958, which created a model for writer development within British theatres. In the early stages of the group, Keith Johnstone, now world-renowned as an expert on improvisational technique, 'led sessions

[36] Wandor, p. 30.
[37] Steve Waters, 'How to Describe an Apple', p. 139.
[38] David Edgar, 'Playwriting Studies: Twenty Years on', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23 (2013), 99-106 (p. 100).
[39] Edgar, 'Playwriting Studies', p. 100.

defined by improvisation and physical exploration', where the focus was on what was immediately 'happening in the theatre', rather than analysis and discussion.[40] This methodology led writers towards an affinity with performers who also used improvisational methods, both within the devising process and when working on their interpretation of scripted characters.

The transition from this practical, experiential methodology of training writers, strongly connected with the devising tradition, to the pedagogical model which is becoming increasingly popular in Britain, is fascinating in its contradictions. The Royal Court and other new writing theatres still develop playwrights, but use the methodology of the playwrights' workshop. Additionally, an emphasis within the university sector on studying the practice and theory of past playwrights has led to the isolation of the playwright from other theatre artists during the stages of formal training. The first British MA in Playwriting, which was founded at the University of Birmingham in 1970 under the direction of David Edgar, was established because the university had 'noticed that there were many post-graduate playwriting courses in America and in continental Europe but none in Britain, and that such a course might provide an attractive element in its portfolio'.[41] Edgar had emerged from the politically-motivated theatre of the 1970s, and posited the course as being part of 'the wider playwrights' movement', which had seen the founding of the Theatre Writers Union and a number of groups supporting writers such as North West Playwrights.[42] He explains: 'Three of its underlying principles — that it is taught by practicing playwrights, that it combines theoretical exploration with work on student texts and that it involves live performances of students' work — are principles that underlaid the self-help tradition [of writers' unions and

[40] Ruth Little and Emily McLaughlin, *The Royal Court Theatre Inside Out* (London: Oberon, 2007), p. 43.
[41] Edgar, 'Playwriting Studies', p. 99.
[42] Undergraduate drama courses, for example at the University of Warwick, often contain modules or pathways specifically focused on playwriting, and one can obtain a BA in Creative Writing (for example, the 'Theatre and Creative Writing BA' at Brunel University), but there is no undergraduate university qualification I can identify in the United Kingdom specifically dedicated to playwriting.

groups].'[43] As had been advocated by a number of playwright-instruction manuals, the course was a combination of theory and practice, taught by people with experience and expertise. One of Edgar's students, Steve Waters, also a successful playwright (and pedagogical writer), later took over as convenor, and a number of other similar MAs have sprung up across the United Kingdom in the last two decades.

Ironically, given Edgar's roots in the collective movement of the 1960s and 1970s, there has been traditionally very little focus on devising methodology on the Birmingham MA. Whilst Edgar did arrange workshops 'on the needs of the actor', and students worked with directors and performers to stage their work once it had been written, there was limited interaction with other artists during script development periods.[44] Therefore, the strongest influences upon the students were the dramaturgical texts and scripts studied, and the teachings of lecturers and workshop leaders. There has been some development; according the current convenor, playwright Fraser Grace, 'students do have some limited access to a collaborative module, where devising methods are explored', but collaboration is hardly a central focus of teaching.[45] Teaching strategies do differ in other postgraduate courses. However, as will be explored below, the vast majority do not stray from the path set out by Edgar, and indeed Baker: students, normally under the guidance of experienced writers or theatre-makers, take an initial dramaturgical focus, then apply this learning to the writing of work, which is shared and discussed within a 'workshop' environment.

The playwrights' workshop approach has its origins in Baker's English 47 Workshop class and is still the dominant form of teaching on postsecondary and non-academic playwriting courses.[46] The format is generally as follows: writers listen to each other's work (usually read by members of the class) and provide commentary; the work is performed by

[43] Edgar, 'Playwriting Studies', pp. 100-01.
[44] Edgar, 'Playwriting Studies', p. 102.
[45] Fraser Grace, email to Karen Morash, 3 December 2014.
[46] Reilly, p. 112. I have found no other reference to the usage of workshop methodology prior to Baker.

the writers rather than trained actors. Kathleen E. George, a strong advocate for workshop methodology, claims that 'playwrights benefit from the workshop method because theatre is an active art, meant to be heard, meant to be performed'. She provides rules for the workshop, including exhortations that the 'play should be read aloud whenever possible', initially by the playwright and then, as the class becomes more advanced, by others, and that all 'members of the class or group should be active in responding' except for the playwright who '*should not speak*'.[47] It is noteworthy that this approach shares many features with the research and development period of devised work: there is usually some form of stimulus. In the playwright's workshop this may be an instruction from the facilitator to write about a particular subject or image; devisers, as noted in Chapter One rarely start with nothing – there is usually an idea, an image, or something carried over from a previous project. Rough work is often created through improvisational strategies, sometimes known as 'free writing' which bear similarity to the improvisational games and exercises devisers are tasked with. In both the workshop and the devising room, the work produced is evaluated, and then discarded, or further finessed at a later stage. In this way, playwrights can gain some understanding of the processes that performers undergo whilst devising. However, it is knowledge gained at one remove, with no direct input from performers or directors. Without the presence of other theatre artists within the workshop, playwrights are unable to consider the choices an actor, director, or designer might make in their interpretation of a character or action, and the possibilities of physical representation. Micheline Wandor is thus right to argue that the conventions of the workshop are 'unsatisfactory and need to be reconceived', partially due to the 'overwhelming stress on personal experience', but also because the 'main pedagogic activity in the workshop is "criticism"' rather than a focus on the basic skills of writing. [48]

[47] Kathleen E. George, *Playwriting: The First Workshop* (Boston, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1994), p. 25 (George's emphasis).
[48] Wandor, pp. 4, 79, and 76.

The workshop model has become 'entrenched as the standard fare' of postgraduate writing programmes, though a number of institutions have developed the structure to include a wider, practical experience for the playwright.[49] For example, the Yale School of Drama, arguably America's leading playwriting MFA, has 'no writing pedagogy', according to Jeanie O'Hare (Head of Playwriting). Rather, the department is run like a 'small theatre'.[50] Former Drama 47 (the course instigated by Baker) class leader Mark Bly explains that, prior to his arrival at Yale, the course 'was populated primarily by playwrights', which 'reinforced their sense of isolation in the school' and gave the impression 'that a knowledge of their process was not deemed to be an integral part of the other students' training'.[51] He therefore restructured the class so that it included students from the 'Acting, Directing, Dramaturgy, Playwriting, and occasionally the Design Programs', providing exposure to and opportunities to work with students from different skillsets.[52] Similar courses at the New School (New York) and Brown University go beyond the traditional writer-only workshop in that students are able to work in close collaboration with actors and directors at the same institution. Christopher Shinn, Department Head at the New School (also renowned for its acting programme, and with historical links to devising), explains that 'the focus of teaching is on collaboration itself'; whilst the writers are developing their own work, they are also learning the processes of performers and directors.[53] This represents a significant development from course structures which emphasize the literary aspects of training over the collaborative.

Most British university degrees (and short courses) do not provide this opportunity, preferring instead an approach that emphasizes taught dramaturgy alongside the development

[49] Hillary Miller, 'Advice to Applicants: Labor, Value, and MFA Program Design', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 35 (2013), 32-42 (p. 33).
[50] Jeanie O'Hare, email to Karen Morash, 1 December 2014.
[51] Mark Bly, 'New Play Explorations in the Twenty-First Century', in *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, ed. by Romanska, pp. 313-16 (p. 313).
[52] Bly, p. 313.
[53] Christopher Shinn, email to Karen Morash, 6 December 2014.

of practical work in a writer-only workshop environment.[54] At the time of writing, Royal Holloway and Goldsmiths (both University of London) are the only institutions which actively require students to engage specifically with devising methodology. The University of the Arts MA programme's website indicates that students develop 'connections to actors, directors, designers and animators in their peer group' via other Drama Centre courses, though it is not specifically stated how this collaboration is implemented within the curriculum.[55] Given the results of the playwrights' survey above, there is clearly a need to provide practical opportunities for writers to work collaboratively with other artists, yet the emphasis in Britain seems to be on seminar-style teaching which focuses on theory, the examination of existing playtexts, and taught skill development. Short playwriting courses, which are even more limited in time and scope, generally also follow the seminar/workshop pattern of tuition.

The Case for a New Pedagogical Approach

There is a notion that only the basic technical rules of the stage can be taught, and an understanding of how to write already exists in those who attempt to do so.[56] This may be an assumption made by collaborative companies who choose not to work with a specific playwright: if one has a general knowledge of performance then one intrinsically understands how meaning is communicated through structure, characterization and dialogue. On the other hand, one could question the value for a writer of a pedagogical approach which does not explicitly teach writing skills. In order to argue for a particular methodology of tuition for playwrights, the assumption must be made that it is a craft; that is, successful playwrights

[54] Appendix A provides an outline of the general approach of the majority of British institutions providing postgraduate playwright training

[55] 'MA Dramatic Writing — Drama Centre London' <www.arts.ac.uk/csm/courses/postgraduate/ma-dramatic-writing-drama-centre-london> [accessed 3 July 2016].

[56] For example, see: A Dramatist, *Playwriting: A Handbook for Would-be Dramatic Authors* (London: The Stage Office, 1888), p. 10.

have become so because they have acquired (and practised) a particular set of skills and understanding of technique, as opposed to the Romantic notion of inherent genius or talent, or indeed the avant-garde tradition of challenging received knowledge of performance. Michelene Wandor, herself an accomplished dramatist claims, that 'writing is its own skill. It takes time to learn and develop'.[57] Alternatively, there is a sense, as Steve Gooch states, that writing 'is neither a purely rational nor a purely intuitive process'; skills and knowledge can be acquired, but 'having ideas can't be taught'.[58]

In a collaborative setting, ideas are easy to come by, as there are many people contributing. It can, at times, be the writing skills which are in short supply, as Liz Tomlin explains:

> Whilst collaborative practice is regularly taught at universities, an emphasis, within such a context, on the development of written performance text that might be comparable with the emphasis given in the teaching of playwriting alone, is understandably less common. Given that, in the teaching of collective practice, all the elements of acting, directing, conceptual staging, design, audience, soundscape have to be considered in addition to the written text it is not surprising that the resulting text may be less developed than in a parallel module of playwriting.[59]

Tomlin argues that this dilution of the skills of playwriting within the teaching of collaborative skills leads to professional devising practice which has a 'reduced focus on the development of the written word'.[60]

According to Tomlin, the presence of a playwright within the collaborative context not only ensures a skilled approach to scripting, but is also a matter of efficiency, as the 'development of a script […] demands the time of only one individual'.[61] These benefits will

[57] Wandor, p. 9.
[58] Gooch, p. 1.
[59] Tomlin, p. 120.
[60] Tomlin, p. 120.
[61] Tomlin, p. 121.

be further explored in Chapter Three, but it is clear that the presence of a trained playwright within the collaborative structure offers certain advantages.

Conversely, what can devising offer to the playwright and why should it be included within formal pedagogical structures for writers? John Ginman argues that there is a danger in 'writer-development programmes' which 'have an in-built tendency to focus primarily on the words on the page — which, as scripts are usually notated, privilege the journey through time rather than through space'.[62] Ginman is primarily concerned with the failure of playwriting pedagogy to address issues of space, audience interaction, and intermediality, which are becoming increasingly important in contemporary performance (and are also often important features of devised work). However, his argument also applies to the need for a playwright to understand how a performer uses his or her body to communicate, and the opportunities to experiment with new forms made possible by devising. As Tomlin queries:

> how can the new writer begin to make informed decisions about how divergences from these [traditional pedagogical] principles will function in performance? They may look like they 'won't work' on the page, because they 'wouldn't work' within the tried-and-tested broadly realist structure, but that's not to say that they might not.[63]

Experience in collaborative theatre-making from the early stages of a playwright's career can provide insight into these processes and allow the playwright access to alternative performative forms. In denying would-be playwrights the opportunity to collaborate and create work with other theatre artists, or providing watered-down versions of devising via the playwrights' workshop, the standard playwright pedagogy emphasizes tradition over innovation, and distances writers from those who are responsible for transforming their text into a performative object.

---

[62] Ginman, p. 134.
[63] Tomlin, p. 121.

Pedagogical Literature

As the playwrights' training survey suggests, taught courses are only one pathway into a career of writing for the stage. Many playwrights consult pedagogical texts for advice, and a number of formal courses include these 'how-to' manuals as required or suggested reading.[64] There seems to be two major approaches within playwriting books: one is a more academic, dramaturgical position, which examines canonical texts for structural rules. The second approach includes guidance of a more practical, coaching, nature: inspiring and cajoling a writer to work, providing tips about the industry, and basic rules to follow. A quick scan of the bibliography of this dissertation will reveal that there has been a steady increase in the number of instructional texts in English for playwrights since the 1990s; Steve Waters's contention that there has been a dearth of 'literature on playwriting' is therefore not accurate, though his claim that it is 'under-documented' is.[65] It therefore follows that no attempt has been made to catalogue the advice (or lack of advice) given to playwrights within these texts about collaboration with artists and the benefits and drawbacks of the writer-deviser approach.

What remains of Aristotle's *Poetics* stands as the first example (still in existence) of practical guidance given to writers, and given the frequency of reference to his ideas within contemporary pedagogical texts, his advice is still treated as the 'Bible of playwriting technique'.[66] For Aristotle, dramatic action is the dominant feature of (performed) mimetic representation. He states: 'Tragedy is a representation of an action of a superior kind —

[64] For example, the University of Leeds recommends David Edgar's *How Plays Work*, and Robert McKee's *Story*, amongst other texts; and the Birmingham MA directly refers to Alan Ayckbourn's *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*, Steve Waters's *The Secret Life of Plays*, and Edgars's text (amongst others): Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (York: Methuen, 2014); Alan Ayckbourn, The Crafty Art of Playmaking (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002); Steve Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013).

[65] Waters, 'How to Describe an Apple', p. 137.

[66] John Howard Lawson, *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting,* 2nd edn (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. 9.

grand, and complete in itself.'[67] This idea of action being 'complete in itself', along with Aristotle's insistence that the 'most important element is the construction of the plot', are problematic.[68] Even within a number of Ancient Greek plays, for example the *Oresteia* or *Medea*, character competes with action for dominance. Nonetheless, screenwriting gurus such as Robert McKee and Christopher Vogler have produced how-to texts which adhere closely to Aristotle's imperative for action, and playwrights such as David Edgar make only minor variations to the Aristotelian approach within their pedagogical texts; Aristotle's presence is still keenly felt in playwriting pedagogy.

What, then, did Aristotle have to say about an essential element of the performance: actors? The answer is, very little. In Anthony Kenny's translation of *Poetics*, the word 'actor' appears twice, and both occurrences are within a few paragraphs of each other. Aristotle claims: 'since the representation is performed by actors, a necessary part of tragedy must be the presentation on stage of the performance.' He goes on to say that, along with the performance, there is also 'music-making' and 'style'. However, by 'style' he is not referring to modes of performative interpretation, or even the *mise-en-scène*; he is simply referring to dialogic construction or, 'composition of the verse'.[69] Fascinatingly though, he does credit an aspect of devising methodology as a preindicator for scripted drama. He states: 'Certainly [tragedy] originally took shape out of improvisations. (This is true of tragedy as well as of comedy: the former began with the leaders of the dithyramb, and the latter from the leaders of the phallic singing).'[70] Additionally, in a brief section which appears to be a precursor to the more practical aspects of contemporary how-to books, he instructs: 'As far as possible, the poet should act the story as he writes it.'[71] This indicates that Aristotle had an understanding of the intricate relationship between script and mimetic representation and the fact that the

[67] Aristotle, p. 23.
[68] Aristotle, pp. 23-24.
[69] Aristotle, p. 23. Please note that, unless otherwise noted, the word 'dialogic' in this dissertation refers to the adjectival form of dialogue, and not Mikhail Bakhtin's usage of the word to describe work which is in dialogue with other works or authors.
[70] Aristotle, p. 23.
[71] Aristotle, p. 38.

origins of drama lay with the performer, not the writer. However, with its emphasis on structure and action, *Poetics* suggests that the responsibility for the creation of dramatic meaning lies with the writer; actors are mere vessels for the dramatist's words. In this way, the plays of Ancient Greece were very much the vision of one person, the playwright.[72]

Reading through contemporary pedagogical texts, one could make the assumption that a two-thousand year gap existed between *Poetics* and a return to the subject of formal instruction for playwrights: most modern writers neglect to mention any other historical pedagogical texts. Rather, there is a rich selection of books examining theories of scripted drama. Writers as varied as Horace, Dryden, Ben Jonson, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and G. E. Lessing, amongst many others, argued for the emphasis of particular forms; many were a direct response to Aristotle's teachings.[73] The majority of texts, however, were focused on analysis of techniques of structure and characterization, as opposed to providing practical advice for creative performative text, and as such exist 'as an outpost of literary criticism', rather than skills-based advice for writers.[74] W. B. Worthen argues that theatrical performance 'has everything to do with everything that's beyond the text: the practices and ideologies of directing and design, of acting and dance, of architecture and economics, the unscripted materiality of stage production'. Yet, we seem to have developed a 'massively literary understanding of dramatic performance'.[75] Worthen places the blame for this failure of focus on the performative on 'the interdependence of the arts of writing and performance in the age of print', even if texts composed before the printing press was invented also

[72] Playwrights generally directed their own work in Ancient Greece: Graham Ley, *A Short Introduction to the Ancient Greek Theatre* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 8.
[73] Marvin Carlson's *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984) and John Howard Lawson's *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting* both present useful histories of dramatic theory and criticism. Barbara Norden's unpublished doctoral thesis, 'How to Write a Play: Dramatic Structure and Open Form Drama' (University of London, Royal Holloway, 2007) also contains useful commentary on a number of historical theorists, and their proclivities for 'closed', Aristotelian structures.
[74] Waters, 'How to Describe an Apple', p. 138.
[75] W.B. Worthen, *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 3 and 5.

ignored features 'beyond the text'.[76] The tendency of pedagogical writers, who are often playwrights themselves, to see writers as the unique originators of meaning within performance, can also be blamed. Besides, as highlighted in Chapter One, the sole preserved aspect of a performance is generally a script, which stands as the solitary product through which analysis after the fact can occur. In examining what had gone before and was preserved in text, rather than analyzing viewed live performance, these writers emphasized traditional narrative structures and the dominance of the playwright.

From the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, linked with the commercial growth of theatre as widespread popular entertainment, a number of texts appeared which took a more practical approach to providing advice to would-be writers. Whilst William Archer and George Pierce Baker stand as well-known names, often referenced by contemporary pedagogical texts, there is an impressive collection of how-to books from this period which have been largely forgotten.[77] What the list reveals is that the 'literature' on playwriting did not indeed diminish 'to a trickle' between William Archer and Steve Gooch's 1988 book *Writing a Play*, as Steve Waters contends.[78] In fact, the would-be playwright had a number of titles and approaches to choose from. There is, however, a fallow period in playwriting literature lasting from Grebanier's 1961 text to the late 1980s. That this recession coincides with the rise of the director-as-auteur, Roland Barthes's and other postructuralist reconsiderations of the cult of the author, and the growth of collaborative theatre-making, cannot be dismissed. Another factor may be a cultural preference for cinema during this time, although there is only a handful of books from this period on screenwriting, and the majority were written in the 1980s.[79]

---

[76] Worthen, p. 3.

[77] Whilst restrictions of space do not allow for full commentary on these texts, Appendix B provides a list of texts and basic information, so as to assess general trends in early pedagogical books.

[78] Waters, 'How to Describe an Apple', p. 142.

[79] These texts include: Wolf Rilla, *The Writer and The Screen: On Writing for Film and Television* (London: W. H. Allen, 1973); Donna Lee, *Magic Methods of Screenwriting* (Tarzana, CA: Del Oeste Press, 1978); William Charles Miller, *Screenwriting for Narrative Film and Television* (New York: Hastings House, 1980); Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1982); Tom Stempel, *Screenwriting* (San Diego, CA: A. S. Barnes, 1982);

The list also reveals that, even before the rise of devised theatre, many pedagogical texts advised would-be playwrights to gain practical experience of the theatre to provide insight into how to write for performers and other artists. Those who did offer such advice, for example 'A Dramatist' and Charlton Andrews, did so within texts primarily concerned with the practical aspects of writing: the how-to type of books. More dramaturgically-focused writers, such as Archer and John Howard Lawson, barely mention the involvement of other artists in producing the work. Baker, who recognizes how other artists add value to writing, is perhaps an exception, but he still dedicates little space to the idea of collaboration.

This trend has continued with contemporary pedagogical texts, with even less discussion of collaboration, except within a small number of books.[80] Steve Gooch's 1988 text *Writing A Play* takes an approach grounded in Gooch's practical experience of making work rather than dramaturgical theory: he recognizes the collaborative aspects of creating performance, yet stoutly defends the playwright's status as a uniquely skilled individual. He is one of the few how-to writers with devising experience; significantly, considering the observations above about the lack of playwriting texts during the rise of collaborative theatre-making, he argues:

> since the opening up in the 1970s of opportunities for playwrights to work alongside theatre companies on commission, in workshops, through actors' improvisation and a variety of different playmaking methods, the need to open up and communicate the writing process has become more urgent.[81]

Eugene Vale, *The Technique of Screen & Television Writing* (London: Prentice-Hall International, 1982); Edward Dmytryk, *On Screen Writing* (Boston, MA: Focal Press, 1985).

[80] Because the field is ever-widening, and I cover some of the books in detail, I am not presenting texts from the late-twentieth century onwards in tabular form in the appendices. The titles do, however, appear in my bibliography (under the subheading 'Pedagogical Texts on Playwriting'), as they were consulted as part of the research process of this chapter.

[81] Gooch, p. 3.

Gooch wants recognition of the specialized skills of playwriting and worries that they may be subsumed within a collaborative practice which places text on equal footing with other performative elements.

Noël Greig also has a background in devising, most significantly as part of the Theatre-in-Education movement, yet he takes a different approach to Gooch. His focus in *Playwriting: A Practical Guide*, is on providing exercises for a playwright to generate material. It comes directly from collaborative workshop methodology, and the majority of the practical activities are designed for groups; the work produced is meant to be shared and discussed, and Greig provides rules for this sharing of work.[82] Much of the text is focused on forms of written improvisation with the goal of generating character, situation (setting), and story, which 'generally come before full dialogue is developed'.[83] Theory is rather sparse, and a writer would emerge from using this text with a number of scenarios or characters to start with, but (unlike Gooch) no advice on structure, compiling material, redrafting, and the practicalities of staging a script.

Whilst Alan Ayckbourn is not an experienced writer-deviser, he has worked extensively as a director, a fact reflected in the structure of *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*: half the book is dedicated to playwriting and the other half to directing. This might suggest an approach more grounded in the idea of collaboration. However, Ayckbourn treads a fairly traditional path, listing a number of '*Obvious Rules*' which provide common-sense suggestions for playwrights, although these are rather tongue-in-cheek and Ayckbourn is relatively un-dogmatic in his methodology. He does, however, insist that before writing, the 'structure should be in place'.[84] Whilst there is no reference to collaborative theatre-making, this flexibility of approach lends itself to such work, as it guides the playwright to be more open to alternative approaches to creating material.

[82] Noël Greig, *Playwriting: A Practical Guide* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 202.
[83] Greig, p. 32.
[84] Ayckbourn, p. 46.

Rather more dogmatic in approach is Robert McKee's *Story*; though it is aimed towards screenwriters, it appears on the reading lists of many university courses (for example, writing courses at Leeds, Northumbria University, and Kingston University). Though McKee claims *Story* is 'about principles, not rules […] eternal, universal forms, not formulas', his fondness for plot diagrams, technical terminology, and insistence on the superiority of the classical form of narrative (deriving mainly from Aristotle), reveals a less flexible dramaturgical outlook.[85] Yet, *Story* is not without merit, particularly for those who wish to write for commercial theatre, for he emphasizes the need for simple storylines combined with a varied pace, and advises against unnecessary exposition, characters and dialogue (as do most how-to writers). Additionally, his development of ideas such as the 'obligatory scene' and 'turning point' is useful for writers struggling with structure (as might occur in a devised piece of work). To follow the methodology of McKee as a playwright, however, would be to ignore many of the opportunities presented to the writer of working in a collaborative, live medium, where design and performance can have enhanced symbolic resonance, and audiences are generally more accepting of alternative structures.

Though David Edgar's *How Plays Work* is similarly rooted in Aristotle's basic concepts, it is distinctly a book about theatre writing. His discussion in Chapter Seven of the various devices playwrights can use to create meaning is founded in theatricality rather than film technique. However, like McKee (and Aristotle), action is paramount for Edgar, and all other aspects of the script (character, time, location) are defined in their relationship to 'emplotment'. *How Plays Work* takes a dramaturgical, historical approach to elucidating Edgar's theories, strongly rooted in Lehmann's dramatic theatre: in line with the structure of Edgar's course at Birmingham (and, rather curiously, given his own involvement with the

[85] McKee, p. 4; on dramaturgical outlook, p. 45.

political theatre collectives of the 1970s), Edgar admits that within his book there 'is little reference to physical, live, devised and/or event theatre'.[86]

Steve Waters, Edgar's acolyte and his successor as convenor of the Birmingham MA, has undoubtedly been influenced by his teacher. However, his book, *The Secret Life of Plays* is, arguably, the most successful of the instructional texts at combining thoughtful, informed dramaturgy with useful advice on technique. Rather than reducing scripts to a series of working components with abstract names, Waters embraces the idea that the seemingly magical chemistry of certain plays is actually the result of various strategic elements working together in a holistic way; plays are 'a series of effects that yield narrative rather [than] remaining simply servants of it'.[87] Though still grounded in a literary understanding of drama, this at least recognizes the idea of layered meaning derived from elements often indecipherable from each other in performance, which is commonplace in devised work (although Waters does not make this connection himself). Additionally, in providing writers with the tools to consider the elements of drama (such as space, time, and character) in alternative ways which reflect the playwright's overall intentions, he advocates not so much a breaking, but a reinterpretation of the rules in a thoughtful way. This is in line with many of the alternative, postdramatic structures found in devised work.

Micheline Wandor also advocates an alternative approach to playwriting, but rather than Waters's 'Mobius strip' model of play construction, she presents a strong argument for the primacy of dialogue, sympathetic with traditional, dramatic structures.[88] Unlike the majority of instructional texts, she has a keen understanding of the history of playwright tuition, especially within the United Kingdom, and, as previously discussed, is highly critical of the workshop system. She puts forth an impassioned argument for a better pedagogical model which recognizes writing as an 'applied skill' and the dramatic script as something

[86] Edgar, *How Plays Work*, p. xiv.
[87] Waters, 'How to Describe an Apple', p. 145.
[88] Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays*, p. 8.

complete in itself, with dialogue as the primary source of meaning.[89] As discussed below, she rejects the notion of theatre as a 'collaborative' art and argues that during the writing stages there is a 'distinctive imaginative process' singular to the writer.[90] Directors and actors may ignore stage directions, so it is essential that plot, character, and situation are all revealed through dialogue. This approach is at odds with the growing popularity of postdramatic performance, which, as discussed in Chapter One, holds that no particular element of performance is dominant; as much devised work falls under the category of postdramatic, Wandor's theories would be difficult to apply to collaborative devising contexts and their associated processes.

Though Paul Castagno's *New Playwriting Strategies* also emphasizes the importance of text within performance, it is the most radical of the pedagogical texts. Castagno argues that, as the 'best playwrights' have moved on from Aristotelian orthodoxy, it is time the teaching and development of playwrights caught up.[91] Applying Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism to drama, Castagno rejects the traditional model of the 'single-voiced' play, focusing instead on the '*multivocal* character' (referring to 'a single character's speech strategies') and the '*polyvocal*' text (polyvocality means the 'orchestration and juxtaposition of all voices present in the play').[92] He rejects the concept of character-specific language, noting that as strategies and situations change, so does language, and the multivocal character is a reflection of our multicultural, global society which bombards us with a myriad of influences. In this way, Castagno favours the 'hybrid' play, with material drawn from 'diverse sources' and a narrative that is 'often diminished in favour of aural landscapes and exciting spectacle'.[93] It is noteworthy that Castagno does not mention the opportunities which naturally occur within collaborative theatre-making for the development of polyvocality; the

[89] Wandor, p. 9.
[90] Wandor, pp. 20-22.
[91] Paul Castagno, *New Playwriting Strategies: A Language-Based Approach to Playwriting* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 1.
[92] Castagno, p. 17.
[93] Castagno, p. 36.

nature of devising means that a writer-deviser would be exposed to a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, and would therefore be more likely to use a polyvocal approach.

There are a number of other contemporary texts on playwriting; those mentioned above have had a significant impact and/or represent a development in the field. Within the majority of texts, discussion of devising methodology is virtually non-existent. As John Ginman argues, the 'overwhelming tendency' within published literature on playwriting 'is to endorse continuity of thought and practice with the past'.[94] With the exception of Paul Castagno, and certain elements of Steve Waters's book, Ginman is correct: the majority of playwriting texts adhere closely to Aristotelian, closed frameworks, where action, as revealed through dialogue, is key, closely followed by character. Yet, contemporary theatre practice increasingly rejects these models. Playwrights are 'likely to benefit also from a ferment of fresh debate and practical experimentation that aims to redefine the essential aspects of the medium', but few of the texts listed above offer advice to the would-be playwright who wishes to explore new forms of performance.[95]

Pedagogical Propositions for the Writer-Deviser

As established in Chapter One, devised work often garners accusations of incoherence, structural inconsistencies, and a lack of a distinguishable voice; there are distinct advantages in the involvement of a writer in the development work of a devised piece. Playwrights, who have been trained to think analytically about structure, dialogue, and character development, can function as experts in these areas, with the ability to refine the raw material produced by their collaborators, whilst introducing their unique creative voice and original material. They must, however, be able to function within the collaborative context, and understand that, for most devising companies, speech is only one feature of the performance, and the working

[94] Ginman, p. 129.
[95] Ginman, p. 129.

habits they may have developed as solo playwrights will need to be adapted to collaboration.[96]

What, then, are the tools offered by pedagogical texts which the writer-deviser might find useful, and what is missing from the teaching toolbox? As a counterpoint to the discussion of devising technique in Chapter One, it is useful to examine the aspects of the instruction given to playwrights within these pedagogical texts, which may assist (or potentially hamper) the writer-deviser. Categories chosen are the standard building blocks of not only a script, but of performance, and are therefore essential for consideration by playwrights. This also leads on to the presentation in Chapters Three and Four of specific examples of writers working in a collaborative context, and provides a vocabulary and framework for the examination of text within devising processes. Finally, keeping in mind the research-led practice/practice-led research methodological framework of this dissertation, as discussed in the Introduction, subsections represent important areas of consideration which both influenced the practice elements of my investigation, and issues within the development of both plays which led me to consult pedagogical texts for advice.

Action-Led Drama versus Character-Led Drama

George Pierce Baker claims that history 'shows indisputably that the drama in its beginnings, no matter where we look, depended most on action', and the majority of instructional texts still focus on action (in its various forms) as the predominant force in drama.[97] Aristotle suggests drama 'got its name' from the Greek word for doing, *dran*.[98] However, in many pedagogical texts, the word 'action' is not defined and appears rather vague: does it refer to the points of the plot which move the story along, does it mean conflict, or does it refer to the movements, utterances, and other physical representations of the performers? Baker seems to

[96] The use of the term 'solo playwright' within this dissertation indicates a dramatist who researches, plans, and writes the first draft of a playscript on her own, without (major) input from other collaborators.
[97] Baker, p. 16.
[98] Aristotle, p. 19.

identify action as something communicated by performers to an audience, whether it be 'mere physical action' or 'mental activity'.[99] For David Edgar, action not only 'provides causality' in that one action can be explained by that which has come before, and affects that which comes after, but it also must reveal 'a contradiction in the human condition'.[100] In other words, it is the strategic placement of action (or 'emplotment') within a play which reveals the failure of expectation, rather than detailed characterization. Character is a tool of action.

Not all agree, however. William Archer claims that the 'difference between a live play and a dead one is that in the former the characters control the plot, while in the latter the plot controls the characters'.[101] Tom Gallagher asserts: 'stage plays are character based. Everything starts and ends with character.'[102] Texts (and workshop-style classes) such as Noël Greig's suggest exercises that will build up an extensive biography for a character, and an emphasis on psychological naturalism has left some writers feeling compelled to create protracted back stories, which do not appear within the action of the play. This intense focus on character can be problematic, as the playwright can be tempted to include character-based information which is unnecessary, tedious, and distracts from the narrative.

The majority of texts providing instruction to playwrights seem to set up division between action and character; playwrights are compelled to choose early on whether their work is led by one or the other. Is this action/character dichotomy a useful one, particularly for the writer-deviser? Arguably not, for as Lawson points out: 'character and action tend to become abstractions, existing theoretically on opposite sides of a theoretical fence.'[103] Rather than treating them as separate entities, is it not more fruitful to recognise that they are inextricably intertwined? Of the pedagogical writers, Ayckbourn is unusual in that he notes that there is no 'hard and fast rule as to which constructional element comes first'; the idea

[99] Baker, p. 36.
[100] Edgar, *How Plays Work*, p. 23.
[101] Archer, p. 17.
[102] Tom Gallagher, *The Way to Write For the Stage* (London: Elm Tree Books/Hamish Hamilton, 1987), p. 19.
[103] Lawson, p. 5.

for the play is paramount and all dramaturgical elements must work together to serve the idea.[104]

Notably, improvisation to develop a biographical and emotional understanding of a character, a technique with origins in Stanislavski's methodologies, is a common practice in some devised theatre.[105] However, when developing story through improvisational techniques, even when there are pre-existing plot points, devisers do not consider action and character separately. Instead, they at once consider possibilities for the broadening of their (and their collaborators') understanding of a particular character, whilst experimenting with points of action, which may (or may not) end up as part of the play's overall structure. Writer-devisers who have been witness to these developmental techniques embodied within active workshop processes can gain an understanding that it is not always necessary to emphasize character over action or vice versa, or can have their notions of a certain hierarchy of dramaturgical elements challenged. Additionally, their own skills/training in developing character and action points will be supplemented by the input of collaborators, whose holistic approaches will aid the writer-deviser in considering non-speech based methodologies for delivering information to audience members.

Structure

Any advice on structure is a challenge, given that the concept of an ideal dramatic framework shifts with every era. We have, after all, moved from a five-act structure in Elizabethan drama to the prominence of three acts in the last century, with tight controls over where plot features such as the inciting incident, reversal, the obligatory scene, and climax appear in the action. In the twenty-first century, there is more acceptance of structural experimentation, and non-linear forms are increasingly popular. David Edgar puts

[104] Ayckbourn, p. 20.
[105] For example, see the discussion of Mike Leigh's character-driven improvisational practices in Chapter Three.

forth, with particular reference to Brecht, that the 'most interesting developments in structure of the last hundred years have sought to make the playwright more visible'; in other words, the employment of devices such as fractured time to disrupt the action, or the use of *Verfremdungseffekt*, make obvious the controlling hand of the writer.[106] Even within Absurdist performance, repetitive, circular, or apparently non-existent narratives are structures in themselves (perhaps most emblematically in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*).

As discussed in Chapter One, a common complaint of devised work is the lack of a coherent structure. This could be because the intricacies of scene, act, and story positioning are not dominant features of traditional conservatoire-based performance training (in the United Kingdom at least). The development of a structure often requires an individual who can be at a remove from the experimentation in the devising room; she can take the material created by performers, and use a structure to frame it, making decisions as to what to include, discard, or invent if there are gaps which need filling. As Steve Waters declares, we 'feel the presence of a strong act structure like a firm grip, guiding us forward and wrong-footing us all at once'.[107] Careful study, thought, and planning of structure on the part of a playwright can therefore ameliorate issues of coherence, pace, and progression within a devised piece of work.

Physical Representation

In opposition to the numerous chapters focusing on action, character, and structure, commentary on physicality and non-dialogic/non-structural imagery within the instructional texts is notable by its absence. This could be partially explained by the emphasis within English-language theatre on dialogue over other aspects of representation. Playwright Simon Stephens makes this point when he states that, in opposition to the descriptor 'spectator' employed in most languages to describe a group of people gathered to watch a performance,

[106] Edgar, *How Plays Work*, p. 107.
[107] Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays*, p. 50.

in English the most commonly used word is 'audience': 'Only in English do we draw attention to the ear. In every other language we draw attention to the eye.'[108]

Most pedagogical writers seemingly prefer to leave issues of physical representation to the performers and directors rather than offer suggestions of how it can be successfully incorporated into the script. This is an opportunity missed: in order to communicate with audiences who will, by nature of being human beings watching live performance, respond to what they see along with what they hear, playwrights should consider how performers and designers can contribute to semiological interpretation and cognitive response beyond dialogue.[109] This will come naturally to a playwright who has spent time with actors, directors, and designers developing a script within the devising room. Playwright Susan Yankowitz confirms this when commenting on her work with the Open Theatre:

> Above all, what the Open Theatre's work fostered in me was a faith in the visual image as equal in importance to the word. I learned that actors, with a gesture or a movement, could often supply what an extended monologue couldn't. Silence, too, is a language, in which bodies speak.[110]

As the case study of Bryony Lavery (Chapter Four) and my own non-devised play (detailed in Chapter Five) reveal, writers can incorporate aspects of physicality commonly associated with devising, even when they are writing non-collaboratively. There is therefore no reason why pedagogical texts cannot offer advice in this area, even if it is simply the suggestion of working with actors and/or consulting directors and designers in the redrafting of scripts. Yet, the majority do not. Therefore, combined with the lack of focus on collaborating with actors, directors, and designers within standard playwright training, students suffer from a

[108] 'Appendix 1: Simon Stephens – Interview', in Duška Radosavljević, *Theatre-Making: Interplay Between Text and Performance in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 197-210 (p. 198).
[109] See Chapter Five for a discussion of cognitive approaches to movement and performance.
[110] William Coco et al, 'The Open Theatre (1963-1973): Looking Back', *Performing Arts Journal*, 7 (1983), 25-48 (p. 39).

deficiency of knowledge about the potential inclusion of physical aspects within scripts and over-dependence on dialogue to transmit information.

Significantly, even though Noël Greig came out of a devising/TIE tradition, and advocates a physical warm-up for writers, his practical exercises do little to encourage the would-be playwright to consider physical imagery. This could be because of Wandor's postulation that the 'executive relationship' of the dramatist is to the 'written text'; this suggests that non-dialogic elements are not the writer's concern (for, as established earlier, Wandor does not advocate for the importance of stage directions).[111] Writers, inexperienced in the ability of the body to transmit ideas, or ignorant of the capacity of design features such as sound, set, or lighting to communicate meaning, may feel more comfortable with the form of dramatic representation most easily communicated in print: speech. In ignoring issues of physicality within their texts, instructional writers may be implicitly suggesting what Wandor explicity states: 'writing is a distinctive form of the imaginative mode of thought, realised through dialogue alone.'[112]

There is not universal agreement on this issue, however. Baker argues for the historical importance of physicality:

> Look where we will, then — at the beginnings of drama in Greece, in England centuries later, or among savage peoples today — the chief essential in winning and holding the attention of the spectator was imitative movement by the actors, that is physical action. Nor, as the drama develops does physical action cease to be central.[113]

[111] Wandor, p. 13.
[112] Wandor, p. 120.
[113] Baker, p. 36. Baker's usage of the word 'action' should not be conflated with dramatic action; he is referring to the movement of performers.

John Howard Lawson also recognizes the potential potency of physical representation, stating: 'the important thing in the scene is not the slightness of the movement, but the quality of it — the degree of muscular tension, of expressiveness.'[114]

In ignoring the capacity for meaning to be transmitted in both a powerful and economical way through non-textual elements (reducing, for example, the need for exposition through dialogue), the playwright limits her opportunities to communicate with an audience. To illustrate this point, Steve Waters uses the chair from Caryl Churchill's *This is a Chair*, a 'simple prop […] loaded with meaning', which is a 'throne, a ducking stool and a restraining device all at once'.[115] This recognition of the various cognitive and sensorial ways in which audiences engage is rare within the pedagogical texts.

Dialogue

This is, however, not to undermine the potency of speech; the presence of physical imagery in a script does not by necessity weaken the spoken elements (which, it can be argued, are themselves 'physical imagery', given that they are produced through the physical action of voice). Speech itself is a rather broad category: the primary focus of writers tends to be dialogue, but the monologue has had, and continues to have, a function within drama. Increasingly, especially in devised and/or postdramatic work, we also experience a kind of slipping in and out of character speech; at times the performer appears to be speaking as him/herself, and at other times as a character. Whether this non-mimetic speech can be considered dialogue is contestable. For example, in the work of Forced Entertainment, the company members often introduce themselves by their actual names at the beginning of the performance and, at times, appear to be speaking as themselves, yet also as characters; audiences are not sure what is real and what is fictionalized (and, often, what is scripted and

[114] Lawson, p. 171.
[115] Waters, *The Secret Life of Plays*, p. 142.

what is improvised). This is an area of speech, however, covered by no instructional writer except Castagno.[116]

Pedagogical writers (with the exception of Castagno) generally agree on two dialogic issues: the first being the importance of character-specific speech as, according to Agnes Platt, one of the 'most usual faults in the dialogue of an inexperienced writer is that any one of his speeches might be spoken by any one of the characters'.[117] The second is the necessity of concise writing which eliminates the redundancies or fillers ('um', 'ah', etc) typical of everyday speech. Tim Fountain states: 'dialogue must never be chatter; it has to relate to the pursuit of a goal, be it conscious or unconscious (or both).'[118] On the other hand, David Edgar does suggest that one should be aware that 'audiences need to process what they are hearing, and the occasional, semantically redundant phrase allows them to do so. A redundant phrase can tell us about the speaker or the listener'.[119] Devised work often incorporates fillers or redundancies which become resonant: for example, when the members of Forced Entertainment introduce themselves (normally with the use of a microphone) at the beginning of a show, fillers, repetition, and the use of vocal fry communicate an implied reaction to what the previous speaker has said. This can also create the impression of improvised speech, reinforcing the feeling of 'liveness'.

Although dialogue itself is less central in postdramatic writing, speech is still an essential aspect. Castagno argues that 'for new playwrights interest extends beyond words to what can be verbalised or vocalised — it can be about syllables, sonic utterances, or phonemic variables'.[120] Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Four in relation to Bryony Lavery's work, this is a quality typical of devised work, as is speech which feels improvised and immediate to an audience (even if it is not). Castagno argues that in these new forms, 'the

[116] Castagno, p. 17.
[117] Platt, p. 63.
[118] Tim Fountain, *So You Want to be a Playwright?* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2013), p. 18.
[119] Edgar, *How Plays Work*, p. 155.
[120] Castagno, p. 24.

play is negotiated in the moment'. He continues: 'New playwriting keys in a virtual, parallel world where the word is the shifter, where language takes on protean characteristics, providing the material for transition and transformation.'[121] This type of writing is rooted in the awareness of how a performer can transform the language of the page and provide immediacy.

In line with the general lack of reference to performers within pedagogical texts, the idea of the actor's role in enhancing this sense of immediacy is rarely noted within instructional books. The authors of these books, many of whom have limited devising experience, seem reluctant to recognize the powerful status of actors as crucial intermediaries between their writing and the audience. A playwright who has worked closely with actors via the devising process cannot fail to understand the variety of ways individual performers approach the interpretation of dialogue and utterance. She will have had the opportunity to observe improvisation and experimentation with language within the devising room and, in playing the role of audience, will experience first-hand the dramatic effects of various performative modes of speech. Whilst a playwright who does not work collaboratively may have a keen ear for dialogue (be it realistic or not) and knowledge of general speech utterances, these are filtered through the individual's phenomenological experiences of speech. As J. L. Styan argues: 'Words written, seen and heard must meet first in the mind of the playwright, then in the theatre in the person and voice of the actor, and finally, in the minds of the audience. […] One word of dramatic dialogue has many functions to fulfil.'[122] Working collaboratively with other artists can expose playwrights to new forms of vocal expression, unfiltered by the writer's cognitive recall. On the other hand, unfiltered dialogue may be unwieldy and uninteresting in a dramatic context. In being mindful of the pedagogical suggestions for effective dialogue, whilst exposed to a wide

[121] Castagno, p. 96.
[122] J. L. Styan, *The Elements of Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 3-4.

range of utterances, the writer-deviser has more to draw on than writer-less devising groups or solo playwrights.

Collaboration

It is apt to end with the treatment of collaborative contexts within these texts; this will inform the discussion in Chapter Three on playwrights working within the devising process. Whilst, as seen above, a number of texts fail to address collaboration at all, or dismiss it as irrelevant, it is worthwhile examining the advice provided by those texts which do provide some commentary.

Playwright and theorist Eric Bentley states categorically that, whilst several arts are involved in creating performance, only two are 'essential': 'First, something must be written that is suited to theatre, second, it must be performed by someone who knows how to perform it.'[123] In other words, the only two roles which matter in the theatre are the (trained) writer, and an actor who can deliver what the writer wants. He even goes as far as to say the theatre belongs to the 'playwright', and after that, 'to the actor'. No one else, especially not the director, is 'master'.[124] Whilst Bentley's statements appear rather bombastic, the fact that many pedagogical texts fail to address devising processes and collaborative contexts reveals a neglected, and often uneasy, relationship between playwrights and other practitioners.

This uneasiness is revealed by writers' comments on the development process of devised work. Noël Greig states: 'we have a bit of a tendency to find collaborative work problematic. […] I note that there is a certain urge to push towards the negative and egotistical when it comes to being in a potentially collaborative relationship.'[125] Steve Gooch argues that, within the devising room, 'the hope for consensus is thin indeed' as the nature of the work 'is so personal to everyone involved that the whole of their being — from their

[123] John L. DiGaetani, *A Search for a Postmodern Theatre: Interviews with Contemporary Playwrights* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 33.
[124] DiGaetani, p. 34.
[125] Greig, p. 202.

childhood to their political affiliation and what they had for breakfast — can be brought into play'.[126] He also perceptively notes that writers can 'find it difficult to articulate their intentions other than through the script'.[127] It is not unthinkable that some writers choose the profession because they prefer the written word to the oral as a means of communication. Gooch, an experienced writer-deviser, argues that in 'most rehearsal situations actors are in the majority, in some they have the whip hand. So the issue is often decided on the basis of what the actors think is real'.[128] This situation is further complicated by the fact that 'much of the writer's observation (of character particularly) is indeed from the outside, while much of an actor's craft depends on getting inside a character'.[129] There is little recognition from Gooch that the writer and actor in this way have much to learn from each other, and observations of the craft of another artist can help to open up possibilities of expression for both writer and performer. Gooch does however recognize that 'the process of writing dialogue […] can be very similar to an actor performing an improvisation'.[130] Surely familiarity with the techniques of improvisation, as a writer might observe in the devising room, would aid a playwright in the early stages of character development, or when struggling to find the appropriate words to express a complicated idea; as can be seen in the exegesis of my practice in Chapter Five, my observations of improvisational technique have greatly enhanced my own writing.

Given Micheline Wandor's argument that the most important element of a play is writer-originated dialogue, it is not surprising that she is similarly suspicious of collaboration; she states categorically that the idea of theatre being a collaborative art is a 'cliché'.[131] For Wandor, if a writer must devise, it is important that everyone knows their place: 'The cozy idea that it is just all, in some way, "collaborative", serves to mask the authority structure,

[126] Gooch, p. 53.
[127] Gooch, p. 52.
[128] Gooch, p. 53.
[129] Gooch, p. 54.
[130] Gooch, p. 55.
[131] Wandor, p. 13.

keep the writer in a constrained place and conceal the extraordinary and imaginative process with which a dramatist works.'[132] Whilst she does admit that students of 'writing drama benefit a great deal from working with, interacting and acquiring some training in performance and directing', she insists that 'the skills entailed in writing cannot be collapsed into, or confused with, the skills entailed in performance and production'. Although it is true that playwriting is a distinctive skill, Wandor's comments on collaboration seem short-sighted. As the case studies in Chapters Three and Four show, it is possible for a playwright to work collaboratively within a hierarchical structure that emphasizes the skills of individual practitioners, yet benefit from the sharing of ideas, workload, and cross-fertilization which inevitably result from devising methodology.

Happily, a handful of writers do recognize the importance of understanding the craft of their fellow theatre practitioners (even if they do not explicitly reference devising). As seen in Appendix B, many of the early how-to writers (of the late nineteenth and early-mid twentieth centuries), advised that the playwright should develop an intimate knowledge of stagecraft through hands-on experience as a performer or backstage. 'A Dramatist' insists that to 'attempt to become a play-writer without practical experience of the land behind the scenes is like trying to build an easy chair upon a knowledge of cabinet making derived from *Cassell's Popular Recreator*'; he urges aspiring playwrights to 'go upon the stage'.[133] Though there is less recognition in contemporary texts of the importance of a writer's understanding the craft of her fellow artists, a number of writers do state the usefulness of an intimate knowledge of performance. To Gassner's aforementioned examples of writer-performers Shakespeare, Molière, and Ibsen, one could add ground-breaking contemporary playwrights who also had experience in other stage jobs: Harold Pinter (actor and director);

---

[132] Wandor, p. 22.

[133] 'A Dramatist', p. 19. *Cassell's Popular Recreator* was part of a series of books published by Cassell & Co in the nineteenth century offering basic, practical advice on a number of subjects. An electronic copy of the text can be found at < lcweb2.loc.gov/service/rbc/rbc0001/2012/2012houd15070/2012houd15070.pdf> [accessed 21 May 2015]. See also entries for Basil Hogarth and Norman Holland in Appendix B which suggest playwrights should gain experience as actors.

Suzan-Lori Parks (studied acting at Drama Studio London); debbie tucker green (stage manager); Philip Ridley (actor/performance artist). Maria Irene Fornes, who studied performance because she wanted to 'find out how actors work so that my writing can feed into the way actors work', says that she 'learned more about writing plays from Gene Frankel's school of acting than from that course I took in playwriting at the same school'.[134] In fact, as Paul Castagno reveals, theories of performance have had a profound effect on the vocabulary of playwriting: 'Playwrights and play developers have adopted the terms of the actor: *through line*, *arc*, *subtext*, *fleshing-out*, *intention*, *obstacle*, and *conflict* are as solvent for the actor as they are for the playwright.'[135] This observation confirms the interdependence of the various roles within a collaboration, and negates Wandor's argument that theatre is not collaborative. Playwrights must be aware of the methodologies of their collaborators, as, although writers, directors, designers, and performers all use different tools, ultimately these tools are employed to the same end, a theatrical performance which exits as a complete unit interweaving various elements such as design, speech, and movement.

It is puzzling that collaboration with other theatre artists is given such short shrift within pedagogical texts (and within many courses of study). Whether it occurs as part of the devising process, or in instances when a playwright is part of the rehearsal process, many playwrights interact with other professionals. Writers of drama are entirely reliant on other artists for their work to be realized performatively; surely the playwright seeking advice within the pages of instructional manuals is not being fully served by texts which fail to recognize these crucial, interdependent relationships.

Conclusion

The training of playwrights is an industry. Though many writers do have success without formal education, the growth of postsecondary courses and the increasing number of

[134] Maria Irene Fornes, 'You Have to Learn How to Daydream', in *Playwrights Teach Playwriting: Revealing Essays by Contemporary Playwrights*, ed. by Harrington and Bain, pp. 1-21 (pp. 2-3).
[135] Castagno, p. 52.

pedagogical texts published would indicate that many writers wish to learn more about their craft. Yet, in a theatrical landscape where new, more collaborative forms of performance-making are becoming popular, the pedagogy of playwriting remains heavily reliant on Aristotelian theory and conventional approaches to creating scripts. What does this mean for playwrights (who may have made a significant financial investment in their training)?

Forms of theatre which Lehmann would describe as 'dramatic' are still popular and there is an appetite for the tightly-structured, singular protagonist type of play, especially on commercial stages and in amateur theatre. The majority of playwrights, however, will not begin their careers in commercial theatre. The opportunities within fringe and community theatre are far greater for fledgling playwrights, and it is particularly within these arenas that writers will often be expected to engage with collective creation. It is clear from the original research conducted for this chapter that many playwrights are not adequately prepared for collaborative relationships and that devising, although gaining some recognition within postsecondary courses, is not considered an essential part of a playwright's training. This is not only detrimental in terms of employability; it also means that playwrights are not being taught to consider essential aspects of performance that go beyond the written word. A literary approach to playwright training under-emphasizes performativity and theatrical innovation. As Liz Tomlin argues, it is not surprising that 'the eventual playtext that results from a predominantly literary pedagogical process is more than likely to share a comparable formal shape with the many other plays which have gone before it'.[136]

It is no coincidence that many successful playwrights have experience in other theatrical disciplines such as acting, and some playwrights seek out performance training in order to compensate for a lack of focus on non-textual elements within playwright pedagogy. When playwrights experience devising methodologies, they are offered the opportunity to observe how other practitioners create work, and consider alternative approaches to generating material. Conversely, when trained playwrights enter the devising room, they

[136] Tomlin, p. 121.

bring with them a wealth of knowledge which helps their collaborators to structure work and ensure coherence. The reluctance pedagogical writers display about devising methodology is either clearly stated within a few texts (Wandor and Gooch), or implicitly suggested through an avoidance of the subject. Rather than focusing on the more difficult aspects of devising, or ignoring devising completely, surely playwrights would be better served by pedagogical texts which offer suggestions on how to work effectively in collaborative settings. These texts, however, are yet to be written; I have suggested in this chapter ways in which these future texts could be framed.

This chapter thus constitutes an important first step in the analysis of how playwrights learn their craft, an area which has, until now, suffered from academic neglect. Additionally, apart from the survey conducted for this chapter, there has been no attempt made to consult playwrights about their training and areas they feel require more attention. It is clear that many playwrights wish to know more about, and engage with, devising. Following on from Chapter One, there is also a need for individuals within the collaborative framework who hold the specific skills of a playwright. The writer-deviser, who combines dramaturgical and performative skills and experience, represents a potentially ideal approach to play-making. Chapter Three therefore examines the practical application of this ideal.

Chapter Three

The Historical and Contemporary Context of the Writer-Deviser

> My feeling is that the energy in British theatre has moved elsewhere and that elsewhere is largely into an area of work where the writer, director and everyone else involved in the production work as collaborators and there is no singular vision but a shared vision.[1]

Introduction

As Chapter One established, devised and collaborative forms of performance have invaded mainstream theatre, and the creative methodologies involved are no longer considered radical. On the other hand, as observed in Chapter Two, traditional methodologies for playwrights still prevail in pedagogy and literary development. This tension extends to the definitions pressed upon contemporary performance, as Alex Chisholm suggests:

> This opposition posits particular qualities and values to the two types of theatre: New Writing does narrative, story, characters and naturalism, whereas New Work does non-linear, non-narrative, non-naturalism. New Writing and New Work is then developed in different ways, programmed and managed by different people, sold to different audiences.[2]

As Liz Tomlin argues, there has been a 'growing conflation of innovation and non-text based practice over the late 1990s and early 2000s, significantly supported in academic circles by

[1] Lyn Gardner, 'Writing as Collaboration: Experiments in Form', in *The Skeleton Key: Unlocking the Secrets of Writing Outstanding Plays 'For' and 'By' Young People*, ed. by Joe Sumison (Ellesmere Port: Action Transport Theatre Company, [n.d.]), pp. 9-11 (p. 10).

[2] Alex Chisholm, 'The End of "New Writing"?', *Exeunt*, 11 May 2012 <exeuntmagazine.com/features/the-end-of-new-writing> [accessed 2 July 2015].

the growing influence of Hans-Thies Lehmann's definition of postdramatic theatre'.[3] Yet, as has been observed in Chapter One, Lehmann does not argue for the absence of text in postdramatic theatre, merely that it does not stand as the one dominant feature.

Although Chisholm's statement indicates that for programming and marketing departments in theatres there appears to be a need for delineation, this chapter argues that, for artists and, arguably, audiences, this traditional-text versus innovative-performance binary is largely irrelevant. As Tomlin states, the dichotomy exists as a predominantly 'economic rather than aesthetic preoccupation'.[4] Indeed, many companies associated with devising do, at some point, engage with text, many spectators do not financially discriminate between either category, and a number of playwrights work within the liminal space between text and performance. Whilst still a minority faction, the methodologies of these writers are gaining ground since many are, as David Lane writes:

> breaking through the staid and restrictive image of being simply autonomous providers of a list of lines, and moving closer towards what we might refer to as 'performance writing': a space where writers explore and develop their work in a direct and active relationship with other practitioners and spaces.[5]

I therefore advance a title, as proposed in the introduction to this dissertation: the writer-deviser. The writer-deviser is defined as a playwright, with some training or experience in traditional methodologies of scripting, who engages with other theatre artists (including, but not limited to performers, directors, and designers) in the early stages of the development of a new piece of performance, working within a collaborative context. This definition contains within it a wide spectrum of processes, and the specificity of the writer's involvement can vary greatly from project to project. It includes: the writer who provides passages of

[3] Liz Tomlin, 'Chapter 2: British Theatre Companies 1995-2014', in *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014*, ed. by Liz Tomlin (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), pp. 55-125 (p. 96).
[4] Tomlin, p. 100.
[5] David Lane, *Contemporary British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 1.

unstructured text which are then developed and used in performance; the writer who uses and organizes textual contributions from cast and director; and the writer who observes a period of improvisation and discussion and then uses these observations to write a script on her own.[6] Following the discussion in Chapter Two highlighting the difference between a playwright and a dramaturg, it is essential that the writer-deviser's work within collaborative contexts must include a significant amount of her own original, creative writing.

The writer-deviser is an ever-expanding methodological category. Moreover, the impact of the writer-deviser category extends beyond the original event. This chapter (and the subsequent case study of Bryony Lavery in Chapter Four, followed by an examination of my own practice in Chapter Five) presents evidence that playwrights who have worked closely with other artists are inevitably marked by this experience. Even when producing work without the benefit of a collaborative development process, writer-devisers use their experience to think more holistically, and 'work with *all* the elements of language of the theatrical event […] the whole theatre, not just what is said on stage'.[7]

As there are many categories of performance, so there are numerous classifications of devised performance. Whilst I recognize the commercial and methodological significance of devised literary adaptations such as have been popularized by Shared Experience and Kneehigh, the processes involved in adapting pre-existing (and often canonical) texts are specific and would require a chapter in their own right.[8] Similarly, the practice of using devising methodology to aid a writer in assembling a production based on verbatim text is popular in some theatrical cultures, but as the interview-led process is quite intricate, it deserves greater attention than can be provided in this chapter, though it is touched on in

[6] See Chapter Two for a discussion of the difference between a playwright and dramaturg.
[7] John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre, Audience, Class and Form* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), p. 6.
[8] For a more detailed examination, consult Duška Radosavljević's chapter 'Devising and Adaptation: Redefining "Faithfulness"' in her text *Theatre-Making*: *Interplay Between Text and Performance in the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 56-188; or Sarah Sigal's chapter on Shared Experience in her unpublished PhD thesis 'The Role of the Writer and Authorship in New Collaborative Performance-Making in the United Kingdom from 2001-2010' (University of London, Goldsmiths, 2013), pp. 113-79.

passages about the Canadian devising company Theatre Passe Muraille [*sic*]. The focus of this chapter is on work which primarily originates within the devising workshop; text which has been crafted by the writer-deviser must have been mainly influenced by developmental performance and creative input by collaborators. This analysis, complementary to the practice elements of this dissertation, allows for a detailed investigation of how a collaborative approach can aid the writer by providing source material on how the writer-deviser functions within collaborative contexts, and how the work produced is symptomatic of the related processes.

As such, and to emphasize the fact that contemporary writer-devisers (including, significantly for the research query at the centre of this dissertation, myself) have inherited a tradition reaching back decades, if not further, the chapter begins with historical examples of writer-devisers. This includes a case study of *Cloud Nine*, one of the best-known examples of a production in which a playwright (Caryl Churchill) engaged with actors and a director in the early stages of script development. These studies are not intended to provide a potted historical timeline of writing, but stand as instructive cases, indicating the various ways writers can engage with devising, and which practices can lead to positive or negative experiences for collaborators (and audiences). Contemporary examples are subsequently provided, including a case study of a collaboration between Zuppa Theatre and writer Kate Cayley, in order to examine the current position of the writer-deviser, and confirm that devising with a writer in place remains an established, and ever-expanding, praxis.

The practitioners featured have been chosen in order to provide a varied view of contemporary devising practice. Each company or artist featured has developed their own particular methodology for creating text, and though these processes may differ slightly from production to production, the performances produced are intricately bound up in how each company views text within performance. The emphasis in this chapter on analyzing examples, as opposed to engaging with academic commentary on the writer in the devising process, signifies the fact that very little has been written on this specific methdodology. A

small number of critics, including David Lane, Liz Tomlin, Roger Bechtel, and Duška Radosavljević, have addressed the topic, either as specific chapters and case studies, or embedded into general commentary in larger books about devising or contemporary theatre practice. Sarah Sigal's doctoral dissertation is a useful overview of collaborative contexts which involve writers, but takes the experience of companies as her focus, rather than examining the specific development of the individual writer-deviser. Apart from the above texts, there is very little academic discourse on the subject, and in particular, few detailed case studies of the embedded playwright. Therefore, this chapter contains original material and analysis, in the hope that other academics will recognize the necessity of further commentary and debate on this under-served topic.

In line with the stated focus, exclusions, and autobiographical information contained in the Introduction, the examples are drawn from British and Canadian theatre practice, not to imply that these are the only two countries in which writer-devisers operate, but to represent my own background. The chapter ends with an extended conclusion, using the examples provided to reflect generally on which aspects of process can lead to successful collaborations, or alternatively, can create negative experiences for collaborators and their eventual audience. This conclusion serves as a framework for the investigation of my own practice in Chapter Five, and the creation of a Toolkit for writer-devisers and the companies with which they work.

Historical Examples of Writer-Devisers

Despite its associations with the postdramatic and avant-garde, the concept of the writer-deviser is not particularly new. Though we have no direct evidence that the plays of Shakespeare and Molière were created via the methodologies commonly associated with contemporary devising, the fact that these two writers worked closely with an ensemble of actors (and were occasional actors themselves) meant their texts benefitted from an

'embodied understanding of [their] potential effect on an audience. In other words, these texts would be informed by a kinaesthetic intelligence […] typical of an actor'.[9]

Nevertheless, devising itself, and the participation of a writer distinct from other artists within the devising room, only became a formalized practice in the twentieth century. Indeed, there have been few attempts to name the process of devising which involves a writer as distinct from that in which the text of the play is created without an individual, specified writer. As Radosavljević states: 'most of the recent texts on the subject struggle or, indeed refuse, to draw clear lines between various manifestations of what we call "devising".'[10] Likewise, there have been no attempts to determine formally a historic lineage of the writer-deviser. Considering there are numerous high-profile British examples of work developed via writer-deviser methodology, this is rather curious. Whilst there has been much commentary on canonical texts such as *A Taste of Honey* (Shelagh Delaney and Theatre Workshop); *Fanshen* (David Hare and Joint Stock); and *Vinegar Tom* (Caryl Churchill and Monstrous Regiment), amongst other well-known examples, little effort has been made to place them within a lineage of texts created by writer-devisers.[11]

Indeed, there are few examples of productions devised without a writer-deviser which have achieved as high a prominence as the texts listed above. This is arguably due to a preference within English theatre for text-based productions, along with the fact, as discussed in Chapter One, that the ephemeral nature of unscripted performance means it is much more difficult to document and analyze than a script-based play. Yet, the critical field of study on devised and collaboratively-created performance is widening without much attention to the

[9] Radosavljević, p. 105.
[10] Radosavljević, p. 61.
[11] For example, the entries for Shelagh Delaney, David Hare, and Caryl Churchill in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* do mention that Delaney and Churchill worked with Theatre Workshop and Joint Stock respectively, but do not place these works within a historical context of devising. The text does not mention Hare's collaboration with Joint Stock for *Fanshen*, giving the impression that it was created as a solo playwright: *Dictionary of Literary Biography: British Dramatists Since World War II*, 2 vols, ed. by Stanley Weintraub (Detroit, MI: Bruccoli Clark, 1982). For Shelagh Delaney, see pp. 138-42; for Churchill, see pp. 118-24; for David Hare, see pp. 234-43. Additionally, chapters in *British Playwrights, 1956-1995* detailing the work of these three writers make no mention of the devising process in relation to the plays mentioned above: *British Playwrights, 1956-1995*, ed. by William W. Demastes (London: Greenwood Press, 1996).

playwright's role in the process, and little effort has been made to differentiate the forms this involvement can take. As such, the present historical skeleton of the writer-deviser must be confined to notable examples in the United Kingdom and (in order to inform the case study of Zuppa Theatre presented later in the chapter) Canada.

The waters are further muddied by a semantic argument about notions of 'playwriting' versus 'performance writing'. As Heddon and Milling observe, even the first wave of devisers working in the 1950s and 1960s 'frequently combined devised performance with text-based work in their repertoire, or moved easily from text-based, and back, over time'.[12] However, academic and critical differentiations between text and performance still permeate. John Freeman argues that the term performance 'suggests the body', as it is 'less suggestive of text, of text-as-word'.[13] He further develops the argument by stating '[i]f dramatic plays occupy a space where we feel we know something of the rules of engagement, writing for performance is located within a landscape where only uncertainty reigns'.[14] For Freeman, playwriting exists in the realm of the dramatic, where participants follow rules of process, including defined roles and a structure for delivery of work. The role of writer-deviser does not fit easily into this schema. Performance writing exists in opposition, occupying the postdramatic space (though Freeman does not refer to the postdramatic), with writing subsumed by more physical forms of representation.

This binary is often suggested within the academic realm by the naming of courses and departments. Within the title of the MA in Text and Performance at RADA and King's College, University of London (a course which I undertook in 2006-07), the usage of the connective 'and' suggests the two are considered separate issues. Goldsmiths, University of London, changed the name of the 'Drama' department to 'Theatre and Performance' in 2012; the 'Theatre' portion of the name presumably suggesting text-based drama in opposition to

[12] Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 30.
[13] John Freeman, *New Performance/New Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 10.
[14] Freeman, p. 28.

other forms considered 'Performance', including dance, sport, movement, and installations. In London, certain performance spaces are known for new writing (such as Theatre503, the Finborough, the Royal Court, and the National Theatre) and it has been unusual to see work there which would fall under the rather vague category of 'performance', although, as indicated in Chapter One, this is changing. Likewise, there are institutions such as the ICA, the Albany, and Battersea Arts Centre where there is more of an emphasis on work that would typically fall under the 'performance' category.

Nevertheless, these are becoming spurious categories, and companies and artists strongly associated with the performance tradition can be seen at venues known for text-based theatre.[15] A symposium at Royal Holloway, University of London, on 26 September 2015, titled 'Are We on the Same Page? Approaches to Text and Performance' took as its main task the act of challenging 'binaries between devised and text-based theatre', and included practitioners such as Tim Crouch who, despite crafting the majority of text in his productions, regards himself as a theatre-maker rather than a playwright (though he did occasionally use the term playwright in reference to himself).[16] Performance writing tends to be more closely aligned with devising, although as Duška Radosavljević (also a participant in the Royal Holloway symposium) argues: 'My research into contemporary ensemble theatre has shown the academically and politically defined distinctions between new writing, devising and live art/performance are most definitely dissolved in those contexts where collaborative modes of theatre-making prevail.'[17]

[15] For example, the National Theatre introduced a space called The Shed (opened in 2013, during the refurbishment of the Dorfman Theatre, and originally named The Temporary Theatre), which often featured work which might fall under the 'performance' category. It closed in May 2016, but the legacy of the building is being seen in the National's current (2016) programming, which includes work by live artist Bryony Kimmings, and a workshop on 2 November 2016 titled 'Devising for Performance Explored' <www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/shows/devising-performance-explored> [accessed 19 October 2016].

[16] Catherine Love, 'Are We On the Same Page?', *Exeunt*, 17 September 2015 <exeuntmagazine.com/features/are-we-on-the-same-page/> [accessed 19 November 2015], and my own observations from Tim Crouch's interview at the Royal Holloway symposium.

[17] Radosavljević, p. 103.

My own observations of companies such as Athletes of the Heart, Zuppa Theatre, Shaky Isles, and the Chaosbaby Project, and personal experience of being a playwright within a collaborative context, confirm this statement. Athletes of the Heart (observed during October 2009 at Goldsmiths, University of London) devised *Sick of Love*, based on the performers' own experience of relationships, and incorporated text (from the Biblical Song of Songs, and quotations from Roland Barthes) at a late stage of the work. It worked as an accompaniment to the performers' gestus, flipping the traditional relationship of text to performance, by acting as an undercurrent to the movement, rather than the director of the audience's attention. Zuppa, as will be explored later in the chapter, use traditionally-scripted text, text generated in the rehearsal room, and pre-existing non-dramatic text, to generate work. Shaky Isles and the Chaosbaby Project (I observed development work of the Chaosbaby Project during July 2012), both incorporated Open Space technology to generate material, and embedded a number of writers within the development process, who each generated scripts which were incorporated into the whole performance.[18]

The involvement of a playwright can take many forms, and tends to be determined by the demands of a specific project, rather than any pre-determined categories of methodology. Indeed, even when a writer works in isolation, the results (as are revealed by the writing of numerous contemporary playwrights such as debbie tucker green, Martin Crimp, Caryl Churchill, and Philip Ridley) can be located within the postdramatic, uncertain landscapes which Freeman claims are the territory of performance writing. As Tomlin argues, 'models of new writing', often (and somewhat ironically) derived from companies associated with devising methodology, 'have begun to permeate the establishment both in terms of what it

[18] Open Space is a system formalized by Harrison Owen, based on communication techniques observed in a number of indigenous cultures, and originally created for use in business meetings; Open Space World, <www.openspaceworld.org> [accessed 19 July 2013]. The usage of Open Space technology is now being disseminated through Phelim McDermott and Improbable Theatre's associate artists such as Stella Duffy and Matilda Leyser, as well its usage across the country in Improbable's Devoted and Disgruntled events, where theatre-makers gather to discuss, collaborate and plan in Open Space, as well as their workshops (including the 'Making It Up' workshop 11-16 July 2011). Open Space operates on a number of principles, including: the people who are in the room are the right people; the law of two feet; and anyone in the room can call and/or join a session.

produces and the diversity of textual frameworks that commissioned writers are now permitted to explore'.[19] Playwriting and performance writing are categories vulnerable to regular re-definition, and therefore the focus of examination must be on the act of writing in itself. Thus, this dissertation recognizes that there is no standard methodology for the usage of text within collaborative theatre-making, and rejects the notion that writers must identify themselves as either playwrights or performance writers. A potential historical account of the writer-deviser must therefore include a wide spectrum of analysis of the ways in which writers can be embedded within the development process.

Theatre Workshop

Though there is evidence of Michael Chekhov's collaboration with playwrights at the Chekhov Studio, the historical example of a company engaging with a writer-deviser which is better-documented and therefore better-known is Theatre Workshop.[20] The company's work centred on the development of scripts. However, as Heddon and Milling argue, 'the playwright was not king'. They go on to quote Joan Littlewood in a 1959 radio interview: 'the playwrights have got to be in the theatre […], then perhaps out of our type of play, which have a great deal of improvisation in them, we shall get better plays.' [21] Robert Leach claims the company absorbed the 'playwright into the collective', a process which 'worked best when the author's script, the starting point of the process, was fairly raw, as *A Taste of Honey* was'.[22] In Theatre Workshop's case, the bare bones of a script would be generated before the development process, and then the company would use improvisational activities to add to it, including occasionally introducing new characters. As Leach explains:

[19] Tomlin, p. 123.
[20] Cassandra Fleming details Chekhov's collaboration with playwrights at the Chekhov Studio: 'A Genealogy of Embodied Theatre Practices of Suzanne Bing and Michael Chekhov: The Use of Play in Actor Training', unpublished PhD thesis (De Montfort University, 2013), pp. 289-91.
[21] Heddon and Milling, p. 31.
[22] Robert Leach, *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the Making of the Modern British Theatre* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), p. 163.

> Often this work proceeded through mime or movement without words, seeking the heart of the episode. Thus, an actor's truth was established which might then require revision of the script. […] From this process, a final production script was reached — though it must be noted that this was not sacrosanct or untouchable during the play's run.[23]

For a young, new writer like Shelagh Delaney, whose working-class background and gender would have precluded her work from being accepted in the 1950s at many other institutions, this experience offered her a life-changing opportunity; arguably, her background and gender also made it easier for the company to insist on their right to rework the text. It is relevant in a discussion about the significance of devised work to note that *A Taste of Honey*, and its film version, remain the work Delaney is best known for, despite a portfolio of film and television scripts.[24] Brendan Behan, whose breakthrough play *The Quare Fellow* (1954), was adapted by the company for a production at Theatre Royal Stratford East in 1958, fully supported the version of his play developed by Littlewood and the actors. Speaking after the first night, he stated: 'Miss Littlewood's company have performed a better play than I wrote.'[25] Again, though Behan did have prior experience writing poetry, the development of *The Quare Fellow* by Theatre Workshop came at a time when his playwriting career would have been considered nascent. It, along with Behan's alcohol-fuelled chat show appearances, made him a household name; he went on to write *The Hostage* for Theatre Workshop before dying at the age of 41, leaving an unfinished script, presumably meant for development by Littlewood.[26]

Not all Theatre Workshop writer-devisers enjoyed the process. Playwright Frank Norman, whose play *Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be* (1959) was produced by Theatre

---

[23] Leach, p. 163.
[24] Dennis Barker, 'Shelagh Delaney Obituary', *Guardian*, 21 November 2011 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/nov/21/shelagh-delaney> [accessed 22 November 2015].
[25] Leach, p. 167.
[26] Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, *Changing Stages: A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), pp. 263-64.

Workshop, claimed: 'The moment of a play's acceptance [at Theatre Workshop] was very often the moment of departure from it.' Littlewood took the script, which started out as a straight play, and added musical numbers by Lionel Bart. Norman describes the process as: 'a forlorn author would sit hunched in the stall and gaze up at a stage littered with discarded pages as Littlewood tore his play to bits with her bare hands, cut out the heart, and gave it the kiss of life and tossed it to the assembled company of improvisers.'[27] As Norman's original manuscript is unavailable, it is difficult to know if his complaints were justified, or if Theatre Workshop's production represented an improvement.[28] However, his unhappiness over the loss of control over his work is not an isolated incident amongst writer-devisers; as the embedded writer rose in prominence in line with increased experimentation with devising methodology, to the point that companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company embraced the process, so some of the pitfalls of the process became more apparent.

US: Peter Brook and the RSC

Another well-known historical example of a playwright engaging with devising methodology was Dennis Cannan's involvement with the RSC anti-Vietnam War production of *US* in 1966, directed by Peter Brook, and described as a 'group-happening-collaborative spectacle'.[29] Because there 'were no plays touching' the theme of the Vietnam War, and Brook was given access to the Royal Shakespeare Company's actors, they decided on a non-traditional approach to the subject:

> But how? We had no answer, but urgency was clearly the motor. […] The pressure was the need to be ready, to deliver without falling back on any of the clichés, the precooked ideas of the Left or the Right […]. We all agreed on one basic sacrifice. To meet our deadline and

[27] Frank Norman, *Why Fings Went West: A Time Remembered* (London: Lemon Tree Press, 1975), p. 46.
[28] The play won the Evening Standard Award for Best Musical in 1960: 'Evening Standard Theatre Awards: 1955-1979' <www.standard.co.uk/goingout/theatre/evening-standard-theatre-awards-1955-1979-7236386.html> [accessed 20 June 2016].
[29] Heddon and Milling, p. 73.

> to do this as best we could, art could never be our goal. If the end product was not up to cultural standards that had driven so much work in the past, then that would be just too bad.[30]

These comments, made by Brook over forty years after the original production, may be a reaction to some of the criticism levelled at *US*.[31] The development process, like many devised pieces, involved a period of research where the company read historical and current information on Vietnam, and met with 'officials, diplomats, journalists — dissidents, opponents, anarchists', from which the company developed improvisations. A 'gruelling' workshop was held, run by the then-unknown Jerzy Grotowski. The authors, Denis Cannan, Michael Kustow, and Michael Scott, contributed 'fragments of writing', and 'gradually by trial and error, a form began to evolve'.[32]

The piece, which was finally performed at the Aldwych Theatre, was formed of two parts. The first was, according to Brook, 'a collage of contradictions'. The second was a 'concentrated dialogue written by Denis Cannan and played by Glenda Jackson [and others] on the theme of self-immolation as protest'.[33] Michael Kustow credits Brook with succeeding under trying circumstances, claiming that it was a 'miracle' that Brook 'managed to hold together a fissparous group and make a piece that deployed arguments, developed a dramatic line and was unmistakably theatre'.[34] However, some recognition must be given to contribution of the writers, whose presence helped to create a plausible through-line, which RSC audiences, unaccustomed to devised work, might accept. Arnold Wesker, in an open letter to the company, stated that he could feel 'the presence of a single writer' in the second half', and wrote there were 'some powerful passages, the bulk seems to be the product of one

[30] Peter Brook, 'Introduction 2010 to *US*', in *Theatre in Pieces: Politics, Poetics and Interdisciplinary Collaboration, An Anthology of Texts 1966-2010*, ed. by Anna Furse (London: Methuen Drama, 2011), pp. 3-5 (pp. 3-4).
[31] Director and critic Charles Marowitz stated that 'the underground swell against this production is so great that one begins to shift position to redress a balance': 'The Royal Shakespeare's *US*', *Tulane Drama Review*, 2 (Winter 1966), 173-75 (p. 175).
[32] Brook, p. 4.
[33] Brook, p. 5.
[34] Michael Kustow, 'On *US*', in *Theatre in Pieces*, ed. by Furse, p. 12.

hand'.[35] Wesker's comments must be mitigated by the fact that he is a playwright whose own plays reveal a preference for non-collaborative working methods. Because the production employed RSC actors, playwrights, and appeared on a West End stage, critics struggled to define it. Jean-Paul Sartre claimed 'we cannot call it a play', and the Bishop of Woolwich stated it was more a 'liturgy' than a play.[36]

Examining the script forty years after the original production (which has never been revived; a fate which befalls many devised productions), it appears no more radical than work presented by companies such as Forced Entertainment or the Wooster Group, though it is conspicuously more political. The first act is a series of tableaux and agit-prop-style songs, which do follow a historical through-line, attempting to educate the audience on Vietnam's past and create a sense of the chaos of its present. The desire of the company to share as much of their extensive factual research as possible is palpable. There is very little in the way of character development (unless Vietnam can be considered a character), but one could argue that the idea of character is largely irrelevant in such a production. Act Two is more dependent on dialogue and monologue, as opposed to spectacle, to develop arguments, and, to a greater degree than Act One, presentation of character, though, similar to the discussion of Forced Entertainment's work in Chapter Two, the characters are versions of the actors themselves. On the page, large sections of text prevail, with little interruption for songs or tableaux. Stage directions exist to augment speech, rather than being actions in their own right, until we reach the final moment, where a butterfly is set alight.[37] Given these features, which seem connected to traditional modes of playwriting, it is easy to see why Wesker argued that the hand of the writer was obvious; indeed, the stylistic imprint made by some writers, such as Mike Leigh, becomes so strong that the contributions of collaborators can be overlooked.

---

[35] Arnold Wesker, 'Open Letter to the Team', in *Theatre in Pieces*, ed. by Furse, pp. 82-5 (p. 84).
[36] '*US*', in *Theatre in Pieces*, ed. by Furse, pp. 81 (Sartre) and 77 (Bishop of Woolwich).
[37] *US*, in *Theatre in Pieces*, ed. by Furse, pp. 13-74.

Mike Leigh

Productions such as *US*, and Joan Littlewood's work at Theatre Workshop, whilst not universally lauded, had a lasting effect on a number of companies and writer-devisers in Britain, including John McGrath, Mike Bradwell, who founded Hull Truck, and Mike Leigh.[38] As argued in Chapter One, Mike Leigh has, in many ways, become emblematic of the writer-deviser (or writer-deviser-director) in Britain, though his body of work, especially in the later years, has focused on film, and, as Roger Bechtel reveals, he is 'rarely and scantly mentioned in histories of devising'. Bechtel suggests this is due to the fact that 'the historians of collective creation have been suspicious' of Leigh 'because [he] engenders hierarchies of profit and power'.[39] Leigh started developing his process in 1965, because he was 'inherently bored by directing scripts that already existed. I also found it arid to sit in a room, writing'.[40] Like many writer-devisers, Leigh trained as an actor (at RADA), and developed his 'sense of drama in theatre', writing plays for the stage before moving into film.[41] This background will have provided Leigh with a keen sense of the link between speech and physicality. Though his work does tend to be rooted in dramatic speech as opposed to physical spectacle, it is notable for the fine attention to physical detail (including 'character quirks of speech, gesture and appearance').[42] During a placement at the Midlands Arts Centre, he made his first steps into devising through developing work via improvisations with young people. These early efforts did not display much finesse; Leigh describes his process as: 'You're the dog; you're the Dad; you're the Mum, now improvise.'[43]

---

[38] See John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre, Audience, Class and Form* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), and Mike Bradwell, *Inventing the Truth: Devising and Directing for the Theatre* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2012), for autobiographical accounts of their work in devising.

[39] Roger Bechtel, 'The Playwright and the Collective: Drama and Politics in British Devised Theatre', in *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*, ed. by Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 39-50 (pp. 42 and 49).

[40] Bert Cardullo, '"Making People Think Is What It's All About": An Interview with Mike Leigh', *Cinema Journal*, 50 (2010), 1-18 (p. 3).

[41] Cardullo, p. 10.

[42] Freeman, p. 116.

[43] John O'Mahony, 'Acts of Faith', *Guardian*, 19 October 2002 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2002/oct/19/rsc.artsfeatures> [accessed 25 November 2015]. The

Leigh learned from these experiences that:

> if, as a dramatist, he was genuinely to be in control of the material, he must get in on the ground floor of character-making and share the work *with* the actor instead of abdicating it *to* the actor and confining his function to an orchestration of what the actor comes up with.[44]

This observation is significant. It recognizes that the involvement of the writer, especially in terms of assisting actors to generate material which is then translated into an original script, is crucial to the process. The writer is as reliant upon the performer in the creation of the work, as the performer is upon the writer. Leigh prefers to draw from 'actual specific experience' of his actors, arguing that this makes the content 'richer'; as a result he has become 'selective in his casting' to ensure he has actors who are able to generate personally resonant material and who are comfortable within his process.[45]

Leigh eventually developed two distinct phases within the rehearsal period, for both plays and film: the 'pre-rehearsal' stage and 'structuring'. Pre-rehearsal, which generally takes up six weeks of the development period, involves actors' creating lists of the people they know (who are the same sex), selecting material from those lists, and creating characters, who are then 'changed, extended and modified'; it is when 'the characters meet each other and when the substance of their lives together is created throughout extensive improvisation and research'.[46] The audience may never see the material generated during this time, but it informs the final determined action of the play or film.[47] At the end of this phase, Leigh 'writes a scenario', which leads into the next phase, structuring. This phase '*might* follow the narrative events of the pre-rehearsal very closely, and equally it might not'. For

---

Midlands Arts Centre has been identified as one of the earliest locales for formalized devising in the United Kingdom. See Chapter One for further details.

[44] Paul Clements, *The Improvised Play: The Work of Mike Leigh* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 17.

[45] Clements, pp. 17 and 22.

[46] Clements, p. 33.

[47] Clements, p. 38.

example, Leigh states that the narrative structure of *Abigail's Party* (arguably Leigh's best-known piece of work, which appeared on stage and television) was composed of 'a little of what had happened in pre-rehearsal and a great deal of what I thought ought to happen'.[48] Then, working with the actors, Leigh goes 'over all the material again and challenge[s] it moment by moment', with the flexibility that things can be added or discarded until they reach a final version. Though this process can often result in a play or film in which the speech feels spontaneous, there is no 'improvisation or spontaneous invention of dialogue in performance'.[49]

Significantly, Leigh also directs the work, meaning that a formalized script, mapping out the action and dialogue of every moment, is not necessary. This could negate the notion that Leigh is a writer. However, like all playwrights, he carries responsibility for the dialogue and structure of the piece; whether the performance text is written down before a final version is created is irrelevant to the dramatic work produced, and, as evidenced above, he does create written text throughout the process.[50] Though Leigh carries authorial status, the work he creates would be impossible without the collaboration of performers from the earliest stages; his methodology means that the characters created and their relationships are the product of a process with the writer-deviser at the centre. However, it is problematic; as Roger Bechtel argues: 'Just as it seems ethically dubious for the collective to abrogate the playwright's authority, it seems just as dubious for the authority figure to claim the collective's authorship as his own.'[51] The issue of ownership within productions utilizing a writer-deviser has been a thorny one, as discussed in Chapter One; an examination of Anthony Nielson's work later in the chapter attests that it continues to be.

[48] Clements, p. 52.
[49] Clements, p. 55.
[50] Some of his plays have published scripts, including *Abigail's Party*: Mike Leigh, *Abigail's Party and Goose-Pimples* (London: Penguin Books, 1983).
[51] Bechtel, p. 45.

Theatre Passe Muraille

Canada also has a rich history of devising, though with origins more closely aligned to grassroots verbatim theatre. The company most strongly associated with collective creation in Canada, is Theatre Passe Muraille, founded in Toronto in 1968 by director and writer Jim Garrard, 'to explore new models'.[52] Garrard was 'heavily influenced by the theatre experiments of La Mama in New York and he saw Passe Muraille as a similar response to conventional naturalistic theatre aesthetics and the Canadian theatre mainstream'.[53] It came to prominence under the directorship of Paul Thompson, whose 'free-form improvisation by the actors' became 'the most influential type of collective playmaking in Canada during the 1970s'.[54] Theatre Passe Muraille's best-known piece of work, *The Farm Show*, was devised without a playwright, and based on the observations of the company who researched the production by living in a rural Ontario community and developing improvisations and verbatim-style dialogue based on their observations.[55] Despite Thompson's refusal to advocate 'the primacy of the writer in his collective enterprises', the company did bring writers in on subsequent projects, and, according to Diane Bessai, was 'influential in the development of certain writers for the theatre'.[56]

The typical Theatre Passe Muraille process involves the actors' improvising, based on documentary research. A Theatre Passe Muraille writer might introduce text, often (but not always) based on observations of improvisational work, but it is not necessarily included in the final script. The writer's involvement seems to have differed from project to project, and at times a playwright could be treated as a 'glorified secretary', merely recording the work

[52] <passemuraille.ca/> [accessed 20 November 2015].
[53] Michael McKinnie, 'Space Administration: Rereading the Material History of Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto', in *Essays on Canadian Writing: Materializing Canada*, 68 (1999), 19-45 (p. 21).
[54] Bessai, p. 28.
[55] The introduction to the script states: 'All the characters in this play are non-fictional. Any resemblance to living people is purely intentional'; *The Farm Show: A Collective Creation by Theatre Passe Muraille* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1976), p. 1.
[56] Bessai, p. 15.

produced by director and actors.[57] Acting as an amanuensis, whilst potentially fulfilling an important role within the devising process, and allowing for some creative decision-making in terms of *what* is noted down, de-qualifies the individual from the category of writer-deviser, as there is a lack of significant individual creative input.

Playwright Betty Jane Wylie approached the company with an idea and research for a production about a United Church minister who had been wrongly prosecuted, titled *The Horsburgh Scandal* (1976). Once work began, she found it difficult to adjust to the company's methodology, particularly that 'for most of the rehearsal period, the writer as well as the director must serve the performers rather than the script'. Written work and offers to go away and come back with a script were brushed aside, and her attempts to 'select and compile some of the better improvisations' were also rejected. She played 'court stenographer', recording everything that occurred in rehearsals, and eventually offered a 'deliberately simplistic three-act outline "with a beginning, a middle, and an end; with a protagonist, an antagonist, a pivotal character and an obligatory scene"'.[58] For Wylie, who came from a traditional, solo playwriting background, the lack of definition of her role within the workshop room, coupled with no dictates as to what she should be producing, left her feeling that the production was 'more of a theatrical exploration of social surfaces rather than depths'. This was despite Thompson's decision to bring writers into the process because he felt the 'need for stronger narrative structures for the more complex stories'.[59]

Other writers had more positive experiences. Rick Salutin, an experienced writer-deviser, developed *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* (1976), using the research of the actors which then informed improvisations. He was more comfortable working within the uncertainty of the workshop room than Wylie, indicating that 'each scene developed its own form: through the collective's trial-and-error method rather than out of any sense of direction'.[60] Novelist

[57] Bessai, p. 43.
[58] Bessai, p. 116-18.
[59] Bessai, p. 116.
[60] Bessai, p. 86.

Ruby Wiebe, who developed *Far As the Eye Can See* (1977), also had a positive experience as a writer-deviser, possibly due to the fact that he had 'an agreement with Thompson that, when the improvisational process came to an end, he would be writing a play', so he did not need to concern himself with writing in the workshop room.[61] Wiebe 'took home more than 300 pages of notes' from the workshop and 'wrote a first draft of the play just in time for the full-cast rehearsal period of three more weeks'.[62]

The varying experiences of writers working within Theatre Passe Muraille's process are instructive. It is notable that Wiebe and Salutin, unlike Wylie, did not come to the work from a background of solo playwriting, and both began with a more concrete structure for creating material. At any rate, Theatre Passe Muraille's methodologies were highly influential, and whilst traditional, dramatic theatre is still the most dominant form on Canadian stages, devising, in its various forms, is used by many contemporary companies in Canada to create work. They include Zuppa Theatre, who will be examined later in the chapter.

Monstrous Regiment

As evidenced in Chapter One, there was a movement during the second wave of devising away from the cooperative company structure which did not recognize individual specialities, and 'collective playwriting waned in the face of the dissipation of the ideals of communality and the difficulties of the craft'.[63] Hierarchies re-appeared, and there was recognition (by some companies), that the inclusion of a writer within the devising process benefitted the work. For example, feminist company Monstrous Regiment, who, 'in the early days […] demanded the involvement of every member of the company with the script at all stages', eventually admitted that they 'had been through the painful experience of writing shows

[61] Bessai, p. 119.
[62] Bessai, p. 114.
[63] Gerald Rabkin, 'Is There a Text on This Stage?: Theatre/Authorship/Interpretation', *Performing Arts Journal*, 9 (1985), 142-59 (p. 143).

collectively in other groups to know that the skills of playwriting was one skill we wanted to acknowledge'.[64] Relationships with writers were not always unruffled; in developing the play *Scum* (1976), the company re-wrote the work of playwrights Claire Luckham and Chris Bond whilst they were away, and when the writers saw what had been done with their work they 'weren't at all happy'.[65] Gillian Hanna, one of the company's founding members, argues that, in working on the material, the actors and director 'were going through an experience which the writers couldn't be a part of through an accident of physical separation' (Chris Bond had been appointed Artistic Director of the Liverpool Everyman and the couple had to spend a good deal of time there).[66] This is a problematic situation not only because a writer-deviser may be unhappy with the rejection of her text and the addition of passages written by others, but if the writer is credited as playwright on the production, as Roger Bechtel argues: 'the text stands in for the author and the author stands up for the text.' This can be 'either a boon or a bust', depending on the situation; a playwright may be commended or castigated for text which she has not written. Bechtel states: 'As compensation for bearing this burden, if not for assuming a task beyond the ability of the collective as a whole, it seems ethically imperative that the author be granted a certain authority over the text.'[67]

An unhappy relationship does not necessarily lead to an unsuccessful production: according to the website Unfinished Histories, *Scum* opened at the Chapter Arts, Cardiff to 'great acclaim'.[68] Rosalind Asquith, reviewing for *Time Out*, stated: 'Each scene is a beautifully constructed cameo in its own right and the whole is very funny, conscientiously researched and with superb music to boot.'[69] In this case, Luckham and Bond benefitted from the attribution. The company eventually moved on to have positive relationships with

[64] Gillian Hanna, 'Introduction' in *Monstrous Regiment: Four Plays and a Collective Celebration*, ed. by Gillian Hanna (London: Nick Hern Books, 1991), pp. xiii-lxxxiii (pp. xiii, xxxiii).
[65] Hanna, p. xxxiii.
[66] Hanna, p. xxxv.
[67] Bechtel, p. 41.
[68] '*Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing*', <www.unfinishedhistories.com/history/companies/monstrous-regiment/scum-death-destruction-and-dirty-washing> [accessed 20 June 2016].
[69] Rosalind Asquith, 'Monstrous Regiment in *Scum: Death, Destruction and Dirty Washing*', *Time Out*, 21-27 May 1976, p. 17.

playwrights such as Bryony Lavery and Caryl Churchill. In so doing, they developed a more flexible approach to defining the involvement of a playwright: 'As it turned out, there was no recipe for what that relationship might be, and each one of our ventures with writers — whether it ended happily or unhappily — was different from others.'[70]

As suggested by the introduction to this section, the above does not present a complete history of the writer-deviser. Rather, the chosen examples are illustrative of the multitude of approaches to embedding writing into collaborative contexts, within and amongst different companies, and provide examples of methodologies which may have influenced subsequent generations of theatre-makers. Yet, it is apparent that there is no standard methodology for the writer-deviser, and some experiences are clearly more positive than others. Joint Stock, founded by directors William Gaskill and Max Stafford-Clark, manager David Aukin, and playwright David Hare, is probably the company best known for working with writer-devisers; their process has become influential to the point that it is now referred to as the 'Joint Stock method', though their modes of working have not been consistent with every playwright.[71] The writer with whom Joint Stock had the longest-standing relationship was Caryl Churchill, who is herself strongly associated with collaborative theatre-making. An examination of one of their best-known productions, *Cloud Nine*, is therefore useful for a detailed analysis of the writer-deviser experience. Alongside its influence on my own work, this production makes an ideal case study due to the availability of first-hand accounts from participants, and a detailed narrative of the process via Max Stafford-Clark's diaries and other sources. As such, it provides explicit detail of one particular approach to theatre-making involving a writer-deviser, which highlights both the pitfalls and benefits for the writer and her collaborators, and exists as part of the foundation for the investigation of my own practice.

---

[70] Hanna, p. xxxiii.

[71] Sarah Freeman, 'Joint Stock Theatre Company', *The Literary Encyclopedia: Postwar and Contemporary English Writing and Culture, 1945-Present*, ed. by Aleks Sierz <www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=1655> [accessed 20 June 2016].

Case Study (a): *Cloud Nine* by Caryl Churchill

When Caryl Churchill was asked to work with Joint Stock on a project Max Stafford-Clark provisionally titled 'Politiques Sexuelles' in 1978, [72] the two had a common history of writer-deviser methodologies. Churchill's first experience was working on a project titled *Strange Days* (1975) with director Joan Mills and school children from William Tyndale School in Islington.[73] They approached the workshop with the idea that 'the writers who create plays for children might not necessarily understand a child's imagination', and used exercises and discussions with the children to try and access their thought processes and fears.[74] In 1976, a year Churchill describes as a 'watershed', she was asked to join workshops with Joint Stock and Monstrous Regiment. Comparing this to the solitary experience of writing for radio, Churchill states: 'All the time that I was doing radio plays, I don't think I met any writers, or anyone else just connected with the theatre', but working with the two devising companies helped her to see 'how your own inner feelings connect up with larger things that happen to other people'. [75]

Along with *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, another production developed with Joint Stock, Churchill entered the workshop with Monstrous Regiment to create *Vinegar Tom*, about the seventeenth-century persecution of women accused of witchery. She describes feeling 'exhilarated' after meeting the company for the first time, and experiencing a different way of creating work: 'I [had] never discussed my ideas while I was writing or showed anyone anything other than a final polished draft. So this was a new way of working which was one of its attractions'.[76]

---

[72] Max Stafford-Clark's Diary, 22 July-6 October 1978, London, British Library, MS 79545, p. 1.
[73] Dan Rebellato, 'On Churchill's Influences', in *The Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill*, ed. by Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 163-179 (p. 170).
[74] Philip Roberts, *About Churchill: The Playwright and the Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 166.
[75] Caryl Churchill, interviewed by Geraldine Cousins, 'The Common Imagination and the Individual Voice', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 13 (1988), 3-16 (p. 4).
[76] Elaine Aston, *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 33.

Whilst the writer-deviser experience was a new one for Churchill, by 1976, Joint Stock had already established a methodology for working with playwrights from the earliest stages. The members of Joint Stock developed a working pattern which consisted of 'an initial workshop with actors and writer, followed by a gap', in which a 'script was developed by the writer, which then formed the basis of subsequent rehearsals'.[77] Significantly, this process allows the writer to observe (and sometimes set up) improvisations, discussion, and other practical research tasks, thereby becoming acquainted with the particular strengths of individual performers, but also to have time to reflect and write, away from the demands of the workshop room. This process was an expansion of Stafford-Clark's methodologies developed whilst artistic director at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh; his 'big influences' had been the 'wild' American devising companies Open Theatre, La Mama, and the Living Theatre.[78] In the Traverse Workshop Company minutes, he noted that '[e]ncouraging and developing playwrights is and must remain the most important aspect of the Traverse's work', yet:

> there's a growing dissatisfaction with actors standing on a stage making speeches and people sitting in an audience listening. This 'movement' is groping towards additional methods of expressing emotion and feeling, through voices, through dance movement and through a much greater physical involvement.[79]

By incorporating the playwright in the early stages of work, along with providing material and research, the writer would be more open to forms desired by the actors of expression alternative to dialogue.

Joint Stock initially made its name with *Fanshen*, a collaboration with playwright David Hare, based on William Hinton's book about Communist land reform in 1940s China.

---

[77] Philip Roberts and Max Stafford-Clark, *Taking Stock: The Theatre of Max Stafford-Clark* (London: Nick Hern, 2011), p. xvi.
[78] Roberts and Stafford-Clark, p. 31.
[79] Roberts and Stafford-Clark, p. 7. Stafford-Clark includes quotations in the text from the minutes of meetings held by the Traverse Workshop Company.

Influenced by the politics of the novel, the company developed a structure in which 'all decisions were monitored and scrutinized by meetings of the whole company'; significantly, the majority of company members were actors. The pattern for work was also set:

> An extended preparation period, typically ten weeks, is divided into a four week workshop and a six week rehearsal. During the workshop, actors, writer and director explore the subject matter, each contributing ideas and undertaking research. Improvisation, talks by experts [...], interviews with character models, research trips, reading sessions, group discussions, a vast assortment of games and exercise — all are used to generate material for the play.[80]

In the break between workshop and rehearsal, the writer composes the play. Whilst material might be drawn from improvisations, the writing of the script is treated as 'an independent creative act', which may result in something quite different from the material covered in the workshop.

Working in this way, especially in a company which allows all members to have significant input into decisions, is not always easy for writers.[81] That some playwrights find this methodology challenging is suggested by the fact that, with the exception of Caryl Churchill, there 'has never been a prolonged relationship between the company and particular writers'.[82] Churchill compared the experience positively to solo writing, stating: 'If you're working with a group of people, one approach is going to have to be from what actually happened, or what everyone knows about—something which exists outside oneself.'[83] In other words, the initial workshop stage allows writers to think in greater detail about the experience of others, challenging their own perceptions, widening the field of reflection, and, arguably, aiding in creating a piece which resonates with a larger audience. Churchill credits

[80] *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, ed. by Rob Ritchie (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 18.
[81] *The Joint Stock Book*, ed. by Ritchie, p. 20.
[82] *The Joint Stock Book*, ed. by Ritchie, p. 30.
[83] Churchill, 'The Common Imagination', p. 4.

this process with helping to inspire her writing: 'I could give endless examples of how something said or done by one of the actors is directly connected to something in the text.'[84] This resonates with Alan Filewood's quotation from Chapter One, that although the skills employed by a writer-deviser to construct a devised narrative may not differ greatly from that of non-devised theatre, it is the 'quality' of the creative contribution amassed from a group, as opposed to the reliance upon an individual imagination, which offers benefits. However, in her introduction to *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill is careful to note that the play 'is not improvised: it is a written text and the actors did not make up its lines'.[85]

Two years after *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, Churchill returned to work with Joint Stock on *Cloud Nine*. From an initial discussion on 13 September 1978, before the *Cloud Nine* workshop took place, Stafford-Clark records 'Caryl's Breakdown' of areas of exploration as: '1. Male and female: different expectations: role reversal: relationships (male and female) within homosexual relationships, 2. Family, 3. Class, 4. Sex and Aggression.' Other Churchill quotations recorded in Stafford-Clark's diary in reference to topics of investigation include 'the ultimate impossibility of living one's life through a man, and finding one's whole *raison d'être* in the idea of love', and 'that bastion of social conservatism, the family'.[86]

Stafford-Clark assembled a group of actors, specifically choosing performers 'both for their sexual orientation and for their acting ability'.[87] The actors initially met with the director on 17 September, without Churchill present, to improvise and take part in games such as 'This End That End', and using playing cards denoting status to play with relevant scenarios (a favourite workshop activity of Stafford-Clark's).[88] Churchill joined them the

---

[84] Caryl Churchill, 'A Note on the Production', *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* in *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 183-85 (p. 184).
[85] Churchill, 'A Note on the Production', p. 184.
[86] MS 79545, p. 91. Stafford-Clark often abbreviates words in his diaries, which have been expanded in this dissertation to aid clarity. For example, the reference cited appears in the diary as: '[…] diff expectations: role reversal: relationships (m + f) within homosexual relationships.'
[87] Roberts, *About Churchill*, p. 71.
[88] Max Stafford-Clark's diary (MS 79545), passim, lists daily plans of activities. 'This End That End' is a game which forces participants to make decisions, by positioning themselves in the room

next day, and the company discussed individual expectations for the workshop, beginning the process of revealing intimate details about their lives, their relationships, and the familial forces which had shaped them.[89]

The next few weeks of the workshop followed a pattern of improvisations and games, most determined by Stafford-Clark, but occasionally set by Churchill or the performers, and interviews and discussions with cast members and invited guests about their childhoods, parents, and sexual relationships. Books such as *The Female Eunuch*, *With Downcast Gays*, *The Women's Room*, and Shere Hite's work, were read and discussed.[90] R. Darren Gobert claims that Churchill's work on *Cloud Nine* also 'bears the influence' of writers such as 'Frantz Fanon, Jean Genet, and Michel Foucault'.[91] Attitudes towards gender and sexuality were explored, and '[s]ex became the predominant issue'.[92] The game 'Interviews' (observed by Churchill) involved each person sitting in the middle of the group, whilst others asked questions which the interviewee would have to answer truthfully. The group also invited members' partners, or important people who had shaped their sexual identity, to come in and talk. Carole Hayman's 'granny' told a story about her sister, Maud; Maud is the name of the grandmother in Act One of the play.[93] An important moment in the process came when they persuaded the caretaker of the rehearsal rooms, who had previously rebuffed gestures of friendship, to tell them her story, as actor Anthony Sher describes:

> the woman had expressed curiosity about our workshop and Julie had invited her to one of the sessions... Soon she was telling us her life

according to the applicability of a statement about their personal circumstances (thank you to Joint Stock actor Lou Wakefield for an explanation of the game, via email correspondence between Sue Dunderdale and Karen Morash, 8 December 2015).

[89] MS 79545, p. 98. Throughout the workshop process, Stafford-Clark recorded many of the intimate details revealed by the performers and Churchill. According to Miriam Margolyes (in a telephone interview with Karen Morash, 27 March 2011), he had made it clear to the cast that everything said during the preparatory period was confidential, though he later revealed some of these details in his book *Taking Stock*, an act which Margolyes termed 'absolutely disgraceful'.

[90] Anthony Sher, in *The Joint Stock Book*, ed. by Ritchie, p. 139, and MS 79545, p. 112.

[91] R. Darren Gobert, *The Theatre of Caryl Churchill* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2014), p. 88.

[92] MS 79545, p. 116.

[93] Margolyes, interview, 27 March 2011; the observation of the usage of the name Maud in the play is my own.

> story which, not surprisingly, was full of harsh personal relationships: a strict upbringing, a husband who had beaten her, men constantly being dismissive and cruel until recently when she had met one who was different and with whom she had finally, in her middle age, been able to experience her first 'organism'. We asked her what it had felt like and her answer was to inspire the title of our play – 'It was like being on cloud nine'.[94]

The influence of this moment is seen not only in the title of the play, but also in the evolution of the character Betty, who moves from sexual repression in Act One ('I live for Clive. The whole aim of my life / Is to be what he looks for in a wife.'), to liberation at the end of Act Two:

> I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there. And one night in bed in my flat I was so frightened I started touching myself. […] and my hand went down where I thought it shouldn't, and I thought well there is somebody there.[95]

Following the workshop, Churchill had a writing period of twelve weeks, and then returned to the group with the script.[96] As Churchill says, the 'idea for a workshop isn't necessarily an idea for a play', and the plot and structure of the script which she brought to the group seemed, on the surface, to bear little resemblance to the group improvisations.[97] The first act was set in Victorian colonial Africa, revolving around a British family; in the second part, the family had aged twenty-five years, but the setting of the play had jumped one hundred years, to 1970s Britain. This unusual structure was Churchill's: 'a very quick idea as I was walking down a street.'[98] However, reading through Max Stafford Clark's workshop diary, notably the accounts of actors and guests deriving from their 'interviews', there is a

[94] Sher, in *The Joint Stock Book,* ed. by Ritchie, p. 139.
[95] Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, in *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 242-320, (p. 251 [Act One] and 316 [Act Two]).
[96] Churchill, 'Introduction', *Cloud Nine*, pp. 245-47 (p. 247).
[97] Roberts, *About Churchill*, p. 74.
[98] Roberts, *About Churchill*, p. 74.

distinct sense of a diverse group of people struggling to combat the attitudes towards gender and sexuality impressed upon them by parents. Churchill says: 'when the company talked about their childhood and the attitudes to sex and marriage that they had been given when they were young, everyone felt that they had received very conventional, almost Victorian expectations.'[99] Though there may not have been a coherent link in Churchill's mind between the accounts provided in the workshop and the Victorian African setting she concocted, the link between colonial oppression and sexual repression is clear. Sher's account of being brought up by black servants in South Africa, and his realization at a young age that he was gay, seem a likely influence on both the setting of Act One and the character of Edward, a boy with clear homosexual instincts, which become fully realized in Act Two.[100] Additionally, the group improvised scenes based on the master/servant relationship; this theme resonates throughout the play, not only in the portrayal of Joshua and Clive, but within many other relationships, including Joshua's misogynistic attitude towards Betty in Act One, and the reversal of the traditional parent-child dynamic in Act Two.[101]

The play has also become well known for the trope of casting against type: Betty, the wife of colonial patriarch Clive, is played by a man; Joshua, the black servant, is played by a white man; Edward, the young son, is played by a woman; and Victoria, the daughter, is represented by a doll. The visual impact for an audience is obvious, and the metaphors resonant, yet, as Churchill says, like 'so many things that happen in plays, it came about from the solution of a quite practical problem and then fell into a theoretical justification as well'. The practical problem was that she wanted to set it in colonial Africa but had an entirely white cast; the solution was placing a white actor in the role of a black man, emphasising how Joshua was performing what the dominant patriarchal character (Clive) wanted him to be. Churchill then saw the potential to extend this trope by having Betty in the first act also

[99] Gobert, p. 99.
[100] MS 79545, p. 122, and Gobert, p. 99.
[101] MS 79545, p. 125.

played by a man.[102] The particular make-up of the workshop participants, therefore, led to the innovative distribution of roles, which is reinforced in the published character list, with the intention that future productions would follow suit.[103] The imprint of the devising process upon the writer is clear.

The cast responded positively to the first act, but had misgivings about the second part, which originally had Clive and Betty from Act I, retired, and living in a coastal bungalow, where they are visited by their children and partners. A meeting was held, 'during which Caryl bravely and patiently suffered the ordeal of her baby being subjected to group molestation and battering, it was agreed all round that she should go away and rewrite it completely'. [104] Whilst the cast rehearsed the first act, Churchill produced a new second act, set in a London park and featuring Victoria and her partner Lin as central characters; Anthony Sher claims it was 'clearly a descendant of the workshop, with its central characters our own generation, with monologues reminiscent of our life stories'.[105] Though there were still some objections from the cast, particularly in regards to casting, this version was rehearsed, and Churchill continued to make amendments, taking into consideration her observations and Stafford-Clark's notes.

The period of script delivery and rehearsal is often difficult for writer-devisers. There is the impetus to honour the work done by the actors during the workshop period, coupled — or perhaps in conflict — with the writer's individual artistic voice. As Churchill says, 'you simultaneously write a public play and a private play, but it's both for oneself and for others'.[106] The 'others' in this scenario are not just the audience (though they must also be considered); the devising process means that the playwright will have observed the processes of individual actors closely, and this work may be highly affective, revealing, as was the case

[102] Roberts, *About Churchill*, p. 75. It should be noted that this casting, particularly the representation of a black character by a white actor, is considered by some to be problematic.
[103] Churchill, *Cloud Nine*, p. 248.
[104] Sher, in *The Joint Stock Book*, ed. by Ritchie, p. 141.
[105] Sher, in *The Joint Stock Book*, ed. by Ritchie, p. 141.
[106] Churchill, 'The Common Imagination', p. 5.

with *Cloud Nine*, personal details of their collaborators' lives. When working as a solo playwright, there is no need to consider the effect upon anyone else of excluding intimate material that an actor has revealed; the needs of the narrative comes before that of the actors. As documented in the account of my involvement with the devised play *The 9.21 to Shrub Hill*, the presentation of early drafts to performers is a particularly stressful time for writer-devisers, as actors may not initially understand why a writer has chosen to discard particular material, or include aspects which emerge completely from her own imagination; in some cases, actors may choose to leave a production because of this.

Furthermore, in traditionally-scripted drama, actors agree to take part knowing the breadth of a role in advance. In devised productions, they commit without knowing what their role will entail. The character of Maud in Act One, whose function within the action seems largely irrelevant, was arguably created in order to provide a number of roles to match the number of the cast, and to ensure all actors had something to do in Act One and Act Two. It is difficult for a writer, especially with a large ensemble, to create characters of equal weighting. Actors unhappy with their roles may, under the guise of 'workshopping', attempt to critique the script in order to instigate edits which they view as more favourable for their particular character.[107] Additionally, because they have a greater degree of ownership of the production, having been involved in the early stages of development, actors may feel more liberated to assert their opinions than they would in traditional rehearsal scenarios. This is not to say that the contribution of actors during this period is necessarily unhelpful or self-centred, but, as Churchill argues:

> I'm rather dubious about this recent practice of putting a writer through rewrites by giving them readings and workshops and I understand many writers are beginning to feel burdened by it. It can be helpful but there's a danger of its ironing out a writer's idiosyncrasies. I'm not sure what would

[107] Anthony Sher admits that his objections to the second draft of Act II sprung with his unhappiness about being given a 'small […] part'; *The Joint Stock Book*, ed. by Ritchie, p. 141.

> have happened to Brecht or Beckett, workshopped by director and actor contemporaries.[108]

In other words, in attempting to incorporate the contributions of a diverse cast, the singular voice of the playwright may become diluted and actors may be accommodated to the detriment of the script; this also applies to non-devised plays which are 'workshopped' with the expectation that the writer will complete another draft based on feedback. There is also the problem of a hierarchy of opinions. Should the director's input have more weight than the actors'? Are the suggestions/demands of an actor who has developed a specific role more valid (in terms of the writing of his/her particular character) than other collaborators? Do age and experience mean that certain critical comments are considered more carefully? Churchill did go on to say, however, that workshopping a script is 'a different thing from having a workshop to research material by actors, director and writer', indicating she still views the early, developmental stages of devising to be beneficial.[109]

Cloud Nine played to ninety-two per cent capacity and 'helped eradicate the [Royal] Court's deficit'.[110] It went on to tour widely, has had a number of revivals, and, given its regular appearance as a university and A-Level set text, has reached canonical status in the United Kingdom.[111] Roger Bechtel claims it has 'indisputably become a modern classic'.[112] Churchill continued to engage with devising methodology for a number of years, including projects such as *A Mouthful of Birds* (1986), for which she collaborated with choreographer Ian Spink, and *Mad Forest* (1990), a project developed with the Central School of Speech and Drama. Since the late 1990s, however, all of her projects have been written non-collaboratively. Yet, the stamp of the devising process is still there in her work, which

---

[108] Caryl Churchill, email to Karen Morash, 12 March 2010.
[109] Churchill, email, 12 March 2010.
[110] Gobert, p. 100.
[111] For example, the play is a set text on the *OCR A Level Drama and Theatre Studies Syllabus*: <www.ocr.org.uk/Images/242650-specification-accredited-a-level-gce-drama-and-theatre-h459.pdf> [accessed 21 June 2016].
[112] Bechtel, p. 49.

features the kind of polyvocality seen in *Cloud Nine*, inspired by listening to the various experiences of her collaborators. Additionally, her recent work continues to display an intimate awareness of and trust in the capabilities of actors and directors, and a willingness to let physical action dominate over text, which is characteristic of devised work. This was exemplified in the 2015 National Theatre production of *Here We Go*, directed by Dominic Cooke. Churchill's script notes instruct that the number of actors, gender, and age can be determined by the director. The stage directions for the first act allow for distribution of speech by cast and director. Most strikingly, the third and final act contains no speech, and consists of two actors performing the repetitive actions of getting dressed and undressed '*for, as long as the scene lasts*'.[113] This created, based on my viewing of the production, an emotionally devastating effect.

It is important to note that when Churchill first experienced devised theatre-making, like Shelagh Delaney, she was still at a relatively early point in her career; the specific structure of participating in an initial workshop, then being given the freedom to write independently, was a formative one. As a young writer she would have been provided with a secure base of research, and the knowledge that her work was addressing the concerns of a group of people (as opposed to one individual: herself), yet given a high degree of artistic freedom. As playwright Moira Buffini states: 'Such a way of working creates ensemble plays, plays about society. It's hard to write an epic about a nation in your garret (I have tried it).'[114]As Churchill's experience attests, the experience of being a writer-deviser is not uncomplicated, and given the confidence that has come with critical appreciation and, arguably, age, she now chooses to work non-collaboratively. Churchill's technical virtuosity as a writer must be acknowledged since, though the unusual structure of *Cloud Nine*, the nuanced portrayal of gender of sexuality, and even the title were inspired by the initial

[113] Caryl Churchill, *Here We Go* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015). I observed a matinee production on 17 December 2015 at the National Theatr (Lyttleton Theatre).
[114] Moira Buffini, 'Caryl Churchill: The Playwright's Finest Hours', *Guardian*, 29 June 2015 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jun/29/caryl-churchill-the-playwrights-finest-hours> [accessed 30 June 2015].

workshop, it is Churchill as an individual artist who was able to process this material and generate a ground-breaking script. Thus, in incorporating collaborative devising processes with the particular skills of a playwright, Caryl Churchill embodies the figure of the successful writer-deviser.

The Twenty-First Century Writer-Deviser

The previous section established historical precedents of writer-devisers who have had a lasting influence. In order to argue for the continuing significance of the writer-deviser within performance praxis, and to examine how the processes involving a writer within devising methodology continue to evolve, it is crucial to provide examples from the landscape of twenty-first century performance-making and its critical reception. This also provides a professional and methodological context for my practice, as a writer-deviser who has, and continues to, work in the early twenty-first century.

As David Lane writes, the 'tendency to compartmentalize theatre into easily identifiable genres misunderstands the frequency with which the varied languages of theatre-making overlap, particularly in collaboratively written or devised work when influences on the composition of the work are multiple'.[115] The desire, whether it be academic or in the interests of marketing, to delineate performance into knowable categories, is one which does not serve the interests of companies and practitioners who adopt different methodologies for each project. Likewise, whilst the dominant writer-deviser model within British theatre has historically been one in which the writer observes a period of research and development, then writes in isolation, it would be mistaken to assume that this is always the case. A playwright's activities may also alter from project to project, especially in the case of those writers who are not core members of companies and are instead brought in on an ad hoc basis. The following examples provide evidence of the multitude of approaches which can fall under the umbrella of contemporary writer-deviser methodology.

[115] Lane, p. 82.

Forced Entertainment

In the landscape of twenty-first century theatre practice, even the title of playwright is questionable; in certain companies individuals take on the role, but do not assign themselves the title. For example, Tim Etchells, of Forced Entertainment, often provides text for performances (though there is no standard formula for a Forced Entertainment show), yet is not given the title playwright, and the company 'is rarely discussed in the framework of new writing' despite being 'in the vanguard of such development'.[116] He is also, notably, known as a writer in other forms, independent of his work with Forced Entertainment.[117] A typical workshop pattern for Forced Entertainment is:

> one or two days of practical work, followed by four or five days' discussion, analysis, writing and model building. From four to six weeks of this, comes a basic set design, text ground rules and a performance 'feel', which are important starting points for the company's work.[118]

According to Alison Oddey, the text of Forced Entertainment shows sometimes comes from improvisations, 'but more normally' it derives from 'ideas and discussions with the rest of the group', who are involved in re-writing and revising the text. The job of playwright is described as: 'writer of text within the devising process, rather than writer of a show.'[119] This less-defined authorial structure is recognized in the lack of a writer's credit within production listings, and the rejection by Etchells of 'an authentic authorial voice' in

[116] Heddon and Milling, p. 202; Tomlin, p. 119.
[117] Etchells' website <timetchells.com> describes him as 'an artist and writer', and contains examples of his text-based work [accessed 21 June 2016].
[118] Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 36.
[119] Oddey, pp. 52-53.

the work.[120] The role of the writer is one of 'contributor of text to the devising process, and as a participating member of the company making a performance'.[121] This contribution of text does, however, fulfil some of the role of a script: the documentation of devised performance is notoriously difficult, yet Forced Entertainment have taken special effort to produce and publish textual evidence of productions. The book *Certain Fragments* contains a section titled 'Performance Texts'; the examples provided do not uniformly look like traditional playscripts, and description of physical movement, staging, and signs held up to the audience are included alongside (or sometimes apart from) spoken text. They are meant to stand as 'ghosts' of the performances rather than as directions 'for other people to "do" them', yet they share with other scripts of plays already performed the same function of a (limited) preservation of performance.[122] With the exception of *Speak Bitterness*, which credits text to members of the ensemble, the authorship is denoted as 'Forced Entertainment/Text by Tim Etchells'. Though Etchells bemoans the fact that playwriting 'is still, sadly, the measure too often employed in the UK, despite a rich history of writers in theatre spaces who are doing something quite different', in developing text for performance, he performs a task distinctive from, yet dependent upon, his collaborators.[123] In this, he fulfils the criteria of a writer-deviser.

This approach is reflected structurally in many of Forced Entertainment's productions, such as *The Coming Storm* (2012), *The Thrill of It All* (2010), *The World in Pictures* (2006), *Bloody Mess* (2004), and *First Night* (2001), amongst others. They work loosely on a central theme, but take the audience from quiet and intensely introspective monologues, to large moments of bombastic spectacle; the two consistent features of these

---

[120] Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson, and Katie Normington, *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 6.
[121] Oddey, p. 54.
[122] Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 133. The performance texts included are *(Let the Water Run its Course) to the Sea that Made it Possible*; *Emanuelle Enchanted (or a Description of this World as if it were a Beautiful Place)*; *Club of No Regrets*; and *Speak Bitterness*.
[123] Etchells, *Certain Fragments*, p. 98.

pieces are (ironically) inconsistency and personal narratives which are often conflicting. It is not clear if these are mere illusions of autobiographical performance, but it is the performers' voices, rather than the writers', which appear to dominate. However, these strands have been subtly woven together by a guiding hand, and structured towards a synaesthetic finish similar, though perhaps more visually ostentatious, to what one experiences in traditional dramatic theatre.

Recent productions seem to signal the presence of the writer more strongly. *The Possible Impossible House* (2014), Forced Entertainment's first work for children, listed as being 'conceived and devised by the company in collaboration with [visual artist] Vlatka Horvat', has a format which, though mimicking the dream-like experience of moving through an ever-changing space, is still highly structured.[124] It is easy to see how the often comic moments of physicality combined with Horvat's projections may have derived from improvisation. However, the child's story, though highly surreal, has the feeling of a singular voice that is not often found in devised work. Additionally, it is 'told', in that two performers narrate and add visual and sound effects, rather than dramatize the action. Significantly, the narration changes hands between core company members with every performance, symbolically detaching themselves from textual ownership that is assumed with the above-mentioned performances where they appear to be playing autobiographical roles. Other productions, such as *Void Story* (2009) (which credits the text to Tim Etchells singularly), and *Exquisite Pain* (2005), derived from artist Sophie Calle's work, have similarly used interchanging performers. *Exquisite Pain*, according to Forced Entertainment's website, was the first time the company have worked 'from "a text"'; Calle's words have been assembled

[124] '*The Possible Impossible House*' <www.forcedentertainment.com/project/the-possible-impossible-house> [accessed 17 November 2015]. I observed a production of *The Possible Impossible House* at the Barbican on 27 December 2014.

and structured for performance, again suggesting the presence of another authorial hand or hands.[125]

Since *Exquisite Pain*, Forced Entertainment seem more interested in working with pre-existing texts (including visual texts); their 2014 production *The Notebook* is based on Ágota Kristóf's novel of the same name. A common thread throughout their work, however, is a concern with how stories are made and told, rather than the content of narrative. Tim Etchells states: 'we're often interested in narrative — how it goes wrong, how it gets interrupted, how digressions work, how stories are constructed.'[126] This self-reflexive impetus is common amongst devised work, which by nature of its process steers collaborators to think about personal approaches to story-telling and how they integrate or clash with the narrative approaches of collaborators.

Anthony Neilson: Narrative

A contemporary writer-deviser who is open about questioning narrative form is Anthony Neilson, a playwright who started as a solo writer, but has recently become associated with writing-devising, collaborating with actors in the development of scripts, for example *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2004; premiered at the Edinburgh Festival before an international tour). His process involves six weeks of development, 'the first two spent mostly talking', during which Neilson writes at night and rehearses during the day. The cast (and commissioning theatre) must be prepared for daily radical changes to the script. According to Neilson: 'I have a particularly difficult time just sitting by myself and writing. […] The pressure of this schedule forces me to circumvent that inbuilt censorship. It allows

[125] '*Exquisite Pain*' <www.forcedentertainment.com/project/exquisite-pain> [accessed 17 November 2015].
[126] Alice Saville, 'Possible Impossibilities', *Exeunt*, 16 December 2014 <exeuntmagazine.com/features/possible-impossibilities> [accessed 17 November 2015].

me to think outside my box.'[127] This is a benefit which is not often highlighted by other writer-devisers or texts: the pressure to produce work for rehearsals means that there is no time for inertia (otherwise known as 'writer's block') or self-doubt. Writing must be produced or actors and directors will have nothing to work with; this does not, however, necessitate that the substance of the material produced has been carefully considered. As Matt Trueman states, 'Neilson's process means that you can't bank on good, but interesting is a dead-cert'.[128] Like Mike Leigh, Neilson also directs his own work, 'expanding the role of the writer away from just a provider of text and into that of a hands-on theatre-maker'.[129] Neilson's case is particularly interesting, as, in taking on both roles (which each carry historical — and competing — burdens of authority), he turns the model of the ad-hoc playwright on its head: 'Neilson's performers are collaborating to assist the writer's vision rather than acting as an existing long-term company.' He maintains authorial control, but provides the actors with material to experiment with, and further develops the material according to observations. According to Neilson: 'I don't believe playwriting is something you can do by committee… what I'm looking for are ideas, reactions, inspirations, challenges, personal insights, accidental moments. The actors have a huge impact on the work but it's mostly a conceptual influence.'[130]

Neilson's 2013 Royal Court Upstairs production of *Narrative* showed clear evidence of this methodology.[131] Using a multi-layered technique to deconstruct the idea of narrative playfully from different angles, it combined traditional storytelling with postdramatic features. Narrative moments were reinforced for the audience through the use of sound, whilst overlapping scenes and a variety of visual stimuli forced spectators to make phenomenological choices. The hand of the writer was made obvious through the threads

[127] Matt Trueman, 'The Uncertain Stage', *Financial Times*, 5 April 2013 <www.ft.com/cms/s/2/11f68a64-9ad0-11e2-97ad-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2Pbw40VVq> [accessed 11 July 2016].
[128] Trueman, 'The Uncertain Stage'.
[129] Lane, p. 89.
[130] Lane, p. 89.
[131] I observed a performance of *Narrative* on 27 April 2013.

bringing disparate stories and motifs together, ironically dwelling on the human need to create narrative out of even the most random phenomena (for example, trying to place events happening in North Korea in a structure comprehensible to westerners). The actors wore t-shirts with pictures of themselves as children, and, as is common in devised work, seemed to be projecting a version of themselves (though one which becomes more and more surreal as the play progresses), reinforced through idiosyncratic movement and vocal expression.[132] This suggests a production heavily reliant on the personal contribution of actors. At the same time, the play dealt with issues of character function and dramaturgical rules, which generally fall under a writer's concerns. In the introduction to the published version of the play, Neilson states: 'Structurally, *Narrative* is an attempt to find a modern, mainstream form that accommodates these changes [neurological shifts due to increased internet usage] and mimics the "multi-tab" experience of internet surfing.'[133] Although Neilson acknowledges that the 'play would simply not exist in this form if it weren't for [the actors'] presence, their creative contributions and their personal support', his identification of a precise structural strategy indicates his control of dramaturgical aspects of the play.[134]

In the programme and published script, only Neilson was credited as writer. However, the process of devising, and some of the difficulties that stem from it, were palpable, especially as the authorial and performative obsession with narrative turns into questions of control, with characters/performers attempting to wrest control of the performance they find themselves in. As is common with much devised work, the critics seemed rather confused about *Narrative*.[135] The *Guardian*'s Andrew Dickson claimed the play covered 'rich territory', but complained that it was 'deliberately inconclusive'.[136] Charles Spencer called it

[132] For example, one performer (Zawe Ashton) created an onstage persona who is insecure about her height, and becomes comically stooped as the action progresses.
[133] Anthony Neilson, '*Narrative*' in *Contemporary Scottish Plays*, ed. by Trish Reid (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), pp. 217-304 (p. 221).
[134] Neilson, p. 219.
[135] See Chapter One for a discussion of the problematic reception of devised work by critics.
[136] Andrew Dickson, '*Narrative* – Review', *Guardian* 11 April 2013 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/apr/11/narrative-review> [accessed 2 November 2015]. Broadsheet critics often only have a few hours to respond to performances; the implications for post-

'intriguing at times, occasionally funny, but at others self-indulgent and pretentious'; Paul Taylor veered between 'intrigued amusement and admiration' and irritation that the show 'signals too early that inconclusiveness is its foregone conclusion'.[137] Ian Shuttleworth was unusual amongst the critics in recognizing how closely form was aligned to theme: that the structure gives us various 'signposts', and from those the audience constructs a narrative phenomenologically, 'not out of a sense of compulsion but simply as part of the way our brains process information'. [138] *Narrative*, in many ways, stands as the embodiment of devising, not just via the process in which it was made, but through its theme, presentation, and reception from a critical body who generally do not think audiences, can be, as Shuttleworth states: 'trusted to *make* those stories out of the ingredients he and his company of seven give us.'[139]

Shaky Isles and The Chaosbaby Project

Collaborations between writers and devising companies increasingly result in what Paul Castagno calls the 'hybrid play', a 'literary and theatrical crossbreed, a blending of genres and disparate sources, both textual and performative'.[140] It is not difficult to understand how a hybrid play is the natural child of traditional pedagogical approaches undertaken by many playwrights, focusing on text and its structural requirements, and aspects of performance training which focus on the non-linear body, physical reception, and sensation. It is not always a straightforward parentage, however, and it can be difficult to maintain a balance

---

dramatic, avant-garde, and non-traditional approaches, which can be more difficult to assess spontaneously than traditional, linear narrative models, are obvious.

[137] Charles Spencer, '*Narrative*, Royal Court Upstairs, Review', *Telegraph*, 11 April 2013 <www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/9987382/Narrative-Royal-Court-Theatre-Upstairs-review.html> [accessed 2 November 2015]; Paul Taylor, 'Theatre Review: *Narrative*, Royal Court Upstairs, London', *Independent*, 11 April 2013 <www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/theatre-review-narrative-royal-court-upstairs-london-8568612.html> [accessed 2 November 2015].

[138] Ian Shuttleworth, '*Narrative*, Jerwood Theatre Upstairs, Royal Court, London', *Financial Times*, 12 April 2013 <www.ft.com/cms/s/2/6161b236-a2a5-11e2-9b70-00144feabdc0.html> [accessed 2 November 2015].

[139] Shuttleworth, '*Narrative*'.

[140] Paul Castagno, *New Playwriting Strategies*: *A Language-Based Approach to Playwriting* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 35-36.

between the two approaches. A number of projects which performer, writer, and director Stella Duffy has been involved with attempt to keep these familial relations smooth by incorporating Open Space technology in the development and rehearsal rooms. Duffy is the artistic director of Shaky Isles, a theatre company who 'make devised work where narrative counts, and text-based work that is physical and aural', has worked closely with Improbable Theatre, and creates devised productions such as the *Chaosbaby Project*, all of which incorporate Open Space into development work.[141] The Open Space philosophy extends to recruitment: according to Duffy, 'anyone who wants to join in can join in'.[142] This means there can be a number of writers (who may also be performers) involved, along with actors, dancers, designers, and musicians.

The *Chaosbaby* workshop room had large sheets of paper on the walls, some outlining the Open Space principles, others with names of 'sessions', details of discussions and work, and the daily schedule. There were maps of sorts, and suggestions for scenes. Anyone could call a session (though there were suggestions of what, in particular, needed to be developed), and participants were free to move from one session to another, though the majority seemed to stay with their original choice. During the observed *Chaosbaby* research and development period, some sessions involved discussion or working through structural or technical issues (for example, mapping the setting), others involved improvisation, and there were sessions developing music. There was an external session for performers who wanted to observe a tango lesson. Writers could participate in sessions or work on their own to produce text. Days began with a discussion in a circle, recapping previous work and commenting on expectations, and ended with a sharing of work, and another circle for discussion. It is through these discussions that decisions were made about the final piece, yet it was clear that

[141] <www.shakyislestheatre.com/> [accessed 10 November 2015]; for an overview of *The Chaosbaby Project*, visit <www.youtube.com/watch?v=douKCPOPwIs> [accessed 10 November 2015]. I attended a performance of Skaky Isles's *TaniwhaThames* at the Oval House Theatre on 2 December 2011, and attended a *Chaosbaby* workshop 21-22 July 2012 at Make Believe Arts in London.

[142] Stella Duffy, interviewed by Karen Morash at the Oval House Theatre, London, 2 December 2011.

the participants looked to the director (Duffy) to make choices about casting, what material should be pursued, and what should be discarded.

Shaky Isles' *TaniwhaThames* (2011) was developed in a similar fashion, with a large group of participants, including a number of writer-devisers.[143] Centred on the themes of home and the nostalgia of place, it imagined that the fantastical water serpent Taniwha made a voyage with Captain Cook and lives within the waters of the Thames. The company, mainly composed of New Zealand and English performers, told a series of narratives interposed with moments of physicality and music. In contrast to *Narrative*, which had the guiding hand of one writer-director, the involvement of a number of writers was made evident in the structure of the piece. The various narrative strands were related thematically, rather than having any interdependence on each other, and varied greatly in style and temporal/physical setting; it is during the non-narrative, physical (and quite striking) moments, for example, as the cast united to create the Taniwha itself, when the production achieved its fullest sense of clarity. The narrative episodes were individually distinctive in style, and gave the sense of short plays written around a common theme. This is not necessarily negative. However, it can be difficult to realize many narratives fully in one performance. In her review for the *Guardian*, Lyn Gardner stated that although the show has a 'rich inner life', it 'sometimes felt a little elusive', and the *Time Out* review celebrates the play's 'visual poetry', but complains of 'too many underdeveloped stories'.[144] Indeed, the collaboration between performers, musicians, designers, and writer-devisers resulted in emotive, and visually and aurally arresting material, which approached its subject phenomenologically, in that there was much for a diverse audience to respond to in an individualistic way. The production was thematically, but not

[143] Please note that I have categorised writers who participated in the *TaniwhaThames* development period, using material generated from devising to create a script, as 'writer-devisers'; they did not use this term themselves.

[144] Lyn Gardner, '*TaniwhaThames* — Review', *Guardian*, 18 November 2011 <www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/nov/18/taniwhathames-review> [accessed 29 November 2015]; '*TaniwhaThames*', *Time Out* (reviewer's name not supplied), 21 November 2011 <www.timeout.com/london/theatre/taniwhathames-1> [accessed 29 November 2015].

stylistically, consistent due to the number of writers involved; inconsistency of style is not uncommon in devising, and decisions about whether or not it is problematic are subjective.

As with the historical examples, the above accounts of twenty-first century writer-deviser practice present a limited overview of the ways in which playwrights are currently engaging with devising methodology. The productions discussed vary greatly in content, structure, and the specific involvement and process of the writer-deviser. There are, however, conclusions about work produced by writer-devisers which can be made from these examples. The first is a fascination with form and structure, which sometimes takes precedence over narrative content. Secondly, and following on from the first point, non-linear storytelling tends to dominate. Thirdly, critics are often confounded by devised work, and attempt to apply to devised work the same parameters of assessment as they would use for non-devised theatre. Critical reception to devised work, and in particular performance which includes a writer-deviser, is an area which requires further academic scrutiny. Finally, the ways in which writing practice have been incorporated into the company's process are often revealed in the work itself. In order to examine this correlation between process and product closely, a case study of a specific writer-deviser's involvement in a contemporary production is useful; in being allowed access to both the development work and an early showing of Zuppa Theatre's *The Archive of Missing Things*, I have been able to observe first-hand the integration of a writer into the work of a company well-known for devising practice. In so doing, and in combination with other case studies presented in this chapter, I am able to investigate how the role of the writer-deviser in the performance-making process is both evolving, and made evident in the work produced. This first-hand observation, as an outside eye within the collaborative context of another company, also allows me to place my role as both participant and observer in the creation of the two plays presented as the practice element of this dissertation, within a methodological context in Chapter Five.

Case Study (b): Zuppa Theatre's *The Archive of Missing Things*

Zuppa Theatre is a collective based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, whose core ensemble consists of director Alex Maclean, performers Susan Leblanc, Ben Stone, and Stewart Legere, along with a number of associate actors, musicians, and designers with whom the company regularly collaborates.[145] The company receives funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, amongst other organizations, and tours internationally. Zuppa's work has inhabited a wide spectrum of genres over its fifteen years of existence, and includes literary adaptations, work devised entirely by the company, and traditionally-scripted drama. According to their website, they represent theatre 'that uses the whole animal', and at 'the heart of each show is the restless spirit of the actor', which suggests that the words of the playwright are not the dominant concern of the company.[146]

Roberta Barker observes that their work 'is distinguished by playful juxtapositions of physical action, found and new text, evocative objects and powerful live music'.[147] Bruce Barton identifies their lineage as: 'the strenuous rigour of Jerzy Grotowski (via Eugenio Barba, Richard Fowler, and Ker Wells) and the *bouffon*-inflected clown work of Philippe Gaulier.'[148] It is clear, from these descriptions and my own observations, that there is a strong emphasis on physical expression: at times in the form of stylized movement and choreography, and others a more naturalistic form of physicality. The company is also notable for the intermedial aspects of their work, where technology is used both functionally (for example, mobile phones used for sound and lighting effects) or to add dimensions of meaning. Nevertheless, there is also a strong focus on story-telling, and text is an essential ingredient in their work. Zuppa's approach does not fit easily within the traditions of Canadian devising, in that it is not overtly grassroots in the style of early devising companies

[145] Susan Leblanc, interviewed by Karen Morash at the Dalhousie Arts Centre, 20 August 2014.
[146] 'About Us' <zuppatheatre.com/about-us> [accessed 28 December 2015].
[147] Roberta Barker, 'Crossing the River: Zuppa Circus's *Penny Dreadful*', in *Theatre in Atlantic Canada*, ed. by Linda Burnett (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2010), pp. 181-84 (p. 181).
[148] Bruce Barton, 'Judged as Mystery: Making Space with *Penny Dreadful*', in *New Canadian Realisms: Eight Plays*, ed. by Roberta Barker and Kim Solga (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2012), pp. 171-237 (p. 171).

such as Theatre Passe Muraille. The European model of collective creation, with its emphasis on play and clowning, holds more influence for Zuppa than North American companies.[149] They have, however, inherited the legacy of a Canadian tradition of devising strongly rooted in ideas of place and identity, and a collaborative approach which allows all members to have an integral part in the development of work, whilst still recognizing the individual skill of director, designer, performer, and writer.[150]

The company's playful approach, consistently driven by a competitive, yet affectionate, ribbing of each other, belies a highly structured methodology for creating work. Within the typical Zuppa workshop room the 'Rules of Play' are posted, participants are expected to be punctual, and the company pays close attention to the day's predetermined schedule.[151] At the end of each day there is a round table discussion, which is, again, highly structured with rules about the length of speaking time and how to respond. When working, actors are expected to make 'active proposals', rather than interrupting the flow of performance to suggest or query something.[152] Other suggestions can take the form of 'tries', when further information can be whispered into the ear of another performer, or more complex ideas can be written down in the 'Book of What Ifs' for later consideration.[153] On a superficial level, this seems to contrast the Open Space format favoured by Improbable and

[149] Members of the company have worked with, and been influenced by, the Canadian theatre company Primus. Primus's work can be 'traced to the theatrical studies of Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba': Gaetan Charlebois, 'Primus Theatre' <www.canadiantheatre.com/dict.pl?term=Primus%20Theatre> [accessed 22 June 2016].

[150] I observed 'The Missing Theatre' workshop at the Dalhousie Arts Centre, Halifax, on 20 and 28 August 2015, and a development workshop and showing of work from *The Archive of Missing Things* on 20, 27, and 28 August 2014. Whilst spending time with the company, I was party to a conversation about Theatre Passe Muraille's *Farm Show*; playwright Kate Cayley had read the script and the group commented on some of its limitations and the progress made in Canadian devising since that formative production. This shows cognizance of their forebears and an awareness of Zuppa's own place in the history of Canadian devising.

[151] Leblanc, interview, 20 August 2014. The 'Rules of Play' were developed by the core company members. See 'Appendix C' for a copy of the rules. Chapter Five explores how a solo playwright can utilize similar structures observed in devised work within solo writing.

[152] The concept of active proposals means that, rather than articulating an idea or question whilst performing, the actor includes/embodies it within the performance, proposing it to other performers, who must respond. The active proposals are considered once the performing is finished. Maclean often instructs the company to 'AP' (actively propose) something, rather than work it out beforehand through discussion. Proposals are used in development work only.

[153] See 'Appendix C' for Zuppa's 'Hierarchy of Proposals'.

Stella Duffy, which allows for flexible participation and freedom of movement. However, Open Space does operate, in a similar way to the Zuppa Theatre workshop room, on a number of agreed, well-understood, and accessible rules. In both cases the predetermined structure seems to alleviate some of the personal stresses (for example, aggravation at feeling one's opinion is not being heard) that can hamper the devising process, whilst allowing for continuity of work. It also allows for non-core participants, such as a writer brought in to provide text, to understand and assimilate the company's processes. An interesting area for exploration is whether a solo playwright can create and utilize her own 'rules of play', and if, in coding these rules in written form, the playwright might be more focused (and forgiving of failures) when working on her own.

Though there is not a particular Zuppa tradition of writing, the company has created its own text for certain projects. *Pop-Up Love Party* (2015) was written by the performers and directors as a series of lectures on the theme of love, and the script of *Penny Dreadful* (2007-2008 and 2010) was developed using pre-existing text from well-known literary sources. The company kept the structure of the original text (for example, keeping the same metre and rhyme structure for verse) but created new written material.[154] Notably, in both of these examples, the writing occurred within a highly regulated framework, where issues of structure had already been resolved. Both Leblanc and Maclean indicated that the task of writing can be difficult for the company as it means they need to 'spend a lot of time sitting down and neglecting other aspects of a show's theatricality'.[155] As such, the company has previously collaborated with playwrights Rob Plowman (*Radium City*, 2004); Bruce Barton (*Poor Boy*, 2009; *Five Easy Steps (to the end of the world*), 2010); Peter MacBain (*Uncle Oscar's Experiment*, 2013); and Mike Geither (*The Attaining Gigantick Dimensions*, 2013).

Their latest writer-deviser collaboration is with Kate Cayley on *The Archive of Missing Things* (working title). Cayley is a poet, playwright, and prose writer, and is also a

[154] Leblanc, interview, 20 August 2014.
[155] Alex Maclean, email to Karen Morash, 24 December 2015.

director and artistic director with Stranger Theatre. It was Cayley who approached the company to collaborate on a new project, loosely based around Goethe's *The Erlking* and notions of parenting, though the subject matter was 'secondary' to Cayley's desire to engage with a new methodology for creating work:

> I was moving into a more traditional playwriting practice in Toronto, and […] the process felt deadened — too much division of labour, too much correct dramaturgy at the expense of vitality, and in fact weirdly a-historic. […] I was excited about feeling like the text was serving the process of the performers, not the performers serving the text.[156]

Indeed, in the first stage of the workshop (which I observed), Cayley did not present the company with a script, but rather sections of text, some based on source material or original narrative, others based on observations of development work, which the company then re-formed, adding in physicality with a strong emphasis on technology. At the time, Cayley stated that the play was 'more like a recitation than a script', which she foresaw taking the shape of a 'site specific promenade, closer to art installation'. This statement, along with Cayley's methodology of working within the devising room, displayed an intimacy with Zuppa's modus operandi; she worked within the 'Rules of Play', and the text progressed quickly as she understood the 'shared language' of the group. Importantly, however, Cayley also maintained a distance at this stage; she often wrote in the devising room, but independently, whilst the performers were developing other work, rather than simply writing down textual records of improvisations. Writing was still a 'solitary task'.[157] This method of working links well with the concept of 'active proposals'; in many ways, the sections of text Cayley gave to the actors were proposals, which were accepted and responded to by the actors in performance rather than discussion. Though Cayley had 'no input into the physicalization', she was strongly influenced by the physical aspects of

[156] Kate Cayley, email to Karen Morash, 30 December 2015.
[157] Kate Cayley, interviewed by Karen Morash at the Dalhousie Arts Centre, 20 August 2014.

proposals, such as the inclusion of a red coat found in the workshop room and used in improvisational play, which then became integrated into the narrative.

When interviewed during the second week of work (the original research and development workshop was three weeks), Cayley was worried about 'the amount of narrative', and at this point the piece did seem to consist of the performers reading various stories, interspersed with moments of physicality and technology.[158] The themes of monstrous children, disappearance, and folklore were evident. However, one week later, when I returned to observe, the piece had changed considerably in structure and content. It now operated under the working title of *The Library of Missing Persons*, and much of the original narrative material had been cut. Three narrative strands remained, with the links between the trio made more obvious by visual motifs such as red coats. A non-narrative section at the end, involving movement and music, now had stronger resonance with the piece as a whole, as the company physicalized the idea of disappearance.[159] When the work-in-progress was shown to an audience, they were instructed to bring laptops and tablets, and cast, crew, and spectators all were connected to the same Google Doc, which displayed instructions and provocations during the course of show. A vocal track provided further instructions and provocations, and the audience were invited to examine 'library' artefacts thematically connected to the idea of missing people.

Though the work shown was not intended as a finished piece in itself, it embodied the methodology which had created it. Despite the fact that they had begun with large amounts of text, Zuppa's physical approach to breaking it down had led to a non-linear, multi-sensory piece, which created a series of sensations rather than the telling of one story. Cayley's influence was still present in the narrative aspects, and — from the annotations of library objects, to the Google Docs, and the stories told by the performers — text was a crucial

[158] Cayley, interview, 20 August 2014.

[159] Zuppa regularly collaborates with musician Jason Michael MacIsaac, and intended to do so on this project, though he was unavailable for the 2014 workshop. The company used the Lou Reed track 'Slip Away' to stand in for the music which would eventually be provided by MacIsaac, but the track itself had a profound influence on the development of both text and movement.

component of the performance, yet it did not dominate. The language, images, and music created a sense of cohesion rather than narrative structure, and the sophistication of these three elements indicated that individual, skilled practitioners had been involved in their creation. For example, the spoken text was grounded in the naturalism of local dialect, yet contained elements of lyricism one might expect from a writer experienced in creating verse. A woman, speaking in the cadences of Nova Scotia, tells the story of her changeling child who disappeared into the water only to reappear in monstrous form; Leblanc's delivery of this speech, using her native accent, combined with Cayley's incorporation of a lyrical structure inspired by *The Erleking*, created something strongly rooted in Atlantic Canada, whilst also linking to a larger literary tradition. Cayley is a poet, and listening to the three performers speak in local rhythms over the course of the workshop would have helped to create this effect (Cayley is from Ontario). As Maclean states, 'it is a show that really evolved out of the literary sophistication that Kate brings to the process'.[160]

Following the workshop, Cayley returned to Toronto and Zuppa continued work on other shows. They reunited in December 2015; during the interim Cayley had produced a full script based on the work they had done in 2014 and, as she explained: 'turned it back over to them. They then reworked the script totally, in rehearsal, and I came on in the final week of that process and added my voice back in.'[161] These last few words are significant. Cayley chose to work with Zuppa knowing that their approach means 'text can be changed drastically if other production elements seem more promising in a given situation. […] We honour the writer and their process, rather than all the text they create'.[162] Yet, unlike a playwright who loses control once a script is handed over to a director, Cayley was given the opportunity to respond to what the company had done with her text, allowing some retention of control and involvement with the process. Cayley also stated that the writer-deviser process had changed with the second workshop: it was 'much more active', in that she had to

[160] Maclean, email, 24 December 2015.
[161] Cayley, email, 30 December 2015.
[162] Maclean, email, 24 December 2015.

respond more immediately to the work being done, and she 'was right there, writing furiously as the new text was demanded, sometimes so fast they started using it before I was finished'. For Cayley, this 'felt much better'.[163] When working in such a way, knowing that text will be reshaped by collaborators (or by the writer herself at a later stage), there is less pressure to produce highly-polished work and the text is inevitably more closely connected to the physical images which engulf the writer in the devising room. Whilst it is not an easy way to work, and the playwright must produce material quickly whilst accepting that the text produced may be altered significantly or discarded, sharing the decision-making process with collaborators can also reduce stress; as Cayley states, a 'bit of whiplash seems like a fair trade' for the benefits of collaboration.[164]

The process offers benefits for Zuppa as well. As Maclean states: 'For *The Archive of Missing Things* we are doing things with sound, performance and computers that require a lot of attention, so knowing that Kate is holding down the writing fort is tremendously reassuring.' Even when writing in quick response in the thick of the workshop, 'an independent writer is likely to craft text with more attention than an ensemble with a more divided focus'. [165] The potential benefits are, inevitably, dependent on the individual writer's willingness to divert from their personal vision, especially if the concept was theirs. Tellingly, despite Cayley's being the originator of the project, she sees herself as a 'hired gun' within the collaborative context, which means that although it can be 'disconcerting' when a production parts ways with a writer's original intention, she is willing to accept this in order to 'feel like I was along for the ride'.

At the time of writing, the piece is still in development and the final structure is to be determined; there are a number of possibilities being considered, and Cayley and Maclean have 'a lively back and forth on all proposals'.[166] Zuppa have traditionally given writers

[163] Cayley, email, 30 December 2015.
[164] Cayley, email, 30 December 2015.
[165] Maclean, email, 24 December 2015.
[166] Cayley, email, 30 December 2015.

'final say on whatever text is spoken in the show', but not necessarily other elements; according to Maclean, this 'gives writers some authority over their domain, while allowing the rest of us to also steer the piece'.[167] This also has implications for overall ownership of the play. According to Susan Leblanc, there is 'the understanding that it is their [Zuppa's] production'; they 'produce it, […] create it, […] engage the writers to do work in a certain way'.[168]

As previously indicated, the writer-deviser approach is one which both Cayley and Zuppa feel offer many benefits in terms of process. The members of Zuppa are capable of creating performance text, as I observed in the 30 July 2015 performance of *Pop-Up Love Party* in Parrsboro, Nova Scotia. Yet, much of this narrative was of a personal nature, and, as stated above, written within a pre-identified structure. Maclean has said that he does not have 'much' confidence in his own ability as a writer.[169] The recognition of individual skillsets within the collaborative context is strategic for Zuppa; in allowing each collaborator to focus on contributing work within their own speciality, and being open for its development by other collaborators, it strengthens the individual strands of movement, text, technology, direction, music, and other elements, which combine to make a whole performance. For the writer-deviser, it allows access to a variety of stimuli. Cayley, like Churchill, came to the project with her own ideas, but the significant alteration of the structure of the piece over the development period is testament to her willingness to incorporate the ideas of her performers. Churchill did make amendments in response to the concerns of the company, but her work was not restructured as drastically as Cayley's. Nevertheless, Cayley entered the collaboration knowing that for Zuppa, the script is not sacrosanct. The act of requesting to be part of Zuppa's process is telling. Cayley clearly sees value in it and believes that working with Zuppa on this particular project is preferable to going alone.

[167] Maclean, email, 24 December 2015.
[168] Leblanc, interview, 20 August 2014.
[169] Maclean, email, 24 December 2015.

Conclusion: The Writer-Deviser Experience

Walter Ong writes: '[…] words are alone in a text. Moreover, in composing a text, in "writing" something, the one producing the written utterance is also alone.' He goes on to complain that written words 'lack their full phonetic qualities', and that '[e]xtratextual context is missing not only for readers but also for the writer', which makes it an 'agonizing activity'.[170] In so writing, Ong probably did not have the devising room in mind, though the writer-deviser does often compose when away from the workshop. Even so, she maintains the voices and gestures of the performers in her memory (or at times on video), so cannot be said to be truly creating work alone. Dramatic text in script form may be 'alone' if one reads silently and solitarily as one might whilst consuming prose or verse. However, if it is read according to its purpose — dramatization by performers — the extratextual context is made apparent. In avoiding working 'alone', by engaging with devising methodology, the writer-deviser overcomes the limitations of words on paper, and has an immediate relationship with those who will be communicating her words to an audience. Yet, Ong argues, 'written words sharpen analysis', as the writer is forced to make 'language work so as to come clear all by itself, with no existential context'.[171] The experience of composing in isolation hones a writer's textual skills. In the absence of their own textual expertise, devising companies turn to writers in order to strengthen the text-based aspects of their work.

Though written text still remains an important aspect of performance, its dominance has been challenged in the postdramatic era, and the writer-deviser inhabits an equal, or even lesser, status within the devising process. Some playwrights, used to having to wrestle only with themselves during the writing process, may struggle with the loss of power and less-structured approach to making work, as was seen in the example of Jane Wylie and Theatre Passe Muraille. As seen from the examples above, along with Chapter Five (which details my own experience in the devising room), when playwrights are involved in rehearsals, they are

[170] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 101-02.
[171] Ong, p. 104.

often subject to the unmediated opinions of collaborators on their work, who may feel, given their involvement in the development of the script, a greater sense of ownership of the piece. Yet, though it is not easy to hear direct criticism of one's work, this process can serve the same purpose as seeking the opinions of readers on early drafts, a practice in which many playwrights engage. Indeed, one could argue that, if an actor is able to put aside his/her own desires for greater stage time, performers and directors, operating as a group and therefore mitigating individual proclivities, are best able to assess a script's potential for performance.

As stated in Chapter Two, many celebrated playwrights have a background in acting, directing, or other aspects of theatre production. For a playwright without this experience, collaboration, especially at an early stage in one's career, can offer many advantages, including the practical ones of exposure via an established theatre company, and sharing the risk of mounting a production. Additionally, as argued in Chapter One, devising has been influential within the contemporary performance landscape. Heddon and Milling provide an example of how this influence can be observed:

> The preponderance of the fragmented narrative in devised performance alongside its relative scarcity in other performance fields does […] suggest that the processes involved in devising are responsible for the generation of this type of work.[172]

Creating performance using writer-deviser methodology does not simply benefit the playwright; it can offer significant advantages to the company. One particular benefit is of a commercial nature: venues used to commissioning traditional, playwright-initiated work can still market plays involving a writer-deviser as a play which has been written by someone; this provides reassurance to a public who may not completely understand what the term devised means. As Liz Tomlin argues, the role of text has been vital in 'securing the

[172] Heddon and Milling, p. 222.

legitimacy of certain devising practices'.[173] It is significant that playwrights were involved in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *US*, though many other devising collectives operating at the time did not directly employ writers. Commissioning a collaborative company who employ a writer is safer, allowing the theatre to 'bring in new audiences', whilst mitigating the 'risk of alienating their loyal base audiences'.[174] The popularity of companies such as Kneehigh and Shared Experience, who engage playwrights to adapt existing texts to create new performances confirm this; by using the work of two writers (the writer of the original text and the playwright-adapter), commissioning theatres can feel more reassured about the structural integrity and coherence of a production.

On a more artistic level, as noted in Chapter One and evidenced by the press reviews cited in this chapter, devised work is often accused of lacking coherence. A writer-deviser has intimate knowledge of work produced during the development stages, and augments this information with her own technical skills and dramaturgical perspective. Alexander Kelly of Third Angel discusses what writer Chris Thorpe (who has significant devising experience with his own company Unlimited) adds to their process. He reveals that when 'the story was very familiar to us, but we didn't have the mechanism for telling it', Thorpe had been able to work on his own and come back with 'text almost as it is in performance right now'.[175] Thorpe recognizes that writing 'in the devising process is enhanced by skills you develop over the years […]. It's almost like writing is […] a separate skill which needs time'.[176] If appropriately trained and/or experienced, a playwright is equipped to provide the sense of unity and coherence which is often difficult to achieve in devising, but which, according to

[173] Tomlin, p. 100.
[174] Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart, 'Introduction', in *Devising in Process*, ed. by Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 1-29 (p. 21).
[175] Duška Radosavljević, 'On Writing and Performance in an Ensemble: Alexander Kelly (Third Angel) and Chris Thorpe (Unlimited Theatre)', in *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with Theatre-Makers*, ed. by Radosavljević, pp. 159-71 (p. 168).
[176] Radosavljević, 'On Writing and Performance', p. 169.

Jackie Smart, is required if 'a piece is to communicate with an audience'.[177] *US* is a good example of this: though some spectators were baffled by the production, there was a general sense that the second half, which had been scripted by Denis Cannan, was more intelligible. Conflict over what material is to be included in a piece is to be expected when a number of personalities are involved. However, the writer, who is at once both internal and external to the process, can manage the difficult dramaturgical decisions whilst keeping in mind the work that has gone into the development process.

Moreover, the writer-deviser relationship with companies is at its most positive when efforts have been made before work begins to define how the writer will work with the company. The examples of Monstrous Regiment and Theatre Passe Muraille confirm this: conflict occurs when writers perceive their role within the process differently from the company. On the other hand, operating within pre-established structures of work, as exemplified by Joint Stock's and Mike Leigh's schedules of development, allows a writer to feel secure in their understanding of what and how they are supposed to contribute. Strategies such as 'The Rules of Play' and 'Open Space' help all participants to understand the underlying structures for work, and allow a greater focus on creating content, and efficient mechanisms for dealing with conflict. As David Lane argues, 'the presence of guidelines or boundaries […] is also part of the devising process […] and suggests the requirement of a methodology that can release creativity, rather than restrict it'.[178] Arguably, the longevity and critical success of companies such as Joint Stock (and its descendant Out of Joint), and practitioners such as Mike Leigh suggests that there is a correlation between a well-defined role for the writer-deviser and the quality of the production which results. Chapter Five also reveals the problems which can be created through the lack of predetermined operational structures.

---

[177] Jackie Smart, 'The Feeling of Devising: Emotion and Mind in the Devising Process', in *New Dramaturgy: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, ed. by Katalin Trencsényi and Bernadette Cochrane (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2014), pp. 101-14 (p. 107).

[178] Lane, p. 96.

Jackie Smart argues: '[a]cademic literature on devising tends to emphasize its positive aspects: the sense of liberation from conventional restrictions, the satisfaction of connecting with one's "deeper" self; the excitement of working closely with others, sparking off their ideas and sharing ideas with them.'[179] It has been my observation that, in opposition to academic texts, which do feature accounts of negative experiences, it is the writers and artists themselves who emphasize the positive aspects of devising, though most will admit to some difficulties.[180] As Smart states, 'these undoubtedly appealing qualities of the devising process can also be sources of confusion and distress'.[181] Actors are encouraged to contribute research and personal material, yet must give up ownership of that information; writers are provided with material and first-hand access to performers whilst developing work, but must accept that there will be greater interference with their work. Directors must be part of the process, yet separate from it, creating a structure in which all can work, and managing the various, and sometimes conflicting, contributions.

One might query why those who choose to work using writer-deviser methodologies are generally ebullient about the experience. It could be partially explained by a desire not to alienate collaborators, especially those who might potentially offer further work opportunities. Ultimately, however, if a playwright felt truly uncomfortable in the devising room, she would not continue to work in this way. The examples in this chapter of practice provide an explanation of why a (small, but increasing) number of writers engage with devising. From providing valuable on-the-job training and exposure to an early-career writer; to furnishing the writer with multi-layered research from a variety of perspectives; to accessing collaborators' physical and technological vocabularies at crucial stages of development; to having a group of informed editors to hand; to considering approaches to performance suggested by collaborators which may be outside the writer's experience: the

[179] Smart, 'The Feeling', p. 102.
[180] For examples of the documentation of 'negative experiences' see Helen Freshwater, '*Delerium:* In Rehearsal with Theatre O', in *Devising in Process*, ed. by Mermikides and Smart, pp. 128-146; and Virginie Magnat, 'Devising Utopia, or Asking for the Moon', *Theatre Topics*, 15 (2005), 73-86.
[181] Smart, 'The Feeling', p. 102.

advantages are many, and, as will be seen in the study of writer-deviser Bryony Lavery in Chapter Four, they extend beyond the initial collaboration. It is particularly beneficial for writers who have not had a great deal of experience in other theatrical roles; working closely with actors and directors allows playwrights to consider different, non-textual methods for creating meaning, as well as understanding how collaborators work with text. As Alan Ayckbourn states: 'I do believe playwrights should think of themselves in part as orchestral composers. Before you sit down to write a passage for the woodwind section, say, it's handy to know the octave range of a flute.'[182]

As the 'writing' versus 'performance' binary is increasingly contested, and devising companies continue to engage with playwrights, it is becoming apparent that, as Liz Tomlin argues, 'it is more dramatic realism that seems to have fallen out of favour, rather than text-based practice'.[183] Equally, the best-known and most commercially-successful devising companies are those with a strong focus on text, even if, as in the case of Forced Entertainment, they do not overtly associate themselves with new writing. As can be seen in Lyn Gardner's opening quotation, the shift away from traditional methodologies of play-making is becoming increasingly apparent, as audiences and theatre-makers search out work which recognizes Peter Brook's contention that 'theatre has the potential — unknown in other art forms — of replacing a single viewpoint by a multitude of different visions'.[184] Whilst it is not impossible for the solo playwright to create work that is '"multimodal", in that it finds ways to move swiftly between distinctly different aesthetic models within the same piece of work' whilst maintaining 'aesthetic coherence', it is much more likely that a writer-deviser, creating work emanating from the multitude of perspectives and skills represented within the collaborative framework, will do so.[185] In order to further authenticate a central tenet of this inquiry, that engaging in devising not only has immediate, but long-

[182] Alan Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), p. 36.
[183] Tomlin, p. 102.
[184] Peter Brook, *The Shifting Point: Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration 1946-1987* (London: Methuen, 1988), p. 15.
[185] Tomlin, p. 121.

term impact upon a playwright's methodology, in that traces of the devising process (for example polyvocality, approaches to research, or an emphasis on the physical) can be found in a playwright's working methods even when not specifically engaging in devising for script development, Chapter Four will examine the career of established writer-deviser Bryony Lavery, whose devised and non-devised work provides corroborating evidence of the imprint of devising.

Chapter Four

Bryony Lavery: Case Study of a Career as a Writer-Deviser

Introduction

This chapter provides a case study of the British playwright Bryony Lavery, with particular reference to work created collaboratively with theatre companies. As a dramatist who has been involved in the devising process throughout her career (unlike some writer-devisers, such as Caryl Churchill, who no longer engage with the methodology), and who continues to produce scripts both as a solo playwright and a writer-deviser, her work exemplifies many of the benefits and drawbacks for playwrights who choose to engage with devising methodology, as discussed in previous chapters.

With a professional life spanning over forty years and sixty plays, Bryony Lavery is one of Britain's most prolific playwrights. Whilst perhaps not a household name (Kate Kellaway calls Lavery 'one of the best but most consistently underrated' playwrights in the country), she is well known in the theatrical world and regularly commissioned by leading theatres such as the National Theatre, Birmingham Rep, and the Young Vic, and companies such as Frantic Assembly and Shared Experience.[1] Her 1998 play *Frozen*, about a serial killer and the mother of a child he murdered, won the Theatre Management Association's award for best play and was nominated for four Tony awards. Despite this success, and an innovative approach to structure and stage directions which will be examined in this chapter, Lavery's work is rarely addressed in an academic context. This chapter aims to redress this situation by examining Lavery's suitability as a writer-deviser whose practice can be considered exemplary for playwrights wishing to engage with the devising process, including myself.

By addressing the question of how a career of working with actors, directors, and designers in devising stage plays has fundamentally affected the way Lavery works and

[1] Kate Kellaway, 'Comedy of Terrors', *Observer*, 23 June 2002 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2002/jun/23/features.review27> [accessed 30 September 2010].

writes, this chapter examines texts produced by Lavery, her thoughts on them, and the commentary of others. In this context, three plays are examined in detail: *Stockholm* (2007), produced in collaboration with Frantic Assembly through mostly physical collaborative developmental work; *Kursk* (2009), produced in collaboration with Sound&Fury [*sic*] using a combination of research and collaborative workshopping; and finally *Frozen* (1998), an example of her non-devised work which provides a useful comparison to *Stockholm* and *Kursk*, and highlights the lasting effects of the devising process upon a writer.[2] Thus, a framework, based on the close examination of the working contexts and processes of a professional writer-deviser, is established for the investigation of my own devised and non-devised work in Chapter Five.

Roots of the Writer-Deviser: *Origin of the Species* and *Goliath*

Lavery has been devising since the beginning of her career, starting with Les Oeufs Malades, a company she formed in 1976 with actors Jessica Higgs and Gerard Bell.[3] In the spirit of collaborative work, Lavery became involved in all aspects of production, as she explains:

> I learned that just writing isn't good enough. If you want to write the plays you want *and* have them produced and performed how you want, you also have to learn how to direct, how to raise money, deal with the Arts Council, talk people into putting your plays on in their theatre, talk to the press, talk to actors, talk to the audience afterwards […].[4]

Building on her multi-faceted experience with Les Oeufs Malades, Lavery experimented

[2] Although *Frozen* was written before *Stockholm* and *Kursk*, it provides evidence (as do all three plays) of the imprint of her early devising experiences upon later work, and is therefore positioned after the two devised plays in this chapter (mirroring the positioning of my own devised/non-devised practice in Chapter Five). These early devising experiences are documented within the following pages.

[3] Bryony Lavery, 'But Will Men Like It? Or Living as a Feminist Writer without Committing Murder', in *Women and Theatre: Calling the Shots*, ed. by Susan Todd (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 24-32 (p. 26).

[4] Lavery, 'But Will Men Like It?', p. 26.

with other production roles. She acted, was an artistic director (of the cabaret group Female Trouble in the early 1980s and theatre company Gay Sweatshop in the late 1980s), and directed productions for companies such as Siren Theatre.[5] This developed Lavery's understanding of the abilities of, and demands placed upon, other types of theatre artists, and her capacity to write plays which pay homage to the physical capabilities of performers and visual creativity of directors, whilst providing them with appropriate challenges within her scripts.

Lavery's work with Les Oeufs Malades led to an invitation to write for Monstrous Regiment and the Women's Theatre Group (later known as Sphinx), both pioneering feminist theatre companies well-known for their collaborative approach to creating work.[6] The experience of writing for these companies was a formative one for Lavery: 'Gradually I became more and more impressed with the way they thought and believed. They did not start from a script... they started from what they, the actors and administrators and directors, wanted to say.'[7] She was invited to collaborate as playwright on *Origin of the Species* (1984), which became one of Monstrous Regiment's most successful productions. It began with a three-week workshop with Lavery, actors Gillian Hanna and Mary McCusker, and director Nona Shepphard, and examined evolution from a feminist perspective. Lavery claims she cannot remember if it was their idea or hers, a frequent declaration from those who engage in devising.[8] This early exploration was 'wide ranging and without preliminary assumptions about character, plot, or setting'; Lavery then went away and 'sketched in the script'.[9]

---

[5] Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 105 (Gay Sweatshop); Sandra Freeman, *Putting Your Daughters on the Stage: Lesbian Theatre from the 1970s-1990s* (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 62 (Siren Theatre).

[6] See Chapter Three for a discussion of Monstrous Regiment's collaborative work.

[7] Lavery, 'But Will Men Like It?', p. 28. Unless indicated by [brackets], all usage of ellipses, both in quoted commentary and playtext, is Lavery's own. Likewise, the structure of quoted text, including spacing and the usage of bold and/or italics is represented as per Lavery's original text.

[8] Stephenson and Langridge, p. 113.

[9] Janelle Reinelt, 'Resisting Thatcherism: The Monstrous Regiment and the School of Hard Knox', in *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, ed. by Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 161-79 (p. 172).

Lavery says that working in this way was 'like a bomb going off in my head'.[10] What resulted was the surreal story of Molly, a kind of anthropologist-of-the-ages, and Victoria, a four-thousand-year-old hominid whom she smuggles home to Yorkshire. There are a number of elements typical of Lavery's non-devised playscripts, including short, titled scenes ('**Twenty-five: The end of the year**'), and tongue-in-cheek humour: 'if she [Victoria, the hominid] escaped from my charge she would pass for one of my Yorkshire neighbours.'[11]

There is, however, much evidence of the influence of the devising process. Lavery is keenly aware of the talents of her collaborators, and gives them the freedom within the script to use these talents. For example, her opening stage directions read:

> *A very strange, very comfortable and unsettling room. In it – a comfortable, eccentric, healthy, intelligent, magnificent woman of an indeterminate age.*[12]

The contrasting qualities of 'comfortable' and 'unsettling' could present a challenge for a director; unlike many writers, Lavery does not give specific instructions on how to achieve this paradox. This suggests she and Nona Shepphard had already formed a sense of the strangeness of this room and character — and the play itself — before the writing of the script. Lavery trusted Shepphard to realize scenographically the abstract atmosphere that had been established within the workshop and did not feel the need to maintain control over the look of the play through overly-didactic directions. Lavery herself says her stage directions are 'to amuse and cajole the director into *listening* to me'.[13] This idea of attempting to 'amuse' directors shows her general affinity with them and, more importantly, an appreciation of the craft of directing; rather than issuing definitive instructions to be slavishly followed, her stage directions are like conversations, which replicate the process of negotiation within the

[10] Stephenson and Langridge, p. 113.
[11] Bryony Lavery, *Origin of the Species* in *Plays:1* (London: Methuen Drama, 1998), pp. 1-48 (p. 48 for short scene titles; p. 14 for Yorkshire neighbours).
[12] Lavery, *Origin of the Species*, p. 3.
[13] Bryony Lavery, email to Karen Morash, 23 May 2010.

collaborative workshop.

One could argue that Lavery is simply displaying a preference for abstract stage directions, rather than embodying the results of collaborative work within her instructions. A close examination of the work of a contemporary solo playwright such as Martin Crimp, however, reveals that abstract (or in his case, a lack of) stage directions are less of a dialogue with the director and more of a handing over of responsibility for making decisions.[14] When, in *Attempts on her Life*, he does give instruction, he states precisely what he wishes to communicate, for example: '*it should not be clear whether she's suffering from stage fright or true distress.*'[15] This use of negative instruction definitively tells the director that s/he must emphasize confusion over a particular interpretation of the character's psychological state. This differs greatly from Lavery's abstract directions in her devised work, which make suggestions (based on what has already been developed in the rehearsal room) for atmosphere and emotion, but allow for a great deal of creative interpretation by the director. Although Michelene Wandor states when 'dramatic text goes anywhere near the production process, one can guarantee that the stage directions will […] go out the window and be ignored',[16] when the directions are representations of work already produced, established, and agreed upon by actors, director, and writer previous to the script being written, it seems more likely that they will be retained.

Lavery's dialogue for *Origin of the Species* is also reflective of the work undertaken by the performers, particularly by Mary McCusker, who played Victoria and used the workshops to do 'research on the physical development of her creature [...] in order to help her find physical attributes of movement and speech for Victoria'.[17] Lavery's script contains many non-words, guttural sounds which evolved from McCusker's research on animal

[14] For example, in *Attempts on her Life*, there is very little scenographic description and descriptive instruction for line delivery beyond silences, pauses, and laughter: Martin Crimp, *Attempts on her Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).
[15] Crimp, p. 75.
[16] Micheline Wandor, *The Art of Writing Drama: Theory and Practice* (London: Methuen, 2008), p. 104.
[17] Reinelt, 'Resisting Thatcherism', p. 173.

communication, for example, 'Gnee . . . errh . . . gneeh . . . gneeh'.[18]

A writer who is present when actors are undertaking physical research becomes acutely aware of the variety of tools a performer has at her/his disposal; emotion expressed through non-dialogic vocalization rather than words can be powerful. In articulating (or perhaps failing to articulate) on the most primitive level, performers communicate innate emotion to an audience in a way that words are not able to. For example, *Don Juan. Who?/Don Juan. Kdo?*, a co-production of Anna Furse's UK-based company Athletes of the Heart and the Mladinsko Theatre of Slovenia, developed collaboratively (online and in the rehearsal room) contains many examples of non-words. The play is presented in English, Slovenian, and Italian, yet utterances such as 'Ooh ahh lalala mmm...' appear the same in all languages.[19] The noises (and their sexual implications), developed in the workshop, are understood by an audience regardless of their cultural background. Similarly, the incorporation of atavistic guttural sounds into Victoria's dialogue in *Origin of the Species* allows the audience to comprehend the primitive emotion of the character in a manner that could not be expressed through words. Of course, it can be difficult to represent these vocalisations accurately in written textual format, which has implications for potential production remounts with different creative teams, but, much like stage directions, the (original) director and actors respond to the written text with the memory of what was developed in rehearsal. This technique, developed within the rehearsal room, is something that Lavery continued to use after *Origin of the Species*, evidence of the lasting effect of the devising process on her work.[20]

Lavery wrote forty-six plays between 1976 and 1997, yet, and despite her popularity

---

[18] Lavery, *Origin of the Species*, p. 13.

[19] Athletes of the Heart and Mladinsko Theatre, *Don Juan. Who?/ Don Juan. Kdo?*, in *Theatre in Pieces: Politics, Poetics and Interdisciplinary Collaboration*, ed. by Anna Furse (London: Methuen Drama, 2011), pp. 199-314 (p. 229).

[20] For example, Agnetha's guttural sounds of grief in the opening moments of *Frozen* (p. 102) and Alzheimer's Disease-stricken Evelyn's sounds in scene nineteen of *A Wedding Story* (p. 83); both are non-devised plays. See *Plays: 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007): *Frozen* (pp. 95-197); *A Wedding Story* (pp. 1-93).

as a collaborator, she had not received critical attention for her work until *Goliath* (1997), written for Sphinx Theatre Company.[21] The play was inspired by Beatrix Campbell's book about the riots which exploded across Britain's poorest estates in 1991; the initial concept for *Goliath* came from director Annie Castledine, who wanted to collaborate with Lavery and actor Nichola McAuliffe to create a one-woman show based on Campbell's book. Instead of featuring real-life individuals from the text, as the director originally planned, Lavery, McAuliffe, and Castledine collaboratively decided to use the material to create fictional characters who would reflect the experiences of those involved in the riots. This allowed Lavery to create roles and an overall structure which corresponded to McAuliffe's specific performance abilities. Lavery wrote: '[Nichola's] skill with accents is extraordinary. [...] I don't have to worry about creating a structure where characters from the same region speak one after the other.'[22] Additionally, this approach corresponded more closely to Lavery's preferred method of research and writing. She states: '[...] doing [verbatim theatre-type interviews] isn't really my style. I'm a fiction writer.'[23] In this respect, the processes of devising have allowed Lavery to work in a way she feels comfortable, instead of forcing her to adopt someone else's preferred approach.

In a diary written by Lavery after the initial workshop, she states: 'I've adopted what is for me a relatively new work method, which is — where there are bits I can't quite work out — to just put them down anyway (for the time being).'[24] Although Lavery had been workshopping with directors and actors for nearly two decades, this indicates she had finally embraced the freedom that the devising process can bring for a writer. Relieving writers of the pressure to perfect everything in the script before it is handed over is a positive feature of the

[21] 'Bryony Lavery on her new play *Kursk*' from BBC4 *Women's Hour*, broadcast 2 June 2009 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/01/2009_22_tue.shtml> [accessed 30 September 2010].
[22] Geraldine Cousin, *Recording Women: A Documentation of Production* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 2000), p. 151. For a detailed account of Lavery's involvement as a writer-deviser in the development of *Goliath*, see Karen Morash, 'Bryony Lavery: Nerves of Steel and a Forgiving Heart', in *Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance: The Rise of Women Theatre Artists in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. by Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 207-20.
[23] Cousin, p. 150.
[24] Cousin, p. 150.

collaborative workshop process; it gives writers such as Lavery the space to experiment and test things out with performers before committing them to paper. A link between this way of working and the improvisational processes typical of devising can also be drawn; in performing without forethought, actors can be freed from internal editorial processes and focus on responding to collaborators, rather than an insular reflective process. Observing actors utilising improvisation can suggest new ways of working for writers, where one looks outwards, responding to collaborators rather than inwards, and, as suggested by Kate Cayley in Chapter Three, the experience of having to produce work quickly and without self-censorship can be liberating. Additionally, as my own experiences reveal (documented in Chapter Five), having collaborators take on the role of editors can also help to avoid over-writing or time wasted in the run-up to production.

The process is, however, not always easy for playwrights, and the fluidity of roles can mean that the writer can sometimes lose control over the text. For example, in developing *Goliath*, there was an 'understanding that somebody's doing the main body of writing and this can then be added to and improved'. Lavery added: 'Nichola, for example, has done some wonderful rejigging of speeches.'[25] Many writers would find such 'rejigging' of their writing difficult. It does, however, indicate a trust in the performative instincts of actors and an understanding that, especially on a project like *Goliath*, where the origin of ideas and images is not always clear, the writer does not have definitive ownership of the piece. Lavery explains: 'I've sometimes seen writers (especially young writers) getting really blind in their heads when actors chip in with suggestions because there were too many people involved, or the writer wasn't ready to cope with this input. But I've found it very helpful on *Goliath*.'[26]

The 'Real Tools': Lavery's Later Work

The results of these formative experiences developing work through early collaborative

[25] Cousin, p. 152.
[26] Cousin, p. 152. See Chapters One and Three for discussions of ownership in devised work.

research and experimentation can be seen in Lavery's late plays, both those which have been created through the devising process and texts which she has written as a solo playwright. Along with the previously mentioned use of non-words in dialogue, Lavery developed structural techniques such as the use of unusual physical spacing of dialogue. Often appearing on the page like verse, the dialogue, when it is spoken, has the rhythms and pauses of natural speech, even if the language is somewhat heightened. This comes from close observation of the performer in the devising room and an acute awareness of how the cadences of speech are closely linked to the emotional state of the speaker, and, in fact, can often tell us more than the words themselves. In her 'Author's Note' for *A Wedding Story* (2000), she explains, whilst providing a good visual example of her typical dialogue layout:

> The play is laid out to help the actors find
> the true rhythms of dramatic speech.
>
> None of the characters speak in sentences
> or observe punctuation or breathe at the right time.
>
> Because often
> They are in torment
>
> The short lines, the spaces within or between lines,
> are there on purpose to indicate the subtext and
> to help the performer to find the physical
> and emotional journey within a speech.[27]

It is important to point out that the innovative structure of Lavery's dialogue is not the result of Lavery's attempts to provide an exact textual copy of what the actors have said and how they speak during developmental improvisation work. Rather than assiduously trying to provide a replica of the actors' invented speech, she writes dialogue that makes suggestions, and allows performers to explore the inner world of the characters they have created together. Any (experienced/trained/skilled) writer can create distinct speech patterns for a character, but Lavery's presentation of dialogue on the page shows an awareness of a performer's ability to

[27] Lavery, *A Wedding Story*, p. 6.

relate to an audience through breathing, rhythm, and pace, in addition to the words spoken. Arguably, a writer who does not devise but is merely a keen observer of people may have this awareness. However, the laboratory conditions of the devising workshop mean that playwrights gain a more precise, character-led understanding of the physicality a particular actor employs. Lavery relates well to the methods actors use in character development, describing herself as a 'very physical writer' who needs her characters to 'inhabit' her: 'I need to know how they move.'[28] This observation links closely to one of the central tenets of this thesis, in that close contact with performance processes prompts a writer, both when working within devising processes and as a solo playwright, to closely consider and include aspects of physicality when developing characters.

Lavery's late success, and her move out of the margins of professional theatre, began with *Goliath* and her next play *Frozen* (1998, examined in later in this chapter). Both plays, though very different (*Goliath*, as discussed above, was devised and *Frozen* was not) enjoyed critical praise and box office success. Lavery attributes this late success to finally accessing her 'dark' side, and that she, at last, 'had the real tools that I needed as a writer'.[29] This may be simplistic; Lavery seems to forget that she had tackled dark subjects previously: *Two Marias* (1989) and *Nothing Compares to You* (1995) used potent physical imagery to explore death and loss. However, it does indicate that Lavery recognized that something had shifted, both in herself and in audiences' reception to her work. Lavery's experience working in devised theatre, and the innovative aspects of her work which resulted, brought her to the attention of new, more physically-based collaborative groups, such as Shared Experience and Frantic Assembly, and to national producing theatres such as the Birmingham Rep. The UK theatre landscape was shifting away from the political drama where she cut her teeth; Janelle Reinelt, writing about the current status of women in British theatre, claims: 'One of the frequently remarked features of successful women's writing is that it is not marked as

[28] Stephenson and Langridge, p. 111.
[29] Lavery, email, 23 May 2010.

"women's" or "feminist".'[30] This shift has led to the demise of some of the second wave companies with which Lavery worked, such as Monstrous Regiment, but she has weathered the change by, in line with her previous collaborative experiences, showing an openness to engage with new ideas and ways of working, and a flexibility to respond to the particular needs of a company. This, along with the structural techniques developed through her collaborative work, are the aforementioned 'tools' she required.

A close examination of this later work reveals the mark of the devising process, whilst also bringing to light significant differences between individually-written plays and those created collaboratively. To this purpose, the process and product of three projects will be examined: *Stockholm*, devised by Lavery with Frantic Assembly; *Kursk*, created by Lavery and Sound&Fury through a combination of primary and secondary research and workshop activities; and finally *Frozen*, which Lavery worked on as a solo playwright, relying heavily on textual research.

Stockholm

Discussing Bryony Lavery, Frantic Assembly's Scott Graham states: 'we have found an incredible collaborator [...]. Every stage of development has felt like we are inspiring and bringing out the best of each other.'[31] The company has worked with Lavery three times: *Stockholm* (2007), *It Snows* (2008), and *Beautiful Burnout* (2010). Frantic Assembly, one of the UK's most successful third wave devising companies, have become known for using movement and heightened physicality to explore text. The question arises, however, as to why a young, fashionable, and, most importantly, apolitical collaborative company would choose to work with an older writer with roots in feminist and queer theatre.

[30] Janelle, Reinelt, 'Creative Ambivalence and Precarious Futures: Women in British Theatre', *Theatre Journal*, 62 (2010), 553-56 (p. 554).

[31] Scott Graham, *'Stockholm': A Comprehensive Guide for Students (aged 16+), Teachers & Arts Educationalists* <www.franticassembly.co.uk/images/page/Stockhol.pdf> [accessed 10 July 2010], p. 33.

The answer lies within Lavery's vast experience in devising plays, and understanding of how best to use the skills of her collaborators. She states:

> Actors are one of the most miserably under-used resources in British Theatre today... Their ability to play... to take what is in the mind and translate it into action, pictures and plot... […] is such a splendid gift to a writer of plays.[32]

This appreciation for the craft of acting would be especially important to Graham and co-artistic director Hoggett, directors who started out as performers themselves.

Lavery's honesty about the limitations of text is also a feature that is attractive to collaborative companies, who, like Frantic Assembly, generally emphasize physical expression within a performance. She says:

> The playwright's role is always to provide that moment when everything makes sense and it's heartbreaking to acknowledge that it rarely comes from the text. But once you take that truth on board, you're always writing for that point of absolute silence. When everyone in the room knows what they are feeling and thinking and seeing. [33]

Stockholm required a playwright who could combine an understanding of the devising process with the skill to deliver a complicated and unusual narrative. According to Scott Graham: 'we are desperate for *Stockholm* to be a love story. It is not told from an objective position after the breakup of an abusive or destructive relationship. It is told from the

---

[32] Bryony Lavery, 'Writing with Actors... or... The Playwright Gets Out of Her Garret', in *The Women Writers' Handbook,* ed. by Cheryl Robson, Vania Georgeson, and Janet Beck (London: Aurora Metro, 1990), pp. 48-50 (p. 48).

[33] Nancy Groves, 'Brief Encounter with... Playwright Bryony Lavery' , *WhatsOnStage*, 9 September 2010 <http://www.whatsonstage.com/interviews/theatre/off-west+end/E8831284039456/Brief+Encounter+With+...+Playwright+Bryony+Lavery.html> [accessed 30 September 2010].

subjective heart of an existing relationship.'[34] Frantic Assembly's performative style meant that the playwright brought into the collaboration must be adept at marrying the unspoken, physical communication that exists within a romantic relationship, to dialogue. According to Sarah Sigal, their previous collaboration with playwright Mark Ravenhill on *pool (no water)* had left them feeling 'dissatisfied', because (quoting Hoggett) the 'text and movement was hard to put together'.[35] Following this experience, Lavery's background in devising, and her pre-established predilection for leaving space within the script for a performer to physicalize emotion, made her an attractive collaborator for *Stockholm*.

Lavery was present even in the initial research and development sessions, and worked alongside the directors/choreographers, set designer, sound designer, lighting designer, and performers. These sessions included interviews, visits, presentation of research, and talks, but were predominantly focused on physical choreographic work.[36] Though Frantic Assembly have a long history of working with writers, they were not sure what to expect when they first started working with Lavery on *Stockholm:*

> [We] thought that the writer, Bryony Lavery, [...] would sit with us and write, we would work on some moves, she would do some more writing, but for two weeks she just sat with us and cried when we got it right because it was all about tiny movements and looks between people.[37]

Ironically, for a company dedicated to movement, Hoggett and Graham say that usually, 'the text comes first in our rehearsal process'. They were initially concerned that these early *Stockholm* workshop sessions were overly-focused on physical depiction: 'The physicality we were exploring was opening up such a complex and truthful world with believable and

[34] Scott Graham, *'Stockholm': A Comprehensive Guide*, p. 5.
[35] Sarah Sigal, 'The Role of the Writer and Authorship in New Collaborative Performance-Making in the United Kingdom from 2001-2010', unpublished PhD thesis (University of London, Goldsmiths, 2013), pp. 223-24. Unlike Lavery, Ravenhill did not have extensive experience in devising.
[36] Scott Graham, email to Karen Morash, 10 June 2011. For a full transcript of Graham's response, see Appendix D, section 1.
[37] From 'Connecting Conversations: Directors Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett in Conversation with Mary Morgan and Philip Stokoe at Hamptead Theatre' audio interview, <www.connectingconversations.org/?location_id=2&item=43> [accessed 10 July 2010].

complicated characters but we were not really finding their words.'[38] At this early stage, Lavery was not helping to quell their fears: she chose to take notes, draw diagrams, and absorb as much as possible during the initial workshop process, before attempting to write anything.[39] This approach replicates the incorporation of writers into the Open Theatre's devising process as discussed in Chapter One, and that of Caryl Churchill and Joint Stock, as examined in Chapter Three. Trying to do script work during these early stages can often be a struggle, as Lavery explains: 'I simply *watched* Frantic Assembly make movement ideas for two weeks. I tried to write… but realized text and movement wanted to occupy *centre stage*.'[40]

Rather than being focused on the construction of dialogue, the type of observation involved in these early stages is often affective, and influenced by the writer's own presence in the room, although I would argue that a writer-deviser does not hold the same status as Montessori's teacher-observer; the writer (in Barton's collaborative context) is both inside and outside of the collaboration. Therefore, although close observation is an important strategy, it is impossible to be completely clinical in this situation, as the writer's notes will inevitably be phenomenologically structured. However, this is not necessarily negative: as previously argued, it is the writer's individual creative presence in the room, and skills in the reconstruction on the page of workshop activities, again based on the premise of being at once both an insider and an outsider, which is attractive to many devising companies.

Reflecting on workshop exercises such as 'Cuddles', where a loving embrace becomes increasingly complex and hostile, and 'Kitchen Kiss' where performers in pairs attempt to steal kisses in a kitchen environment, with shifting scenarios of power and status, aided Lavery in creating dramatic situations which would explore some of the observations coming

[38] Scott Graham, *'Stockholm': A Comprehensive Guide*, p. 7.
[39] See the introduction of Bryony Lavery, *Stockholm*, (London: Oberon Books, 2007), pp. 12-16, for examples of her notes and diagrams.
[40] Lavery, email, 23 May 2010 (Lavery's emphasis).

out of the physical work.[41] Out of the initial two-week workshop, Frantic Assembly and Lavery also came up with what they called the 'recipe' for *Stockholm*:

> A couple
> 'Us'
> A day
> Some events
> A plea. Some demands. (An ultimatum – the deadline is reached and passed)
> A recipe/A confession
> A meal is cooked
> The last dance
> (The end of the world)[42]

This list of characters and events, plus her observations of movement, were the building blocks on which Lavery structured her script; as she explains: 'I had to go away and work out how to make the two work together. So I made the *movement* the scenes. I then produced a text which was, largely, what we took into rehearsal.'[43]

Though this approach may have caused Frantic Assembly some initial apprehension, it meant that Lavery had the freedom, away from the rehearsal room, to shape the narrative and language in her own way, keeping in mind the physical work she had witnessed, whilst finding a consistency of voice and situation that is not always possible in the workshop. This kind of flexibility is essential for writers who are involved in the devising process; a writer may employ improvised ('free') writing within the devising room as one of many techniques for developing ideas, but it is useful to reflect in isolation on the raw material produced in the workshop, and find ways of structuring the script so that the physical and textual exploration of the rehearsals becomes coherent on the page (and eventually the stage). Lavery was more than a simple amanuensis; Frantic Assembly chose to work with her because of her specific

[41] For a detailed explanation of these exercises, see Scott Graham, *'Stockholm': a Comprehensive Guide*, pp. 8-11.
[42] Scott Graham, *'Stockholm': a Comprehensive Guide*, p. 9.
[43] Lavery, email, 23 May 2010.

technical skills and gave her the time and freedom to use them, weaving together her structural techniques with the corporal modes of expression experienced in the workshops.

What resulted was a visceral and physically exhilarating production, where the audience came to understand the motivations of protagonists Kali and Todd in a multi-faceted way that is typical of devised plays. Characters were explored through movement, sound, visual imagery, rhythm, and dialogue, using a variety of interwoven techniques that indicate the presence of different specialists (writer, choreographers, directors, designers, and performers) in the early stages of development. Lavery's dialogue is often rhythmic and lyrical, reflecting the usage of music in the workshop room:

> **TODD**
> He likes to make her laugh
> He loves to have her laughing
> She's got an award-winning laugh...[44]

The regular use of the third person by Todd and Kali (as indicated in the quotation above) when referring to themselves and their relationship, hints at a collaborative development process where four performers (as opposed to two in the actual production) were used in the early stages to explore both the reality of the characters and the image of themselves they wished to present to the outside world.[45] Lavery held on to this duality, stating that at various moments Kali and Todd are 'either presenting a view of themselves which they would like us to buy, or talking about something they cannot admit into their dangerous construction of a relationship'.[46] Dancing together effortlessly around their house, they display a desire to show off their synchronicity; the audience, observing the 'dangerous

[44] Lavery, *Stockholm*, p. 24; Frantic Assembly often incorporate music into workshop, rehearsal, and performance.
[45] Scott Graham, *Stockholm: A Comprehensive Guide*, p. 7.
[46] Lavery, email, 23 May 2010.

kitchen', with an assortment of knives on display, sense the peril long before the characters do.[47]

At other moments, the hand of a writer highly experienced in crafting dialogue (influenced by her observations of performers' speech patterns) is obvious. As the play progresses, Todd and Kali's speech becomes more hesitant; trailing sentences, changing rhythms, and pauses reveal underlying insecurities, and the joyful movement and language of the early scenes spirals into darkness and violence. For example, Kali's speech in the attic (which takes place after the initial conflict between the couple is revealed), where she describes what was there before they remodelled, suggests a great deal about her life and past outside of her relationship with Todd and helps us to understand the background to her unreasonable behaviour and jealousy of his family:

> **KALI**
> [...]
> Full of junk
>
> All the families who used to live here just dumped all their shit up here... magazines newspapers from Biblical times old photographs she's not a Big Fan of 'Families'.[48]

Lavery employs a strategic pause followed by the comma-less listing of items. This allowed performer Georgina Lamb to indicate to us that 'family' is not a comfortable topic for Kali; her troubled thoughts interrupt the flow of her words, and when she does speak, she rushes over what is not comfortable for her. Though Lavery may not have replicated exactly what was said in rehearsal, she has taken careful note of Lamb's physical presentation of Kali and structured her dialogue accordingly. Many writers use subtext, but Lavery's textual structure is unusual and strongly indicative of the physical awareness gained from being present in the

[47] Lavery, *Stockholm*, p. 60.
[48] Lavery, *Stockholm*, p. 51.

rehearsal room.[49] In performance, Georgina Lamb used Lavery's suggested rhythms to full advantage to allow the audience to see that Kali, who initially appeared confident and charismatic, is in fact deeply troubled.[50]

Critic Lyn Gardner stated that the play came together 'like a perfectly designed piece of flat-packed furniture and is a sinister joy'.[51] Dominic Cavendish added: 'True to Frantic form, an intricate physicality underwrites the entwined amorousness and abuse.'[52] Whilst testifying to the aforementioned multi-layered approach to portraying the relationship of Kali and Todd, these comments show an appreciation of the skill Lavery has in weaving together the physical work of the early devising period with her highly structured dialogue. They also provide a counterpoint to the press critiques of *Narrative* and *TaniwhaThames* in Chapter Three; in this case, a fractured (yet coherent) structure, punctuated by physicality, is something to be celebrated.

Those who are aware of the work done in the first workshop will find evidence of it throughout the play: Scott Graham states that, in *Stockholm*,

> what Bryony does beautifully is capture some of the ideas that emerge from the physical tasks and places them poetically within the text [...] each stage direction referred to a devising task from the workshops. She laced these suggestions/ideas seamlessly. We did not know how or when we might use all of them before Bryony presented her text.[53]

All the ingredients in the 'recipe' above were included in the final draft, including 'the end of the world', which became a speech by the abstract character 'US', who forecasts a horrific ending to the relationship when their 'beautiful beautiful children' are found in the basement

---

[49] See Chapter Five for a discussion of the relationship of subtext to physical expression.
[50] I observed a recorded DVD of the 27 October 2007 performance at the Belgrade Coventry.
[51] Lyn Gardner, 'Stockholm', *Guardian*, 26 September 2007, in *Theatre Record*, 10-23 September 2007, p. 1077.
[52] Dominic Cavendish, 'On the Road: Seeing Stars with No Names', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 2007
< http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3668540/On-the-road-Seeing-stars-with-no-names.html> [accessed 30 September 2010].
[53] Graham, email, 10 June 2011.

'still as dolls'.[54] 'Kitchen Kiss' appears to be the antecedent of a deceptively light-hearted physical power struggle in the kitchen where Kali attempts to distract Todd from the cooking. Lavery allowed Graham, Hoggett, and the actors to have control of that moment through the simple stage directions of: '**She starts to dance with him.../ It goes everywhere dangerous...**'.[55] This resulted in an extended movement sequence which featured sexual, yet competitive and aggressive choreography, which spoke of the couple's physical intimacy, whilst suggesting the potential of violence.

It is clear that whilst Graham and Hoggett are skilled in certain aspects of production, like many devising companies, they require the specific talents of an experienced writer to assemble the strands of the various developmental exercises into something cohesive and dramatic. For example, the company did early work with physical shapes in sleep and what they reveal about the sleeper. Graham says 'we were never fully convinced it was a scene'.[56] However, Lavery saw the potential of it and included it in the final moments, writing:

> **They fall asleep.**
> **They throw their sleeping shapes in their pattern.**
> **Even in their sleep, there is territory, negotiation and danger.**
> **Once, only once during the whole thing, they are both**
> **awake at the same time. At this moment, they look at**
> **each other**.[57]

It is one of the most striking images of the show, telling the audience that, despite the violence and insecurity within the relationship, this is a couple in love. Lavery recognized that it was not possible to express this contradiction in words, especially as the characters did not have the clarity to understand their relationship in this way. Witnessing the power of this

[54] Lavery, *Stockholm*, p. 73.
[55] Lavery, *Stockholm*, p. 40.
[56] Graham, email, 10 June 2011.
[57] Lavery, *Stockholm*, p. 71-72.

particular physical moment in the workshop, Lavery, as Scott Graham suggests, was 'unafraid to suggest that a different theatrical text [rather than words] should take precedence here'.[58]

Yet, this approach was not without its detractors. Writing for *Metro*, Keith Watson said that the production 'crucially lacks heart' and *Time Out London*'s Brian Logan stated that he 'found its characters unlikeable from the outset'.[59] In their lack of connection with the characters, Watson and Logan identify a common complaint with devised productions; dialogue, one of the dominant features of text-based British theatre productions, must share the spotlight with design and movement and the result can at times feel over-crowded, with the voice of particular characters diminished, which makes it more difficult for an audience to connect to them. Watson and Logan, as mainstream critics, are arguably more accustomed to viewing performances where characters use extended dialogue and/or monologue to expose their motivation and thoughts to an audience.

One could argue that the physicality (and design) of a production like *Stockholm* can illuminate character as much, if not more, than dialogue. Hoggett and Graham state: 'One of our main requirements when commissioning a writer is to consider space. By that we mean the unsaid. This could be rage or sadness or unrequited love. By remaining unsaid they offer rich pickings for choreographed physicality.'[60] For example, the stage directions which prompted a three-minute sequence where characters Kali and Todd unpack their shopping, dazzling the audience with various physical feats, including a gravity-defying leap which turns off the kitchen tap, read: '**They unpack and sort the shopping brilliantly./ They show us that they could unpack shopping for England.**'[61] In writing these simple instructions, Lavery displays an understanding of Frantic's specific capabilities; through a series of stylized and expressive movements we see a couple who work together as one unit, and have

[58] Graham, email, 10 June 2011.
[59] Keith Watson, '*Stockholm*' *Metro* (London), 19 May 2008, in *Theatre Record*, 5-18 May 2008, p. 559; Brian Logan '*Stockholm*', *Time Out London*, 22 May 2008, in *Theatre Record*, 5-18 May 2008, p. 559.
[60] Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett, *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 170.
[61] Lavery, *Stockholm*, p. 35.

the kind of confident, effortless and playful physical relationship many of us wish to have. This early moment of physical complicity is essential to make the violence of later scenes all the more horrific. To establish this in dialogue would have proved counter-intuitive; physicality is an essential part of the relationship of Todd and Kali and therefore it is a relationship that should be explored physically. In fact, movement is such a crucial ingredient of this production that Lavery changed the physical layout of her script, writing the stage directions in bold (as above) instead of the traditional italics.

The comments of Watson and Logan were, however, a small blot on the landscape of a critically successful production; Fiona Mountford called it 'a valuable new work that is, in every way, bruising' and Lyn Gardner claimed it was 'up there with the very best of the year so far'. [62] *Stockholm* is successful because the combination of writer-composed dialogue and director/actor-devised physicality gives us an alternative insight into the characters, and challenges the audience's preconceived notions about love and violence. This is a play which could only have been produced collaboratively. Those involved in its development were fruitfully reliant on the skills of their co-devisers. Similarly, when Lavery worked with theatre company Sound&Fury to produce *Kursk*, she was as reliant upon their input as they were upon hers, yet the production which resulted stands as an interesting contrast to *Stockholm*, in that there is much less reliance on physical movement to reveal the relationships between characters. Therefore, an examination of the process of creating *Kursk*, in comparison with *Stockholm*, shows how, depending on the specificities of a particular devising context and its associated processes, the involvement of a writer-deviser can result in a myriad of production styles, although the trace of devising can always be found.

[62] Fiona Mountford, 'Prisoners of Passion', *London Evening Standard*, 15 May 2008, in *Theatre Record*, 5-18 May 2008, p. 559; Lyn Gardner, '*Stockholm'*, *Guardian*, 26 September 2007.

Kursk

As a play developed collaboratively in a similar fashion to *Stockholm*, but based on extensive factual research rather than physical exploration, *Kursk* stands at the median of two methodological approaches to play-making. Set aboard a British submarine in the same waters as the ill-fated Russian vessel of the title, the production aimed to provide the audience, who stood watching from above or amidst the actors in the performance space, promenade-style, with a realistic experience of being in a submarine.[63] Sound&Fury provided the physical experience through an immersive technical design, reproducing the sounds and sights of a submarine, and Lavery was responsible for presenting the psychological experience with a script that combined the complicated language of military procedure with the intimate details of the men's lives.

Sound&Fury are a company who, according to co-artistic director Tom Espiner, 'use sound as a crucial part of the *mise en scène* and in so doing aim to engage the audience in innovative ways, but also weave the sound design into the fabric of storytelling and dramatic structure'.[64] They have established themselves as a company who use their technical expertise collaboratively, taking innovative approaches (such as total dark immersion in *War Music* and *The Watery Part of the World*) to engage audiences in a sensorial, intellectual, and emotional way. Based on the success of their earlier work, Sound&Fury were given an Arvon Foundation grant, funding them to experiment with their processes by pairing the company with an experienced collaborative writer in a workshop setting; this writer was Bryony Lavery. The development week combined improvisation exercises with spatial and sound exploration, functioning as a sort of skill exchange, introducing both writer and company to new theatrical approaches, as Tom Espiner explains:

[63] I attended a performance at the Young Vic Theatre, London, 31 March 2010.
[64] Tom Espiner, email to Karen Morash, 11 August 2010. For a full transcript of Espiner's response, see Appendix D, section 2.

> Bryony [...] opened some areas of creativity for us that we hadn't really explored before. Also she shared a real curiosity in experimenting with form, in how to engage with audience and space in different ways, and in exploring the different manifestations of life on board a contained environment such as a submarine. These are all things which are arguably not the conventional playground for a writer.[65]

In pointing out the difference between Lavery and more conventional writers, Espiner indicates the value for a playwright of working within the devising process. Lavery's past experience working collaboratively, and her understanding of how best to employ the performance and production skills of others, meant that she took a multi-dimensional approach to the development of *Kursk*, thinking beyond plot and dialogue to how to engage physically the audience within the story. As with Frantic Assembly, Lavery displayed careful consideration for the particular speciality of the company with which she was collaborating. In the case of Sound&Fury, it was their ability to create an aural and visual landscape for an audience through sound and lighting effects.

The period of development differed from *Stockholm* in that it, by necessity of the subject matter, involved a great deal of research outside the rehearsal room. Lavery and the company (including directors, performers, and designers) worked closely with the Royal Navy and the Ministry of Defence, and were given rare access to two nuclear submarines. Lavery was ill during some of the process and had to rely on a dossier of research and requirements for the script, provided by Sound&Fury.[66] Despite her extended experience in collaborative theatre, working in this way was not uncomplicated for Lavery. She describes the writing of the script as 'like playing 5th [*sic*] dimensional chess': 'They [the production team] actually wrote and provided the technical jargon of the subs running… plus, in the dossier... lots of the detail of submariners' lives which I then knitted together.'[67]

[65] Espiner, email, 11 August 2010.
[66] Lavery, email, 23 May, 2010.
[67] Lavery, email, 23 May, 2010.

In this way, there is a link to the early stages of the development of *Stockholm*, in that she was provided with a 'recipe' for what was required on stage, and had to build a script based on it, paying careful attention to the specific demands of the company. As lighting designer Hansjörg Schmidt explains: 'we, the company very early on decided that we would have strict rules: there would be no strong narrative but a chain of routines and observations.'[68] The story of *Kursk* is revealed as much through technical features as dialogue; the speech that exists is primarily related to the action. For example, in scene eighteen, a moment of high drama when the British submarine stealthily moves beneath the Kursk in order to photograph its workings, is written as:

> *All non-essentials to bunks. Limited movements. Ventilation stopped. Showers switched off. Water isolated. Galley shut down. People speak in lowered voices in the control room. SYS CON switches various buttons to shut down areas of the boat.*
>
> **COXN/DONNIE BLACK**
> OK lads, low sexy voices
> Move like butterflies sting like bees...[69]

Rather than being told through expository dialogue, the audience sees the physical necessities of working aboard a submarine on a covert operation. Donnie Black's comments also reveal something of his personality whilst being rooted in action, as opposed to reflection. Unlike *Stockholm*, which relied on the creative team's emotional and physical exploration of an extreme situation, *Kursk* is deeply dependent on factual research for its accuracy; because the company had been aboard a submarine, spoken to submariners and read accounts of missions, Lavery was able to provide the audience with enough technical detail to make them believe in this very particular world. However, like *Stockholm* (and every collaborative project she has worked on), it is the transformation by a writer of the raw material amassed during the

[68] Hansjörg Schmidt, 'Lighting Kursk: Creating Immersive Environments, and the Politics of the Real', <http://theatrefutures.org.uk/performance_prompt/lighting-kursk-creating-immersive-environments-and-the-politics-of-the-real> [accessed 12 June 2011].
[69] Bryony Lavery, *Kursk* (London: Oberon Books, 2009), p. 79.

development period into something structurally coherent with recognizable characters, that makes *Kursk* a play. Otherwise, it would be merely a series of facts and observations with little emotional resonance. Sound&Fury relied on Lavery to transform their ideas and details into something which worked on stage.

As such, the script — and therefore the performance — is overflowing with technical instruction and communication amongst the submariners, based on the research provided by her collaborators; Lavery's desire to honour the development work done by the team is palpable. Lyn Gardner said the play was 'too information-heavy at times' and Rafael Behr complained 'the plot risks submersion in the sound effects and naval jargon'. [70] For example, at a moment when the submariners are about to break through the ice to take a look at the Arctic snow (a moment of considerable excitement for the men), the following jargon-heavy dialogue is spoken:

> **NAVIGATOR/KEN**
> 38m sir
>
> **THE BOSS**
> Roger. Cox'n 6 up.
>
> **COXN/DONNIE BLACK**
> 6 up
> [...]
> Pump 500 litres from Ms and Os to sea.[71]

Whilst this is likely an accurate portrayal of the procedural language the submariners would use, it might be confusing for the audience (mainly comprised of those without specialist knowledge of military procedure), who are more interested in the men's reaction to the dazzling beauty outside.

---

[70] Lyn Gardner, '*Kursk*', *Guardian*, 31 March 2010 <www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/mar/31/kursk-review> [accessed 2 October 2010]; Rafael Behr, '*Kursk*', *Observer*, 21 June 2009, in *Theatre Record*, 4-17 June 2009, p. 644.

[71] Lavery, *Kursk*, pp. 59-60

One of the pitfalls for playwrights who work collaboratively is a desire (or even a requirement, dictated by the collaborative company who have hired the writer and ultimately have control over the production) to insert scenes which serve to emphasize the technical specialities of the company more than advance the plot or develop character. However, Lavery did attempt, where possible, to incorporate more emotive aspects into the highly technical production; for example, an atmospheric moment when a submariner evokes the sounds of the outside world heard by men trapped inside the extreme confines of a submarine. As 'Sonar' speaks, taking on the role of a late-night DJ, the sounds he mentions, including killer whales and snow, become a poetic combination of word and sonic effects. The audience, standing in the dim light and shut off from the outside world, experience the otherworldly effect of 'hearing' snow for the first time:

> **SONAR**
> This is DJ Sonar
>
> Playing your favourite sea tracks...
>
> At number four...
>
> Ice floes colliding
>
> *And we hear them...*
> [...]
>
> And at number one...
>
> Snow
> *And, delicately, this too...*
>
> It's snowing up there... [72]

This allows spectators to understand how dependent the submariners, who have been living beneath the sea for months, are on these small auditory impressions of the world outside.

[72] Lavery, *Kursk*, p. 54.

Dialogue on its own, or sound cue alone could not evoke this moment; it is only achievable through the collaboration of a playwright with a sound technician.

In line with the strong focus in the script on the technical aspects of production, it is also interesting to note how Lavery's stage directions in *Kursk* differ in style to her previous collaboratively-written plays. There is much less of her own voice and abstract suggestion, and much more specific instruction for movement and sound. Consider, for example:

> **COXN/DONNIE BLACK**
> Stop engines roger sir
>
> *Leans forward and moves the engine telegraph to 'stop' – it makes a clunking sound as he turns it; but instantaneously Manoeuvre Room would repeat it and a buzzer sounds out of the console in front, as...*[73]

This results from the emphasis on technical interpretation (as opposed to improvisation and discussion) in the development process; Lavery is able to adapt her writing style to match the emphasis of this particular collaboration.

This is not to say, however, that the play is entirely devoid of character-driven narrative. The submariners are well drawn and likeably flawed; reviewer Dominic Cavendish claimed the men 'come to feel like old friends by the end'.[74] Employing her training as a writer, Lavery used the given circumstances of the Kursk sinking and the day-to-day activities of men isolated from the world, to explore, as John Howard Lawson states, the 'inner action' which is 'part of the whole action which includes the individual and the totality of his environment'.[75] As argued in Chapter Two, character and action are inextricably entwined, and neither dominates.

---

[73] Lavery, *Kursk*, p. 61.
[74] Dominic Cavendish, '*Kursk*', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 June 2009, in *Theatre Record*, 4-17 June 2009, p. 642.
[75] John Howard Lawson, *Theory and Technique of Playwriting and Screenwriting*, 3rd edn (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. 6.

This intertwining is evident in the story of Newdadmike, who leaves behind a wife and much-loved newborn daughter. In the final scene of the play, as he climbs from the submarine to a helicopter to deal with his baby's untimely death, the captain dictates a poetic tribute to the lost Kursk submariners, and their names are read out. This evocative moment stands as an example of the efficacy of collaborative theatre. A potent combination of factors makes for a poignant and moving conclusion, where the audience engage with the action physically, emotionally, and intellectually. These factors include: factual detail which emanated from the company's research (the names, positions, and birthplaces of the lost men and the commands associated with disembarking a submarine); visual detail (the re-assembling of the Russian dolls, a powerful metaphorical device suggested by designer Jon Bauser and incorporated by Lavery, which initially appeared humorous but became a tragic image in the final moments, along with the removal of a toy submarine from the baby's mobile by Newdadmike); sound design (the helicopter's approach followed by total silence); and Lavery's narrative.[76] These integrated features link to Lehmann's concept of synaesthesia, as discussed in Chapter One.[77] Simply knowing the factual detail of the Kursk disaster is not enough for us to comprehend the loss; it is only once we have been immersed in the world of the submariner, understood the demands of their daily lives, experienced the humour, stress, camaraderie, and sadness, and seen how their personal lives resonate with our own, that this becomes more than a simple news story. The individual skills of the collaborative team are evidenced in these final moments and are inter-linked. Lavery wrote the scene, but was reliant on the information, technical skills and aesthetic vision of the people with whom she developed the play.

Michael Billington, who proclaimed the play 'something wholly original', recognized that the success of the production lay in its collaborative context: 'What is impressive is the seamless merging of human interest and scenic excitement in Lavery's script and the

[76] For Russian dolls, Lavery, email, 23 May, 2010.
[77] See Chapter One for an explanation of synaesthesia.

massively detailed production by Mark Espiner and Dan Jones [of Sound&Fury].' [78] Lavery's skills, honed from many years of working with devising companies, allowed her to produce a script which combined storytelling and character development, whilst providing space for the technical expertise of Sound&Fury. Although *Kursk* is very different to *Stockholm*, the two plays are good examples of the polyvocal theatricality which results from a positive collaboration between writer-deviser and company. *Frozen*, which was written by Lavery as a solo playwright, shows the imprint of her collaborative experiences, whilst providing a good comparison of the different approaches to devised and non-devised work.

Frozen

Frozen was commissioned by the Birmingham Rep and was produced on stage in 1998. The production (with some script changes) transferred to the National Theatre (Cottesloe Theatre) in 2002 and Broadway in 2004. An account of the interaction between a child killer, his victim's mother, and a clinical expert, the play fuses naturalistic dialogue and non-realistic stage imagery to provide an acute study of grief. In the programme notes to the National Theatre production, Lavery explains the genesis of the play:

> I asked the Birmingham Rep if I could write a play about the banality of evil [...]. I started collecting a huge file of articles and watching films on real crimes. What had the greatest effect on me was a film of the Moors murders, twenty years on. The victims' relatives had such frozen looks on their faces, as if they were transfixed by that moment of murder. But the thing that really enabled me to progress was an account by Marion Partington about losing her sister, Lucy, who was murdered by Fred West. She and her family had moved forward through love and intelligence — it became about Good, not Evil.[79]

[78] Michael Billington, '*Kurs*k', *Guardian*, 9 June 2009, in *Theatre Record* , 4-17 June 2009, p. 642.
[79] An interview with Dinah Wood in the programme notes for *Frozen*, National Theatre, London, 2002, p. 4.

Lavery later describes this process as: 'Read. Imagine. Write. Check.'[80] This tells us that, as opposed to writing immediately from the germ of an idea as some playwrights do, she spends time researching and accumulating material, both factual and notional, before creating the structure, plot, and characters of the play. In some ways, this replicates the process of devising, particularly the structure used by Joint Stock, whereby the writer is initially exposed to the both traditional forms of research (reading texts, observing footage, interviews, etc), undertaken by members of the collaborative team (including the playwright), alongside research in the form of improvisations and physical exploration. This is followed by a period of reflection and writing away from the rehearsal room, and finally receiving and implementing editorial comments from the group. When working as a solo playwright, however, the playwright is largely responsible for her own research (unless she employs an assistant), which can lead to a lack of breadth, and, whilst most writers receive editorial feedback from external sources, the majority will not be intimate with the developmental processes of the play. This, as explored below and in Chapter Five, can have benefits and drawbacks.

This process is represented by the many direct references within the play to Lavery's research, which become obvious when one consults the source material. Marion Partington's article 'Salvaging the Sacred', for example, is referenced numerous times and many of the striking images from the play come directly from Partington's account of dealing with her sister's murder. Examples include the Tibetan prayer flags in scene seventeen, and the arresting moment when Nancy (the mother of the murdered child in *Frozen*) holds her daughter's skull in the mortuary in scene nineteen; Partington wrote about a very similar experience.[81]

---

[80] Programme notes for *Frozen*, p. 5.

[81] Marion Partington, 'Salvaging the Sacred', *Guardian*, 18 May 1996 <proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=159&did=17327095&SrchMode=3&sid=1&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1303988525&clientId=48828&aid=3> [accessed 20 April 2011]. For text-by-text examples of Partington's words and Lavery's usage of them, see Appendix E.

Even the play's title, *Frozen*, and the regular usage of its associated metaphor, echoes a passage from Partington's article, where she describes her mental state after her sister disappeared as, 'a bit like trying to search for a body that is trapped somewhere beneath the frozen Arctic Ocean, as the freeze continues and the ice thickens'.[82] Lavery does, however, claim that she 'had decided to call her play *Frozen* long before she came across Partington's piece, sensing the aptness of that icy metaphor'.[83] This indicates that, in a similar way to devised work, the origins of an idea can become blurred when a writer draws heavily on research (be it textual or physical) undertaken before writing.

In the case of *Frozen*, this opacity between primary source material and dramatic realization created legal issues for Lavery when she was accused of plagiarism by an eminent US criminal psychiatrist. Dorothy Lewis claimed Lavery had plagiarized passages from a long feature Malcolm Gladwell wrote about her life for the *New Yorker*, entitled 'Damaged'. The number of obvious similarities, and even direct quotations, are undeniable.[84] The question therefore arises: how could Lavery, an experienced writer (and teacher of writing), make such a fundamental error in neglecting to credit her source material?

Lavery had not worked with actors and a director in the developmental stages of *Frozen*, but there is the possibility that the devising process, and Lavery's long experience with it, was to blame. A script developed from devising draws on many sources (research done by participants, improvisations, and discussions) and, as previously noted, there is rarely ownership of a generative idea in collaborative contexts, as participants often forget who came up with it in the first place. For a writer who uses only secondary research it would have been habitual to credit sources, but it is a fairly easy mistake to make for a writer like Lavery, who, because of her experience within the devising process, is accustomed to using a myriad of sources, which generally go uncredited. Malcolm Gladwell himself recognized this and

---

[82] Partington, 'Salvaging the Sacred'.
[83] Lyn Gardner, 'In Cold Blood', *Guardian*, 26 June 2002 <www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2002/jun/26/artsfeatures> [accessed 27 May 2011].
[84] See Appendix F for examples.

wrote an article in support of Lavery for the *New Yorker*, arguing that she borrowed his material to write 'something entirely new', adding: 'Isn't that the way creativity is supposed to work?'[85] In this way, even though she did not physically work with anyone else in the development period of *Frozen*, the imprint of collaboration, and the creative process of utilizing other people's ideas to generate new work, is there.

Structurally, there are also many links between *Frozen* and Lavery's devised work, including the use of non-words and dialogue spacing which leaves room for the performer's internal processes:

> **Nancy**
> [...]
> No nothing.
> Just space
> for
> something fresh
> bit of . . . light
> in the red
>
> bit of fresh air
> new feelings[86]

There are, however, significant departures from Lavery's collaborative writing, which reveal a great deal about the two different processes of generating a stage play. A good example is Lavery's use of stage directions. As previously noted, her instructions to directors and actors can be abstract in her collaboratively-produced work, leaving space for the creative interpretation of a director (with whom she has already established a relationship in the devising room). In *Frozen*, her directions are more specific, and there is very little evidence of the humorous tactics she uses to cajole directors in the devised scripts. For example, it may appear to an audience that the effectively seamless movement of researcher Agnetha between lecture hall and prison cell in scene twelve was a directorial choice connecting scientific

[85] Malcolm Gladwell, 'Something Borrowed', *New Yorker*, 22 November 2004 <www.gladwell.com/2004/2004_11_25_a_borrowed.html> [accessed 29 April 2011].
[86] For Agnetha, see Lavery, *Frozen*, p. 102; for Nancy see Lavery, *Frozen*, p. 175

theory to physical manifestation in the movements of serial killer Ralph. It was, however, specifically dictated by Lavery, who wrote: '*Agnetha, a large, academic hall somewhere*' before moving the audience's attention to Ralph with '*Ralph's head lit as if it is an exhibit*'. She then instructs Agnetha to move to him, whilst simultaneously keeping her in the lecture hall, with '*She walks over to stand behind Ralph, demonstrating around his head, but not touching*', before finally placing them in the literal same place with '*The light on Ralph extends. Agnetha and Ralph are in the same space*'.[87] The specificity of these stage directions is indicative of a playwright working in a solo context, who does not know her director at the time of writing and therefore feels the need to carefully lay out the effect she wishes to create on stage. Though the stage directions in *Kursk* were also specific, the high content of technical instruction based on research provided by the company, as well as sound and lighting cues, might have proved confusing for a director who had not been involved in the development stage, and therefore strongly suggest a collaboratively-created piece. The stage directions in *Frozen* are simple, precise, and unlike *Stockholm* and *Kursk*, show no indication that those directing or performing the script share previous knowledge of Lavery's intentions.

Additionally, *Frozen* is much more reliant on long, descriptive monologues to impart information than Lavery's collaboratively-written scripts tend to be. There is very little physical action, or indeed dialogue, in the play. For example, in scene nineteen, rather than depicting a visitation to the mortuary, Lavery has Nancy describe the experience of seeing her daughter's bones, as she sits on something '*low, unsuitable*' and speaks to the audience.[88] She barely moves in the scene, and we are entirely reliant on the character's words to create in our imaginations the moment when Nancy holds the skull of her daughter.[89] Lines such as, 'I say to the Mortician "It's beautiful"', connect very closely to Lucy Partington's moving account

[87] Lavery, *Frozen*, pp. 131-34.
[88] Lavery, *Frozen*, p. 157.
[89] As observed on a video tape of the National Theatre London production, directed by Bill Alexander, recorded on 6 August 2002, from the National Theatre Archive, tape reference RNT/SO/2/2/148.

of seeing her sister's remains.[90] Partington says: 'I gasped at the beauty of her skull. It was like burnished gold and it was a part of Lucy that had survived to tell the tale.'[91] Critic Lyn Gardner claimed this was 'one of the most harrowingly beautiful moments that I have ever witnessed in the theatre'. [92] Lavery's account is so similar to Partington's that the source of the scene's beauty is brought into question. Yet, as Gardner's observation confirms, it is Partington's original experience and reflection on it, borrowed by Lavery for the character of Nancy, and made more beautiful through performance, which is responsible for the efficacy of this scene. Lavery's skills are in recognizing these moments, weaving them strategically into plot and character, and providing rich material for actors and directors to work with.

On the other hand, critic Madeleine North complained that Lavery's monologues could be 'over-explanatory' and Kate Bassett claimed that some speeches were 'too mannered'.[93] Whilst writing the play Lavery did not know the specific capabilities of the performer, director, and designers who would be realizing the scene, and therefore had to rely on the source material rather than taking a more adventurous, physical approach to the scene. As opposed to *Stockholm* and *Kursk*, where live visual and aural elements are integral to an audience's experience, *Frozen* is a play which does not, for the most part, employ non-dialogic aspects of stagecraft to aid understanding. Therefore, someone who has merely read the play is able to grasp the characters, actions and emotional implications nearly as fully as a person who has seen it performed; its emphasis tends to be more literary than theatrical.

This leads to another difference with Lavery's plays written within the context of collaboration: length. At just under three hours, *Frozen* is significantly longer than the average devised play. Many critics complained of a long evening, including Alastair Macauley, who claimed: 'The play could stand being cut by 20 minutes; several of the

---

[90] Lavery, *Frozen*, p. 159.
[91] Marion Partington, 'Salvaging the Sacred'.
[92] Lyn Gardner, 'Compassionate, Courageous Study of Chilling Crime', *Guardian*, 13 May 1998, p. 6.
[93] Madeleine North, 'How to Reach the Depths where a Baying Mob Can't Go', *Independent on Sunday*, 8 July 2002 in *Theatre Record*, 2-15 July 2002, p. 908; Kate Bassett, 'Brave Look at a Terrifying Subject', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 May 1998, in *Theatre Record*, 23 April – 6 May 1998, p. 587.

monologues aren't necessary.'[94] Lavery's determination to place the context of the play within the scientific fact of Dorothy Lewis's research does mean that the audience is subjected to many scenes attempting to explain Ralph's actions within a neurological context; one such scene would have likely been sufficient.

With some exceptions, contemporary devised plays tend to be short in comparison with traditional, dialogue-driven plays, both in the actual time a performance takes, and time as it is experienced by an audience. This can be explained by the fact that a devised play has many editors in the form of all the various collaborators; one person's excesses tend to be mitigated by the other participants' discerning eyes. When working as a solo playwright, an experienced writer such as Lavery might go through a number of drafts, but is likely to have far less input (and suggestions for cuts) from other people, than if she had worked through the script revisions with actors and director before arriving at a final draft.

Working within a solo context, however, has freed Lavery from the responsibility of having to respond to a company's particular speciality (for example, movement with Frantic Assembly and sound and lighting with Sound&Fury), and allowed her to create a tightly focused structure, where the intertwined relationships of three characters are slowly revealed. They initially do not occupy the same place or time; Agnetha's first scene is set in the New York of the present, whereas we first see Nancy and Ralph in the 1970s. The stories are told in monologue so that the audience do not immediately make the connection, until, at a strategic point (scene twelve) Ralph and Agnetha have their first meeting, seamlessly blended in (as discussed above) with Agnetha's lecture and, as Alastair Macauley says, 'then suddenly we see where the play's going, and just what these people have to do with each other, and it's horrifying'.[95]

Lavery has a difficult point to make with *Frozen*, that child killers are made, not born, and are therefore worthy of sympathy, and it is a point that, despite the emotional resonances

[94] Alastair Macaulay, 'Ice in the Soul Stirs Fire in the Heart', *Financial Times*, 5 July 2002, in *Theatre Record*, 2-15 July 2002, p. 906.
[95] Alastair Macauley, 'Ice in the Soul', p. 906.

of the play, needs to be made intellectually. Devised work, grounded within the physical skillset of the performer, designer, and director, tends to use sensory experience to evoke emotion and a sense of kinaesthetic resonance. An argument, appealing to the intellect, is present in both *Stockholm* and *Kursk* (*Stockholm* argues that there is legitimate love within violent relationships and *Kursk* argues that, despite cultural differences, we are all united through our sense of loss), but it is intertwined with — and perhaps subsumed by — the visual and aural elements of each play, which tend to evoke an emotional response. Freed of the requirement to think about the action in *Frozen* in a multi-sensory way, Lavery fully employs spoken text to make an appeal to the mind. *Frozen*, as Michael Billington says, 'genuinely enlarges one's understanding'.[96]

The imprint of Lavery's collaborative work is visible within *Frozen*, but it is clearly the product of a playwright working within a solo context, dependent on secondary resources. It is, given the subject matter, a suitable approach, though not without its flaws. *Frozen* stands as a good example of the different methodologies Lavery (and other playwrights) employ when writing alone, as opposed to working collaboratively. It is, like many non-devised plays, remarkable because of the position it takes (based on Lavery's extensive research) on its subject matter, rather than the innovative stagecraft employed in collaboratively-produced productions such as *Kursk* and *Stockholm*.

Conclusion

Lavery's openness to new ways of working and collaboration has served her, and those with whom she has worked, well. Although she has not avoided all the pitfalls of the devising process, her play-making methodologies, and the work produced as a result, provide evidence of the tangible effects of working collaboratively from the early stages of production. Lavery's writing, including her non-devised work, has undeniably been shaped by her

[96] Michael Billington, 'Frozen', *Guardian*, 4 July 2002 <www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2002/jul/04/theatre.artsfeatures> [accessed 27 May 2011].

collaborative experiences and their related processes, from the structure of her dialogue to the ambitious, yet ultimately achievable, physical and technical challenges she provides for her collaborators. She is a writer who responds enthusiastically to the requirements of her collaborators, even if this means she, as a playwright, has at times had to sacrifice her own words and ideas.

Nevertheless, she has carved out an identity as a writer who produces theatrical texts which appeal to her audience in a multi-faceted way, reaching the intellect, the emotions, and the senses. Her body of work, including her non-devised plays, is a testament to an artist who understands that words, whilst important, have limitations on stage, and that writers must create texts which build upon the complex skills of performers, directors and designers, to engage an audience in a holistic way. In this manner, Lavery's plays, and her commentary on the process of creating them, are useful for playwrights (including myself) who wish to engage with devising methodology and create work which positively exploits the skills of other playmakers to creative multi-faceted performances. In keeping with my previously-stated research-led practice/practice-led research methodological approach, Lavery's comments on both the context and processes of her body of writing, along with those of her collaborators, influence my own engagement within both collaborative and solo working contexts. As such, the close examination of Lavery's work in this chapter provides a foundation for the presentation and analysis of my devised and non-devised practice-as-research work in Chapter Five.