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Negotiating Creativity:

an analytical framework for the study  
of group theatre-making processes

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## **Negotiating Creativity: an analytical framework for the study of group theatre-making processes**

### **Abstract**

This thesis serves two functions. Firstly, it proposes a framework for the analysis of theatre-making processes. Such a framework is a necessary prerequisite for further developing the “articulation of process”<sup>1</sup> currently occupying drama scholarship, especially in relation to forms of practice that cannot be readily accessed through the semiotic model proposed by Patrice Pavis.<sup>2</sup> The second function is to offer a partial survey of post-war British devised theatre practice, an important subject that has yet to receive much serious analysis. Using the analytical framework, this thesis begins to map out this “sprawling, fragmentary”<sup>3</sup> and relatively uncharted territory and prepares the ground for further critical works.

Part I of the thesis reviews the current knowledge on devising practice then introduces the analytical framework. Part II identifies seven models of devising process that relate to specific traditions and areas of post-war British practice. The case-studies of Part III provide detailed analysis of leading devising companies that serves to illustrate selected models of devising.

This thesis is not intended as a practical guide for devisors: it is primarily a tool for scholarship. In its focus on the processual and interpersonal nature of devising, the framework allows us to take account of the transactional nature of theatre-making, conceived here as a system of creative negotiation. Thus, the thesis not only begins to map out an important field of practice but also proposes a framework for analysis that will have application beyond the scope of this research.

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (eds.); *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, London: Faber and Faber 1999 p. xv

<sup>2</sup> ‘From Page to Stage, A Difficult Birth’ in Patrice Pavis; *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. 24–25

<sup>3</sup> Alison Oddey; *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, London: Routledge 1996 p. vii

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

This thesis serves two functions: it proposes a framework for the analysis of group theatre-making processes and—utilising this framework—it offers an examination of the commercial sector of British devised theatre practice. The analytical framework, which is developed in Chapter Two, provides a set of concepts and terminologies that facilitate examination and discussion of the interpersonal and transactional aspects of theatre-making. Part II of this thesis uses these concepts to identify seven models of devising practice that are distinguished according to criteria and variables highlighted by the analytical framework and that each pertain to particular strands of devising practice. These are: the Collective model that emerged from political theatre of the 1960s and 70s, the Devising Playwright which grew from developments in new writing from the 1950s, the Participatory model in applied theatre and drama practices, the Ensemble in physical and visual theatre of a primarily European tradition, the System model of performance and live art, the Network model in design- and technology-led theatre making and the Double-Act model in the emerging area of physical comedy. Part III consists of three case-studies, that is, detailed accounts and analyses of creative projects by three established devising companies: the David Glass Ensemble, Forced Entertainment and Gary Stevens.

Of course, the two main components of the thesis are interrelated: the survey of British devising tests the analytical framework's ability to delineate methodologies according to their model of process and the interpersonal dynamics of their representative companies. Not only are the two components interrelated, they were developed reciprocally. The framework was both determined and continually tested by the research into devising practice while, at the same time, the studies and observations of devising practice were strongly focused by the developing framework.

It is important to state here that this thesis is not intended as a practical guide for devisors. Although the examples of practice that follow may be of value to practitioners, what is on offer is primarily a framework for the analysis of the theatre-making process: a tool for scholarship rather than practice. As will be demonstrated in the examination of devising practice that occupies the majority of this research, the framework is designed to enable the scholar to both formulate accounts of individual processes drawn from direct observation and to identify more general models of theatre-making across a range of practices. It provides a set of concepts and a vocabulary that allow us to describe key aspects of theatre-making. While the analytical framework might have been built out of a study of any form of group theatre-making, devising seemed a particularly pertinent body of practice because of the diversity of methodologies it encompasses and because of the tendency of its practitioners to avoid established techniques. A framework that is sufficiently robust and flexible to be useful in the study of devising promises to have application beyond this particular field.

There are other reasons for choosing this area of practice. Devising is a subject that is important historically and in terms of current practice but has yet to receive much in the way of serious analysis. It is an important area of practice in part because it is the chosen methodology of well-known international practitioners and companies such as Robert Wilson<sup>4</sup>, Robert Lepage, Peter Brook, Lev Dodin and the Théâtre du Soleil, with UK-based companies Forced Entertainment and Théâtre de Complicité gaining increasing recognition on this scale. Through these figures, devising has become associated with successful, innovative and avant-garde theatre practice. Devising is also a key methodology in applied theatre and drama practices that include the work of such pioneers as Augusto Boal and Eugenio Barba and the development of Theatre-in-Education (TIE) in the UK. As a tool for personal, social and cultural development, devising is intrinsic to an area of practice that is seen to reaffirm the value of drama at a time when theatre is suffering a crisis of worth.<sup>5</sup> Yet

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<sup>4</sup> Details on all of the devising practitioners and companies mentioned in this thesis are provided in Appendix One.

<sup>5</sup> This view is promoted by the titles of some recent publications, such as Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers (eds.); *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, London: Amber Lane Press 1999 and Michael Kustow; *Theatre@Risk*, London: Methuen 2000. This sense that theatre is “at risk” is perhaps contestable given that this is a period in which funding for the arts, and theatre specifically, has increased.

despite the prevalence and prominence of devising on both the international and domestic scale, there has only been one major study dedicated to the topic: Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre*<sup>6</sup> defined the field and predicted that devising would continue to play a significant role for the current generation of theatre-makers. This research develops Oddey's objective of "laying down the foundations" of the field.<sup>7</sup> Even ten years on from the original publication of her book in 1994, there is still considerable groundwork to be done in surveying a subject that Oddey describes as "sprawling, fragmentary" before we can truly begin to answer her demand for "more critically analytical works" to address the subject.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, this thesis confines itself to mapping out an area of this uncharted territory—defining its borders and visiting the major areas and sites—and to establishing an analytical methodology with which to do this.

Let us begin this study with my definition of devising:

Devising is a method of making theatre in which the starting point is not a conventional script.

There are three important implications raised by this definition. Firstly, devising is defined as 'everything-but' script-led theatre-making. What I have called 'a conventional script' is an important creative tool that puts in a particular and standardised written form (dialogue, stage directions, division of acts, scenes and so forth) the intended or imagined play-to-be.

Because of the particularity of the script format, script-led creative processes tend towards standardised models of process. These script-led models of process (which include revivals of previously-produced plays as well as productions of new writing) are the predominant way of making theatre in this country: they are inscribed into the productions practices of its major

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<sup>6</sup> Alison Oddey; *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, London: Routledge 1996

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 2

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. xii



theatre venues and to some degree they characterise the British theatre, which is historically defined by its playwrights.<sup>9</sup>

Devising is defined here in contra-distinction to this existing creative methodology: it is not script-led. Thus, devising accounts for a broad range of practices that include, but are not confined to, those that sit outside of the dominant theatre culture that uses the conventional script. To this extent, my definition of devising follows Oddey's characterisation of it as "eclectic"<sup>10</sup>.

A consequence of devising's eclectic nature is that the potential scope of my research becomes vast, encompassing a number of contexts, traditions and periods. The first step in dealing with the potentially huge range of practices that this research might encompass was to confine my study to the context of Britain, and England in particular. This was, at first, a decision based on practicality. Having worked in England (mainly London) I had prior understanding of its theatre context and the forces that determine its cultural climate, together with some personal contact with companies that might be approached as case-studies or illustrative examples. The focus on Britain is also strategically expedient, without limiting the value of the research: a close study of devising in Britain can provide a model for the study of the form in other contexts. Without compromising its value as a model for culturally specific devising elsewhere, Britain also affords an interesting, and in some ways unique, context. As a post-colonial country that has been particularly open to waves of immigration, it has a complex cultural history. Many of the major devising companies—this thesis' three case-studies included—owe aspects of their approach, aesthetics and methodologies to influences outside of the UK (though it is interesting that these influences come mainly from France and the United States of America rather than the other communities that make up Britain's rich cultural heritage). In addition, a study of devising in

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, anthologies of modern British drama, such as Graham Whybrow's *Modern Drama: Plays of the '80s and '90s*, London: Methuen 2001. The statement that the script-led model of theatre-making is the dominant one may be a generalisation, but it is justified by the observation that new writing and revivals of scripted plays form the predominant output of Britain's subsidised producing theatres. I hope not to suggest, however, that script-led theatre is *per se* 'conventional' in the sense that it makes no formal or aesthetic innovation.

<sup>10</sup> Oddey op. cit. p. 2

Britain is often a study of innovative practice and of work that sits uneasily with our predominantly 'literary' culture (this is particularly true in its earliest history; I will suggest that there has been a standardisation of devising in recent years). The success of the British devising companies and practitioners such as those mentioned above seems to have come *in spite of* a cultural, and in many ways, a political and socio-economic climate that is not generally conducive to their survival.<sup>11</sup> This becomes evident if we compare the relative status of devising and script-led theatre in Britain with that of France.

In their important survey of French theatre, David Bradby and Annie Sparks describe a "gulf separating the French theatre tradition from that of Britain and North America"<sup>12</sup>. While the English-speaking countries value the playwright and conventions such as the dialogue-led, realist mode (what is referred to here as the 'literary tradition'), France enjoys a "vigorous experimental or reforming strain" rooted in what the authors call "theatricality". This 'strain' is attributed to the popularity of the Absurdist drama in France as well as to the political and ideological changes of 1968<sup>13</sup> and is associated with "la création collective" (the nearest equivalent to the English term 'devising'<sup>14</sup>) of Ariane Mnouchkine and of other directors of international reputation. This "Theatrical Tradition", suggest Bradby and Sparks, was until recently more important historically and culturally than that of what we might call 'new writing': its companies are better funded than they are in the United Kingdom, audiences are more open to the style of theatre they produce and its practitioners, particularly the directors, are valued and respected. Thus, while both France and Britain make the same distinction

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<sup>11</sup> All of these points may also be true of the whole of the United Kingdom, but the limits of my research do not qualify me to speak of Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish theatre in any detail. When speaking generally, I will refer to the cultural, socio-economic and political contexts of Britain: this is justified by my reading of surveys of the British context. It should not be forgotten, however, that the theatre companies and practitioners discussed in this thesis, including those that constitute its three case-studies, are all based in England.

<sup>12</sup> David Bradby and Annie Sparks; *Mise en Scène: French Theatre Now*. London: Methuen 1997. p xxiii

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 11

<sup>14</sup> In a private discussion about this research, Patrice Pavis also suggested that this term was the most appropriate translation of the English 'devising' (interview following the *Internationalism and the Paris Stage Conference* facilitated by the Institute of Romance Studies, University of London in association with Gresham College at Senate House, the University of London, 14 – 16 October 1999). While a phrase that translates literally as "collective creation" and that is so specific to the cultural shifts of 1968 seems to me unsuited to the rather autocratic director-led creative approaches of Mnouchkine and others, there seems to be no commonly-used alternative.

between script-led and devised theatre, the difference in Britain is that the latter tradition is generally devalued: there is the classical repertoire, plays by new writers and then 'the rest'. One effect of Britain's perception that experimental theatre is more respected in France than in Britain is that many aspiring devising practitioners go to France to study (the Lecoq school in Paris is an important destination). While some follow Peter Brook's example by taking up residence in France, most return, bringing with them not only their newly acquired skills and aesthetic preferences, but also an awareness of the different attitude to experimental theatre in France and the UK.

A second important point about my definition of devising is that it describes a theatre-making method rather than a genre (as in 'devised theatre'). This follows from the first point raised above: there is no single 'devised theatre' form; rather, devising threads through many of the major forms, genres and traditions that constitute the British theatre landscape. It is a key methodology in forms of drama practice that do not necessarily culminate in a public performance such as some Drama-in-Education, Theatre-in-Education and community theatre<sup>15</sup>. While in Britain as in France, devising tends to be associated with more 'theatrical' styles (abstract, expressionistic, image- and movement-based rather than character- and dialogue-driven realist modes) the starting point of this research is that these may be cultural associations. Some devisors or devising traditions may cultivate particular aesthetic preferences, but these are not necessarily intrinsic or definitive of devising.

Moreover, looking at devising rather than devised theatre means that research on the subject of devising must entail an examination of process. This raises some methodological issues. Speaking at a conference on performing arts processes, Professor Susan Melrose asked, "how do you show process: how do you word process?" She expressed the view that "something very elusive, something vague" makes it almost impossible to describe creative

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<sup>15</sup> These fall outside of the scope of my research which has its focus of the creation of theatrical works for public performance (what I refer to as 'theatre-making' rather than 'drama practice').

practice.<sup>16</sup> Melrose's point was that a study of process forces the researcher to deal with areas of subjective experience—a point to which I will return later in this chapter. A more pressing impediment to the study of process is the scarcity of data on process: practitioner accounts of process are limited and in many ways unreliable, access to the rehearsal rooms of established companies is difficult to achieve and, most importantly, there are few existing analytical methodologies or frameworks for its study. Without misrepresenting the methodological issues, this thesis will demonstrate that research into process is possible and, once issues of access are resolved and mystifying assumptions abandoned, relatively straightforward.

The final point to note is that in making so simple a definition of devising, this research takes a deliberate step away from the descriptions of devising that Oddey offers in the introduction to her book. Oddey emphasises what will be termed the 'organic' aspects of devising: the "freedom of possibilities" that she believes devising affords in terms of the creative stimuli and tools that may be used and the value it places on "intuition, spontaneity and on the accumulation of ideas".<sup>17</sup> Oddey emphasises the point that devising consists of "a group of people working in collaboration"<sup>18</sup> and that it is "fundamentally determined by group dynamics and interaction"<sup>19</sup>—that it is a 'collaborative' practice. Moreover, she stresses the ability of the devising process to support the personal, social and cultural development of its participants and their community: what I will refer to in shorthand as its **process-oriented** aspect. For Oddey, devising "is about the fragmentary experience of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit".<sup>20</sup> While Oddey's emphasis on these aspects of devising might have been appropriate at the time of writing and for her readership of further and higher education students, my sense is that such characterisations of devising are, at best, limited to certain areas of devising practice and, at worst, risk romanticising the

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<sup>16</sup> Professor Susan Melrose speaking at an Open Platform discussion at *Nightwalking: Navigating the Unknown*, a conference presented by the Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts (ResCen) in partnership with the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA), at the South Bank Centre, London and Greenwich Dance Agency, London, 17–19 September 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Oddey op. cit. p. 2

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 2

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 3

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 2

practice to such an extent that we fail to see it for what it is. By offering such a basic definition of devising, this research seeks to separate the qualities that have been automatically associated with devising—the organic, collaborative and process-oriented aspects—so that we can examine the full range of devising practices more objectively. It becomes obvious if we consider that the wide range of practices that devising encompasses means that it cannot be all these things all the time. While some examples of devising may be organic, collaborative or process-oriented, other cases may display none of these characteristics.

Oddey makes the following statement concerning devising's eclecticism:

What identifies and defines devised theatre as a separate form worthy of consideration is the uniqueness of process and product for every group concerned ....<sup>21</sup>

It is at this point that this thesis' position most clearly separates from that of Oddey. While in the mid-1990s there may have been some justification for Oddey's belief that "every professional company or group works in a unique way"<sup>22</sup>, this research will demonstrate that it is now possible to identify a number of established models of devising that represent, to some degree, standardised practices.<sup>23</sup> In order to support this assertion, this thesis will outline the characteristics of seven models of devising and trace their origins and development through their respective contexts. One outcome of this is that, in charting these models' origins, this research also builds towards a history of devising (or more accurately, a set of histories) in post-war Britain. What is offered here is by no means the comprehensive history of devising that is evidently lacking in the literature. However, it will cover more ground than either the cursory investigation that Oddey makes of devising's origins or the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 2

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 2

<sup>23</sup> I am aware that the very idea of 'standardised' devising practice is contentious given that important traditions of devising were born from an iconoclastic desire to break with established ways of working. This is a theme I will return to in the conclusion of this thesis. In the meanwhile, I ask that the reader allow Part II of this thesis to illustrate that what is meant here by 'standardised' practice does not necessarily disallow such methodological innovation.

partial histories that relate to particular areas of devising practice, such as the rich and detailed history of physical theatre presented in Dymphna Callery's *Through the Body*.<sup>24</sup>

Underlying the existing histories of devising are three versions of its origins: that it is born of the alternative theatre movement, that it is an ancient form pre-existing the emergence of script-led theatre practice and that it emerges from the twentieth-century 'rise of the director'. The first of these is most common and is exemplified by Oddey, who places British devising's origins within the "birth of new forms or styles of theatre" in the mid-to-late 1960s<sup>25</sup> as a reaction to script-led 'bourgeois' theatre. She identifies as its three tendencies of the period: the desire for collective structures; devising's distinction from "the production hierarchy of a text-based theatre"<sup>26</sup>; and developments in actor training (including the establishment of degree courses) that she believes have "produced actors who wish to engage intellectually in the discussion of work or practically in the creative process of making a performance"<sup>27</sup> to a greater extent than they would in script-led practice. The validity of this version of devising's origins is reinforced by that fact that the earliest published uses of the term 'devised' come from the literature, published in the 1980s, on the alternative theatre movement: Micheline Wandor's chapter in Sandy Craig's *Dreams and Deconstructions*<sup>28</sup> uses it to describe the Women's Street Theatre Group's *The Equal Pay Show* and Steve Gooch defines it as a theatre-making process that has "the script as outcome rather than starting point".<sup>29</sup> While there are references to and descriptions of theatre-making practices that are devising in everything but name dating at least as far back as Arnold P. Hinchcliffe's account of "producer's theatre" in *British Theatre 1950/70*<sup>30</sup> and Ronald Hayman's descriptions of Joan Littlewood and Peter Brook in *British Theatre since 1955*<sup>31</sup>, we will see

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<sup>24</sup> Dymphna Callery; *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, London & New York: Nick Hern and Routledge 2001

<sup>25</sup> Oddey op. cit. p. 4

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 9

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 10–11

<sup>28</sup> Micheline Wandor; 'The Personal is Political: Feminism and the Theatre' in Craig 1980 op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Gooch op. cit. p. 51

<sup>30</sup> Arnold P. Hinchcliffe; *British Theatre 1950/70*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1974

<sup>31</sup> Ronald Hayman; *British Theatre since 1955: A Reassessment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1976

that previous to the 1980s both scholars and practitioners resorted to rather clumsy descriptions of their processes before the coining of the term 'devising'.

While the generally accepted version of devising's origins is that it emerges from the alternative theatre movement, some writers tend to see devising as a form that pre-exists the literary culture that defines twentieth-century Western theatre. For example, Clive Barker's foreword to Tina Bicat and Chris Baldwin's *Collaborative and Devised Theatre*<sup>32</sup> suggests that:

In a sense, devised theatre has always been there, and we could more easily try to establish at what point the producer took on the power of executive, the playwright rose to eminence as proprietary rights were established in the text ....<sup>33</sup>

Jonathan Neelands and Warwick Dobson's *Drama and Theatre Studies at AS/A level*<sup>34</sup> shares Barker's longer historical view, listing Greek and Roman satyr plays, pantomime and Commedia Dell'Arte as forms that "were devised by the performers".<sup>35</sup> To these authors, devising is a sort of oral (or perhaps somatic) tradition, one that is associated with popular forms (particularly Commedia). The third version of devising's development can be traced through the canon of twentieth-century European and American directors and practitioners: Antonin Artaud, Eugenio Barba, Augusto Boal, Jacques Copeau, Jerzy Grotowski, Robert Lepage, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Robert Wilson and others<sup>36</sup> who represent the 'rise of the

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<sup>32</sup> Tina Bicat and Chris Baldwin (eds.); *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*, Wiltshire: The Crowood Press 2002

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Neelands and Warwick Dobson; *Drama and Theatre Studies at AS/A Level* London: Hodder and Stoughton 2000

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.165. The brief history also includes a number of European and American laboratory theatre ensembles as key influences and focuses on Joint Stock and Mike Leigh. Although in many ways a partial history, this has an advantage over Oddey's in that it recognises distinct traditions and models of devising.

<sup>36</sup> This list is derived from survey-style volumes including Michael Huxley and Noel Witts (eds.); *Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London & New York: Routledge 2002, Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle Cody (eds.); *Re:Direction: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* London & New York: Routledge/TDR 2002, Alison Hodge (ed.); *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, London & New York: Routledge 2002, and Jane Milling and Graham Ley (eds.); *Modern Theories of Performance: From Stanislavski to Boal*, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave 2001.

director'.<sup>37</sup> In this history—which has yet to be framed as such—devising is an avant-garde practice distinguished by its innovative nature: its ability to forge new forms of theatre.

In all these histories, devising is defined in relation to cultural shifts in the status of various practitioners' roles: the emancipation of the actor from the interpretive role she is seen to play in script-led practice (Callery uses the term “actor-as-creator”, which she distinguishes from “actor as interpreter”<sup>38</sup>), collective practices that exemplify a reaction against the hierarchy of the director<sup>39</sup> or, paradoxically, as the reconstitution of the director as a creative artist free from the constraints of a pre-established script. These historical fluxes in the conception of practitioner roles echo this research's focus on the 'interpersonal dynamics' of devising.

This thesis leans towards the third version of the history of devising in Britain: it rejects Barker's longer historical view and confines itself to the twentieth century. Not taking Barker's view is partly a practical decision: a study of devising as the original form of theatre-making would not only be a vast undertaking but would also become an exercise in historical research. The effect of locating devising in the twentieth century is to characterise it as an alternative practice to the dominant modes of theatre-making in that century, as appropriate given the definition of devising set out above. At the same time, the version of devising's history offered here predates Oddey's. While it is important to recognise the proliferation of experimental practices that emerged during the alternative theatre movement (classically defined as beginning in 1968<sup>40</sup>), we also need to acknowledge that important devised work occurred before that date: for example, Joan Littlewood and The Theatre Workshop's *Oh!*

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Peter Brook's foreword to Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (eds.); *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, London: Faber and Faber 1999 pp. ix–xvi. However, it would be problematic to suggest that there is a single line of development uniting these practitioners.

<sup>38</sup> Callery op. cit. p. 5

<sup>39</sup> Barker suggests that, “It would not be stretching things too far to see this process i.e. Devising as attempting to supplant oligarchic or even dictatorial control by a more democratic way of working”. Bicat & Baldwin op. cit. p. 6

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Catherine Itzen; *Stages of the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968*, London: Eyre Methuen 1980 and Peter Ansorge; *Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain*, London: Pitman 1975



*What a Lovely War*<sup>41</sup> and Peter Brook's *US*<sup>42</sup> represent examples of devised work that occurred in a relatively 'mainstream' context.

While restricting devising to the twentieth century and the post-war period in the main, this thesis also includes a range of contexts (for example, physical, dance and director's theatre, new writing and live art), each of which is traced through a lineage of influential and representative companies and discussed in relation to the particular model of devising practice to which it pertains. As stated earlier, Part II of this thesis will distinguish three main models of devising in operation in the today: the Participatory model (relating to applied theatre practices), the Ensemble model (physical, visual, dance and director's theatre) and the System model (performance and live art). A further two models that are historically important though less commonly used now (the Collective in politically-motivated devising of the alternative theatre movement and the Devising Playwright model in new writing) and two emerging models (the Double Act in physical comedy and the Network model in design- and technology-led theatre) will also be outlined. Each of these models is characterised by a distinct culture, organisational structure and working process. According to this thesis, the majority of today's professional devising companies will fall predominantly into one of these models of devising, though they may take on aspects of other models.

Part III examines three examples of devising processes by established commercial devising companies and practitioners, which represent the Ensemble model and two versions of the System model of devising. Some background to each of the case-study companies positions them in relation to the history of devising sketched out in Part II. The accounts of their processes will describe in more detail how the models operate in particular cases and will analyse key aspects of what will be identified in this research as their **interpersonal dynamic**<sup>43</sup> and their **process**.<sup>44</sup> Looking at individual cases also reintroduces some of the

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<sup>41</sup> Theatre Royal, Stratford, London, 19 March 1963

<sup>42</sup> Aldwych Theatre, London, *Theatre of Cruelty Season*, October 1964

<sup>43</sup> This aspect was originally to be termed 'politics', which more accurately captures the sense of both formal and informal structures, but that also conjures misleading notions of party politics.

complexity and individual variation that is necessarily omitted in Part II, where a panoramic view across decades and a wide range of practices requires me to work in broad brushstrokes.

In summary, this thesis aims to contribute the following original pieces of research to an underrepresented field of study:

- A framework for the study of the mechanisms of theatre-making. Its focus on interpersonal dynamic and process model makes it particularly suited to the study of devising practice (Part I).
- Some important models of devising in terms of the lineage and contexts in which they operate (Part II).
- A history of British devising across a broad range of practice. In outlining the models above, Part II of this thesis will collate the data required for this history.
- An original and exclusive documentation of the creative work of leading devising companies. This will take the form of three case-studies (Part III).

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<sup>44</sup> This term will be used to refer to a specific phased series of activities that will be outlined in the following chapter as a generic model of devising. When referring to a particular creative process, the terms 'rehearsal' and 'creative process' will be used interchangeably. This may be deemed problematic because the term 'rehearsal' is also used to refer to a particular phase of the model of devising process outlined in Chapter Two. However, it seems less clumsy to use the terms 'process' and 'rehearsal' both as precise and general terms than to proliferate the total number of terms used.

## Background

That devising is a significant methodology among professional companies is borne out by an examination of The British Council's *Theatre Directory*.<sup>45</sup> The Directory (which acts as a showcase of British companies whose work is considered suitably consistent and interesting for touring abroad) reveals that between 39 and 59<sup>46</sup> of 90 small-scale touring companies and between 9 and 11 of 25 middle-scale companies devise most of their work.<sup>47</sup> These figures not only indicate that devising is associated with work of sufficient quality and distinct style as to merit listing in the Directory, they also confirm that it is a successful and reliable methodology. Drawing on Jen Harvie's analysis of the British Council's 'British Theatre' promotional video (which features the same companies as the Directory)<sup>48</sup>, the editors of *The Contemporary Theatre Review's* special issue on *Contemporary British Theatre*<sup>49</sup> make the point that new approaches to theatre-making, including collaborative and interdisciplinary devising, are beginning to overtake the classical revival as Britain's major cultural export:

While the history of British theatre has been constructed as the development of powerful individual authorial voices, the past ten years have seen a range of companies, artists and organisations probing more interdisciplinary approaches to theatre-making.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The British Council; *The Theatre Directory*, originally accessed on [www.britishcouncil.org/arts/theatredance/theatreindex.html](http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/theatredance/theatreindex.html) (visited 04/06/03). The directory is now available at [www.britishcouncil.org/arts-performance-in-profile.htm](http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-performance-in-profile.htm) (visited 04/07/05).

<sup>46</sup> These figures are given as a range to account for varying definitions of devising—the larger figures include street theatre, puppetry and companies working with digital technology. These are methodologies that some might not regard as devising.

<sup>47</sup> Devising is not the predominant methodology in the 25 building-based companies listed—in fact, only two of these devise. This reinforces the statement made earlier in this chapter to the effect that script-led practices are the mainstay of theatre institutions.

<sup>48</sup> Jen Harvie 'Nationalizing the Creative Industries' in David Bradby and Maria Delgado (eds.); *Contemporary Theatre Review* special issue on *Contemporary British Theatre: Playwrights, Politics, Performance*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, February 2003 pp. 11–32

<sup>49</sup> David Bradby and Maria Delgado (eds.); *Contemporary Theatre Review Special Issue on Contemporary British Theatre: Playwrights, Politics, Performance*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, February 2003

<sup>50</sup> David Bradby and Maria Delgado 'Editorial' in *ibid.* p. 2

The same view was taken a number of years earlier by Andy Lavender in his contribution to Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers' millennial *Theatre in a Cool Climate*<sup>51</sup> (a publication that defined itself as "an informal snapshot of contemporary theatre").<sup>52</sup> Here, Lavender listed as one of three "major explorations in British theatre in the 1990s" "an evolution in the nature of 'writing' for the theatre" and cited a number of British companies that "favour methods of devising" and that were breaking into the mainstream.<sup>53</sup> This same scenario is painted in an even earlier survey of British theatre: Theodore Shank's edited volume entitled *Contemporary British Theatre*.<sup>54</sup> Shank's introduction describes the importance of "those [companies] which emphasise visual imagery and those in which the principle means of expression is physical movement". People Show, Hesitate and Demonstrate, Lumière & Son and Welfare State International are given as examples of the former and DV8 as an example of the latter.<sup>55</sup> Tim Etchells' contribution to the same volume discusses the work of DV8 and other "fine art performance, experimental theatre and new dance" practitioners of the 1980s and 1990s—Impact, Gloria, Station House Opera, Gary Stevens, and his own company, Forced Entertainment.<sup>56</sup> Together, Shank, Etchells and Lavender sketch a continual 'mainstreaming' since the 1960s of physical theatre and of live art, and with these, the increasing recognition of devising as a successful practice. This trend is also noted by Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, who suggest that this movement from the margins to the centre of an expanded range of "performance possibilities", including that of "physically based performance" and site-specific performance<sup>57</sup> is occurring on the international scale.

Further confirmation of the popularity of devising in England can be drawn from the Arts Council's Spending Plan 2003–2006<sup>58</sup>, which lists companies in receipt of Arts Council

<sup>51</sup> Andy Lavender; 'Turns and Transformations' p. 180 in Gottlieb and Chambers op. cit.

<sup>52</sup> Gottlieb and Chambers op. cit. p. 9

<sup>53</sup> Andy Lavender op. cit. p. 180

<sup>54</sup> Theodore Shank; *Contemporary British Theatre*, London: Macmillan 1996 p. 8

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. pp. 9–11

<sup>56</sup> Tim Etchells 'Diverse Assembly: Some Trends in Recent Performance' in Shank ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Huxley and Noel Witts (eds.); *The Twentieth-Century Performance Reader* London & New York: Routledge 2002 p. 2

<sup>58</sup> *Arts Council Spending Plan 2003–2006* downloaded from the Arts Council website ([www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk), visited 04/06/03). As this is no longer available, a copy of the document can be provided on request. The latest version, *Spending Plan 2006/2007 and 2007/2008* is available on [www.artscouncil.org.uk/downloads/regular\\_funding.doc](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/downloads/regular_funding.doc) (visited 04/07/05).

subsidy. As there is fierce competition for Arts Council grants, it is safe to assume that those companies in receipt of project grants—and especially of core-funding—have been deemed professional in their organisation and successful, or at least promising, in their work.<sup>59</sup> The Spending Plan indicates that the Arts Council is regularly funding as many independent devising as script-led companies. The Spending Plan is also a useful measure of the prevalence of devising in applied theatre and drama contexts such as TIE and community theatre. Of the 60 or so devising companies included in the Spending Plan, approximately one third are dedicated to such work.

Even this cursory analysis of the documents leads us to begin distinguishing different fields of devising practice. The British Council document makes it apparent that devising is an important method of making innovative, avant-garde theatre (an area of practice that I shorthand as 'commercial' theatre), utilising methodologies that are termed here as **product-oriented** devising. The Arts Council document indicates that it is also an important practice in applied theatre and drama contexts, such as TIE and community drama, where it is used as a tool for personal, social and cultural development (the **process-oriented** aspects of devising). The feature that distinguishes applied theatre and drama from what I have called 'commercial' theatre, is what Helen Nicholson defines as "its intentionality—specifically an aspiration to use drama to improve the lives of individuals and create better societies"<sup>60</sup>, commonly manifested in the use of methodologies favouring "involvement, participation and engagement"<sup>61</sup> and its primary existence "outside conventional mainstream theatre institutions"<sup>62</sup>. The term 'commercial' is not a totally satisfactory designation for practices other than applied theatre: it has connotations of profit-driven enterprise which are, in reality, often far from the devising practitioner's mind. In fact, most devising practice in Britain requires external funding and charitable status in order to survive. However, it is better than alternatives such as 'professional' (which fails to recognise the professionalism of applied

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, the Arts Council often has agendas to develop certain areas of practice and some may argue that it reveals tacit preferences and biases in relation to particular genres or even companies.

<sup>60</sup> Helen Nicholson; *Applied Drama – The Gift of Theatre*, Hampshire & New York: Palgrave 2005 p.3

<sup>61</sup> *ibid* p.8

<sup>62</sup> *ibid* p.2

theatre), 'pure' (because this has connotations of superiority over applied practice) or 'mainstream' (which is simply inaccurate).

There is, of course, "a reluctance", particularly among applied theatre practitioners, "to make a neat separation between process and performance-based work"<sup>63</sup>: all forms of drama and theatre practice involve process and all "rely on artistic engagement for their power and effectiveness"<sup>64</sup>. The distinction between product- and process-oriented models of devising is, nevertheless, a useful tool for broadly categorising the range and seeming diversity of devising practices touched on in this research. However, the fact that devising encompasses these different orientations has led to some confusion in the literature and among practitioners. This confusion might be traced to the historic importance of process-oriented devising in the school context since the 1950s. Educators such as Brian Way, Peter Slade, Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote<sup>65</sup> pioneered models of drama designed for schools on the principle of "conscious employment of the elements of drama to educate".<sup>66</sup> At the same time, TIE programmes, such as those developed at the Bolton Octagon and the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry in the early 1960s<sup>67</sup>, were becoming more commonplace across the country. Devising in TIE and Drama in Education (DIE) tends to be child-centred and process-oriented (in some cases, particularly with younger participants, there is no formal performance). Many of today's practitioners first encountered drama, and devising in particular, in the form of a TIE programme<sup>68</sup> or in pedagogic practices that placed it "at the centre of the curriculum".<sup>69</sup> The important development of devising in schools has thus left us with several generations of theatre practitioners who are at least as likely to devise as they

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid* p.5

<sup>64</sup> *ibid* p.6

<sup>65</sup> See Tony Jackson (ed.); *Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theatre in Education*, London & New York: Routledge 1993, and John O'Toole; *Theatre in Education: New Objectives for Theatre – New Techniques in Education*, London: Hodder and Stoughton 1976 for accounts of these practitioners' contributions to the field of educational drama.

<sup>66</sup> Betty Jane Wagner; *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium*, London: Hutchinson 1979 p. 13

<sup>67</sup> See John O'Toole; *The Process of Drama: Negotiating Art and Meaning* London & New York: Routledge 1993 for an account of the development of TIE.

<sup>68</sup> In 'Devising for TIE', David Pammenter suggests that TIE companies invariably use "self-devised work either with or without a writer" so that "the central activity of most teams has been devising". Jackson; *op. cit.* p. 53. However, it should be noted that not all TIE companies use devising as their principle methodology.

<sup>69</sup> Gavin Bolton; *Drama as Education: An Argument for Placing Drama at the Centre of the Curriculum*, Essex: Longman 1984

are to work with other methodologies. This accounts for the seminal influence TIE and DIE have had on commercial devising practice. The basic principles underlying the growth of devising across the school curriculum continue to chime with current educational aims<sup>70</sup>, the most recent manifestation of which is the promotion of “creative and cultural education”, as outlined in *All Our Futures* (the Robinson Report)<sup>71</sup>, the government’s report into creativity in education. Although it is now relegated to the drama curriculum, where the ‘devised project’ occupies an important place<sup>72</sup>, school-based devising looks set to remain the first drama experience of future generations of practitioners.

The value of devising as a pedagogic tool and in the school context should in no way be underestimated: it is, as I have said, one of the most important starting points for the development of devising in this country. However, my view is that the emphasis currently placed upon devising’s process-oriented aspects (which may be due to the fact that the dedicated literature on devising is dominated by publications aimed at the schools market<sup>73</sup>) somewhat eclipses objective studies of its nature in the other main field of devising practice—the commercial context. The confusion lies in the tendency for practitioners and scholars to define all devising in terms of the characteristics of pedagogic devising—as a

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<sup>70</sup> The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statement for Academic Standards in Dance, Drama and Performance notes that, “experiential learning is a key principle of study” and students’ work will “normally reflect the collaborative nature of their subject” (8.1); The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA); ‘Subject Benchmark Statement for Academic Standards in Dance, Drama and Performance’ on the QAA website at: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/dance.pdf>. (visited 03/07/05). To Ruth Quinn, drama’s ability to fulfil the stated demand for experiential learning is surpassed by its ‘value-added’ ability to teach students the skill of improvisation, which she regards as valuable for personal, social and spiritual development. She states that, “... the place of drama and the arts within the curriculum cannot be overstated, as they not only enable our students to learn through ‘doing’ but also if taught well give young people an opportunity to experience that uncharted, unplanned space and so develop the skills of improvisation”. Ruth Quinn ‘The Performative Self: Improvisation for Self and Other’ in *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 73, Part 1, February 2003 pp. 20–21

<sup>71</sup> DfEE; *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*, National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education 1999

<sup>72</sup> The practical devised project can constitute a substantial proportion of the GCSE Drama assessment. In the Edexcel syllabus, for example, the practical project (which can be devised or a scripted play) accounts for 40% of the marks. See Ken Taylor and Jos Leeder; *GCSE Drama for Edexcel*, London: Hodder & Stoughton 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Lamden (op. cit.) complements the syllabus-based course books such as Neelands and Dobson (op. cit.), Sally Mackey and Simon Cooper; *Drama and Theatre Studies*, Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes 2000, its companion Sally Mackey (ed.) *Practical Theatre: A Post-16 Approach*, Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes 2000, and Andy Kempe’s *GCSE Drama Coursebook*, Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes 2002, all of which contain sections on devising.

system for teaching-and-learning, self-development and empowerment, aimed at a broad and predominantly 'unskilled' participant group. As stated previously, my position is that not all devising can be characterised by this process-oriented aspect.

The publication of David Hornbrook's *On the Subject of Drama*<sup>74</sup> represents a timely challenge to this somewhat romantic view of school-based drama and of devising in general. Stephen Daldry's introduction to this publication expresses impatience with TIE's assumption that "the aims of education and art are the same"<sup>75</sup> and calls for a return to a conception of drama practice as a craft, as part of a heritage and as a career choice requiring a particular set of skills. However, it is somewhat short-sighted of Daldry to express his call to reclaim drama as art rather than education (a methodology rather than a pedagogy) as a return to script-led practice and a rejection of devising. In doing so, Daldry falls into the trap of failing to recognise that there are several models of devising, some of which are as much a skills-based craft as script-led drama and have as long a heritage. Daldry's failure to recognise this point is perhaps understandable given that even Oddey—a keen defender of devising and the key writer on the subject—tends to characterise devising in terms of its supposed pedagogical aims rather than as a methodology used in the creation of art.

Daldry's challenge is just one expression of a long-standing animosity between new writing and devising practitioners. While script-led and devising practices are in many ways methodologically different, there is a cultural divide between the camps that is often expressed with surprising hostility. In fact, in his survey of the fringe, Roland Rees characterises the 'early days' of fringe theatre as a split between new writing (exemplified by Portable) and 'anti-script' companies, such as Pip Simmons', who "improvised their shows around a theme" and "relied on the inputs of his group of actors to make their shows, under his direction".<sup>76</sup> A recent articulation of the new writing side of this split comes from Ella Wildridge's contribution to *Theatre in a Cool Climate*. Like Daldry, Wildridge suggests that devising is an amateur, and by implication, inferior form of theatre-making:

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<sup>74</sup> David Hornbrook (ed.); *On the Subject of Drama*, London & New York: Routledge 1998

<sup>75</sup> Stephen Daldry; 'Foreword' in *ibid.* p. x

<sup>76</sup> Roland Rees; *Fringe First: Pioneers of Fringe Theatre on Record*, London: Oberon Books 1992 p. 21



If in spelling out my commitment to the play, the script and the individual playwright, I seem to be stating the obvious, my defence is that it has become far from obvious in recent years when 'devising' plays, with or without the involvement of a writer, has become so popular, and words improvised by actors have come to be regarded, by some, as every bit as good as words put down by a writer as a unified text on a page.<sup>77</sup>

Criticisms of devising are not confined to its perceived amateur status. For example, in his 1975 lecture 'Playwrights and Play-Writers', John Arden characterises the work of his devising contemporaries (particularly devising collectives) as vague, overly abstract and, by implication, politically ineffectual:

If there is no Playwright, but merely a Director and Actors developing 'non verbalised' images in an 'integrated' manner 'not limited by place and time', the style of the presentation is likely to be so abstracted and so dependent upon generalized emotional responses rather than precise analysis that very few people ... could possibly be upset.<sup>78</sup>

Devising practitioners, on the other hand, see their own practice as more democratic, collaborative and creative than script-led practice. John Ashford expressed the distinction between devising and script-led practice in rather contentious terms:

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<sup>77</sup> Ella Wildridge 'New Plays: We Need Them' in Gottlieb and Chambers op. cit. p. 160

<sup>78</sup> John Arden 'Playwrights and Play-Writers' in John Arden; *To Present the Pretence: Essays on the Theatre and its Public*, London: Eyre Methuen 1977 p. 177. In the same essay, Arden criticises devising companies (specifically those operating a collective model of devising) for failing to meet their own ideological agenda in terms of their organisational structure: "... there are many alleged collectives which in fact are delusory. Their work has the appearance of a communal effort but has really been conceived, controlled and brought to fruition by one concealed individual ..." (p. 176). As we will see in Chapter Five of this thesis, this is one criticism that does hit home. It should be noted that Arden had some experience of participatory drama practices through his Kirbymoorside project with Margaretta D'Arcy in 1963. See Baz Kershaw; *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. 107

There is a catholic and a protestant model. The catholic model is 'there is the word'. It is interpreted by the Pope—the director—and is made flesh through the actors. The protestant model is much more to do with individual creativity and the joint creation of work.<sup>79</sup>

Ashford associates script-led theatre with logocentrism—with the director as 'Pope' (the representative of the Word that comes from some higher source) and with the act of interpretation by the actors. He goes on to criticise the Catholic model's "singularity of meaning".<sup>80</sup> Devising (the Protestant model) is associated with "collective responsibility" and "ensemble creation"<sup>81</sup>, with democratic structures (no Pope) and perhaps with the notion of a 'work ethic'.<sup>82</sup>

There are, of course, some discernible differences between script-led and devising practice in this country that may in part justify some of these statements. It is true that, in the commercial sector, the standard system by which theatre venues accept new work for production is through reading a written script, whether proposed by a director or 'management', commissioned by the venue or read as an unsolicited manuscript. The practical reason for this is obvious: a script can give a fairly accurate measure of the quality of the proposed production well in advance of any major expenditure. The result is that devised productions are more likely to be produced in either 'experimental' fringe venues (the Battersea Arts Centre in London has a particularly developed policy for nurturing such work) or such venues that will accept them on a space-rental system—at least until a company has established a reputation for reliably creating successful work. This 'marginalisation' of devising from established systems makes the issue of funding particularly acute for devising companies. Excluded from the supporting systems of a producing venue, devising companies are more reliant on state subsidy or—more often—on self-funding than

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<sup>79</sup> John Ashford interviewed by Roland Rees in Rees op. cit. p. 286

<sup>80</sup> A similar analogy is made by Herbert Blau in 'The Thought of Performance: Value, Vanishing, Dream and Brain Damage' in *Blooded Thought: Occasions of Theatre*, *Performing Arts Journal* 1982. See, for example, p. 29

<sup>81</sup> Rees op. cit. p. 286

<sup>82</sup> This thesis sides with Rees' counter-argument that such a distinction is unhelpful and agrees with Rees' point that, even in the most democratic processes, "there is a clandestine author", usually the participant who initiated the production (Rees op. cit. p. 287).

script-led counterparts, particularly as devising is less cost-effective in the initial phases of creating a new play than writing (it requires a group of people to meet regularly in a designated space rather than a single person working at a desk). The fact that devising often takes place outside of the established systems of funding and production ties in with the historic association between devising and anti-establishment orientations or excluded communities. An important manifestation of this is the feminist theatre of the 1970s. As we will see in Chapter Three, companies such as the Women's Theatre Group and Monstrous Regiment saw self-devised work as an emancipation from patriarchal production systems, an opportunity to forge a methodology more suited to what were perceived as feminine traits (the ability to work in non-hierarchical structures for example) as well as a means of creating more relevant representations of women on stage.

Having made the point that there are some historic and some practical distinctions between devising and script-led practice, it is important to emphasise that these are cultural and not fundamental or definitive of either form of theatre-making. As we will see in the following chapter, theatre-making (both devising and script-led) is defined here as a process of negotiation through which an initial vision is gradually realised, via a series of successive approximations, into its stage form. Whether this initial vision is formalised as a written script or emerges from a group's practical experiments, and whether what eventually appears on stage was 'written' by a playwright or improvised by the performers in rehearsal, is but a matter of degree. Such characteristics are permutations that will place a particular creative process at one end or the other of a spectrum that spans processes in which the intended outcome (the vision) is more or less pre-established, with more or less tight scores and more or less collaborative interpersonal dynamics.<sup>83</sup> A key principle of the analytical framework is to encourage a focus on the discernible facts of working practice, a principle which may well have the effect of exposing the assumptions—even prejudices—that we may harbour in relation to one form of theatre-making or another. Thus, we might begin to see the anti-devising positions represented by Daldry, Wildridge and Arden as knee-jerk defences of their own practice. At the same time, the pro-devising camp might be rightly accused of its own

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<sup>83</sup> Further discussion of what is meant by these variables will take place in Chapter Two.

set of prejudices and generalisations, both in regard to what they see as “the patriarchal, hierarchical relationship of playwright and director”<sup>84</sup> in script-led process, and in the rather romanticised view of devising as intrinsically collaborative, organic and individually, socially and culturally beneficial in its process.

The sort of generalised descriptions of devising made by both camps draw attention to an important blind spot in the dedicated literature: Oddey and her followers fail to recognise that there is, in fact, more than one model of devising. Daldry’s criticism that school devising is an inappropriate preparation for professional (by which he seems to mean script-led) practice, Wildridge’s that its practitioners lack the skills of their script-led counterparts, and Arden’s that it results in work that is too abstract to be effective, may all be true, but only for some forms of devising, in certain contexts. Likewise, Oddey and Lamden’s conception of devising as a tool for self- and social development is most appropriate to devising in applied theatre and drama—particularly in the education context—and not especially to the models of devising practiced in the contexts of physical theatre and live art. In mapping out models of devising, this thesis aims to recognise that the practice encompasses distinct traditions.

Although I have stated that this thesis does not offer a model of theatre-making, it is hoped that this exercise of mapping out models of devising will be of some use to the student deviser. Currently, students in search of role models are faced with an overwhelmingly eclectic field of practice. Oddey’s solution is to encourage them to engage in a critical, self-reflective ‘pathfinder’ approach, looking to examples of successful practice outside the schools context for inspiration rather than for emulation:

Reading about the work of professional companies and their approaches to devising theatre provides a useful comparison of working methods, not to be replicated but rather to provoke or stimulate further thinking about the ways and means of devising theatre.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Oddey op. cit. p. 4

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 155

There is no doubt some value in holding to this pathfinder approach to devising. For one, it encourages independent learning and the acquisition of social and other personal skills for the student deviser. It also encourages a “sharp critical awareness and analysis”<sup>86</sup>—a recognised educational aim. On the other hand, without a clear framework with which to analyse and assess the work of these example companies as well as their own processes, student devisors are ultimately condemned to continually re-invent the wheel, overanalyse their own process and thereby risk stunting their methodological development. Moreover, the assumption here that each devising company must forge their own creative techniques rather than becoming skilled in existing practices effectively plays into the hands of those who consider all devising as an inherently amateur and thereby inferior practice.

The view that devising is an unskilled practice is unfortunately corroborated by the surprising scarcity of guides on devising. Granted, almost all of the recently published books on devising are practical guides, but even so, there are considerably fewer of them than there are practical guides to writing plays. The relative scarcity of published texts on how to devise may be partly explained by the perception of devising as an eclectic practice and the view—expressed by Oddey—that there is no single model of how to devise. This presents a dilemma: how to give guidance that is on the one hand, precise and simple enough to be practically useful and on the other, general enough to be applicable to the wide variety of devising contexts. A second reason for the scarcity of texts on devising is perhaps the perception that it is a practice that requires no specialist teaching. Chris Johnstone, for example, suggests that drama is a uniquely accessible practice, even to the amateur participant:

There are no scales to be learned or arpeggios to be practised, we can begin creating material straight away. Drama’s language is simply the language of social experience—what it ‘feels like’ to be alive—borrowed and fashioned for other purposes. So it’s easily accessible to those who lack professional arts training.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 102

<sup>87</sup> Chris Johnstone; *House of Games: Making Theatre from Everyday Life* London & New York: Routledge and Nick Hern 1998 p. 3

To Boal, who is a key influence on devising in the community and educational contexts, it is a matter of policy that “theatrical performance should not be solely the province of professionals”.<sup>88</sup>

Both of these implied assumptions—that devising is too ‘eclectic’ to account and that its accessible nature negates the necessity for practical or theoretical literature—not only contribute to a deficit in useful guidelines on how to devise but also restrict the quality of guidance that existing handbooks provide. Bicat and Baldwin’s approach of using ‘jobbing’ practitioners to explain their particular role responsibility and craft seems promising as it represents an attempt to collate the potentially conflicting experiences of different contributors and implies an ambition to represent a broad range of devising methodologies and theatrical genres (though, in fact, the contributors’ biographies reveal a very narrow range of devising practice). The element-specific chapters also suggest an underlying assumption that devising is a skilled practice. However, the guidance itself is often not specific to devising and is rather basic, even patronising. For example, would-be set designers are advised that, “if certain elements are too big or heavy, the designer must work out a way of making them more mobile”.<sup>89</sup> Such specificity seems all the more gratuitous when it is offered without questioning the implications, as when stage managers are told to bring “notebook/pencil/pen/rubber/hole punch/stapler”<sup>90</sup>, with no discussion of the complexities and issues surrounding notation and writing in the devising context, no offer of alternative methods of notation (such as video, physical memory and so forth), no questioning of a creative methodology that aims towards a full prompt-book.

As can be seen from the existing texts, the subject of devising is threaded through with generalisations and misapprehensions expressed by the leading writers and practitioners within the field as well as devising’s detractors. By distinguishing the different fields, contexts and models within a major area of devising practice, this thesis will allow the reader to identify more clearly the characteristics of devising as they pertain to specific rather than

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<sup>88</sup> Adrian Jackson’s Introduction to the First Edition of Augusto Boal; *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. xxii

<sup>89</sup> Bicat and Baldwin op. cit. p. 43

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p. 132

generalised examples of practice. It will lead, it is hoped, to more accurate assessments of devising's strengths and weaknesses.

### **Research Methodology**

It is perhaps with good reason that Oddey described devising as a “sprawling, fragmentary” subject and left the job of untangling its various lineages and practices to others. The task is beyond the scope of a single doctoral thesis and so, in developing her work, I have chosen to focus on a particular area of devising—that of commercial practice. This choice of focus means that there will be no dedicated chapter on the history and practice of pedagogic devising (drama-in-education or drama training) and that a discussion of devising in the applied theatre context is confined to a single chapter dealing with forms of community theatre that might be defined as commercial by dint of their scale. This choice of focus is a matter of practicality (giving due attention to the full range of devising practice is beyond the scope of a single thesis) and also a strategic calculation: it quickly became apparent in my initial research that while the areas of pedagogic and applied theatre are well documented and theorised, devising in the commercial sector has yet to be examined with the same thoroughness. The decision to focus on the commercial sector therefore represents an attempt to make the most useful contribution to current knowledge. It hardly needs mentioning that the research does not underestimate the importance of school-based devising as a central line of development for commercial practice as well as a significant area of practice in its own right; nor does it seek to devalue the enterprise of theatre practitioners in the applied theatre context.<sup>91</sup>

Despite confining its research to the commercial field, the thesis is still ambitious in its scope. The research covered diverse areas of theatre practice that the dedicated literature on devising at best just touches upon and this necessitated an engagement with a large number

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<sup>91</sup> The choice of focus does not mean that this research completely ignores the process-orientated aspects of devising associated with pedagogic and applied theatre. As previously stated, the principles that motivated the innovations in pedagogic drama and applied theatre and drama during the alternative theatre movement continue to underlie current devising practice in many of its forms. This, in turn, raises interesting issues in terms of both the process and interpersonal dynamic of today's devising companies.

and a broad range of publications. The first step was to establish some background knowledge of practitioners (including those outside of Britain) who have contributed to the development of devising in this country: what was earlier referred to as the canon of practitioners. Edited volumes, such as those of Michael Huxley and Noel Witts<sup>92</sup>; Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle Cody<sup>93</sup>; Alison Hodge<sup>94</sup>; and Jane Milling and Graham Ley<sup>95</sup>, allowed me to identify the following practitioners as significant influences: Antonin Artaud, Eugenio Barba, Augusto Boal, Jacques Copeau, Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Robert Lepage, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Robert Wilson.<sup>96</sup> Figures such as these serve to confirm that there is a strong 'theatrical' tradition in Europe and beyond, one that sits outside of the 'literary' tradition that has come to define British theatre and that there is a body of practitioners who pioneer and develop theatre-making methodologies that do not necessarily begin with a conventional script. While it would not be accurate to define all these practitioners as devisers, they are significant to the development of British devising traditions, inspiring companies such as those surveyed in Part II of this thesis either in direct imitation of their style or practice, or, more generally, by widening British theatre's awareness of alternatives to the predominant 'literary' mode. We will see, for example, that Artaud's theories were significant in establishing a seam of experimental explorations into a more 'theatrical' performance sensibility from the immediate post-war period. This stage of the research also served to define the place of devising in relation to 'the rise of the director' in late twentieth century Western European theatre<sup>97</sup>, in which directors such as those included in the canon listed above were seen to take control of the entire performance event, thus usurping the writer or the actor as author of the production text. We saw that Barker suggested, in his introduction to Baldwin and Bicat<sup>98</sup>, that devising represents an opposition to what is perceived as the director's domination of theatre practice and of the theatre-making process. However, this thesis will demonstrate that some models of devising in fact

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<sup>92</sup> Huxley and Witts (eds.) op. cit.

<sup>93</sup> Rebecca Schneider and Gabrielle Cody (eds.) op. cit.

<sup>94</sup> Alison Hodge (ed.) op. cit.

<sup>95</sup> Jane Milling and Graham Ley (eds.) op. cit.

<sup>96</sup> It should be recognised that these instances of devising practice represent just a fraction of the full range of devising that occurs in amateur as well as semi-professional and professional contexts.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Peter Brook's foreword to Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (eds.); *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, London: Faber and Faber 1999 pp. ix–xvi

<sup>98</sup> Baldwin and Bicat op. cit.



offer the director greater authorship in the production than script-led models: devising exists within 'director's theatre' as well as in opposition to it. In the same way, we will also see that devising exists within the script-led practice.

The second stage of background research focused on post-war British theatre. The richest source of information is that surrounding the British alternative theatre movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. While it is possible to exaggerate the importance of this period for the development of devising, it is nevertheless significant for a number of reasons. As a fractured landscape of "abrupt transformations"<sup>99</sup>, it partially accounts for the contemporary perception of devising as eclectic. We can also point to this period as the origin of some of the continuing preoccupations of devising practitioners and theorists. The alternative theatre movement, for example, positioned devising as a counterpoint to script-led practice and to the auteur-director hierarchy—a view encountered earlier in this chapter in John Ashford's concept of the Catholic and Protestant models of devising. The alternative theatre movement, and particularly the feminist movements within it, also drew attention to issues of organisational structure and practice—the interpersonal dynamics—of the devising group as an important area of concern.<sup>100</sup> Lizbeth Goodman's *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*<sup>101</sup> surveys the range of working methods developed by feminist companies, including both devised and script-led practices and some that lie between the two, such as 'collaborative writing' and 'commissioned-devised work'.

While the two bodies of literature discussed above allowed the various lineages, traditions and debates that constitute post-war British devising to be mapped out in broad terms, what proved more problematic was finding accounts of theatre-making processes. This scarcity of process accounts is acknowledged elsewhere. Maria Di Cenzo, for example, points out that

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<sup>99</sup> Sandy Craig; 'Reflexes of the Future: the Beginning of the Fringe' in Sandy Craig (ed.) *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*, London: Amber Land Press 1980

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Steve Gooch; *All Together Now: Alternative Theatre and the Community*, London: Methuen 1984, and the introduction to Maria Di Cenzo; *The Politics of Alternative Theatre 1968–1990: The Case of 7:84 (Scotland)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996

<sup>101</sup> Lizbeth Goodman; *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own*, London & New York: Routledge, 1993. See, in particular, Chapter Four 'Common Working Methods' pp. 88–109

even in the literature dealing with the post-war period, the work of theatre *companies* is often neglected at the expense of the playwright and, more generally, the director.<sup>102</sup> Giannachi and Luckhurst attribute the scarcity of material on directing practices in Britain to “the absence here of both oral and written traditions in the articulation of process” and the lack of the dramaturg as the “consciousness of process”.<sup>103</sup>

One potential source of information on working practices in devising came from practitioners’ self-accounts of their approach and methodology. Peter Brook’s many publications<sup>104</sup> dominate the literature but we also have Littlewood’s rather anecdotal and discursive *Joan’s Book*<sup>105</sup> and Etchells’ *Certain Fragments*.<sup>106</sup> Interviews with practitioners not only provide useful personal accounts but, in edited volumes such as Duncan Wu’s *Making Plays*<sup>107</sup> and Giannachi and Luckhurst’s *On Directing*<sup>108</sup>, they also give a sense of the range of devising methodologies and allow us to make comparisons between the approaches of their contributors. Another important source of process accounts is article-length accounts in journals and magazines, which range from the brief and anecdotal (Russell Hoban’s account of Impact’s *Carrier Frequency*<sup>109</sup>) to more in-depth and analytical studies, such as Lloyd Newsome and Rob Tannion’s account of DV8’s *The Cost of Living*.<sup>110</sup> *Total Theatre* magazine—essentially a quarterly newsletter for the Total Theatre network—regularly includes ‘artists’ diaries’, in which practitioners give accounts of the making of their productions.<sup>111</sup> Accounts such as these are used in this research to give illustrative examples of process for the models of devising outlined in Part II of this thesis. Because of

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<sup>102</sup> Di Cenzo op. cit. pp. 6–7

<sup>103</sup> Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. xv

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Peter Brook; *The Empty Space*, London: Penguin 1968, and Peter Brook; *Threads of Time*, Washington: Counterpoint 1999

<sup>105</sup> Joan Littlewood; *Joan’s Book: Joan Littlewood’s Peculiar History as She Tells It*, London: Methuen 1995

<sup>106</sup> Tim Etchells; *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* London & New York: Routledge 1999

<sup>107</sup> Duncan Wu; *Making Plays; Interviews with Contemporary British Dramatists and Their Directors*, Hampshire and London: Macmillan 2000

<sup>108</sup> Giannachi and Luckhurst op. cit.

<sup>109</sup> Russell Hoban ‘Working with Impact’ *Performance*, issue 32 Nov./Dec. 1984

<sup>110</sup> Lloyd Newsome and Rob Tannion ‘Perfection and Pretence’ *Dance Theatre Journal* Vol. 16, Issue 3, 2000

<sup>111</sup> See, for example, Emi Slater’s ‘Life Isn’t Perfect’, concerning the work of Perpetual Motion in *Total Theatre Magazine* 14/4 2002/3. Accounts in this publication are anecdotal rather than analytical or strongly self-reflective.

the scarcity of such accounts, I have not always been able to use my first choice of representative companies. Moreover, there is some unevenness in terms of the level of detail I was able to access for these illustrative examples.

However, while self-accounts by practitioners were of great value in this research, it is important to bear in mind that these represent the views of a single person (invariably the director) about what is a group enterprise. This may raise issues concerning individual's interpretation of events. An example is Robert Lepage's account of the making of his *A Midsummer Night's Dream*<sup>112</sup>, in which he describes his decision to have the character of the Indian boy represented as a baby:

The actress who played Titania didn't agree because she thought that, if he were a baby, there would be no sensuality to justify the jealousy and the conflict. But I see the relationship between a mother and her newborn as very carnal .... I suggested Titania breastfeed the child. It was hard to convince her, but when she finally revealed a breast, the impact of the gesture was quite powerful .... With her exposed breast feeding the baby, the audience could grasp all the sensuality, all the erotic pleasure expressed in the act ....<sup>113</sup>

Because we are solely reliant on Robert Lepage's account, we can only surmise at alternative readings of the event. It is not inconceivable, for example, that the actor's resistance may have stemmed from reasons quite other than those that Lepage attributes to her. While it is not here suggested that Lepage's incident was anything other than what he claims, it alerts us to the fact that single-person accounts such as this have no defence against accusations of inaccuracy based on individual misreadings of events or faulty memories and of unconscious motivations that justify or distort the retelling of events.

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<sup>112</sup> The Olivier, Royal National Theatre, London, 9 July 1992

<sup>113</sup> Robert Lepage and Remy Charest; *Connecting Flights: Robert Lepage in Conversation with Remy Charest*, translated by Wanda Romer Taylor, London: Methuen 1997 pp. 82–83

Because of issues such as these, accounts by outside observers seemed particularly valuable to my research. A.C.H. Smith's account of Peter Brook's *Orghast at Persepolis*<sup>114</sup> and Leon Rubin's account of the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Nicholas Nickleby*<sup>115</sup> are rare examples of book-length accounts by 'outside' observers. More common are accounts of single processes within broader publications, such as the case-studies that feature in Oddey and Lamden. Ruth Ben-Tovim's case-studies in John Deeney's *Writing Live*<sup>116</sup> give examples of the role of the writer in live art and Samuel L. Leiter's *Belasco to Brook*<sup>117</sup> focuses on the approaches of what he calls "representative" directors in rehearsal.

There was sufficient information in the bodies of literature described so far to map out in broad terms the various lineages, traditions and, ultimately, models of devising that I will be outlining in Part II of this thesis. However, in order to provide more detail and deeper analysis of the process and interpersonal dynamics of individual cases of devising practice than the literature can provide, it fell upon me to generate additional material through the direct observation of companies in the process of devising. This project occupies Part III of the thesis. While the practice of direct observation is an established research methodology in fields such as social science, anthropology and ethnography, it is relatively new and untried in the discipline of theatre studies. This meant that I would be entering into this aspect of the research with only a handful of precedents—Mark Bly's *Production Notebooks*<sup>118</sup>, Lavender's *Hamlet in Pieces*<sup>119</sup> and Susan Letzler Cole's *Directors in Rehearsal*<sup>120</sup>—and a set of guidelines borrowed and adapted from Clive Seale's *Researching Society and Culture* (a key text for students of social science).<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> A.C.H. Smith; *Orghast at Persepolis: An Account of the Experiment in Theatre Directed by Peter Brook and Written by Ted Hughes*, London: Eyre Methuen 1974

<sup>115</sup> Leon Rubin; *The Nicholas Nickleby Story: The Making of the Historic Royal Shakespeare Company Production*, London: Heinemann 1981

<sup>116</sup> John Deeney; *Writing Live: An Investigation into the Relationship between Writing and Live Art*, London: New Playwrights' Trust 1998

<sup>117</sup> Samuel L. Leiter; *From Belasco to Brook: Representative Directors of the English-speaking stage*, London & New York: Greenwood 1991

<sup>118</sup> Mark Bly (ed.); *The Production Notebooks: Theatre in Process*, Volume 1, New York: The Theatre Communications Group 1996

<sup>119</sup> Andy Lavender; *Hamlet in Pieces: Shakespeare Reworked by Peter Brook, Robert Lepage and Robert Wilson*, London: Nick Hern 2001

<sup>120</sup> Susan Letzler Cole; *Directors in Rehearsal*, New York and London: Routledge 1992

<sup>121</sup> Clive Seale (ed.) *Researching Society and Culture*, London: Sage Publications 1998

The value of rehearsal observation as a research method lies in its ability to produce relatively objective accounts. The nature of work on a theatre production is such that those taking part are often under immense pressures of time, workload and budget. There may also be interpersonal concerns, as participants have personally invested in the success of the work in progress and are loyal to the company with whom they are working. In many ways, these people are perfectly positioned but highly unsuited to the task of producing objective accounts of the work in process. While Mark Bly, in the Introduction to *The Production Notebooks*, suggests that it is the dramaturg—"a writer, versed in all aspects of theatre ... who would be intimately involved in the work from conception through closing"<sup>122</sup>—who can best promote understanding of rehearsal room practices, this 'in-house' writer is precisely who was not required for the case-studies in this thesis.

As these considerations suggest, this thesis characterises devising as an interactive activity in which interpersonal dynamics and social processes play an important role. This emphasis on social dynamics has implications for the research methodology. It means attributing significance to aspects of the process that might elsewhere be deemed trivial. Observing modes of dress and address and behavioural rules—such as who makes the tea—might become significant indicators of a company's ethos. Participants' expressions of contentment or 'stress' may indicate the effectiveness or otherwise of particular creative strategies. The case-study accounts needed to retain this attention to significant social detail without becoming overly 'gossipy' or allowing me to become personally involved in the interpersonal dynamics. Becoming an outside observer in the rehearsal room also necessitated consideration of what social scientists would call 'researcher position'. Wanting to observe the participants 'in their natural habitat' I tried to ensure that my presence made the minimum possible impact on the process. Even Forced Entertainment, a company fairly accustomed to

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<sup>122</sup> Bly op. cit. p. xiv

being observed, could become self-conscious when subjected to the continuous—and perhaps unusually intense—scrutiny that these observations involved.<sup>123</sup> My first instinct, followed in the earliest observations<sup>124</sup>, was to try to be as unobtrusive as possible, ‘hiding’ in dark areas of the auditorium and disappearing during breaks. I soon recognised that this had a negative impact (participants got the impression that I had something to hide) and developed a more sophisticated approach, based on the principles outlined by David Walsh in ‘Doing Ethnography’.<sup>125</sup> Here, Walsh defines the observer as a “marginal native” who cultivates a position “poised between a strangeness which avoids over-rapport and a familiarity which grasps the perspectives of people in the situation”.<sup>126</sup> In the case of this research, the approach consisted firstly of a policy of transparency: being as clear as possible when first approaching the company as to what would be involved and answering as clearly and fully as possible any questions from participants about the research (thus avoiding a ‘strangeness’ that causes distrust and fear of judgment). The second aspect of this ‘impression management’ was to consciously observe and take on the culture of the rehearsal process, seeking to blend my behaviour and even appearance with that of the dominant group.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> In fact, the impact that my presence made was rather poetically demonstrated by a dream that Etchells related in which he found my notebook on his bedside table. In the dream, he made a sneaky attempt to read my notes but I came into the bedroom and caught him at it. I cannot help but sympathise with his sense that I was invading his privacy while keeping secrets from him.

<sup>124</sup> I undertook two pilot studies of fringe productions (*Sprog* at Rose and Crown Theatre, Hampton Wick, 25 April 2000 and *Silent Movie* at Camden Peoples Theatre, 28 November 2000). I also conducted other case-studies that, for various reasons, were not included in this thesis. These included the Young Vic’s *Monkey!* (The Young Vic Theatre, London, 22 November 2001) and the first phase Told by an Idiot’s *I’m a Fool to Want You* (scratch performance at the Battersea Arts Centre, 29 May 2003). My professional work with Lightwork included *London/My Lover* (*International Mime Festival 2002*, at the ICA, London, 21 January 2002) and *Here’s What I Did With My Body One Day* (The Pleasance, London, 7 October 2004).

<sup>125</sup> David Walsh ‘Doing Ethnography’ in Seale op. cit.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p. 226

<sup>127</sup> It became apparent that different rehearsals have their own behavioural currency and even a tacit ‘dress code’, sometimes to the point of caricature. For example, it was a point of comment that participants in the Lightwork company all used stationery from Muji (a Japanese chain with a distinctive functional, design-orientated aesthetic); and I found that certain ‘quirky’ items of clothing (colourful, striped toe-socks) that might break the ice and establish rapport in one context (Told by an Idiot and Forced Entertainment) may be frowned on as indicative of frivolity in others (the David Glass Ensemble and the Young Vic company).

My background as a theatre practitioner became a significant aspect of this research method. Following a year's training in writing for theatre, screen and radio in 1995, I had some moderate success as a playwright (productions at Battersea Arts Centre, the Lyric Hammersmith and various fringe venues) and as what might be called a dramaturge with a London-based devising company<sup>128</sup>. The most obvious advantage of this experience was that it seemed to facilitate access to company's rehearsal rooms: I had more success in approaching companies as potential case studies once I had mentioned my own practice and particularly when I was able to 'name-drop' practitioners that we knew in common. Moreover, my experience as a practitioner meant that I had a better understanding of the behavioural codes of the rehearsal room and of the pressures of creating work for public performance. Like the dramaturge described by Mark Bly above, I am 'versed in' aspects of theatre-making and had a better sense of how to conduct myself in the rehearsal room than might be the case with researchers without this experience.

Another area of consideration in respect of the case-study component of this research was the selection of companies to approach. Bly, Letzler Cole and Lavender had all chosen pioneering, international-level companies as their subjects. Bly's criterion for choosing companies for observation was that "the individuals collaborating on the production must be artists of consequence who have a history of imaginatively conceived productions".<sup>129</sup> The only criterion used in selecting potential case-studies for this thesis was that the company must have been in operation for a minimum of ten years. It was assumed that, in ten years, a company would have developed its practice and creative methodology through a series of productions and in relation to a range of training, experience and experiment, rather than simply continuing the single model they had encountered in their formal training. The fact that all my case-study companies forged their methodologies in the 1970s (a period in which TIE and alternative theatre asserted their influence on commercial theatre) also meant that their cultures were infused with ideologies derived from these contexts and that their practice

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<sup>128</sup> In fact, my original intention in conducting this research was to examine the role of the writer in the devising context, an area of study motivated by my experiences as a writer in a devising company. While I quickly realised that a more general study of devising in Britain was a more urgent line of enquiry, my focus on the power dynamics of the rehearsal room remains at the heart of my research.

<sup>129</sup> Bly op. cit. p. xiv

raised the sort of issues of interpersonal dynamics that continue to impact on devising methodologies. Above all, the survival of a devising company for this length of time was taken as evidence of its success, both as creators of innovative work and in forging methodologies that successfully negotiated issues of interpersonal politics that—as we will see in Chapter Three—had killed off other companies.

The number of commercial devising companies that had been in existence for at least ten years and were eligible for this research was fairly small: an initial short list of 20 or so dedicated companies was drawn up from the Arts Council Spending Plan for 2003–2006 and the British Council's *Theatre in Profile Directory*<sup>130</sup>, though devising projects by other companies, including predominantly script-led ones, would not be excluded. By selecting companies from these directories, my short list of potential case-study subjects inevitably reflected certain biases, most evident in terms of race and gender representation. There were only two women-led companies on my short list and, as far as I could ascertain from the published information on my short listed companies, none are run by non-white practitioners. Whether this is due to institutional prejudices surrounding which companies are supported by these institutions or to wider cultural, social and economic factors that determine the means by which—or indeed whether—individuals choose to create theatre, the evidence is that, unfortunately, it is the white male practitioner who tends to dominate in the context of British commercial devising practice, as in many others contexts.

The possibilities were further limited by practical issues. The time-scale of this research (between 2000 and 2003) excluded the possibility of observing Improbable Theatre, Frantic Assembly and *Told by an Idiot*<sup>131</sup>, among others. Practitioners' willingness to allow an

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<sup>130</sup> In the East: Hoipolloi and Trestle Theatre Company; Reckless Sleepers in the East Midlands; Blast Theory, Daily Life (Bobby Baker), David Glass Ensemble, DV8, Graeae (who also engage in new writing), Improbable Theatre, the People Show, Station House Opera, Complicite and *Told by an Idiot* in London; the Northern Stage Ensemble in the North East; Welfare State International in the North West; Forkbeard Fantasy and Kneehigh in the South West; Foursight Theatre Company and Stan's Café in the West Midlands; and Faulty Optic and Forced Entertainment in Yorkshire.

<sup>131</sup> I conducted observations of one phase of the creative process of *Told by an Idiot's I'm a Fool to Want You*. A change to their funding situation meant that the second phase of the process was delayed and I had to take the decision to drop this company as a case-study because of the delay it would represent to the completion of this thesis.



outside observer into the process was also a major factor. While Bly and Letzler Cole's publications suggest that 'open rehearsal' is a common practice in the USA<sup>132</sup>, it seems to be relatively novel in Britain: for most of the companies approached for this research, mine was the first request for access they had ever received. Companies' own decisions or policies not to grant access eliminated Complicite<sup>133</sup> (arguably the most successful and influential devising theatre company), the People Show (the longest running) and the Royal National Theatre's production of *The Power Book*. The latter was a particularly disappointing rejection as the production was unusual both as an example of devising at the Royal National Theatre and as a predominantly female company.<sup>134</sup> It is easy to sympathise with those companies and practitioners that refused access in the belief that the rehearsal room should remain what Letzler Cole called a "hidden world"<sup>135</sup>, particularly among experimental companies that might feel that their 'right to fail' in rehearsal is inhibited by the presence of an onlooker. Until rehearsal observation becomes a more widespread methodology in this country, it is likely that 'outsider' accounts of rehearsal process will continue to be rare and that companies will continue to be suspicious of requests for access. However, my feeling is that the practice will become more widespread as the links between HE/FE institutions and companies grow stronger.<sup>136</sup>

The case-study companies that proved eligible, available and willing to collaborate in the process were: The David Glass Ensemble, identified here as a physical theatre company; Forced Entertainment, an example of a live art company; and Gary Stevens, a company specialising in performance art. It is inevitable, given issues of representation already

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<sup>132</sup> When observing Forced Entertainment in Frankfurt, I was made aware that the practice of 'open rehearsal' is also relatively common in Continental Europe.

<sup>133</sup> Théâtre de Complicité changed its name to Complicite (no accent) in 1999. In this thesis, the most appropriate name for the context will be used.

<sup>134</sup> The Cottesloe Theatre, Royal National Theatre, London, 9 May 2002. My approach to the company was unsuccessful despite the support of Mick Gordon, who was at the time working as director of the National's Lyttleton project.

<sup>135</sup> Letzler Cole op. cit. p. 2

<sup>136</sup> It was already apparent during my research that requests for access were more readily granted by those companies with a more sympathetic attitude to academic institutions. This is perhaps a reason why two of the three case-studies stem from the area of live/performance art, which has traditionally had closer links to academic practice and critical thinking than the physical theatre or comedy context (though the gap in the latter case is closing, as evidenced by Ridiculusmus' engagement with the MA Practice as Research at Canterbury).

mentioned, that all three companies have white, male directors. It may well be argued that, had I succeeded in gaining access to *The Power Book* or another women-led creative process (or indeed to companies with a greater number of non-white participants), my conclusions as to the nature of contemporary devising may well have been different. Moreover, it would have been immensely satisfying on a personal basis to be able to report that the important contribution feminist companies made to pioneering non-hierarchical models of devising in the 1960s and 1970s had had a lasting impact on commercial practice. Unfortunately, it seems that women continue to be excluded (or to exclude themselves) from the area of commercial practice supported by the Arts Council and the British Council. It is the work of another thesis to explore the examples of women's devising practice that no doubt exist outside of this context or to account for contemporary female practitioners' seeming preference for script-led models of theatre-making. One potentially worthwhile area of exploration might be to test the perception that women are better able to sustain non-hierarchical group structures than male or mixed groups (or are perhaps simply more motivated to do so)<sup>137</sup> through an examination of devising practice.

The final methodological issue raised by this research was the absolute necessity of an analytical framework for the documentation and examination of theatre-making process. A survey of existing rehearsal accounts revealed that there is some recognition of the need for such a framework. Letzler Cole, for example, opens *Directors in Rehearsal* with an attempt to find a "single metaphor" of process that might form "an organising principle"<sup>138</sup> for her study. After running through about 25 possibilities<sup>139</sup>, she decides against using any, at the risk, she says, of "some lack of theoretical rigor" and at the same time to "protect against some of the dangers of theoretical rigor".<sup>140</sup> Although she does not expand on these dangers—or indeed on what she means by "theoretical rigor"—the experience of this

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<sup>137</sup> See Kathleen Iannello; *Decisions Without Hierarchy: Feminist Interventions in Organizational Theory and Practice*, London & New York: Routledge 1992

<sup>138</sup> Letzler Cole op. cit. p. 5

<sup>139</sup> The first that she suggests—and subsequently rejects—is that of harrowing a field "... a fine breaking down of the playtext in preparation for a first or simply another planting in the soil of performance ...", which she gleans from the Middle English etymology of the verb 'to rehearse' (p. 4). A trace of this might be seen in the notion of scoring developed in my framework below. She goes on to offer a further 23 analogies for the director's role, settling on 'maternal gaze' as the "most promising".

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. p. 5

research suggests that without “an organising principle”, the observer is liable to be distracted, even overwhelmed, by the abundance of information, calls on her attention and interest in the rehearsal room. However, an overly strict framework might be a blinker, obscuring nuances and detail.

Lavender makes no explicit attempt to formulate a framework but his no-nonsense conception of the theatre-making process became a key principle of my own research methodology:

... theatre-making is a job of work, and like any work it involves management and organisation, sets of decisions, relationships between individuals and systematised processes of creation and production .... I wanted to uncover the various steps of rehearsal of each production, cast light on the shaping input of a range of collaborators and discover who did what, when and to what effect.<sup>141</sup>

While the focus of this research was strictly on “who did what, when and to what effect”, it became obvious that observations went beyond the actions (often the spoken words) that I carefully notated: the experience of the rehearsal room atmosphere, of group culture, of seemingly peripheral activities, formed an integral part of the research and the “thick description”<sup>142</sup> my observer position allowed. The following chapter outlines an analytical framework that can serve to encompass both the discernible actions that constitute a devising process and the less tangible aspects of interpersonal dynamic that constitute its culture.

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<sup>141</sup> Lavender 2001 op. cit. p. 9

<sup>142</sup> A term derived from anthropologist Clifford Geertz, which Walsh interprets as the “cultural script to be read semiotically” (‘Doing Ethnography’ David Walsh in Seale op. cit. p. 219)

## CHAPTER TWO

### Analytical Framework

Although the analytical framework outlined in this chapter was formed from research into devising processes, it is constructed so as to facilitate the study of any group theatre-making process. In fact, it makes no fundamental distinction between script-led and devised theatre. As discussed in the previous chapter, these are simply seen as different points on a spectrum of theatre-making practice that ranges along a set of parameters outlined in this chapter. At one extreme of the spectrum there is work that is created collectively, where ideas emerge organically and which results in improvisational performances. At the other extreme is work created through hierarchical structures, in which the main components are conceived in advance of the dedicated creative period and in which the resulting performance is highly controlled. Generally, devising would be thought to sit towards the first extreme and script-led practice towards the second but this is not necessarily the case. The reason for making the framework relevant to the broadest range of practices is not only so that it might have use beyond this thesis but also to avoid preconditioning the observations into devising. If we were to begin with a framework that assumes that devising is collaborative, improvisational and organic it might misapprehend examples of practice that are exceptions to this characterisation.

Having said that the framework is appropriate for the study of both script-led and devised theatre-making, it should be noted that it does provide an alternative to the semiotic models of theatre-making that are based on script-led practice. Moreover, it offers concepts and vocabulary for discussing two aspects of theatre-making that have particular relevance to current conceptions of devising. The first of these is the concept of **creative process** as a system of successive approximations through ongoing negotiation. This allows the construction of a generic model of process that distinguishes the common phases of a creative period. Given that some traditions of devising tend to appeal, at least historically, to iconoclastic practitioners, the generic model is designed with the flexibility to be able to

encompass experimental methodologies. The second aspect is a system for analysing the **interpersonal dynamics** of a creative group, including its organisational structure as well as what is designated as the group's ethos, along with any social aspects of group interaction that may impact on the theatre-making process. Again, this is particularly relevant to devising practices which may not necessarily allocate practitioner roles in the same way as more standardised script-led practices, or that might adopt a particular organisational structure for ideological reasons. The framework is thus designed to account for the transactional nature of theatre-making in general and for the experimental nature of devising in particular.

In this research, theatre-making is conceived of as a form of creativity. The term 'creativity' seems to encompass three distinct aspects: firstly, 'creativity' or, more usually, 'creative process' is simply the activities through which products are made, thinking is developed or ideas are generated—the emphasis is on the product rather than the process (this I will refer to as 'functional' creativity); secondly, the term 'creativity' can denote a state of being characterised by inspiration, sudden insight, the production of innovative ideas or products ('inspirational' creativity) and which is often associated with a positive personal benefit to the creator ('therapeutic' creativity<sup>143</sup>)—the process rather than the product. These categorisations are apparent across several fields of practice and scholarship in which 'creativity' is the subject of current interest. One instance of this new interest in creativity is the re-branding in the political sphere, of British 'cultural industries' as 'creative industries' since the turn of the millennium<sup>144</sup>. In this context, creativity is valued as an economic asset: creative enterprises must be fostered because their products attract revenue. In the field of education studies as in government policy for education, for example, there is a drive, evidenced by the publication of The Report of the National Advisory Committee on Creativity

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<sup>143</sup> At a conference on *Learning, Teaching and Creativity*, novelist and poet Blake Morrison distinguished this form of 'therapeutic' creativity, where value is placed on enabling an individual's self-expression, from creativity where the concern is with the generation of innovative ideas or products. *Learning, Teaching and Creativity* conference produced by Goldsmiths College, University of London 26 April 2001 at Goldsmith College, University of London. Blake Morrison gave the keynote speech.

<sup>144</sup> See for example Chris Smith; *Creative Britain*, London: Faber & Faber 1998. Jen Harvie examines the British Council's mid-1990s change of policy in relation to this. Jen Harvie; *Staging the UK*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 2005.

and Education, *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture & Education*<sup>145</sup> (the Robinson Report), to engage children and young adults in creative activities both in order to promote personal development and because creative abilities are recognised as valuable across a range of professions and industries. In business, organisational and management studies functional creativity is evident in forms of research and development, problem-solving and manufacturing processes<sup>146</sup>, but analysis is also made of both the personal attributes of ‘creatives’ (such as emotional intelligence<sup>147</sup> or divergent thinking—a move away from the preoccupation of earlier theorists with definitions of ‘genius’<sup>148</sup>) and the environmental conditions, including organisational structures, that might promote inspirational creativity. Incidentally, it is pertinent that writers on this topic seem to share the view of devising theatre practitioners, that non-hierarchical structures allow the potential for greater creativity<sup>149</sup>. In some cases, the educational and business studies of ‘creativity’ veer towards a concept of creativity espoused by writers in the fields of personal development and perhaps more dubious ‘new age’ discourses: Caroline Myss, a medical intuitive, claims that creativity is essential to the human spirit and that restrictions to an individual’s creative expression will lead to a range of physical dysfunctions ranging from sciatica to ovarian cancer<sup>150</sup>. Myss’ view of creativity is an extreme version of a more general conception of creativity as a therapeutic activity.

This research is primarily concerned with ‘functional’ creativity—theatre-making is seen as the generation of theatrical product. However, we will see that the ‘therapeutic’ notion of creativity is not without importance or relevance. Moreover, the notion of creativity as inspiration is one that recurs in practitioners’ own accounts of theatre-making: many devising

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<sup>145</sup> Robinson; *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*, Report of the National Advisory Committee on Creativity and Education. DFEE (the Robinson Report)

<sup>146</sup> See, for example, Jane Henry (ed); *Creative Management*, London, California & New Delhi: Sage Publications 2001 which collates articles from a range of fields into order to provide insights into industry applications of creativity.

<sup>147</sup> See for example Daniel Goleman; *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than I.Q.*, London: Bloomsbury 1996

<sup>148</sup> The main enterprise of Philip E. Vernon (ed); *Creativity*, London: Penguin Books 1970

<sup>149</sup> For example Francis Fukuyama; ‘Technology, Networks and Social Capital in Henry (ed.) op. cit. p. 225 – 238

<sup>150</sup> Caroline Myss; *Anatomy of the Spirit: The Seven Stages of Power and Healing*, Toronto, New York, London, Sydney & Auckland: Bantman Books 1997. See especially ‘The Challenge of Managing Creative Energy’ pp. 135-142.

practitioners in particular are, after all, engaged in the creation of *innovative* products and recognise that they are unlikely to produce such products if they do not facilitate the opportunity for what I will refer to as the 'eureka' moment. Nor are the three versions of creativity unrelated from one another: engagement in functional creativity may be 'therapeutic' in its own right and the 'eureka' moments of inspirational creativity certainly involve personal, often emotional, engagement that may lead to 'therapeutic' advancement.

One long-standing project in the study of creativity has been an attempt to define the stages of creative process. As early as 1928, Joseph Wallas proposed a seminal model of individual creative thought. For the purposes of this analytical framework, I will be using the model suggested by the Robinson Report as the starting point for my definition of creative process in theatre-making.

### **Creative Process**

The Robinson Report defines the "processes of creativity" as a series of "successive approximations".<sup>151</sup> This phrase seems appropriate because it suggests an experimental approach (particularly suitable for a study of devising), hinting that we might build a model of process that is constituted as a series of staging posts rather than as a preordained series of activities. However, there are two implied aspects of the phrase that need clarification before it can be built into a useful analytical model for theatre-making. Firstly, the term "successive approximations" gives the impression that creative process is the step-by-step realisation of a pre-existing image of the product: that to which the work-in-process approximates, the intended outcome. It would be problematic to imagine that this pre-existing image is a fully imagined entity that remains stable throughout the process, something equivalent to the detailed architectural drawings required before the building of a house. We will see from the process accounts in Parts II and III that many of the devising practitioners we will shortly

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<sup>151</sup> Op. cit. p. 31

examine claim to start with “no clean single visions in our process”.<sup>152</sup> ‘That to which the work-in-process approximates’ is more akin to the “deep, formless hunch which is like a smell, a color, a shadow ...” that Peter Brook describes as the starting point of any process.<sup>153</sup> The term used in this research to refer the intended outcome of a process is **vision**, a word that was used by a number of practitioners encountered in the course of this research and which seems to encompass the vagueness of Brook’s “formless hunch” and also the guiding role that the intended outcome, however formless, plays in the theatre-making process.

Robinson’s characterisation of the creative process also implies a product (“to produce outcomes”<sup>154</sup>) that which we reach when we have successfully approximated our intended outcome. However, theatre (along with other live performance) is different from many creative arts in that the ‘product’ (the production, presentation, performance) is temporary and changeable<sup>155</sup>. In seeking to study performance, we are in what Patrice Pavis calls “a rather paradoxical and unenviable position”, in which the theatre specialist “must study an object (the performance) which, as such, is missing”.<sup>156</sup> As it is conceived here, the performance is not so much “missing” but, consisting as it does of the sum of what the performers and the elements of performance (what Keir Elam refers to as theatre’s “multiplication of communicational factors”<sup>157</sup>) *did* on a particular night, it is complex to account in any one instance and all the more so when we consider a run of performances

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<sup>152</sup> Tim Etchells, ‘Play On: Collaboration and Process’ in Tim Etchells; *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, London & New York: Routledge 1999 p. 55

<sup>153</sup> Peter Brook ‘The Formless Hunch’ in Peter Brook; *The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera 1946–1987*, New York: Harper & Row 1989 p. 3. Brook is here using the example of a script-led project where the ‘hunch’ is “my relationship with the play” (p. 3). It is important to note that, in a script-led process, the script does not necessarily constitute the group’s vision in itself (though it may be the playwright’s vision). In rare cases, the script is the explicit articulation of the group’s vision but more usually the vision constitutes the participants’ “relationship with the play”, their reading or interpretation of it, that which is inspired by it or even what is imposed upon it.

<sup>154</sup> The Robinson Report op. cit. p. 31

<sup>155</sup> It is also the case that not all theatre-making processes result in a public performance, for example in some cases of creative drama projects undertaken with young children or in the context of community workshops or as part of dramatic training. This thesis, however, focuses primarily on theatre-making that does result in a public performance.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Discussion on the Semiology of Theatre’ in Patrice Pavis; *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of Theatre*, New York: Performance Art Journal 1993. p. 50

<sup>157</sup> Keir Elam; *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, London & New York: Routledge 1997 p.



that might change on a nightly basis.<sup>158</sup> The root of this research is to ascertain the system that determines the actions constituting any one performance and to look to the creative process as the key determinant of performance. In this, the research follows Roberta Mock, who suggests that “principles of construction” not only determine “the processes of presentation”<sup>159</sup> but that these are one and the same: process in the performing arts (Mock uses the term in its broadest sense) is best imagined as a version of the product and vice versa.

Some of the most evolved studies into the nature of performance come from semiotic analyses. Pavis, for example, seeks to address the question of ‘what is performance?’ by identifying the various texts that constitute and lead to the moment of performance. In *From Page to Stage: A Difficult Birth*, he distinguishes the “dramatic text”, “performance” and “*mise en scène*”.<sup>160</sup> In *Towards a Semiology of the Stage*<sup>161</sup>, he discusses the difference between the written or dramatic text and the performance text, and between the dramatic and the theatrical texts. A taxonomy of texts such as this is a useful paradigm but the semiotic models of performance present certain limitations if we want our framework to facilitate a study of devising. Firstly, the semiotic theorists embed their work within a concept of theatre that is script-based. Pavis sees the theatrical creative process as “beginning with the director’s reading of the script through to the interpreting task of the spectator”.<sup>162</sup> This is problematic in relation to devising, which is defined precisely by the fact that it does not begin with a script. In my framework, **vision** will be seen to play a role that is approximate to that of the “dramatic text” in Pavis’ model, as both the starting point for the process and a point of reference throughout.

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<sup>158</sup> Elam’s argument that to assume there is an “automatic and symmetrical” relationship between the written play and its performance is “facile determinism” also applies to the notion of the devised score that will be discussed in this chapter. Elam *ibid.* p. 209

<sup>159</sup> Roberta Mock; *Performing Process: Creating Live Performances*, Bristol and Oregon: Intellect Books 2000 p. 1. In fact, Mock attributes this term to Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow; *Improvisation in Drama*, Hampshire & London: Macmillan 1990 p. 79

<sup>160</sup> ‘From Page to Stage, A Difficult Birth’ in Patrice Pavis; *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. 24–25

<sup>161</sup> Pavis (1993) *op. cit.* p. 136

<sup>162</sup> ‘A Possible Definition of Theatre Semiology’ in Pavis (1993) *ibid.* p. 13

My rejection of the semiotic models might seem to sit uneasily with my construction of **vision** as the intended outcome of process. Seeing process as a series of successive approximations that 'translate' vision into product might seem in itself to simply translate Pavis' model, renaming the 'meaning' that he sees as implicit in the dramatic text and explicit in the performance, as vision. In a critique of Pavis, Melrose calls into question British practitioners' use of the term vision as a "declaration as to 'what the text / *mise en scène* is (really) about".<sup>163</sup> She suggests that "the focus on the putative source of performance ... severely limits both 'theatre analysis' and notions of human desire to strictly curtailed scenarios and formulae".<sup>164</sup> For this reason, it should be emphasised that the use of the term **vision** in this research, while admitted standing in for its intended outcome as the 'source of performance', does not claim the same status or solidity as the 'meaning'. Vision, in my use, is not what a play is 'about', nor is it the 'core': it is simply the participant or participants' imaginary version of the piece of theatre they are making (which might include but is not limited to their notions of what it is 'about').

A second reason why semiotic enterprises are not appropriate to this research is that, as indicated by Melrose, semiotic models are based on the "textualisation"<sup>165</sup> of the performance:

... 'the work' (for example, theatre performance) was perceived to be 'text', and the sorts of proofs sought were to be determined through a practice of 'reading' performance, whose intricacies were perceived to derive from the interaction of *codes* ....<sup>166</sup>

In another essay, Pavis himself declares "what we still lack is a model—whether it be actantial, discursive or textual—that takes into account the stage form of theatricality and

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<sup>163</sup> Susan Melrose; *The Semiotics of the Dramatic Text*, Hampshire and London: Macmillan 1994 p. 12

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. pp. 20–21

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. p. 5

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. p. 6

also the work of the actor and the director”.<sup>167</sup> Pavis recognises that the semiotic model of performance, based as it is on systems of communication, fails to consider ‘the work’, not as a text, but as a job of work: as the action of theatre practitioners. The model of performance developed in this chapter construes performance not as something to be read (by the performers and subsequently by the audience) but as something that is done (by the process participants). The most appropriate conception of the ‘product’ of a theatre-making process is one that takes account of the ‘work’ as action. The term used here is **score**, which Pavis derives from Richard Schechner.<sup>168</sup> Here, Pavis quotes Schechner’s description of how the “performer’s score”

... corresponds to the need to locate the exact physical actions, musical tones and rhythms that embody the themes or moods of the production ... the performer’s score gives him anchor points—moments of contact, an underlying rhythm, secure details: places to go from and get to.

This thing that locates “the exact physical actions” has been called by various names. For example, director Ruth Ben-Tovim coined the phrase “instructions for performance”.<sup>169</sup> The term **score** is a more resonant one in this instance. For one thing, **score** captures a sense of its own creation, as when David Glass describes theatre-making in an analogy to an etching plate (see Chapter Eight), whereby each experience of the rehearsal scores a line on the plate that represents the actor’s psyche and body. A pattern emerges as these lines multiply and overlap. The performance is equated with the prints made from the plate.<sup>170</sup> In this way, the creative process can be seen as a succession of repeated actions that ingrain certain behaviours in the performer. At the same time, the repetition serves to formalise that action to the point that it becomes something transmittable and repeatable: what Schechner calls “restored behavior” or “material”:

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<sup>167</sup> ‘Interrogation: An exercise in Self-Exorcism’ in Pavis (1993) op. cit. p. 195

<sup>168</sup> Schechner, Richard ‘The Director’ in Wells, J. Robert (ed.); *The Director in a Changing Theatre*, Palo Alto: Mayfield 1976 p. 150, quoted in ‘Reflections on the Notation of Theatrical Performance’ in Pavis (1993) op. cit. p. 117

<sup>169</sup> Director of the company Louder than Words. Interview, 25 November 1998

<sup>170</sup> Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst; *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, London: Faber & Faber 1999 p. 42

... living behavior treated as a film director treats a strip of film .... Originating as a process, used in the process of rehearsal to make a new process, a performance, the strips of behavior are not themselves process but things, items, "material".<sup>171</sup>

As 'material' (the term chosen for this research), "restored behavior" is made explicit and fixed and may be notated. This aspect of the process creates something like a musical score. Thus, the term score, as it is used here, has two aspects: on the one hand, it is action or behaviour that has been ingrained on the participants so that they can reproduce it at will. The resulting score is individual and to a large degree unconscious. At the same time, the scoring process is also one of making this tacit process explicit: of producing a score as a set of instructions for action. The formal score is both fixed (less provisional than earlier scores: approved for performance) and transmittable—the process of fixing a score allows it to be communicated to more than one participant. These two aspects of the scoring process will be referred to here as 'tacit' and 'explicit'<sup>172</sup> respectively. Of these, it is the explicit score (often a paper-trail) that forms the most accessible and tangible measure of the process in the case-study section of this thesis. However, the tacit aspect of scoring must in no way be underestimated, particularly in those models of devising which place a particular emphasis on 'organic' creation and thus seek to avoid explicit instruction.

Until this point, the terms 'behaviour,' 'action' and 'instruction' have been utilised quite loosely to describe the activities that constitute the score. It is now appropriate to offer instead the terms **direction** and **response** to describe the score's constituent parts.

**Direction**, which is in some ways equivalent to Ben-Tovim's term 'instructions for performance', includes explicit instructions given by one participant to another but also encompasses the less explicit interactions of the rehearsal room. The director's verbal instruction to the performer (to "stand still centre stage" perhaps) is an example of explicit direction but it might be that her fellow performers' reaction to her standing still adds another, more subtle direction (they look bored so the performer adopts a comically rigid stance).

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<sup>171</sup> 'Restoration of Behavior' in Richard Schecher; *Between Theater & Anthropology*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1985 p. 35

<sup>172</sup> These terms will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

**Response** describes a participant's action in reaction to a direction. Again, the term is intended to encompass both the explicit response (the performer does what she is told to do) but also less straightforward aspects (the performer's misinterpretation of the direction; her 'failure' to follow instruction because of the limits of her craft or physical capacities; her initiative in finding an original response to a direction). In fact, the term 'response' conflates two separate aspects: a participant's initial intellectual or emotional reaction to a direction and the action she takes as a result of that reaction. So, for example, a director watching an improvisation may be moved by a particular atmospheric quality of the performance (this is her initial emotional response). She then takes action, perhaps to say "that's good. Do it just like that". Thus the emotional response is translated into an explicit response (a decision) and then into an explicit direction (a verbal instruction) that is relayed back to the performers. If her emotional response is visible to the performers—let us say that she sheds a tear—then this too can constitute a direction. Again, while it is the explicit aspects of the direction-response cycle that are most accessible to observation, it is important not to underestimate the importance in creative processes of the affective and the tacit dimensions. For John O'Toole, the "initial, intuitive, spontaneous and affective response on perceiving and experiencing a work of art"<sup>173</sup> (which is akin to the response of an audience member) and "its processing and re-incorporation into the art work, which then produces more responding, provides a self-generative emotional current"<sup>174</sup> that is essential both to the 'work of art' and the process of creativity.

We have arrived then, at a definition of the product of a theatre-making process—that is, of performance—as a **score**, constituted of a set of **directions** designed to determine the practitioner's **response** in the moment of performance. The configuration of performance as being made up of directions and responses accounts for the transactional, negotiated nature of theatre-making in general and devising in particular.

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<sup>173</sup> This is John O'Toole's explanation of the term 'responding' as it is used in Peter Abbs' list of the 'principles of creation' ("forming, presenting, responding, evaluation" – Peter Abbs; *Living Powers: Arts in Education*, London: Falmer Press 1987 p.208). John O'Toole; *The Process of Drama: Negotiating Art and Meaning*, Routledge: London & New York 1992 p.218-219

<sup>174</sup> Ibid p.219

In discussing the distinction between his use of the terms 'script', 'drama', 'theatre' and 'performance', Schechner<sup>175</sup> is in effect describing a range of established techniques by which scores are fixed and made explicit. He suggests that even in the most formal of these, there is a negotiation between fixed "anchor points" and "play"<sup>176</sup>—moments at which the performer has increased self-determination in respect to her actions. He offers "a tentative definition of performance" as "ritualized behaviour conditioned/permeated by play".<sup>177</sup> We see that the direction-response pattern of the score also constitutes a control-play pattern: a negotiation between rigid 'rules' (direct or indirect directions) and the potentially improvisatory 'response' to the rules. In his study of acting, Harrop offers a summary of what has been described so far:

... the actor's basic process is ... to make physical choices that communicate the intention of the impulses gained from the script or text. The interrelationship of all the choices of all the actors creates a 'score' of actions which is the performance. Once discovered in rehearsal and agreed upon by the players, the score remains a constant. However, the way in which the score is played will vary somewhat at each performance as the actors respond to the immediate rhythm of the occasion flowing from fellow actors and from the audience.<sup>178</sup>

Thus, the score is constituted of physical choices and actions that have been agreed in rehearsal. In performance, the actor responds to these fixed points (what Schechner would refer to as the controlled aspect) but may deviate from the precise response agreed in rehearsal in relation to the immediate situation of performance (play).

On the broadest scale, what we have described so far amounts to the conversion of a **vision** into a **score** through a succession of approximations. Thus, we can for the moment envisage theatre-making as a series of trials that 'test' provisional scores against the vision, preserving

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<sup>175</sup> Richard Schechner; 'Dance, Script, Theatre and Performance' *The Drama Review* Vol. 19, 1973 pp. 5–36

<sup>176</sup> Schechner's use of the term is informed by Johan Huizinga; *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture*, London: Paladin 1970

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 29 'Drama, Script, Theatre and Performance'

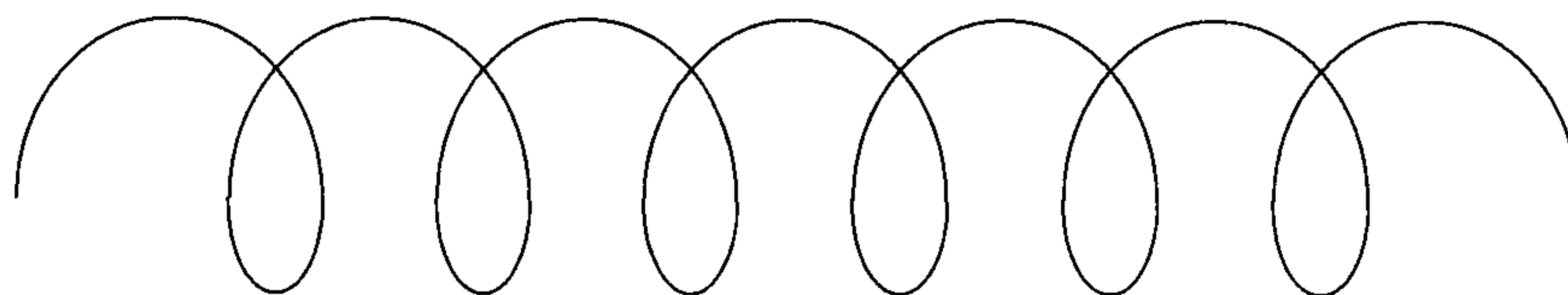
<sup>178</sup> John Harrop, *Acting*, London & New York: Routledge 1992 pp. 56–57

those that best approximate it: 'survival of the fittest', where fitness relates to the most successful approximation to the vision. Schechner's description of the work of director and performer illustrates this:

The director says 'Keep that'. What the director means is not to do it again right now but to throw it ahead in time—to store it in the 'future subjective' .... This is the place where material 'thrown forward' and 'kept' for later use in the performance-to-be is stored.<sup>179</sup>

The director's decision to 'Keep that' is based on the extent to which the material—a particular set of responses—matches the vision (which, we should be aware, may change over the course of a process). By designating that particular response as something to be 'kept' and repeated, the director is causing it to be 'scored', at least for the time being. The director's next set of directions will be a response to the response she has just witnessed—the performer's response may become the director's direction. Directions become responses that in turn become directions as participants negotiate their approximations of the vision.

### **Direction**



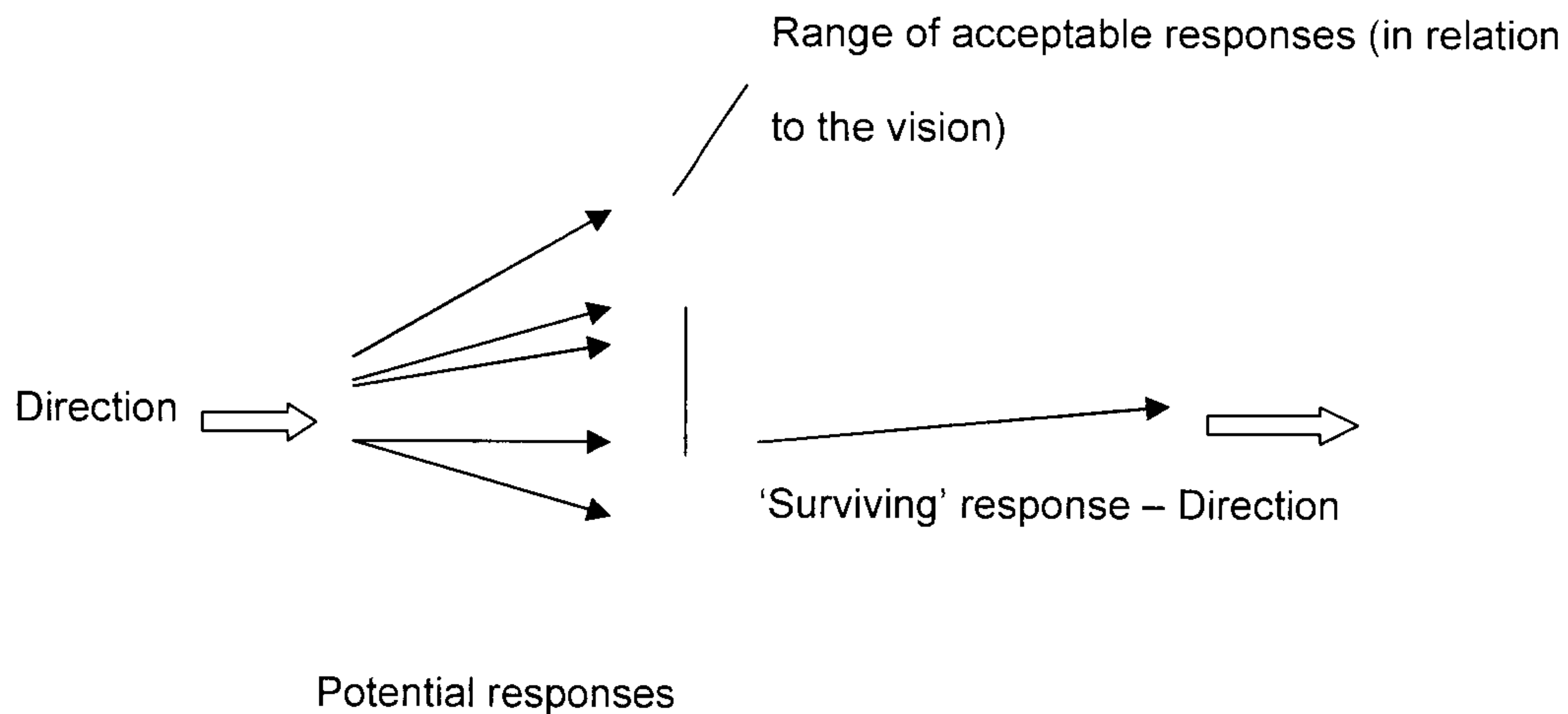
### **Response**

Through successive trials, the provisional scores that 'survive' the direction-response cycle are increasingly formalised, sometimes in tangible formats such as scripts or storyboards. At the same time, the participants of the process acquire a tacit sense of what responses are likely to survive. An aspect of this tacit understanding is their growing familiarisation with the vision.

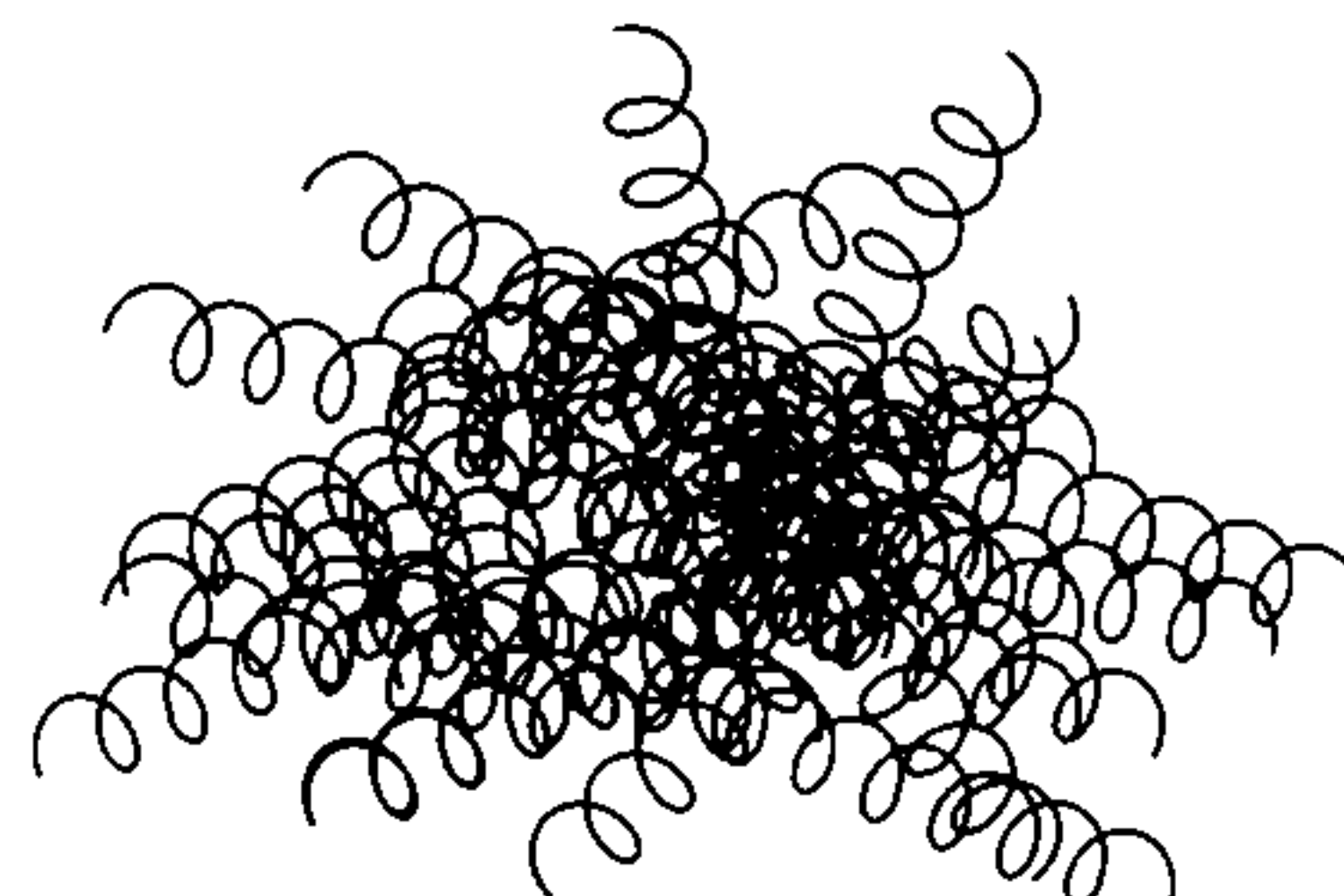
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<sup>179</sup> Schechner (1985) op. cit. p. 101

It is the vision that determines the range of acceptable responses, that is the responses that are most likely to be 'kept' and therefore to survive the scoring process. What Harrop calls the performer's "choice" is delineated by their understanding of the vision: they will offer responses that seem likely to fit. Thus, of all the potential responses to a direction, only a proportion will be considered acceptable.



Of course, the model outlined so far is deliberately simplistic. In the first place, we must take into account the fact that more than one direction-response cycle will be going on simultaneously as each participant interacts with a number of others, responding to and generating directions both explicitly and tacitly. While our analysis of creative process will tend to focus on the most obvious interactions (predominantly that between the director and the performers), it is important to remember that the theatre-making process is so complex a system of exchange that aspects of it will always be impossible to untangle. A visual representation of this might be something like wire-wool, in which the individual helixes that represent direction-response exchanges between individuals are tangled into a dense mass:





We must also take into account both the 'formless' nature of the vision (it is likely to be unconscious to a degree and to be continually changing) that guides the process and also the fact that each participant will have their own version of the vision. These individual visions may be coloured by aesthetic, ideological, practical or other considerations and aspirations, which may or may not be shared by other process participants. We also need to be aware of the tacit dimension of the scoring process: although I have spoken of the director's 'decision' and Harrop refers to the performer's "physical choices", the selection of material that fits the vision is not always a matter of conscious discernment. As we will see in the case of David Glass, a participant may feel, intuitively, that a trial they have witnessed in the rehearsal room is 'right' but can not necessarily articulate why: it simply feels right. The transition between direction and response may also be subject to a degree of 'noise' even when there is agreement on the vision. For example, a performer may misunderstand a direction or may not have the physical ability or relevant skills to enact it. They may also deliberately (perhaps because they are misbehaving or believe they have a better idea) or unconsciously (because the direction is ambiguous or they are not concentrating) offer unacceptable responses. An unacceptable response may simply be rejected (not 'kept'). However, seemingly unacceptable responses can also revise the vision which is anyway continually changing through ongoing trials. In her study of directors in rehearsal, Letzler Cole describes an incident in Richard Foreman's rehearsal of *The Birth of a Poet*<sup>180</sup> where a performer responds unexpectedly to a direction. Rather than correcting the performer, Foreman says, "Stuart [Hoden, a dancer] just made a mistake and I think it's better."<sup>181</sup> Foreman revises his vision for that particular scene and a new set of directions is offered to incorporate the "mistake".

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<sup>180</sup> Brooklyn Academy of Music Opera House, New York, New York, USA, 3 December 1985

<sup>181</sup> Susan Letzler Cole; *Directors in Rehearsal*, London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. 133

If, after they have been given blocking directions, the actors do not quite reproduce what the director has in mind, Foreman often has them do a variation on the original blocking, sometimes suggested inadvertently by the actors. In this way, the actors' variants on the director's initial vision become part of the final creative conception and staging of the theatre piece.<sup>182</sup>

Letzler Cole implies that this is something exceptional, but the premise here is that every response, intended or not, will reframe the vision if only in terms of further defining the range of acceptable responses (“that’s not how to do it”).

The examples of practice given so far all make reference to the work of the director and performer. It is important to be aware that it is not just the performer who has a score: the concept of the score can extend to the lighting operator, the stage manager, the set designer, in fact any participant or performance element. In addition, the direction-response cycle is not the one-to-one process that this model suggests. A performer's score may well derive from the director's verbal instructions, but it is also coloured by the directions given by other performers, by the audience, by lighting and costume, indeed by directions that are not even 'peopled' in a direct way, such as the architecture of the performance space or the placement of stage furniture. Likewise, responses can be shared: let us say, for example, that the whole participant group is watching two of the performers improvise a scene. Although it is the director who is most likely to give an explicit response, the informally expressed opinions of other participants, even their facial expressions, may determine the ongoing scoring process (everybody laughs, so the director is reassured that the scene 'works'). Indeed, some theatre-making approaches, particularly some devising methodologies, place considerable importance on the shared response of the group, that they all feel, or at least agree, that a particular trial 'works'. While the main focus in research is on the relationship between performer and director (partly because these are roles in common across all the processes studied and partly because, in most cases, these practitioners are at the rock-face of the theatre-making process) the extent to which the

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid. p. 133

vision is shared, and therefore the potential for group responses is increased, emerges as a vital consideration threading through the three case studies.

So far, creative process has been described as the linear narrowing down of possibilities through a 'survival of the fittest' system—successive approximations. While this is a useful basic premise from which to develop an analytical framework, in practice this linear pattern is not only unlikely to occur but is also not particularly desirable. What the 'successive approximation' model of creativity leaves out is the sense of creativity as inspiration. The 'eureka' moment of unexpected discovery, of inspiration, is almost mythologized in the literature on creativity, especially in studies that have been made into the working processes of distinguished artists or scientists (for example, Vernon's *Creativity*<sup>183</sup> or, more recently, Alan Lightman's taxonomy of scientific discovery which lists eight processes by which such 'moments of truth' have been achieved<sup>184</sup>). Many forms of theatre-making, and of devising in particular, also place particular value on such moments and their practitioners will organise their processes in such a way as to maximise the possibility of their occurrence: the common claim of a director that she begins a project with no prior intentions or expectations of what the final performance might be like is one example of what is often referred to as an 'organic' or playful approach.

Creativity 'guru' Edward de Bono's many books and manuals draw a distinction between 'vertical' thinking (a sequential cause-and-effect pattern) and 'lateral thinking'. In vertical thinking, the selection of one option narrows the range of possible next options. Each successive choice leads to a smaller range of possibilities because of our tendency to anticipate future experience according to past experience.<sup>185</sup> The equivalent in a theatre-making process is the pattern by which each successive improvisation or trial will define more narrowly what the most appropriate next version should be: a neat succession of increasingly successful approximations to the initial vision. Lateral thinking, as de Bono describes it, offers strategies to deliberately break the logic-based, vertical pattern so as to

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<sup>183</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>184</sup> See Alan Lightman; 'Scientific Moments of Truth' in *New Scientist Magazine* Issue 2526 19 November 2005 p. 36

<sup>185</sup> Edward de Bono; *Lateral Thinking for Managers*, London: Penguin Books 1984 pp. 33–34

generate unexpected innovation. The principle behind de Bono's strategies bears a striking resemblance to what Arthur Koestler—in his seminal *Act of Creation*—calls 'bi-sociation'<sup>186</sup>, the coming together of two seemingly irrelevant or irreconcilable matrices in a way that sparks insight. Thus, as Archimedes discovered, something as mundane as getting into the bath might trigger an unexpected and beautifully simple solution to the problem of calculating how much gold there is in a crown. The theatre-making process offers the possibility of bi-sociation between vision and provisional score and between the visions of different participants. It may occur within the detail of the direction-response cycle. Directions might be designed to trigger responses that are unexpected for the direction-giver (as in the example of Foreman) or for the respondent, as when David Glass says of his performers:

I wasn't interested in what was coming out of the conscious mind of the actor as devisor: I was interested in the unconscious mind .... It's kind of difficult because they don't know they're actually producing things, even though it's come from them.<sup>187</sup>

In the case of Glass, the bi-sociation of the performer and the director's instruction triggers the production of potentially valuable material (that is material that is likely to coincide with the vision) from the "unconscious mind" of the performer. Bi-sociation may also occur in processes where elements that are initially worked separately come together. A small-scale version might be when an actor—in this case Stanislavski—finds that "the accidental touch of the make-up brush on my face" gives:

... a living and comic expression to my face, and something suddenly turned in me. All that was dim became clear, all that was groundless suddenly had ground under its feet, all that I did not believe suddenly found my trust. Who can explain this unexplainable, sudden and magical creative motion!<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Arthur Koestler; *The Act of Creation*, London: Hutchinson 1969 p. 35

<sup>187</sup> David Glass, interview with the author, 3 April 2001. Statements such as these begin to raise issues of interpersonal dynamic, authorship and even ethics.

<sup>188</sup> Constantin Stanislavski; *My Life in Art*, translated by J.J. Robins, London: Eyre Methuen 1980 p. 165

It is important to note that these 'eureka' moments form an important aspect in the direction-response cycle. What makes Schechner's director say 'Keep that' may not only be an intellectual appraisal that the trial he set up satisfactorily approximated the vision or even that it generated an emotional response that he appreciated as potentially valuable to the work in progress. Sometimes the response surprises and astonishes the participants. Such moments are all the more powerful when they are shared by the whole participant group. An example from my personal experience demonstrates the power of such eureka moments. This occurred during the creative process of *London/My Lover*, a show in which live and pre-recorded video images of the two on-stage performers were projected onto a screen behind them (so that the audience saw both the live performers and either simultaneous filmed images of them or pre-recorded images of other locations). On this particular day we were experimenting with projections that might suggest that one of the characters was in a swimming-pool. We were not having much luck until, out of the blue, a lucky sweep of the camera showed our performer on screen swimming in a blue void, her image doubled as though reflected on the under surface of water. The cast and crew fell silent as we watched the screen: the excitement was tangible and lasted throughout the day even though the more technically-able participants were quickly able to explain the effect<sup>189</sup>. There was no need for the director to explicitly state that this would be part of the show: the group simply set about working out how to reproduce the effect.

We have reached, then, a model of creative process in theatre-making that takes into account two distinctive aspects of creativity in this context: firstly its group, transactional nature, including the affective dimension, and secondly, the fact that the 'product' of theatre-making is an intangible series of instructions that lead to performance: the theatre-making process is the formulation of a score through ongoing direction-response cycles.

This chapter will now outline a generic model of theatre-making process on which the subsequent accounts and analyses of process will be based. The generic model will be used

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<sup>189</sup> My clumsy handling of the video camera had caught not only the performer but the screen behind her (which gave the doubling effect). The blue was a result of interference.

to facilitate the description and comparison of the particular models of devising methodology outlined in Part II of this thesis and the accounts and analyses of the case-studies of individual processes in Part III. It grows out of the concept of creative process outlined so far in this chapter, so that it sees process as constituting the creation of the vision and subsequent 'matching' of the score to this vision. It is necessarily simple, yet it takes into account the stages that occur—in various forms and to various degrees—in all the processes examined in the course of this research.

Many writers in the broad field of creativity studies—as well as in performance theory—have attempted to chart the stages of creativity.<sup>190</sup> The Robinson Report cites Wallas' classical division of "creative thought" into "preparation–incubation–illumination, then verification" as an important, but contested, starting point.<sup>191</sup> There have been a couple of attempts in the field of theatre and performance studies: Roberta Mock builds a five-stage model out of her critique of Schechner's version.<sup>192</sup> Like Wallas' and Mock's models, the one developed here centres on stages of activity. It is structured around the process of converting the vision to score.

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<sup>190</sup> Anna Halprin's 'RSVP' cycle (see Anna Halprin 'Community Art as Process' in *The Drama Review* Vol. 17, 1973 pp. 64–77), and Schechner's seven-phase model (see Schechner (1985) op. cit. p. 99) are two influential models from the field of performance studies.

<sup>191</sup> This is attributed to Joseph Wallas *The Art of Thought*, New York: Harcourt Brace 1926 p. 80, in the Robinson Report op. cit. p. 31.

<sup>192</sup> Mock op. cit. p. 5. Her phased model runs as: conception–development–presentation–repetition–reflection.

## Generic Model of Group Theatre-Making

Phase	Typical activities
<p><b>I. Conception</b> (from <b>initial vision</b> to <b>working vision/framework score</b>)</p> <p>Starting with an initial vision that is often individual and unarticulated, this phase works towards either a more explicit and usable vision (the working vision) or a still more explicit framework score. The working vision will give the practitioners a sense of 'what works'. The framework score gives more precise parameters for the work of the next phase.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinking, musing, inspiration, dreaming</li> <li>• Creative games and exercises designed to trigger 'ideas'</li> <li>• Individual or group research—'desk', experiential, physical</li> <li>• Training and exercises that build a 'common language'</li> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Organisational and administrative functions of setting up the project</li> <li>• Reading, discussing, perhaps annotating the script, if one exists</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Generating material</b> (from <b>working vision/framework score</b> to <b>rehearsal score</b>)</p> <p>Generating, showing and evaluating provisional scores. In some models of devising, a great number of provisional scores are generated in this phase. Where there is a more clearly delineated framework score, the company will be more strategic in its generation of material.</p> <p>Throughout this process, the vision will be continually revised and refined.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvisation, trying out 'ideas' on-the-floor, trials</li> <li>• Drawing, story-boarding, model-making</li> <li>• Creating and/or collecting materials (for example, possible costumes, set components, masks)</li> <li>• More specific research</li> <li>• Discussion, 'brain-storming'</li> </ul>

<p><b>3. Fixing (rehearsal score)</b></p> <p>Provisional scores are 'fixed' and collated in order to create an agreed—perhaps explicit and notated—score. This phase is often marked by a shift from 'creative' activity to decision-making. There is continued revision and refinement of the vision but typically the visions of individual participants begin to cohere at this stage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scripting/notating/storyboarding</li> <li>• Decision-making</li> <li>• Editing</li> <li>• Integrating scores of separate elements</li> <li>• Discussion</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Rehearsal (rehearsal score to performance score)</b></p> <p>Learning and practicing the performance of the rehearsal score, so that participants have sufficient understanding of the score, its components and the acceptable range of responses to enable its successful enactment in a public performance. The performance score is that which will determine the public performance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued integration of performance elements</li> <li>• Repeated performances that increasingly approximate the performance context</li> <li>• Feedback and discussion from the director or other participants or observers</li> </ul>



<p><b>5. Performance</b> (enactment of the performance score)</p> <p>The enactment of the performance score in front of an audience, often repeated over several performances. The performance score will be revised simply through repetition and through the tacit directions implied by the audience's reaction. In some contexts formal direction-giving continues into the performance phase. The nature of the performance score itself will determine the extent to which the performer can deviate from the score in performance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeated performances</li> <li>• Director's 'notes'</li> <li>• Continued rehearsal</li> <li>• Tacit and explicit revision to the performance score</li> </ul>
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The phases outlined here are broadly chronological but most creative processes will involve several instances of 'looping back' so that, for example, a provisional score may be fixed but the company decides to go through another phase of material generation and fixing before proceeding to rehearse the resulting score.

In order to account for the broadest of theatre-making methodologies, including the experimental approaches of some devising practitioners, the terms identified in the generic model above include a set of parameters and variables:

### **Vision**

Visions vary in the extent to which they are pre-established or 'formless'. At one extreme, the reader may imagine an initial, detailed vision, which envisages a whole production from beginning to end. This might conjure the image of a Romantic artist, struggling to re-capture

and realise a dream, inspiration or glimpse of the divine: something akin to a religious vision. We will see something like this exemplified in director's theatre, as discussed in Chapter Five. Pre-established visions may also exist where practical issues—a complex set-build, tight deadline or large participant group—call for considerable planning and forethought (as in the Network model discussed in Chapter Seven). The opposite extreme is represented by the company that does not know what they have created until they create it: “you know it when you see it”.<sup>193</sup> In these cases, process becomes a voyage of discovery: a characteristic of processes that are referred to as ‘organic’.

The second variable is the extent to which a vision is shared by the participants of the group. In the Romantic extreme described above, the vision is that of the ‘inspired’ individual who struggles to communicate a vision to participants whom she has gathered around herself in her attempt to realise it. Another version is a process in which the vision is made explicit through a common language, discussion and perhaps tools such as storyboards and scripts. I return to the analogy of building a house, in which the architect is equipped with the specialised knowledge and tools (the structural drawings, blue-prints, specifications and building regulations) required to communicate her vision effectively to the relevant participants: to make it explicit. However, even in this case, key aspects of the vision may remain individual and personal to the visionary: although the house is the architect's dream home, it is just another job for the builders. At the other extreme are visions that are conceived late in the process and to which a fuller range of participants has contributed and invested. The conception phase in this case is likely to be characterised by group activities and discussion as a mechanisms for conceiving the vision and making it explicit. This explicit and shared vision means that all participants are able to make the decisions that characterise the fixing phase of the process model. A further alternative is the ‘multi-vision’, in which the performance constitutes a framework within which each participant (or group of participants) realises their individual visions: the format of a cabaret or variety show made up of a series of ‘turns’, perhaps united by a fairly loose set of criteria or themes. Some versions of the System model described in Chapter Six exemplify this variable.

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<sup>193</sup> Etchells op. cit. p. 55

The notion that a process is determined by one vision (be it shared or single) is of course a necessary simplification. Even the most individual visions can be shared and communicated to a degree and shared visions are in fact made up of a jangling mass of single visions that have some area of coincidence. In addition, every vision is constituted of explicit and tacit aspects. However, this simplification has enabled the mapping out of key variables that will be useful in the forthcoming chapters. They are summarised here:

Preconceived vision.....Late-conceived vision  
Explicit vision..... Tacit vision  
Single vision.....Multi-vision.....Shared vision

Over the course of a process, the vision will move from an initial (often individual) vision to a working vision, then to a point where, ideally, vision and score coincide.<sup>194</sup>

In addition to this, a company might have an overriding vision of the sort of work it resolves to create. This 'big vision' might be explicit—as expressed in the company literature—or an outcome of the company's ethos, its cultural context, or the tastes of its individual members. The 'big vision' will influence not only the working visions of individual projects but will also pervade the company's other creative activities and organisational strategies.

## Scores

As defined here, process consists of a series of scores that become increasingly less provisional and more formal as work continues, culminating in the fixed performance score that determines the public performance. The first variable in terms of score is how 'provisional' or 'fixed' it is. A provisional score is a 'throwaway' score: one that tries out ideas

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<sup>194</sup> Participants who have visions that do not coincide with the score they are required to work with may experience dissatisfaction and exhibit signs of stress.

that are less likely to 'survive' the scoring process (though it may help define the vision). A fixed score is one that has been formalised, often through being made explicit. Over the course of a process, the scores will tend to move from the provisional initial scores (phase 1) sometimes to a framework score (phase 2) through a major point of fixing in stage 3 (the rehearsal score) and finally to the performance score (stage 4). Thus, there is a movement from scores that can be characterised as tacit to those that are explicit, as well as from provisional to fixed scores. The terms 'tacit' and 'explicit' are derived from Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, writing on creativity in relation to organisational management.<sup>195</sup> In their view, the currency of successful organisational management is "knowledge" and the appropriate deployment and dissemination of this knowledge. This knowledge can be either tacit or explicit. Tacit knowledge is acquired by repeated practice: craft knowledge. Explicit knowledge is that which is formalised and transmittable, that can be passed on through formal learning contexts. Creative process—in the theatre company, as in the business organisations that form Nonaka and Takeuchi's object of study—includes the conversion and transmission of both explicit and tacit knowledge through the processes of socialisation (the sharing of tacit knowledge through interpersonal contact), combination (the sharing of explicit knowledge in formal activities such as presentations), externalisation (activities that render tacit knowledge explicit, such as presentations or discussions) and internalisation (activities that render explicit knowledge tacit, such as repeated practice).<sup>196</sup>

The tacit scoring process that was referred to in relation to Glass' etching block analogy is an example of a system whereby both explicit knowledge (the director's instructions, for example) and tacit knowledge (aspects of the company's ethos, for example) are internalised to give the performer tacit knowledge of the performance score. The point at which Schechner's director says "Keep that" is a moment when knowledge is externalised by her framing it and making it explicit. The explicit 'behaviour' that constitutes this knowledge may subsequently be combined with other explicit knowledge or internalised by repetition.

Different forms of knowledge conversion tend to take place in each phase of the theatre-

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<sup>195</sup> Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi; 'Organisational Knowledge Creation' in Jane Henry (ed.); *Creative Management*, London, California, New Delhi: Sage Publications 2001 pp. 64–80

<sup>196</sup> Nonaka and Takeuchi op. cit. p. 68

making process. The conception phase will be made up of socialisation and externalisation; phase two comprises socialisation, externalisation and combination; phase three is characterised by externalisation and combination, and rehearsal is a form of internalisation. Thus, processes may be compared in terms of their general preference for scores that are either tacit or explicit and their individual pattern of knowledge conversion activities over the course of a theatre-making process.

Scores can also vary both within a process and in relation to other processes, in the degree to which they are loose or improvisatory on the one hand or tight or directed on the other. A tight score will provide the performer with many precise directions and limited scope for self-determination in her response. An example might be the choreography of a classical ballet, with all the precise detail that can be transcribed in Benesh Movement Notation. A loose score gives minimal formal directions, allowing the performer a greater degree of self-determination in her responses (the term 'indeterminacy' will be used in Chapter Six in relation to this). Improvisatory performances in the vein of some of Keith Johnstone's *Theatresports*<sup>197</sup> or Improbable Theatre's *Animo*<sup>198</sup> might use scores that consist of little more than a single instruction or some words suggested by the audience.

As stated earlier, theatre-making process can be characterised, in part, as a case of 'survival of the fittest', where fitness is determined by a response's fit with the vision. How close this fit needs to be in order for a response to survive and therefore be scored is determined by what was earlier described as the acceptable range of response. A broad range allows a greater likelihood that an unexpected, surprising or innovative response will survive and is indicative of a process that can be described as 'playful' or 'creative'. A narrow range of acceptable responses will occur when the vision is preconceived and detailed: it suggests a process in which the director is fastidious and knows what she wants.

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<sup>197</sup> See Keith Johnstone; *Impro for Storytellers: Theatresports and the art of making things happen*, London: Faber & Faber 1999

<sup>198</sup> Battersea Arts Centre, London, 20 January 1996

To summarise, scores can be distinguished according to the following variables:

Fixed.....Provisional  
Explicit.....Tacit  
Tight/strict.....Loose/playful/creative

### **Interpersonal Dynamics**

What distinguishes theatre-making from other processes discussed in creativity studies is the fact that it is a group process. The analytical framework developed here essentially defines theatre-making as a set of interpersonal, transactional activities, involving the communication and sharing of visions, giving and responding to directions, group and individual decision-making processes and the sharing of knowledge. These various activities constitute what this thesis will refer to as 'interpersonal dynamics'. Who generates ideas, who makes decisions, who gives and who responds to directions, and what determines the creativity and creative input of each individual participant: the answer to such questions not only enables us to distinguish one creative methodology from another, but also give important insights into the nature of group creativity. One such revelation is of the importance of power and a particular form of it that is here designated 'authority', in designating the roles that individuals might play in a group process. By 'power', I mean a participant's general ability to do: to act and to influence, typically within the broad scope of the theatre company as an ongoing concern and including the managerial, administrative and other functions that support the work of the theatre-making process. **Authority** refers specifically to the ability of a participant to effect and determine the scoring process within the scope of a single theatre-making process.

The habitual way practitioners tend to gauge the relative authority of their process participants is through creative contribution: the number of 'ideas' that a participant contributes to the scoring process. This is not without precedent. In his seminal studies of management teams, Raymond Belbin uses "proposal rate" to measure his subjects'

creativity, though he admits that the number of proposed ideas that survive would in fact be a more accurate measure.<sup>199</sup> In this research, the degree to which a participant's ideas survive the scoring process and appear in the performance score is a measure of their **authorship** rather than their authority. Authorship can be a retrospective measure of authority (how much of a devised piece was 'written' by an individual participant) but it is also possible for a participant to have authority without authorship: for example, in some participatory practices, where the core company creates a framework score and leaves the authorship, from this point on, to the participants (see Chapter Four). A rule of thumb measure of authorship is the extent to which participants claim to feel 'ownership' over the scores.

There are two further determinants and expressions of authority: the ability to give directions (particularly explicit direction-giving, as when blocking the physical movements of a scene for example) and the ability to choose (usually through this direction-giving) what survives the scoring process. Thus, the three sites of authority in the process are:

- The ability to contribute creatively to the process (for one's responses to 'survive')
- The ability to give directions to which other participants respond
- The ability to make decisions as to what 'survives' the process

We have seen that the survival of directions and responses depends on their appropriateness in realising the vision or their ability to usefully refine the vision. Thus, authority is directly related to knowledge of the vision. The participant with the 'fittest' understanding of the vision can give directions intended to lead the others towards this vision and has the ability to choose which responses comply with the vision and thereby survive. Greater or more accurate knowledge of the vision allows a participant greater ability to produce 'acceptable' responses in relation to a direction; and the more acceptable a response is, the more likely it is to become a direction itself and subsequently be incorporated into the performance score.

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<sup>199</sup> Raymond Meredith Belbin; *Management Teams: Why They Succeed or Fail*, London: Heinemann 1981 p. 33

In addition to their knowledge of the vision, there are several other factors that determine an individual participant's ability to express authority. These are:

- The **organisational structure** of the company and the participant's allocated role within it
- The company's **ethos**
- The personal characteristics of the participant

The term **organisational structure** in this research refers, in the first place, to the formal organisation of the company as it is delineated by its job titles and descriptions, roles, employment contracts, pay structures, recruitment mechanisms and so on. This formal structure may be supported or undermined by the informal or actual structure—as when a director fails to command sufficient respect to fulfil her role. Thus, there may be a fissure between the intended and actual authority structure. This is particularly the case in those companies that aim to uphold power/authority structures that appeal to their self- or public image but which may not be the most effective distribution of power for the work they do. Most commonly, this self- and public image revolves around stated claims (and beliefs) of some devising companies to operate flattened, collaborative, inclusive power structures. Objective observation or the experience of participants in a process might reveal that implicit—and sometimes even formal—structures do not in fact accord with these images.

Certain roles traditionally entitle a participant to more or less relative authority in the process. For example, the director is typically the participant with most authority overall, while other participant roles have authority over particular areas of responsibility (performance, design, lighting design, stage management and so on). An important consideration in describing the structure of a company is the extent to which such role allocation is rigid and specialised on the one hand or non-existent at the other extreme. Thus, while many of the examples of practice cited in this chapter view the director as chief authority, some companies do not have an allocated director or have one whose role is not as a primary authority or author. The second variable in terms of structure is the extent to which roles designate status. For



example, the general tendency is to endow the director with greater status than the lighting operator, but this status pattern may be overturned in certain cases. The parameters in terms of participant role and area of responsibility are:

Specialised/rigid.....No role allocations ('free-for-all')  
 Status distinctions.....No status distinctions

The term **ethos** refers to the particular values, beliefs, goals, objectives and behavioural codes that characterise a group and its ways of operating. The ethos of an organisation, like its structure, consists of both formal/explicit and informal/tacit aspects. Examples of the explicit aspect include a company's artistic policy or a particular tradition or training system to which it adheres. The tacit aspect may be indicated by the way in which company members dress, interact, address each other and socialise. A company's ethos encompasses what was referred to earlier as its 'big vision': a set of principles that applies across the body of their work and will therefore affect the initial vision of any one production. Different theatre-making contexts bring with them a particular ethos that will carry a set of expectations in relation to the formal role delineations and the extent to which each role contributes to the scoring process, as well as to the informal distribution of authority. For example, Jane Whitworth describes how certain physical training systems encompass what she calls "theologies of the body".<sup>200</sup> In her "embodied ethnography" of three physical theatre ensembles, Whitworth describes how "each training [system] raises the question of subjection in a variety of ways: of the relationship of the individual to outside will—that of the director and that of the ensemble".<sup>201</sup> She suggests, for example, that the Viewpoints technique<sup>202</sup> SITI use alongside their Suzuki training serves to "break down the hierarchical social structures in the theatre-making process".<sup>203</sup> The extent to which one participant is

<sup>200</sup> Jane Whitworth; 'Translating Theologies of the Body: SITI's Physical Training and Corporeal Ideology' in *Performance Research* Vol. 8, No. 2, June 2003 Bodiescapes p. 21.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. p. 25

<sup>202</sup> See Bogart, Anne and Landau, Tina (eds.); *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition*, London: Theatre Communications Book 2005

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. p. 25

subject<sup>204</sup> to another plays a part in determining how much authority both participants have in the scoring process.

In many ways, ethos is to the interpersonal dynamic of a company what vision is to its process. An individual's knowledge of the ethos will determine their level of power and, with this, the authority they enjoy in that particular company. Theodore Mills' classic study on the sociology of small groups suggests that the "complex interpersonal processes" of a small group break down into five levels—behaviour, emotions, norms, group goals and group values<sup>205</sup>—that a new member of a group must progressively master before finally gaining access to "the executive functions"<sup>206</sup>, the ultimate authority within the group. By amassing this knowledge of the group's ethos, the participant gains increasing authority within the group—an equivalent to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural or social capital as systems through which social relations and classes are defined.<sup>207</sup> Mills suggests that only once a group contains a healthy majority of participants with sufficient access to the "executive processes" can the group as a whole develop fully. Like the vision, knowledge of this culture can be tacit or explicit and thus converted through the four processes described above by Nonaka and Takeuchi. Mills' model of small group development suggests that a participant's longevity in a particular company is an important determinant of their authority and that newcomers into a company tend to have limited authority.

Finally, an individual participant's authority in the process is affected and determined by their personal attributes. We are no doubt aware from our own experience of people who are natural 'leaders' or 'followers'. Belbin was among the first of the management theorists to take this observation further, matching particular personal characteristics such as being "disciplined, focused and balanced" or "highly strung, outgoing and dominant" with particular roles to which these traits are suited (the Chairman and the Shaper respectively in these

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<sup>204</sup> Whitworth derives the concept of subjection from Judith Butler. See, for example, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection*, Stanford California: Stanford University Press 1997

<sup>205</sup> Theodore Mills; *The Sociology of Small Groups*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1997 p. 57

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. p. 88

<sup>207</sup> See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu; *Language and Symbolic Power*, edited and introduced by John B. Thompson, translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1991 p. 230

examples). Belbin suggests that the most successful teams will match each personality type (there are eight in all) with the appropriate role in the team. In theatre companies, each of these personality types will want to take on a particular role, and probably status, in the authority structure. Thus, a participant with the characteristics of The Company Worker—“Methodical, trustworthy and efficient ... not excited by visions ...”—is likely to be most fulfilled and useful in a position with fairly limited direct authority in the process, especially when compared to The Plant, who is “the source of original ideas and proposals, being the most imaginative as well as the most intelligent member of the team”.<sup>208</sup> While this research does not go to the lengths of testing the personalities<sup>209</sup> of the practitioners investigated, it is important to raise this point, especially as a counter to assumptions regarding the collaborative and egalitarian nature of devising. Not all participants are able, or indeed want, to ‘collaborate’ on an equal footing. In addition to the sort of personal characteristics described by Belbin, other possible determinants of a participant’s authority status in the process include the same sort of factors that may limit access in all forms of social engagement: gender, ethnicity, disability, age and so forth. It is not within the scope of this research to assess individual companies on whether or not they are successfully implementing their equal opportunities policies, but it is worth considering the way in which issues of access endemic to the general social culture are played out in the interpersonal dynamic of the scoring process. For example, it has already been pointed out that the majority of devising companies funded by the ACE or represented by the British Council have white, male directors.<sup>210</sup>

Charles Handy, a seminal writer on organisational management, provides a useful taxonomy for describing the structure and ethos of organisations that can be usefully applied to this study of devising companies. Handy suggests that what he calls the “Culture” of an organisation is determined by the following factors: history and ownership, size, technology,

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<sup>208</sup> Belbin op. cit.

<sup>209</sup> Belbin provides a questionnaire that seeks to identify one’s personality type.

<sup>210</sup> It was in view of the dominance of males in certain roles that I considered using the male pronoun when referring generally to the role of director or playwright. However, I recognised that this might have the unintended effect of reinforcing the dominance of men in certain roles. I have therefore chosen the female pronoun as a substitute for the more clumsy ‘he or she’ when referring generally to theatre practitioners.

goals and objectives, the environment, and the people.<sup>211</sup> The particular form and combination of these factors will result in a company taking the form of one of four basic models: the Power Culture, the Role Culture, the Task Culture and the Person Culture.<sup>212</sup>

The Power Culture:

... depends on a central power source, with rays of power and influence spreading out from that central figure .... The organization depends on trust and empathy for its effectiveness and on telepathy and personal conversation for communication.<sup>213</sup>

Companies that emulate this pattern are hierarchical, though the emphasis they place on interpersonal factors such as “trust and empathy ... telepathy ... [and] personal conversation” may make such a company feel somewhat more egalitarian than it is. This research suggests that the Power Culture relates to the Participatory, the Ensemble and certain examples of the System models of devising.

The Role Culture is also a hierarchical structure but one that is organised by roles or job descriptions and by “rules and procedures”<sup>214</sup> rather than personal relationships. The Role Culture may be seen to operate in the Devising Playwright and the Participatory models of devising, though these are ‘watered down’ versions of the large-scale bureaucracies that are Handy’s central focus. Most devising companies would seek to distance themselves from the Power and Role Cultures and the hierarchical structures associated with them. They are more likely to view themselves as something like the Task Culture, which:

... seeks to bring together the appropriate resources, the right people at the right level of the organization and let them get on with it .... It is a team culture .... The task culture utilizes the unifying power of the group to improve efficiency and to identify the individual with the objective of the organization.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Charles Handy; *Understanding Organisations*, London: Penguin Books 1993 p. 209

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 183–189

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* p. 184

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* p. 185

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.* p. 188

Devising companies that do fit the Task Culture have the potential to be exceptionally egalitarian, particularly when the 'team' in question is assembled from within the company and where there is a rotation of responsibility. The "unifying power of the group" is likely to give the process a collaborative 'feel'. Models following the Task Culture include some versions of the Collective, Co-operative and Network models. In fact, the most pervasive of Handy's cultures in current devising practice seems to be closest to the Person Culture. In the Person Culture, "the individual is the central point" and the company "exists only to serve and assist the individuals within it".<sup>216</sup> In this culture "... influence is shared and the power-base, if needed, is usually expert: that is, individuals do what they are good at ...".<sup>217</sup> We will see this culture in the System, Double Act and Network models of devising.

For the sake of clarity, the structure of devising companies has been discussed thus far as though it were a static entity. However, just as the scoring process is constituted of different phases of activity, each with its own micro-culture, so the structure and ethos of the company is likely to undergo a series of changes over the course of a creative process. For example, in many devising methodologies, phases 1 and 2 of the process tend to be characterised by a 'free-for-all', 'creative' atmosphere, with a less formal structure and a more collaborative, organic feel. As the company enters the fixing phase, roles and hierarchies may be more rigorously applied. In addition, as a social group, the devising company itself is likely to undergo a series of transformations over the course of time by dint of that group's development as a social entity: the group relations. Handy offers a succinct model of the group developmental process: forming–storming–norming–performing. In 'forming', the first of these four successive stages, the group is "not yet a group but a set of individuals" who engage in "talk about the purpose of the group" and in which "each individual tends to want to establish his personal identity". 'Storming' amounts to a "conflict stage" in which consensus on purpose and structure "is challenged and re-established" and through which "personal agendas are revealed and a certain amount of inter-personal hostility is generated". The result of the 'storming' stage is 'norming', which is characterised

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid. p. 189

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. p. 190

by a “new and more realistic setting of objectives, procedures and norms”. It is only by successfully completing the first three stages that the group achieves “full maturity” and is able to be “fully and sensibly productive”: in other words, ‘performing’.<sup>218</sup> This social drama may subvert a company’s rehearsal plans or, with more mature groups, develop in parallel to the phases of the creative process.

### **Implications for Contemporary Devising Practice**

This chapter closes with a consideration of some of the particular factors that affect contemporary British devising practice as they relate to the analytical framework just outlined. Without underestimating the diversity of devising contexts and practices in existence, it is possible to make some statements as to external factors that are common to the majority of devising companies in Britain and how these impact on their process and interpersonal dynamic. As already noted in the previous chapter, devising is still a practice that often sits outside of established cultural institutions. While this is perhaps less the case now than it has been in the past, we saw in Chapter One that there are few building-based devising companies and that devised productions tend to take place in a limited number of venues. This marginalisation of devising has implications in terms of the characteristics of its practitioners. Devising, at least historically, appeals to those who hold strong ideological beliefs as to its value and often to those who view their work and vision as outside the mainstream. We will see that, in their different ways, all the directors in my case-studies regard their practice as distinct from that which they see around them and often position themselves as ‘marginalised’. This research suggests that, as a result, devising companies often have a conscious sense of their own identity in relation to other forms and that this sense constitutes an important aspect of their ethos and ‘big vision’. It also has an effect on the interpersonal dynamic. Companies led by iconoclastic visionaries pioneering their own brand of theatre and theatre-making are likely to constitute a particular culture and organisational structure. Handy’s Power Culture seems best fitted to describe such companies.

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid. p. 165

A second important factor is that of economics. This issue is more urgent for devising companies than for more established forms of theatre-making. As suggested in the previous chapter, devising is at least potentially more expensive than most script-led theatre-making, requiring longer periods of group creative time (and the subsequent expense of paying participants and renting space). Devised work by a new company is more risky to fund than new writing (in which the script acts as some measure of the production's viability before significant financial outlay has been made) and much riskier than revivals of established plays (for example, the British repertory system relies on the fact that, given experienced performers, a known classic can be staged to a commercially viable level in three weeks). There are two common compromises that devising companies make in order to function within limited budgets: the length of rehearsal and the size and stability of the company. Indeed, shortage of time for theatre-making is a major topic of complaint for British devising practitioners, who often believe that their continental counterparts have the advantage of longer periods of development time. If this holds true, it could be argued that the methodologies examined in this thesis are not true representations of their companies' working processes: that, with appropriate funding, their theatre-making would be more experimental, 'deeper' and more likely to produce truly innovative theatre products. Another compromise companies often make is reducing the size of their company. Even with the ACE support of devising companies cited in Chapter One, the large permanent companies and on-going creative work that some would regard as essential to a group's development are impossible to sustain. Instead, many devising companies consist of a small central 'core' (sometimes a single person), with additional participants recruited on a project-to-project basis, often from a 'pool' of people known to the company.<sup>219</sup> In this scenario, the company may practically disappear from existence between projects. As well as affecting the creative development of the company, this core-and-pool structure has an impact on the company's interpersonal dynamics: the permanence of the 'core' tends to give greater power and authority to those members of the core who participate in an individual process, while new

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<sup>219</sup> Katie Mitchell refers to the way in which Théâtre de Complicité works with a "constellation of performers whom they draw on for different productions" as one solution to the impediments to forming an ensemble in Britain. Katie Mitchell; 'Liberate, Don't Refrigerate' in Vera Gottlieb and Colin Chambers (eds.); *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, London: Amber Lane Press 1999. p. 71

and temporary participants—who are likely to be unfamiliar with the company's ethos—tend to be restricted in their power and authority. The impact of economics means that work on a devising project tends to constitute a short, intense period of activity, structured according to deadlines and budgetary considerations. In most cases, the creative process brings together a group of people who are not necessarily known to each other at the outset and who are expected to work in close proximity for this period. These factors tend to lead to a 'hot-house' environment that exaggerates and artificially accelerates social processes—including the potential for conflict.<sup>220</sup>

Devising practitioners may often express discontent with their position in the general cultural climate and the economic issues that relate to this, often imagining a more favourable situation in which they would enjoy large permanent companies and unlimited development time. It could be argued that the devising processes in existence now are compromised versions of what the companies would follow, given sufficient support. The fact is that the majority of devising in Britain does not take place in ideal conditions. Moreover, this research is based on the belief that theatre-making is not something that occurs outside of economic, cultural and social factors. One reason for choosing companies that have been in existence for over ten years as case-studies is that—through their very survival—these companies have demonstrated that they are able to successfully negotiate these forces in forging their methodologies. A comparative study between Britain and a country in which devised work is better funded would reveal the extent to which the particular conditions in Britain have led to distinctive 'British' devising methodologies. However, such a study lies outside the scope of this research.

### **Conclusion: Devising as Negotiating Creativity**

By this point of this thesis, the reader will have a sense of devising as a complex and often fraught form of theatre-making. As discussed in Chapter One, this complexity comes from

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<sup>220</sup> Handy's forming-storming-norming-performing model suggests that 'conflict' (including "a certain amount of inter-personal hostility") around "purposes ... leadership and other roles ... norms of work and behaviour" may not only be an inevitable part of the process but also essential in a group's development. See Handy *op. cit.* p. 165



the range and variety of contrasting practices in which devising occurs. Both the practitioner and the researcher of devising must negotiate between existing contexts and models of practice. In particular, devising practitioners often find themselves navigating the contrasting motivations of process-oriented and product-oriented devising: between devising conceived as a *process* designed to promote the individual, group, social and cultural development of its participants and devising as a goal-orientated process resulting in an innovative *product*. In the same way, even individuals within a devising group negotiate between creativity defined as the actions taken towards to realisation of a product, and ‘therapeutic’ creativity as a seems of self-expression in which the process of creative expression is valued above that of innovation. It is contrasts such as these that inspired the title of this thesis: *Negotiating Creativity*.

This chapter has served to remind us that devising is also a practice defined and affected by interpersonal transaction, where factors such as personal attributes, group dynamics and social processes play an essential part in the theatre-making process. Participants in a devising process negotiate between possibly contrasting or conflicting visions through a system of direction and response; although often starting as individuals, participants of a devising group will also negotiate between them a group ethos, built out of their individual behavioural and value systems. The transactional and interpersonal nature of devising is a further important reason why the practice is characterised in this research as a process of negotiation. The following chapters—which outline the seven models of devising in the commercial sector—demonstrate the kind of factors that the coming generation of devising practitioners will be dealing with when formulating their methodologies. They will also illustrate how each model of devising represents a negotiation between ideology and practicality: between process and product and between the individual creativities of its participants.

## Part II: Models of Devising

### Chapter 3: models of devising in the 1960s and 1970s

**The Collective**  
Political theatre of the 1960s and 1970s

**The Devising Playwright**  
New writing of the 1960s and 1970s

### Chapters 4–6: established models of devising

**The Participatory Model**  
Applied theatre

**The Ensemble Model**  
Director's, physical and dance theatre

**The System model**  
Live and performance art; visual theatre

### Chapter 7: emerging models of devising

**The Double Act**  
Physical comedy

**The Network Model**  
Design- and technology-led theatre

### General Summary of Models

Model	Collective and Co-operative	Devising Playwright	Participatory	Ensemble	System	Double Act	Network
<b>Context</b>	Some political theatre companies of the alternative theatre movement	New writing ventures from the late 1950s; some political theatre companies of the 1970s	DIE, TIE and community theatre from the 1950s to present day; other forms of applied theatre	Director's theatre of the 1950s and 1960s; physical, dance and visual theatre from the 1950s	Performance art from the 1950s; 'carnavalesque' alternative theatre from the 1960s; live art from the 1980s	Physical comedy from the 1980s	Design-led and visual theatre from the 1970s, technology-led theatre from the 1980s
<b>Illustrative examples</b>	Monstrous Regiment, Women's Theatre Group	Joint Stock, Mike Leigh, Caryl Churchill	Welfare State International, Colway Theatre Trust	Peter Brook, Joan Littlewood, Complicite, DV8	Black Mountain College event, Graphis 82 (US) Impact	Early Théâtre de Complicité, The Right Size, Ridiculusmus	Forkbeard Fantasy, Lightwork
<b>Style</b>	Realist, often with a focus on community rather than individual protagonists	Realist	Realist (relevance with the target community is the key concern), occasionally moving towards the abstract (e.g. WSI)	Non-realist: an expressionistic theatrical language; large-scale imagistic productions	Non-realist: post-modern aesthetic with an emphasis on 'liveness'	Non-realist: a surreal, lightweight comedic approach	Non-realist with some realist examples or elements; a valuing of the theatrical 'moment' or trick

### General Summary of Models

Model	Collective and Co-operative	Devising Playwright	Participatory	Ensemble	System	Double Act	Network
<b>Ethos</b>	Left-wing politics; valuing egalitarian structures and inclusive working practices	Develops from the reconstitution of the status of the playwright as author and visionary	Valuing of participation and creativity as a therapeutic experience	A strong set of values and beliefs and a 'big vision' that binds the group	Rejection of established forms and particularly the Romantic notion of the artist	Accessibility; a risk-taking approach and willingness to commit to new, unexpected ideas	An interest in the 'magical' effects of new technology; a practical approach
<b>Structure</b>	Egalitarian structures, either with or without role divisions; ideally, visioning, authority, authorship and power are accessible to all participants	The playwright as main visionary and, often, authority in the first phases of rehearsal and the main author throughout the process	A benign hierarchy; power/authority is organisational; participants have creative authority and authorship within a framework score	Ideally a permanent group, continually training and developing its vision; the ensemble invariably has at its heart a charismatic and visionary director	An avoidance of individual vision through an imposed system of material generation and/or performance	A small core of performers who are the key authorities in the process	Something like the system model  Person or Task culture
	Task Culture	Role Culture	Role Culture	Power Culture	Person Culture	Person culture	

**General Summary of Models**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Collective and Co-operative</b>	<b>Devising Playwright</b>	<b>Participatory</b>	<b>Ensemble</b>	<b>System</b>	<b>Double Act</b>	<b>Network</b>
<b>Key features of the process</b>	An extended conception stage, leading to a shared vision of relevance to its participants  Phase 3 tends to represent site of conflict	An extended conception stage designed to inspire the writer  A very distinct Fixing Phase, during which the playwright works primarily alone	An extended conception stage leading to a shared vision of relevance to its participants  A 'framework' score that determines the authority of the participant group	Conception and material generation phase inculcate participants into the 'big vision'  The fixing stage marks a shift from playful and organic early phases to the rigour and discipline of rehearsal	Participants respond individually to a system determined by an outside agency	Similar to the ensemble process	An early conceived vision and framework score, which determines the creative work of the group

## CHAPTER THREE

### Models of Devising: The Collective and The Devising Playwright

The two models of devising outlined in this chapter—the Collective (along with a variation of this model: the Co-operative) and the Devising Playwright—operated during the alternative theatre movement of the late 1960s and the 1970s but are no longer in common usage.

These models are particular to the context of the period: we will see that the Collective lost its ubiquity<sup>221</sup> partly as a result of inherent methodology issues, while the Devising Playwright model, already a minor area of practice, became even rarer as the cultural climate shifted.

By 'Collective' I am referring to companies whose theatre-making processes are collective and not those—sometimes called collectives in the literature—that have collective organisational structures but whose methodology follows other models of process.<sup>222</sup> Both of these models reflect, to varying degrees, the increased political activation of the late 1960s.

This activation has been attributed to factors such as a succession of disappointing Labour governments, the growing number of students and the widening social composition of the student body, and global influences such as the Vietnam War, the May 'events' in France and the Prague Spring of 1968.<sup>223</sup> The models constitute responses to an ideological climate that favoured increased social awareness, principles of inclusion and anti-authoritarian structures—a spirit of collectivity. The Collective in particular was used by companies attempting to promote “a more active intervention by the theatre in forming contemporary life and contributing to the futures of our society”.<sup>224</sup> It demonstrates the way in which not just

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<sup>221</sup> Kershaw calls the “desire to develop collective and collaborative procedures” in the 1960s “almost ubiquitous” Baz Kershaw; *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. 102

<sup>222</sup> Joint Stock is an example: although it operated administratively as a Collective, the company did not use a collective creative process. See Rob Ritchie; *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, London: Methuen 1987

<sup>223</sup> Clive Barker describes the context in Graham Holderness (ed.); *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*, London: Macmillan 1992 p. 32. A similar account is given in Catherine Itzen; *Stages of The Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain since 1968*, London: Eyre Methuen 1980 p. 2

<sup>224</sup> John McGrath; *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre, Audience, Class and Form*, London: Methuen 1996 (original publication 1981) p. 1

the content but the form and function<sup>225</sup> of political theatre<sup>226</sup> were renegotiated in the light of these ideological and political inclinations—in particular the radicalisation of the “relations of cultural production”.<sup>227</sup> Lizbeth Goodman lists the earliest examples of these overtly political companies in the UK alternative theatre movement as:

Red Ladder, Joint Stock, Welfare State International, 7:84, Avon Touring, Belt and Braces, Women’s Theatre Group, Monstrous Regiment and Gay Sweatshop, all formed in the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s.<sup>228</sup>

It is the two feminist theatre companies listed among these that will form the main focus of my discussion of the Collective model. The Devising Playwright model will be illustrated by reference to Joint Stock and also Mike Leigh, a practitioner who falls slightly outside of the explicitly political ideologies that define the other companies while pioneering his distinct brand of social realism. It also grew out of a renegotiation of the established practitioner roles in new writing, notably by involving both the playwright and the performers in the conception phase of the creative process (and thus allowing them greater authority and authorship in the process).

While, at first glance, the Collective and the Devising Playwright seem to sit on opposite sides of the schism between devising and script-led practitioners (see Chapter One), this chapter will draw a line of development from the Collective to the Devising Playwright model, demonstrating that the latter offered some companies a solution to the methodological issues inherent in devising as a Collective. Another shared feature that unites these seemingly antithetical models is a certain approach to aesthetic form. As with most

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<sup>225</sup> Graham Holderness provides a taxonomy of increasingly extreme political theatre: theatre of content, theatre of form, theatre of function. Graham Holderness (ed.); *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*, Hampshire & London: Macmillan 1992 pp. 6–8. The companies under discussion in this chapter fall into the latter two categories for the way they radicalise ways of operating and theatre’s role as an element of the social and political life of a country.

<sup>226</sup> Defined by Holderness op. cit. as that which takes on left wing party politics through “conscious choice and deliberate intention” p. 3

<sup>227</sup> Holderness op. cit. p. 10

<sup>228</sup> Lizbeth Goodman; *Contemporary Feminist Theatre: To Each Her Own*, London & New York: Routledge 1993 pp. 52–53

companies in the alternative theatre movement, those discussed in this chapter rejected the sort of naturalism deemed to be the stylistic preference of the mainstream and which, they believed:

... declared, without too much bother, that the best theatre is about the problems and achievements of articulate middle-class men and sometimes women, is performed in comfortable theatres, in large cities, at a time that will suit the eating habits of the middle-class at a price that only the most determined of the lower orders could afford, and will generally have an air of intellectuality about it—something to exercise the vestiges of one's education on and to scare off the Great Unwashed.<sup>229</sup>

For the feminist companies, naturalism was seen to position "... women as the handmaidens waiting on male narratives and male desires". "That this dominant theatrical form could not represent women's experience, rather it threatened to imprison or to silence it, was widely felt by feminist practitioners."<sup>230</sup> However, in rejecting naturalism, the companies did not move towards abstraction—the typical approach of the 'carnavalesque' groups, performance art and physical and dance theatre companies—but instead developed permutations of social realism in an effort to make "a serious and original investigation into ... real experience".<sup>231</sup> The three plays that constitute Micheline Wandor's anthology of political plays are emblematic of this tendency:

All three plays ... rest heavily on the everyday activity and conversation of their subjects .... The naturalism of all three plays shows that women's conversation has political potential and is the opposite of trivial.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> McGrath op. cit. p. 15

<sup>230</sup> Elaine Aston (ed.); *Feminist Theatre Voices: A Collective Oral History – Six Feminist Theatre Groups in Interview*, Loughborough: Loughborough Theatre Texts 1997 p. 22

<sup>231</sup> Mike Clements; *The Improvised Play: the Work of Mike Leigh*, London: Methuen 1982 p. 15

<sup>232</sup> Micheline Wandor (ed.) *Strike While the Iron is Hot. Three Plays on Sexual Politics*, London: Journeyman 1980 p. 11



In addition, an effort to appeal to a broader public and to distinguish their work from the 'bourgeois' mainstream often led companies to make work that focused on "the shared life of the community and its tensions"<sup>233</sup>—for example, in the feminists' rejection of "the neo-Romantic heroine by projecting a group image, rather than an individual identity".<sup>234</sup> Thus, the values of inclusiveness and egalitarianism that characterise, to different degrees, the methodologies of companies operating through these models also extended to the aesthetic conventions of the work itself.

### **The Collective**

Devising became a key methodology in many areas of political theatre<sup>235</sup> because of a renewed interest in agit-prop techniques<sup>236</sup> and in what we might call traditional theatrical forms—the "conventions, techniques and styles of the traditional, historically plebeian, cultural forms".<sup>237</sup> Some political theatre companies did not deliberately choose to devise or to identify themselves particularly as devising companies but adopted devising approaches incidentally. For example, agit-prop techniques were often chosen as a matter of practicality for nascent political companies, especially those operating outside of established venues. Simple agit-prop devising is "inexpensive to produce"<sup>238</sup> and, through bypassing the formal scripting process, practitioners could respond to topical issues directly and quickly. In other cases, using these techniques and, more particularly, the 'traditional' forms of earlier political and popular forms of entertainment constituted a "deliberate rejection of the materialist values of the commercial and mainstream theatre"<sup>239</sup> and "the values which construct the

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<sup>233</sup> Javed Malick; 'The Political Dramaturgy of John Arden' in Holderness, pp. 134–153 op. cit. p. 134

<sup>234</sup> Aston (ed.) op. Cit. p. 21

<sup>235</sup> While the period as a whole is marked by an increase in devising practice, we should not forget that there is a whole body of political theatre that operated through script-led methodologies and was defined by its dramatist.

<sup>236</sup> Many political companies had roots in political action such as demonstrations. In fact, the history of the feminist theatre movement is often seen to have begun with events such as the 1969 Miss World Contest demonstrations and street theatre events like the Women's Street Theatre Group's 1972 *The Equal Pay Show*. See, for example, Micheline Wandor; *Carry on Understudies*, London & New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1986 p. 8.

<sup>237</sup> Malick op. cit.

<sup>238</sup> Maria Di Cenzo; *The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain 1968–1990: The Case of 7:84 (Scotland)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1966 p. 44

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. p. 44

dramatic canon".<sup>240</sup> Practitioners hoped that traditional forms would appeal to segments of the population excluded by both the mainstream theatre and the "mind-blown, elitist experimentation of the time".<sup>241</sup>

Devising was also recognised as a methodology that could "provide positive models of non-hierarchical structures".<sup>242</sup> The Collective is, above all, an attempt to create egalitarian structures following "the idea that the relations of production within the group should reflect its politics and provide a model for the organization of society as a whole".<sup>243</sup> A Collective company does away completely with the perceived hierarchy and oppression of script-led practices and thus rejects role definitions and individual areas of responsibility. For the feminist companies, the established practices of the theatre industry were viewed as patriarchal in their hierarchical structures (as well as in their perpetuation of a canon of work written almost exclusively by men, where women were represented in a limited range of subsidiary roles). The Collective seeks to share vision, authorship and authority functions equally among its participants for all aspects of the production and creative process, giving equal access—or at least opportunity for access—to these functions to each participant:

... the collective approach to work breaks down the boundaries between the different areas of production and, consequently, the status or importance traditionally attached to certain roles. Ideally, everyone has a say, everyone shares both the challenging/exciting and the tedious aspects of the work, everyone is happy and fulfilled.<sup>244</sup>

Thus, the Collective is the ultimate collaborative structure and process. The Co-operative variant is less radical in its approach: while continuing to promote an ethos of equality and democratisation, it allows for role demarcations or at least individual specialisms within the

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<sup>240</sup> Aston op. cit. p. 11

<sup>241</sup> Baz Kershaw and Tony Coult (eds.); *Engineers of the Imagination: The Welfare State Handbook*, London: Methuen 1990 p. 6

<sup>242</sup> DiCenzo op. cit. p. 31

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. p. 55

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. p. 91

structure of the company.<sup>245</sup> Claire Grove (of Avon Touring and Women's Theatre Group) defines the co-operative system in this way:

The co-operative working system retained the ideal of the non-paternalistic power base but allowed for exploitation (in the positive sense) of individual skills, without assigning different levels of worth or status to those skills.<sup>246</sup>

The models approximate to Handy's Task Culture, which affords participants "a high degree of control over their work, judgement by results, easy working relationships within the group with mutual respect based upon capacity rather than age or status" and that thrives where "speed of reaction, integration, sensitivity and creativity are more important than depth of specialization".<sup>247</sup> Paradoxically however, the imposition of an egalitarian structure in some cases led to something like a small-scale version of the Role Culture, in so far as "... personal power is frowned upon and expert power tolerated only in its proper place. Rules and procedures are the major methods of influence".<sup>248</sup>

Wandor's short account of Gay Sweatshop's *Care and Control*<sup>249</sup> illustrates the point at which the collective process begins to fail, or at least fails to remain a fully collective one. In this process, the initiating vision—the subject of lesbian motherhood—was suggested by audiences from the company's previous shows and was subsequently researched through simultaneous projects: one company member conducted interviews with lesbian mothers, another participant took slides of the same subject, a third wrote the music (the conception and material generation phases of the process). From there, the company drew up a rough scenario that formed the basis of a process of 'filling in' through improvisations that were written up by the company on a daily basis (the fixing phase and rehearsal). Nancy Duiguid

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<sup>245</sup> These definitions of collective and collaborative structures are taken from Lizbeth Goodman; *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own*, London & New York: Routledge 1993 p. 55

<sup>246</sup> Quoted in Goodman op. cit. p. 55

<sup>247</sup> Charles Handy; *Understanding Organisations*, London: Penguin Books 1993, op. cit. p. 188

<sup>248</sup> Handy ibid. p. 185

<sup>249</sup> The Drill Hall, London, May 1977. Production credits include: 'Researched by Nancy Duiguid; devised by the original company and Priscilla Allen; scripted by Micheline Wandor'. See Wandor op. cit.

and Kate Crutchley describe a key moment, "... we arrived at a point where we had a lot of material but felt we could not produce an adequate script ourselves".<sup>250</sup> At this point Wandor was invited to write the script that would constitute the rehearsal score. Writing elsewhere about her experience with this and similar processes, Wandor says that:

... at the end of these collaborations it seemed to me that the only way it could work was if the power relations were very clearly outlined at the beginning: either the writer was servicing the company, and had to refer always to them, or the company was serving the writer's script.<sup>251</sup>

The introduction of an outside playwright, whether they serve or are served by the company, effectively prevents this being a pure version of the Collective or Co-operative model.

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<sup>250</sup> Quoted in Wandor 1980 op. cit. p. 63

<sup>251</sup> Wandor (1986) op. cit. p. 186

## The Process of the Collective and Co-operative Model

### Phase 1: Conception

The initial stages will be spent negotiating the procedures of inclusion and participation, particularly for new companies. There will be an effort in this phase to find a subject that is of particular relevance and interest to all participants and the audience. Research is a key activity and may take the form of sharing personal experience or investigating social issues. Collectives are particularly notorious for the amount of discussion they require in order to ensure that all members have their 'say', both in how the company operates and the subjects with which it deals. This conception stage is likely to be long relative to other models of process.

### Phase 2: Generating Material

As in the previous stage, discussion will feature strongly as the seemingly most effective method of ensuring egalitarian contribution. Improvisation and writing may also feature but the culture of collectivity may make individual projects unpopular. Again, this phase is likely to be fairly long as participants develop a shared vision and produce a body of potential material.

### Phase 3: Fixing Material

This is a key problematic in the Collective and, to a lesser degree, the Co-operative process. By necessity, it will require the elimination of material to which some participants feel strongly affiliated. Systems of reaching consensus will have to be introduced in order to prevent a tacit hierarchy emerging. Likewise, the system by which the work in progress is formally scored will have to be carefully considered in order to prevent inadvertent authorship hierarchies. Scoring in the Collective will usually take the form of the group writing a script. The Co-operative model allows for an individual to take on this responsibility.

**Phase 4: Rehearsal**

This phase depends for its effectiveness on whether or not the previous phase has been successfully negotiated. It may, by necessity, involve the participants taking on distinct roles and responsibilities (particularly for those performing), so special efforts will be made to prevent these from bringing in status differentiations.

**Phase 5: Performance**

Companies operating this model vary in the degree to which they create the tight performance score seemingly required by the ethos of collectivity (in which the full company agrees every detail). Improvisation may be frowned on as an expression of individual authorship but may also suit the accessible performance styles often favoured by these companies.

The methodological issues surrounding authority and authorship struck at the root of companies operating Collective and, to a lesser degree, Co-operative models. In fact, the decline of the Collective model can be attributed to the problem of negotiating the fixing stage of the processes while retaining a collective structure. Examining the histories of feminist Collectives reveals a common trajectory: a succession of increasingly compromised attempts to maintain egalitarian structures while meeting the basic practical demands needed to produce a play of the required quality. Both The Women's Theatre Group—which began life as The Women's Street Theatre Group in 1974—and Monstrous Regiment started as Collectives and eventually became new writing companies (the former still exists as Sphinx). Thus, the Co-operative developed from what might be construed as the failure of the Collective and models of theatre-making with even more conventional power structures followed from the Co-operative.<sup>252</sup> The changes in the organisational and methodological structure of these companies coincided with the recognition that, in order to produce work of appropriate quality, there was a need not only for the specialist skills of the playwright but for

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<sup>252</sup> This trajectory is described in Chapter One of Aston (ed.) op. cit.

the individual authoring or scripting function that such a role can provide. Gillian Hanna gives a vivid account of Monstrous Regiment's evolution into a new writing company:

Why should an actor be considered more important than a stage manager? Why should the writer be God? Wouldn't it be more democratic to write scripts collectively? If you were working in a collective, how could one voice represent the ideas of the whole? We acknowledged some truth in this, but there were some areas where we recognised it as bunk. Enough of us (and I was one of them) had been through the painful experience of writing shows collectively in other groups to know that the skill of playwriting was one skill we wanted to acknowledge. We also know that women writers had to be found and nourished .... We were looking for a collective relationship with a writer.<sup>253</sup>

An important conference on feminist theatre<sup>254</sup> acknowledged further issues surrounding collective devising as a methodology. One of these was the suggestion that operating egalitarian structures—and focusing on a 'politically correct' process within these structures—often meant a significant compromise in terms of the quality of the product. Claire Grove, for example, outlined one way in which seeking to give vision, authorship and authority to every participant of a process can result in a mediocre product:

Quite often it [working in a collective company] completely cut against what you wanted to say because, having set up a structure like that there's a feeling that everyone can contribute ... and you ended up with a sort of gap in the middle of a

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<sup>253</sup> Gillian Hanna; *Monstrous Regiment: Four plays and a Collective Celebration*, London: Nick Hern Books 1991 p. xxxiii. In fact, Monstrous Regiment would form just this "collective relationship with a writer" when, in 1976, it invited Caryl Churchill to work on what would become *Vinegar Tom*. Churchill was at the same time encountering the Joint Stock method for *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*.

<sup>254</sup> The discussion, published in *Platform* in 1982, is reported and analysed in Goodman (1993) op. cit. pp. 53–54. Participants in the discussion included members of Monstrous Regiment, Red Ladder, Belts & Braces, Avon Touring, Women's Theatre Group, Pirate Jenny and 7:84 England.

group of people that was the play. All your intentions were right and the play was dreadful.<sup>255</sup>

By not allocating an authority role to bridge “the gap ... that was the play”, companies also left themselves open to tacit hierarchies, as when “... an individual [had to] to intervene and ‘take control’ of a given script or production, thereby invoking a hierarchical structure”.<sup>256</sup>

Collectives and Co-operatives were also particularly vulnerable to the external factors that affected all political theatre, in particular issues of funding. As Di Cenzo puts it, “the single most important factor” for the demise of politically and socially engaged theatre was “economics”.<sup>257</sup> The Collective and Co-operative models were particularly demanding of time and money because of the large amount of administration and discussion required to ensure that all participants had their ‘creative say’. They were therefore sensitive to changes in funding structures and the increased bureaucracy imposed by the demands of Arts Council subsidy after 1974. It is this increased bureaucracy that David Edgar cites as one of two main causes for the retreat of political theatre companies in general from their own revolutionary principles.<sup>258</sup> Even where the direct pressures of economics and bureaucracy—Edgar cites the second of the two factors as the death-knell of political companies—did not immediately kill off Collaborative and Co-operative devising companies, these factors often resulted in the failure of these groups to operate outside of “the arbitrary group of people who were the company at the time”<sup>259</sup> and their subsequent failure to meet their own ideals of inclusiveness and collectivity in anything but a small way. With notoriously demanding systems of administration and operation, it became increasingly difficult for participants (particularly those with families) to make the full contribution required for a truly collective or co-operative company. Gooch gives a demographic of the average fringe theatre practitioner: “... (m)ost of the people working in fringe companies were young. They

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Goodman op. cit. p. 55

<sup>257</sup> Di Cenzo op. Cit. p. 61

<sup>258</sup> David Edgar derives these points from an anonymous article, ‘Grant Aid and Political Theatre’ in *The Wedge* Summer 1977. David Edgar, ‘Ten Years of Political Theatre 1968–1978’ in *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 32, Winter 1979 pp. 25–33

<sup>259</sup> Anon. ‘Grant Aid and Political Theatre’ in Edgar ibid.



could postpone the realities of wages, rent, mortgages, childcare—for themselves and for a little while, at least.”<sup>260</sup> Thus, Collectives and Co-operatives became accessible only to those who could afford them—an ironic about-face for companies dedicated to accessibility and inclusion.

Despite the apparent failure of these models and, arguably, of political theatre in general by the late 1970s, the principles of collectivity and inclusiveness have extended beyond the boundaries of the alternative and political movements, remaining a strong influence on current devising practitioners and scholars:<sup>261</sup>

The prevalence of collective theatre companies had a significant impact on the hierarchical conceptions of theatrical production. They redefined the role of writers, offered new creative opportunities to actors and tempered the power of directors. The achievements were not confined to the area of alternative theatre; these developments had an inevitable effect on the working relations within the major subsidized companies .... The approaches filtered into mainstream companies through the movement of directors and performers.<sup>262</sup>

We will see in the following chapters that the egalitarian principles developed especially by the feminist companies continue to pervade the ideologies of devising companies in operation today.

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<sup>260</sup> Steve Gooch; *All Together Now: An Alternative Theatre and the Community*, London: Methuen 1984 p. 42

<sup>261</sup> See also Goodman (1993) op. cit. p. 52, Gooch op. cit. pp. 38–39, Di Cenzo op. cit. p. 54, Wandor (1986) op. cit. p. 9

<sup>262</sup> DiCenzo op. cit. p. 59

## The Devising Playwright

The key feature of the Devising Playwright model is a process in which a playwright<sup>263</sup> creates a script through and following a period of group research and development. The script is subsequently rehearsed by essentially the same devising company. We will see a similar process used in other models outlined in this thesis (the Gay Sweatshop example cited above and that of the Colway Theatre Trust in the following chapter) but, in its purest form, the Devising Playwright model is distinct from these cases in the degree of authorship and authority the playwright has in the first three phases of the process. In the true Devising Playwright model, the playwright takes on a visioning role from the outset, has greater authority (at least during the conception stage) than in either other devising models that use a writer or in script-led practice and is the author of any script that results from the process (which will usually be credited as 'by' the playwright). In its clear delineation of roles, the Devising Playwright model most closely resembles Handy's Role Culture, which depends on the distribution of responsibility for its effectiveness.<sup>264</sup> A further distinction from other models is the fact that the Devising Playwright model encompasses (though is not confined to) the field of new writing and relates to developments in the role of the playwright in the late 1950s. Thus, the Devising Playwright model represents a site for devising within the script-led context and the 'literary' tradition. The notion of the playwright-artist, as primary visionary and author of the play, is a relatively recent development that Dan Rebellato dates to the seminal 1956 production of *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre. Rebellato argues that this production marked "a reconstitution of the writer's role, and a reorganisation of the working relationships in which it functioned".<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> That is, a participant who identifies herself with this role and who might have relevant expertise and experience. Throughout this thesis, role titles will be chosen according to the conventions of the period or company under consideration, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>264</sup> See Handy op. cit. p. 185

<sup>265</sup> Dan Rebellato; *1956 and All That: The Making of Modern British Drama*, London & New York: Routledge 1999 p. 82

The new playwright that emerged from this “reconstitution” was associated not only with a certain romantic mystique<sup>266</sup> but also with the notion of expertise—what Rebellato calls the “professionalisation of the playwright”.<sup>267</sup> This idea of professional expertise generated certain ventures in writer-development that constitute a small-scale but important seam of devising within the script-led context, based particularly at the Royal Court, the bastion of new writing. The Royal Court’s Writers’ Group<sup>268</sup> was designed to cultivate the playwright’s ability to create work through group practice, particularly through improvisation. Here, Keith Johnstone led exercises designed to get writers ‘on their feet’, using improvisation and undergoing performance training derived from Copeau.<sup>269</sup> The group generated a body of playwrights who felt as much at home in the rehearsal room as at their desk<sup>270</sup> and was the genesis of plays that were “developed-in-improvisation” rather than “written-for-performance-pieces”.<sup>271</sup> Another Royal Court venture, the Actors Studio<sup>272</sup>, continued with the same core activities as the Writers Group (improvisation and training) but was “not conceived as a writers’ group but as an actors’ group”.<sup>273</sup> In the Actors Studio, “what began as a workshop for methods of acting began to generate scripts out of improvisations for public performance”.<sup>274</sup> It was also a training-ground and meeting point for Max Stafford-Clark, David Hare, David Aukin and later William Gaskill, the founding members of Joint Stock, a key Devising Playwright company.

Joint Stock merged the particular development of the playwright’s role exemplified by the Royal Court Writers’ Group and an approach to acting developed by the Actors Studio in order to pioneer its distinct creative approach. A key function of the Joint Stock method was

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<sup>266</sup> Rebellato regards Lindsay Anderson as embodying the view of the playwright’s process as a mysterious, highly personal activity, driven by inspiration that is best left unexamined. Rebellato *ibid.* p. 76

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71

<sup>268</sup> 1958–1960; also referred to as the ‘Writers’ Group’

<sup>269</sup> This is described in Gredna A. Doty and Billy J. Harbin; *Inside the Royal Court Theatre, 1956–1981: Artists Talk*, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press 1990 pp. 88–90 and Richard Findlater; *At the Royal Court: 25 Years of the English Stage Company*, London: Amber Lane Press 1981 p. 56

<sup>270</sup> Members of the group included Amlin Gray, Ann Jellicoe, Edward Bond and N.F. Simpson.

<sup>271</sup> Amlin Gray quoted in Doty & Harbin *ibid.* p. 90

<sup>272</sup> 1963–1974

<sup>273</sup> William Gaskill quoted in Doty & Harbin *ibid.* p. 90

<sup>274</sup> Amlin Gray quoted in Doty & Harbin *ibid.* p. 106

to “get the writer out of the garret and get him or her onto the rehearsal floor”.<sup>275</sup> At the same time, it gave performers a degree of authorship and authority that they would not have in a script-led process. Rob Ritchie<sup>276</sup> describes the Joint Stock methodology as follows:

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 .... In the second stage of the process—the gap between workshop and rehearsal—the writer composes the play .... [The third stage constitutes] the gathering of the group—the rehearsal.<sup>277</sup>

For Caryl Churchill—one of the first and most regular writers associated with Joint Stock—this third stage was “something like a normal rehearsal”.<sup>278</sup> What occurs during “the gap between workshop and rehearsal” indicates the distinction between the Devising Playwright model and other models that, while they may follow the same pattern, essentially constitute a return to the pre-1956 view of playwriting as a “technical craft”.<sup>279</sup> Thus, in Joint Stock, the writing gap:

... is not, as is sometimes assumed, a question of scripting improvisations or following instructions drawn up by the group. The writer’s work remains an independent creative act and the result may have no obvious relationship to the material yielded by the workshop.<sup>280</sup>

However, it is apparent from various accounts in the *Joint Stock Handbook* that the method is vulnerable to the same sort of conflicts as the Collective models. David Hare describes “a particular tension” between playwrights who are “tied to one view of the world” and “actors and directors” who “must feel free”. Echoing Wandor’s statements on her work with

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<sup>275</sup> Max Stafford-Clark quoted in Doty & Harbin op. cit. p. 107

<sup>276</sup> The Royal Court Theatre’s literary manager 1979–1984

<sup>277</sup> Ritchie op. cit. p. 18

<sup>278</sup> Caryl Churchill; *Plays: Two*, London: Methuen 1990 p. vii

<sup>279</sup> Rebellato op. cit. p. 74

<sup>280</sup> Ritchie op. cit. p. 18

Collectives, Hare suggests that the method works best either when “the writer appears to stand out of the way of the raw material altogether [during the workshop phase]” or “when using writers with very strong personalities”, such as Caryl Churchill.<sup>281</sup> Max Stafford-Clark implies that the latter is the truest realisation of the Joint Stock method when he states that the method depends on the ability of the workshop group to recognise the authority and authorship of the playwright:

... respect for the writer, handing the material back to the writer, and the kind of acceptance that the writer is the senior collaborator, is very much part of Joint Stock's success ....<sup>282</sup>

Caryl Churchill's own account of the making of *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*<sup>283</sup> describes a symbiotic relationship between the workshop group and herself as writer and between the workshop material and the script:

It is hard to explain exactly the relationship between the workshop and the text. The play is not improvised: it is a written text and the actors did not make up its lines. But many of the characters and scenes were based on ideas that came from improvisation at the workshop and during rehearsal. I could give endless examples of how something said or done by one of the actors is directly connected to something in the text. Just as important, though harder to define, was the effect on the writing of the way the actors worked, their accuracy and commitment.<sup>284</sup>

While this description seems to imply a blurring of authorship and acknowledges the important role the actors played in generating material, the reader should note how careful Churchill is to state that “the actors did not make up its lines”. The actors play a strong role in the first and second phases of the process but, in the end, it is the playwright who has the

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<sup>281</sup> David Hare quoted in Ritchie *ibid.* p. 107

<sup>282</sup> Max Stafford-Clark in Duncan Wu; *Making Plays: Interviews with Contemporary British Dramatists and their Directors*, Hampshire & London: Macmillan 2000 p. 58

<sup>283</sup> The Royal Court Theatre, 1976

<sup>284</sup> Caryl Churchill; *Plays: One*, London & New York: Methuen 1985 p. 184

final authorship. Indeed, the playwright's authority in these situations is now confirmed by the Theatre Writers' Union and copyright regulation, which both state that in cases such as these copyright belongs to the person who wrote the script (whether or not the actors feel they 'own' any of the work).<sup>285</sup> This is part of the reasoning behind the Royal Court's policy to pay the contracted playwright to attend rehearsals and has come about as a result of ownership issues that emerged during the original production of Churchill's *Top Girls*.<sup>286</sup> The legal issues surrounding copyright of Marie Jones' *Stones in His Pocket*<sup>287</sup> suggest that authorship continues to be a contested area.

Despite its deliberately egalitarian administration and its inclusive creative process, Joint Stock was essentially structured along the lines of a conventional new writing company: it consisted of a permanent core of administrative and leadership staff, a pool of performers that might feature in ongoing productions and a series of 'new' playwrights who rarely worked with the company more than once (Churchill is an exception). As is typical of the new writing industry, there is a premium on novelty when it comes to playwrights. The case of Mike Leigh illustrates an example of the Devising Playwright model in which the playwright forms the permanent core, with a pool of performers and other collaborators participating on a project-to-project basis. In this case, there are apparently no issues as to the overall authority of the playwright.

In a brief survey of the fringe theatre of the 1970s, Mike Leigh is marked out as a pioneer of the sort of social realism identified earlier as typical of politically motivated theatre:

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<sup>285</sup> See Lizbeth Goodman (ed.) 'Devising as Writing' in *The Drama Review*, No. T126, Summer 1990 pp. 17–18 for an account of the Theatre Writers' Union meeting in which these policies were set (at the Actors' Centre, London, 18 March 1979).

<sup>286</sup> The Royal Court Theatre, 28 August 1982

<sup>287</sup> See, for example, *Director Regrets Copyright Row*, BBC News – World Edition 24/03/02; available from: [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/3564083.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/3564083.stm) (visited 18/11/04)

Mike Leigh has developed ... improvisation with his groups to a fine art, with shows like the recent *Wholesome Glory at the Theatre Upstairs* ... [and] take[s] psychological, truthful, naturalistic theatre to its utmost limit.<sup>288</sup>

In the only book dedicated to Leigh's theatre work, Mike Clements pinpoints Leigh's inspiration for his method to a realisation that came to him during a life drawing class at Camberwell School of Art. He quotes Leigh's own account of this:

In the life drawing class there were a dozen or fifteen kids and everyone was making a serious and original investigation into a real experience. Nobody was doing a second-hand rendering of something. I began to think that acting could be creative in the same way that an artist is.<sup>289</sup>

The methodology, then, is chiefly motivated by a desire to move away from what Leigh perceives as artificial and contrived conceptions of characters and events. Clements identifies two phases in the method that Leigh went on to pioneer: a pre-rehearsal of about six weeks, followed by a further six weeks spent structuring the play. The pre-rehearsal stage involved each actor making a "serious and original investigation" of a person known to them, which Leigh would develop with them through intensive one-to-one discussion and improvisation. Once the characterisation was on firm foundations, Leigh would initiate improvisations designed to bring the characters together.<sup>290</sup> The second phase of work would begin with Leigh writing a scenario, "a rough structure for action" which would "most often include a great deal of new material although, by its very nature, this material must involve the characters in action which is consistent with their existing motivations or can be feasibly motivated out of what has gone before".<sup>291</sup> This scenario would be explored and developed through ongoing improvisations, working towards a realisation of a fixed score for performance. As with the Joint Stock method, the actors played a strong role in research and

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<sup>288</sup> Jonathan Hammond 'A Potted History of the Fringe' *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 12, 1973 p. 43

<sup>289</sup> Mike Leigh 'Account of the Development of My Improvised Play 1965–1969, An Application to the George Devine Award 1969', October 1969, cited in Clements op. cit. p. 15

<sup>290</sup> Clements *ibid.* pp. 23–36

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.* p. 52

in the generation of material, but the process of scripting—of drawing up an explicit score—meant that the playwright was ultimately the main author and authority.<sup>292</sup> The fixing process was the key phase of Mike Leigh’s method. It was characterised by a process of what might be called ‘live editing’ that is typical of devising, whereby the activities of structuring, developing and honing the material generated in the earlier phases is done ‘live’ on stage, embodied by the performers rather than on the page. It is often the case that it is only once all the material has been generated and the playwright (or in other cases, the director) is able to see it realised on stage, that the main vision will be formed.

The cases of Joint Stock and Mike Leigh allow us to draw a process chart of the Devising Playwright Model of devising:

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<sup>292</sup> In examining this methodology, we may question what makes Leigh a devising playwright rather than a devising director. The short answer would be that he identifies himself as one. Clements claims that Leigh’s early ambition was to become a playwright or film writer and that it was only after he had created nine plays through improvisation that he realised that he “was not going to sit down alone in a room and write plays” and that the methodology he was developing “was a way of being a dramatist” (interview with Leigh by Clements, quoted in Clements *ibid.* p. 12).



## The Process of the Devising Playwright Model

### Phase 1: Conception

In some cases a theme or subject is identified in advance of the group creative process (for example, in discussions between the playwright and director). The beginning of the workshop or pre-rehearsal phase will be characterised by activities designed to “catch the writer’s imagination”.<sup>293</sup> Other participants—the performers in particular—will provide a large number of provisional ideas that the playwright will use to develop a vision. There is a great emphasis on research, “a serious and original investigation into ... real experience”.<sup>294</sup>

### Phase 2: Generating Material

As the playwright begins to get a clearer vision, she may create a framework score for the continued research, discussion and improvisation, providing a tighter focus for the generation of material relevant to this vision (Leigh’s scenarios, for example). The actors will continue to contribute ideas through these activities.

### Phase 3: Fixing

This phase constitutes an “independent creative act”<sup>295</sup>, with the playwright often working alone and away from the space for a given period of time. During this time, the playwright creates a tight, fixed rehearsal score, usually in conventional script format. Often, there is no obligation for the playwright to incorporate material generated in the previous phase and she may also include material generated outside of the workshop.

<sup>293</sup> Max Stafford-Clark in Wu op. cit. p. 59

<sup>294</sup> Leigh op. cit. p. 15

<sup>295</sup> Ritchie op. cit. p. 18

#### **Phase 4: Rehearsal**

The rehearsal phase is in some ways equivalent to the full creative process of a script-led production. In some cases, the moment of handing over the script may mean the end of the playwright's primary involvement, as the director takes over.

#### **Phase 5: Performance**

With a script in place, the performance strongly resembles that of a script-led process in which the script becomes the main point of reference for the performers. The performance is likely to remain fixed from night to night, with little scope for improvisation.

We see from this chart that the process of the Devising Playwright model is characterised by extended and inclusive conception and material-generating phases (these two phases often overlap), designed to feed the playwright's developing vision: a fixing phase that is distinct from the previous two and a rehearsal phase that resembles "something like a normal rehearsal".<sup>296</sup> In fact, it may be useful to regard the whole process as a sort of opened-up writing process that gives the actors and directors access to the conception processes that are conventionally the sole domain of the playwright. In an interview with Max Stafford-Clark, Duncan Wu gives the following description of the Joint Stock method:

... we might say that the main difference between this [Joint Stock] method and the usual one is that you have this workshop period at the beginning during which the actors and the director and the writer all muck in together ... in a period of investigation.<sup>297</sup>

At the heart of this model, however, is the preservation of the notion of the playwright as an artist and as a bearer of a distinctive 'voice' that must be served by the process. Stafford-

<sup>296</sup> Churchill (1990) op. cit. p. vii

<sup>297</sup> Wu op. cit. p. 63

Clark's method was occasionally criticised for the way in which it might impose particular agendas, topics and methods on the playwright's process:

... Max Stafford-Clark, as in the case of Kureishi's *Borderline*, tended to commission work on a prescribed topic and often required the play to be predicated by Joint Stock workshop techniques after which the writer would construct the written text.<sup>298</sup>

Implicit in this is the suggestion that the playwright's vision, 'voice' and methods are best left untouched—the sort of mystification of the playwright and her process that Rebellato sees as intrinsic to the general conception of the New Wave dramatists. As suggested by the title of Adrian Page's book, *Death of the Playwright?*<sup>299</sup>, this perceived supremacy of the playwright as author and 'voice' was thrown into question from about the mid 1970s. Ben Payne's account of shifts in the playwright's role traces what he sees as the regrettable demise of 'new writing' and the 'well-made play'.<sup>300</sup> Andy Lavender's overview of British theatre at the turn of the century states that "... in general terms, the playwright's status is diminished".<sup>301</sup> These claims are not entirely up-to-date. Payne himself acknowledges that writer development initiatives enjoyed something of a resurgence in the 1980s, through organisations such as the New Playwrights Trust (now Writernet), North West Playwrights in Manchester and Stagecoach in Birmingham, together with the establishment of the first Master's course in Playwriting Studies at the University of Birmingham in 1989 (which testifies to the continued 'professionalisation' of the playwright).<sup>302</sup> Neither Payne nor Lavender acknowledges the mid-1990s revitalisation of drama that followed the production of Birmingham graduate Sarah Kane's *Blasted*.<sup>303</sup> This period, described by Aleks Sierz as, "the most exciting decade of new writing since the heady days sparked off by John

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<sup>298</sup> D. Keith Peacock; *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties*, Viewpoint Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press 1999 pp. 188–189

<sup>299</sup> Adrian Page; *Death of the Playwright?: Modern British Drama and Literary Theory*, Basingstoke & London: Macmillan 1992

<sup>300</sup> John Deeney; *Writing Live: An Investigation of the Relationship Between Writing and Live Art*, London: The New Playwrights Trust 1998 p. 46

<sup>301</sup> Andy Lavender 'Turns and Transformations' in Vera Gottlieb & Colin Chambers (eds.); *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, London: Amber Lane Publishing 1999 p. 179

<sup>302</sup> Ben Payne 'Introduction' in Deeney op. cit. p. 6; also in Rebellato op. cit.

<sup>303</sup> The Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, 17 January 1995

Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in 1956"<sup>304</sup> repositioned the playwright centre stage (at least temporarily) as not only author within the process, but also the leader of a movement and the definer of a cultural identity:

... not only because the writer is central to the process of play-making but also because ... the writer defines the Britishness of British theatre.<sup>305</sup>

Without underestimating the significance of British new writing, the following chapters will suggest that there is an equally vital body of work created through devising methodologies that is beginning to acquire the same status in Britain's cultural climate.

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<sup>304</sup> Aleks Sierz; *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, London: Faber & Faber 2001 p.

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<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.* p. xi

## Summary of Models

<b>Model</b>	<b>Collaborative and Co-operative</b>
<b>Context</b>	Political theatre companies of the alternative theatre movement
<b>Illustrative examples</b>	Monstrous Regiment, Women's Theatre Group
<b>Style</b>	Rejection of 'bourgeois' naturalism in favour of social realism. Sometimes focus on the community rather than individual protagonists.
<b>Ethos</b>	Motivated by left-wing politics, these companies value egalitarian structures and working practices that are inclusive of the full participant group.
<b>Structure</b>	Attempts to create egalitarian structures, either with or without role divisions. Ideally, visioning, authority, authorship and power are accessible to all participants.  Task Culture.
<b>Key features of the process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An extended conception stage, leading to a shared vision of relevance to its participants.</li> <li>• The fixing phase tends to represent a site of conflict.</li> </ul>

<b>Model</b>	<b>Devising Playwright</b>
<b>Context</b>	New writing ventures from the late 1950s; some political theatre companies of the 1970s
<b>Illustrative examples</b>	Joint Stock, Caryl Churchill, Mike Leigh
<b>Style</b>	Rejecting of 'bourgeois' naturalism in favour of social realism or hyper-naturalistic styles.
<b>Ethos</b>	Develops from the reconstitution of the playwright as author and visionary since 1956. Will often share political theatre's spirit of collectivity.
<b>Structure</b>	The playwright as main visionary and, often, authority in the first phases of rehearsal and the main author throughout the process (particularly in the fixing stage). Performers enjoy some authoring during the conception and material-generation phase but this is subject to the playwright's authority and authorship. Role Culture.
<b>Key features of the process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An extended conception stage, which seeks to feed the writer's imagination.</li> <li>• A distinct fixing phase, during which the playwright works primarily alone.</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Models of Devising: The Participatory Model

The primary focus of this study is 'commercial' devising, conceived in this research as a separate body of practice to applied theatre. This is, of course, a somewhat arbitrary division. Given that most theatre companies in Britain are subsidised by external funding and that any core-funded company is invariably registered as a charity, the line between 'commercial' and other practices is rather nebulous. Moreover, applied theatre practices have historically exerted a strong influence on the development of those now used in the commercial sector. This influence is both tacit and explicit. The evolution of child-led, active learning strategies in the school context (both in designated drama classes and across the curriculum from the 1950s) means that many of today's devising practitioners first encountered what amounts to devising methodologies at a very young age. At the same time, practitioners of pedagogic drama and, later, community theatre were the first to articulate and systematise their methodologies. Peter Slade's *Child Drama*, first published in 1954, promotes the use of "games, dramatisation, classroom drama, acting exercises, free expression, improvisation, activity method, and creative drama"<sup>306</sup> in a pedagogic system that includes what we would now recognise as devising activities. Thus, it is not always clear, either historically or in terms of current practice, where applied theatre ends and commercial theatre begins (for example, the feminist theatre companies described in the previous chapter might be seen as examples of community theatre). Indeed, many of the commercial devising companies referred to in this research engage in pedagogic, educational, community or 'outreach' activities (ironically, these participatory practices are often among their most commercially successful activities). We will see in Part III of this thesis that the David Glass Ensemble in particular not only has a developed strand of applied theatre activity but that process-oriented values, which underlie applied theatre practices, thread through its commercial work.

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<sup>306</sup> Peter Slade; *Child Drama*, London, Sydney, Auckland, Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton 1980 p. 19

In recognition of the seminal influence that applied theatre has had on commercial practice, this chapter outlines a model of devising that was developed and is predominantly used in the applied theatre context. While, for reasons outlined in Chapter One, this research does not deal in depth with the historical development of the various forms of applied theatre, it is nevertheless essential for our understanding of commercial practice that the Participatory model is introduced at this point. Drawing up a single model to represent this diverse area means that this chapter will be working in very broad strokes and that there is therefore a danger of misrepresenting—through over-generalisation—a wide and diverse field that encompasses a range of traditions and that constitutes a large proportion of contemporary British devising practice. We saw, for example, that 23 out of the 68 Arts Council-funded devising companies work in TIE and celebratory and community theatre, with groups such as the disabled or ex-offenders.<sup>307</sup> My justification for using this broad approach lies in the fact that while applied theatre practice is not the main focus of my research, it is nevertheless essential to acknowledge the Participatory model of devising that has been so influential on the commercial sector. This chapter is therefore an attempt to identify common features that hold true across the diverse contexts that use the Participatory model without generalising either the field or the model to the point of redundancy.

By definition, companies operating the Participatory model involve outside participants in their creative process. By involving their target audience in their creative process (as well as their performances), these companies seek to share the beneficial aspects of drama practice such as its role as a pedagogic system, as a tool for personal or political empowerment, as a framework for raising awareness or for communicating information or celebrating shared values.<sup>308</sup> Participation is also deemed to ensure the relevance of the drama activity or resulting production (if there is one) to the concerns and preoccupations of

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<sup>307</sup> This figure does not include the TIE or other community programmes of producing theatre venues. Such projects have become commonplace since the 1970s. For example, John Elsom noted in 1971 that two thirds of repertory companies had TIE programmes. John Elsom; *Theatre Outside London*, Hampshire & London: Macmillan 1971 p. 113

<sup>308</sup> Chris Johnston notes that the benefits of participatory practices include recreation, the promotion of solidarity, the study of behavioural conflict and celebration. See Chris Johnston; *House of Games: Making Theatre from Everyday Life*, New York & London: Routledge & Nick Hern Books 1998. pp. 5–10. We saw in Chapter Two of this thesis that even higher claims are made for devising as a participatory practice.



the targeted community, in terms of both form and content.<sup>309</sup> The targeted community, which may be identified as a geographical, cultural, special needs or other group, often consists of people who have little previous experience of theatre or drama. The policy statements of participatory companies often make strong claims as to the benefits of creative work. Geese Theatre company work with ex-offenders:

We use drama and theatre to encourage self-awareness and to assist individuals in exploring the idea of change and the impact that it may have on their lives. Within this framework we consider the complex web of connections between personal behaviour, choice and responsibility and broader social, economic and political factors.<sup>310</sup>

Welfare State International makes even grander claims:

WSI's artists are deeply concerned for the survival of the imagination and the individual within a media-dominated consumer society, in which art too has become a commodity .... Art has a central and radical role in our lives. In the everyday, it's about what we value, how and why we celebrate.<sup>311</sup>

Devising is a key methodology in companies such as these because it is perceived as a practice uniquely able to promote individual and group creativity, learning, self-development and empowerment to a broad and predominantly 'unskilled' participant group. Their devising processes range from large-scale and extended projects, resulting in full-on productions, to far smaller projects in which participation is an end in itself. Richard Hahlo and Peter

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<sup>309</sup> In fact, Di Cenzo sees the "method of creating plays on the basis of research, improvisations and collective discussion, as well as the practice of involving the audience in the development of material by way of interviews and post-production discussions— techniques developed as early as the Stoke documentary plays" as standardised across the range of political and community theatre companies. See Maria Di Cenzo; *The Politics of Alternative Theatre in Britain 1968–1990: The Case of 7:84 (Scotland)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996 p. 56

<sup>310</sup> Geese Theatre Company; 'Approach'; available from: [www.geese.co.uk](http://www.geese.co.uk) (visited 11/06/04).

<sup>311</sup> Welfare State International; 'Philosophy'; available from: [www.welfare-state.org/general/about/aboutwsi.htm](http://www.welfare-state.org/general/about/aboutwsi.htm) (visited 22/06/05)

Reynolds predict that the workshop format, until now a learning activity, will develop into a new form of popular drama in its own right.<sup>312</sup> Companies that undergo a full conception-to-performance process are more interesting in terms of this study because they represent a negotiation of process and product—and often of ethos (their ideological beliefs) and the pragmatics of process.

The two key areas of applied theatre practice in Britain—community theatre and TIE—proliferated during the alternative theatre movement.<sup>313</sup> However, the roots of community theatre go back at least as far as Brecht, Piscator and Copeau. Even in Britain there are examples of practice that predate the alternative theatre movement (Arnold Wesker's Centre 42, founded in 1961 and John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy's Kirbymoorside project in 1963<sup>314</sup> are two examples), although it was the late 1960s and the 1970s that saw the emergence of important devising-based community theatre companies such as Welfare State International (WSI) and Medium Fair. TIE, on the other hand, is generally considered a newer form. Writing in 1993, Tony Jackson suggested that TIE's history was only "some twenty-eight years" old<sup>315</sup>, originating in the mid-1960s in response to changing philosophies in the educational system and supported by the new policies of the Arts Council and Local Education Authorities.<sup>316</sup> The TIE work of the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, the Bolton Octagon and the Cockpit Theatre in London are pioneering examples of the form. While

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<sup>312</sup> Richard Hahlo and Peter Reynolds; *Dramatic Events: How to Run a Successful Workshop*, London: Faber & Faber 2000 p. xi

<sup>313</sup> In fact, there is considerable overlap between both these areas of practice and some of the political devising theatre companies described in the previous chapter. Both community and political theatre are concerned with the self-determination and empowerment of their target audience. Some of the political theatre companies discussed in the previous chapter grew out of community initiatives such as feminist 'consciousness-raising' groups. What distinguishes work in this area from the political theatre discussed in the previous chapter is that community theatre and TIE did not stop at dealing with issues relevant to particular communities or even with living out their collectivist principles in their working structure (as with the Collectives) but also made opportunities for these communities to engage actively in the creation of productions. Community theatre's "thoroughgoing concern with social issues" led them to develop "carefully structured approaches to participatory practices" (Baz Kershaw *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. 183

<sup>314</sup> Arden and D'Arcy's project is described in Kershaw (1992) op. cit. pp. 117–122 and Wesker's on pp. 105–106 of the same publication.

<sup>315</sup> Tony Jackson (ed.); *Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theatre in Education*, London & New York: Routledge 1993 p. 1

<sup>316</sup> Tony Jackson; 'Education or Theatre? The Development of TIE in Britain' in Jackson (ed.) *ibid.* pp. 18–21

devising in the political theatre context (especially collective devising) succumbed to economic and cultural shifts from the late 1970s, both community theatre and TIE survive to the present day. Indeed, Ann Jellicoe's Colway Theatre Trust (CTT)—an important landmark in the history of community theatre, which Kershaw credits as pioneering “what almost amounted to a new genre: the community play”<sup>317</sup>—flourished during the Thatcherite 1980s, a period usually considered to be culturally barren.<sup>318</sup>

The model of devising relevant to community and other participatory theatre most closely resembles Handy's Role Culture in that it is structured as a hierarchy, with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities. At the head of this hierarchy is a body of ‘professionals’: people with the necessary skills and experience to enable an effective process and, in some cases, offer some guarantee in terms of the quality of the product. This professional core remains relatively stable from project to project and carries the identity of the company. The ‘amateur’ participants, who usually only take part on a one-off or occasional basis, constitute the lowest levels of the hierarchy. However, the hierarchy is ‘benign’ because it is based on a power economy that is predominantly organisational and administrative: a company member's ability to serve the participants and the project as a whole is the measure of their status. It is, in fact, the amateur participants who enjoy the most active expression of authorship and, to varying degrees, authority. The professional core retains the visioning capacity and creative expertise but deploys the authority this gives them to create a framework score that will inspire and usefully channel the creative input of the participants. The model is designed to make the participants ‘creative’.

The model's process is characterised by two key features. The first is a period of familiarisation between the company and the participants that constitutes the conception

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<sup>317</sup> Baz Kershaw; *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*, London & New York: Routledge 1999. p. 175

<sup>318</sup> The softer ideological positions of community theatre undoubtedly made it more readily tolerated by the Conservative government than the explicitly anti-government stance of political theatre companies. In addition, there is perhaps an expected overlap of interests between community theatre's grass-roots entrepreneurialism and Thatcher's philosophy of self-sufficiency and regeneration, which began to recognise that “the arts might have an important role to play in the process of regenerating the social and economic life of inner cities”. See Keith P. Peacock; *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties*, London: Greenwood Press 1999 p. 35

phase. This familiarisation process may range from extended residencies in a target community (Welfare State International's seven year residency in Barrow-in-Furness, for example) to the initial projects of a TIE programme of events to the company's informal advance research into their target participants. Whatever its form, this "... 'research' into the nature of the target community's history and/or contemporary problems ..." is designed to make "the shows and projects more 'relevant', authenticating conventions more readable".<sup>319</sup> Another way to put this is to say that the conception phase works towards a vision that is shared by both company and participants. It does this by focusing, for example, on a topical or relevant 'issue' or theme or giving the participants the opportunity to try out particular activities or skills deemed essential to their circumstances.

Secondly, companies operating this model will utilise a process that pivots around the creation of a framework score. This score is not only a system of making explicit the shared vision; it also acts as a structuring device that "allows everything else to happen"<sup>320</sup>, determining the mode of participation and level of authorship among the participants. In large-scale community projects, the formal score invariably takes a written form (a conventional script format in the case of CTT, the "scenario" in Welfare State) as this allows it to be easily communicated to the large number of process participants. The professional core invariably has key authority over this framework score but in a way that will allow the participant group to enjoy authorship within this. The nature of the fixing and rehearsal phases depends on the importance that each company places on the public performance and the criteria for artistic quality they apply to their own work. Generally, the more emphasis placed on achieving a particular quality or standard of product, the more elaborate these phases will be.

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<sup>319</sup> Kershaw (1992) *op. cit.* p. 143

<sup>320</sup> Ann Jellicoe; *Community Plays: How to Put them On*, London: Methuen 1987 p. 127

## The Process of the Participatory Model

<b>Phase 1: Conception</b>
<p>An extended conception phase is designed to ensure the relevance of the vision to the participating group. The vision produced at this stage will represent a common ground between the company's 'big vision' (their philosophy regarding the benefits of participatory practice), their preconceived ideas of what might be relevant to the company, the findings they have generated during the conception phase and the participants' areas of interest or concern expressed during this phase. In TIE, it is likely—especially with younger participants—that the company will have greater authority over this vision. The company will often work the vision produced during this phase into a framework score.</p>
<b>Phase 2: Generating Material</b>
<p>The company will organise activities on behalf of the participants which will enable them to generate material of relevance to their concerns and which will also provide positive experiences for them (the balance between the product- and process-oriented drives will vary from company to company).</p>
<b>Phase 3: Fixing</b>
<p>The criteria for the survival into phase 3 of material generated in phase 2 will include considerations of relevance, the experiential dimension of the participants (often to a lesser extent than in previous phases) and, to varying degrees, the quality (however this is construed) of the material. It is usually the professional core of the company that has main authority in this respect (particularly in cases where the participant group is younger or more 'amateur'). The rehearsal score fixed at this stage is likely to be explicit and may take a written form.</p>

<b>Phase 4: Rehearsal</b>
Again, the greater the emphasis on the artistic quality of the product, the more extended this phase is likely to be. This is also a phase in which the professional company is likely to reassert its authority.
<b>Phase 5: Performance</b>
Performances (if they exist) in this category tend to be one-offs or short runs. They are often an opportunity to celebrate and share the achievements and learning outcomes of the participant group with the wider community.

The large-scale community work of Welfare State International (WSI) and Ann Jellicoe's CTT Theatre Trust illustrates the importance this model places on the familiarisation phase of phase 1. While most community theatre of the 1970s sought out "the theatrically-deprived"<sup>321</sup> by touring regional areas, WSI and CTT took their participatory practices into large-scale residential projects in which the companies "'nested' in the networks of the producing community".<sup>322</sup> The CTT playwright would take up residence in the target community and, by setting up local history and other projects with community participants, would "find the subject in consultation with the townspeople".<sup>323</sup> WSI would often work through a series of smaller projects over an extended period of time, slowly building a relationship with the community group that would occasionally culminate in large-scale celebratory events. In these companies, the conception phase was extended over long periods of time: a typical CTT process would take up to two years and, while WSI run some short-term events, participating in any of the larger projects was often a long-term commitment for community members and company alike—their famous Burrow-in-Furness residency lasted seven years. Moreover, WSI has a strong ideology, which all but the most short-term participants

<sup>321</sup> Naseem Khan 'The Public-Going Theatre: Community and Ethnic Theatre' in Sandy Craig (ed.) *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*, London: Amber Lane Press 1980 p. 62

<sup>322</sup> Kershaw (1999) op. cit. p. 205

<sup>323</sup> Jellicoe op. cit. p. 126

would be expected to buy into and which was likely to demand a full, often life-changing, commitment.

The sheer scale of these projects throws into relief a key methodological issue for the Participatory model: the power dynamics between the professional company responsible for organisational issues and the amateur participants responsible for the generation of material. Kershaw draws attention to the dilemma that large-scale projects represented for companies upholding principles of inclusion and creative involvement. For WSI, he suggests, the success of projects depended “upon hierarchical organisational structures which must be operated with a near-militaristic efficiency. Within such structures participation can all too easily be little more than a tokenist nod towards self-determination and empowerment”.<sup>324</sup> The danger that a concern for efficiency may compromise the company’s policy of “self-determinism and empowerment” was obviously real. In fact, WSI raised the stakes by promoting a culture centred on “collectivist, egalitarian utopianism” by making “grand, even visionary claims for the healing power of creativity and the place of ‘poetry’ in a healthy culture”<sup>325</sup> and by sharing with the Collectives a desire to operate as a model society. John Fox (one of WSI’s founder-‘visionaries’) recognised that aligning this ideology with the practicality required for managing large groups of people required delicate negotiation:

The responsibility and complexity [of bigger events] demands a bureaucracy and a hierarchy. The difficulty is to balance flexibility and efficiency with a full creative involvement of everyone. We are wary of over specialisation and the false separation of artists and enablers: we try to make (ideally) a social microcosm of a ‘better’ society, but it’s not easy.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Kershaw (1999) op. cit. p. 237

<sup>325</sup> Ibid. p. 212

<sup>326</sup> Baz Kershaw and Tony Coult (eds.); *Engineers of the Imagination: The Welfare State Handbook*, London: Methuen 1990 p. 20

Yet WSI's ideology was, according to Kershaw, "honed by a pragmatism which produced ... an acute grasp of contemporary power structure".<sup>327</sup> The resolution of the conflict between ideology and practicality came from the company's acknowledgement of the necessity for leadership and their acceptance of a hierarchical structure where status is allocated by role and by expertise. The role of what WSI calls the "gaffer" (in fact, often taken in partnership by Fox and Boris Howarth) was to provide a framework score that both structured and inspired the participants' creative involvement. Fox makes an analogy to a music band, in which the "primary creators ... write scenarios ... round the needs of the people". "... we provide the tunes, but the soloists explore harmonies and we love to write work to incorporate imaginative engineers or wonderful sculptors, people we can enjoy creating with."<sup>328</sup>

To further soften the hierarchy, WSI would give access to the "gaffer" role, on a rotating basis, to as many company members as qualified. This rotating hierarchy acknowledges individual preference, experience and expertise and enables efficient lines of responsibility to be drawn, while at the same time mitigating the dangers of entrenched hierarchies:

I believe you have to give access to that central role to as many people as possible and train people into it by allowing the inexperienced to rise to the occasion. We prefer to give one person the 'gaffer's baton', and they take primary artistic (and other) responsibility. The buck stops at them.<sup>329</sup>

An important factor in determining the organisational structure of the Participatory model is skill and expertise: it is through training that WSI participants can "rise to the occasion"<sup>330</sup> and up the rungs of the hierarchy. This is in part possible because the training required consists of a wide range of craft skills that can be learned on-the-job, through what Nonaka and Takeuchi identified as socialisation (see Chapter Two)—"we all learn from each other

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<sup>327</sup> Kershaw (1999) p. 212

<sup>328</sup> Kershaw & Coult p. 21

<sup>329</sup> Ibid. p. 21

<sup>330</sup> Ibid. p. 21



through observation and consultation and helping each other”.<sup>331</sup> While the key roles in CTT were, as we will shortly see, those of director, playwright, stage manager and so on, those in WSI were “engineers” and “architects”<sup>332</sup>—terms that the company’s unique aesthetic, with its large-scale performance objects, makes literal as well as metaphorical.

The Colway Theatre Trust did not share WSI’s “collectivist, egalitarian utopianism” and was therefore less anxious to soften the hierarchical structure that the enormous scale of their projects made a pragmatic necessity. The main leadership role was taken by a permanent director (Jellicoe herself for the majority of the company’s life), who had responsibility for “the running of the professional team and for every other aspect of the production, technical and artistic ... responsibilities”.<sup>333</sup> As director, Jellicoe presided over a number of specialised teams responsible for various administrative and artistic areas. The core company’s areas of responsibility were more specialised and clearly delineated than those of WSI, based on the job titles of commercial script-led practice, while the amateur participants engaged in what were assumed to be less specialised tasks:

Each production centred on a core of professional actors and was produced by a professional director, stage-manager, composer and designer. Each was performed, researched, constructed and costumed by sometimes over a hundred and fifty amateurs drawn from the community.<sup>334</sup>

It is important for Jellicoe that the higher roles in the hierarchy are the preserve of not only company members but of people with experience and expertise in the professional theatre.<sup>335</sup> This insistence on specialist professional expertise is a reflection of the value she placed on a particular quality in terms of the performance: “... if local people do everything, it’s axiomatic that the artistic standard will be lower than if professionals are called in”.<sup>336</sup> An

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid. p. 21

<sup>332</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> Jellicoe *op. cit.* p. 150

<sup>334</sup> Peacock *op. cit.* p. 113

<sup>335</sup> She herself gained early experience at the Royal Court Theatre, writing a number of successful plays including *The Knack* (The Royal Court Theatre, 27 March 1962)

<sup>336</sup> Jellicoe *op. cit.* p. 55

effect of CTT's use of industry professionals was that it made for a methodology that closely resembled that of script-led practice, both in terms of its process (a playwright acted as the main authority during the first stages of the process but was then replaced by the director) and its formal role designations. Jellicoe herself goes to some length to distinguish her method from that of devising, arguing that the early play *The Garden* was, "as near a devised play as we ever got".<sup>337</sup> However, the main point of distinction Jellicoe makes between her own practice and what she characterises as devising is essentially one of political bias:

If we carefully analyse a great many devised plays, it's likely we shall discover three things 1) nothing really rude or unpleasant is ever said about the member of any working-class family connected with the play; 2) the villains are all people against whom the community can comfortably unite, e.g. the wicked capitalist landlord or entrepreneur; 3) the devisers, being socialist, will be tempted to see the working-class through rose-coloured spectacles.<sup>338</sup>

This view indicates how firmly entrenched is the association between devising and the socialist, alternative values of the 1970s and demonstrates the impact that the political devising theatre companies had on subsequent perceptions of devising. Writing in the 1980s, Jellicoe's more establishment position leads her to distance herself from the methodology itself, along with the naïve liberalism that she associates with it.<sup>339</sup>

One result of CTT's strong demarcation between the industry-trained professional core and the amateur participants was that the higher levels of the hierarchy in the creative team were less accessible to the amateur group. The particular culture that these industry professionals brought with them also had its impact on the power dynamic of the CTT. A professional playwright such as David Edgar expects to take on a significant authoring role: "Community

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid. p. 23

<sup>338</sup> Ibid. p. 124

<sup>339</sup> Although Jellicoe herself claims that her methodology is not devising, the definition of devising offered in Chapter One of this thesis (a process that does not use a conventional script at an early stage) allows for the CTT methodology to be included.

Theatre, as produced by the Colway Theatre Trust, with its professional writer ... permits only very limited influence on the subject-matter and political angle of the play by the participants".<sup>340</sup> The resulting restrictions of creative access might seem ideologically questionable in view of community theatre's culture of inclusion and in a company such as CTT, which makes high claims for its ability to empower the local participants.<sup>341</sup> In fact, CTT is generally held up as an example of a company that has successfully joined both professional and amateur participants in "a shared and co-operative experience in which the **process** would always be acknowledged as of equal importance in the theatrical product".<sup>342</sup> Kershaw ponders the issues of accessibility and inclusion that arise from the professional / amateur divide but finally construes the relationship as something of a fair exchange:

The dynamic between the professionals and non-professionals raises interesting ideological issues in community play production, particularly in relation to the empowerment of the participants. Unsympathetic observers have noted the potential for mystification and manipulation in the relationship for the professionals are in control of the event in that they write the play, direct it, design. But the relationship [is one in which] the skills of the professionals are exchanged for performances (and other types of work) by local people, not as equal but as a way of achieving equality.<sup>343</sup>

However successfully both CTT and WSI negotiated the demands of organisational pragmatism and inclusive ideals, large-scale community projects such as these continue to

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<sup>340</sup> Peacock op. cit. pp. 120–121

<sup>341</sup> Indeed, community theatre as a whole can be questioned along these lines. Kershaw, for examples, raises this issue: "Whether the aim is for performance to be instrumental in community development; or to be an expression of the community; or to reinforce the community in particular campaigns, the underlying impulse is to enable the satisfaction of community needs through attempts at increased empowerment. However, there is always the potentially dangerous assumption that—whatever the socio-political or cultural needs of the community—the company can in some way increase its power. The patronising implication then is that the community *needs* the company." Kershaw (1992) op. cit. p. 62

<sup>342</sup> Peter Reynolds; 'Community Theatre: Carnival or Camp?' in Graham Holderness (ed.); *The Politics of Theatre and Drama*, Hampshire & London: Macmillan 1992 p. 21

<sup>343</sup> Kershaw (1999) op. cit. p. 193

be rare events. NoFit State Circus' *SteppingStones to the Millennium*<sup>344</sup> is a rare case of a project on a scale equivalent to CTT and WSI's earlier work. Contemporary community theatre tends to operate on a smaller scale, though there is a growing incidence of building-based and established companies engaging in small and mid-sized community projects, often through their educational departments. There are also a number of professional practitioners who work in this way. Chris Johnstone acknowledges the work of Phelim McDermot of Improbable Theatre, Jonathan Kay and Mark Long of People Show<sup>345</sup> and Hahlo and Reynolds outline the RSC's theatre in development work.<sup>346</sup> Like the spirit of collectivity embodied by the Collective, community theatre's belief in the personal, social and other benefits of engaging in drama practice—in accessibility and in widening audiences—continues to pervade contemporary practice. In fact, the current conception that theatre is in crisis<sup>347</sup> calls for a renewed interest in participatory practices as a means of reaching new audiences and re-establishing its relevance.

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<sup>344</sup> A series of activities and performances involving over 300 community members and 50 professional in Cardiff, Wales, from September 1997 to December 1998. Director Orit Azaz and writer Andy Rashleigh gave a presentation of their process at the *Challenging Language* conference, produced by Writernet on 23 January 1999 (Jerwood Space, London)

<sup>345</sup> Chris Johnstone; *House of Games: Making Theatre from Everyday Life*, New York & London: Routledge & Nick Hern Books 1998

<sup>346</sup> Hahlo & Reynolds op. cit.

<sup>347</sup> Titles of recent books give this impression: in *Theatre @Risk*, London: Methuen 2000, Michael Kustow perceives live performance to be threatened by the advent of new technologies, and *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, London: Amber Lane Press 1999, edited by Vera Gottlieb and Colin Counsell, regards the economic, cultural and social climate of 'Lukewarm Britannia' as a danger to socially engaged theatrical practice.

## Summary of Model

<b>Model</b>	<b>The Participatory Model</b>
<b>Context</b>	TIE and DIE from the 1950s to present day Community theatre from the 1950s to present day Other forms of applied theatre
<b>Illustrative examples</b>	Welfare State International Colway Theatre Trust
<b>Style</b>	Relevance to the target community is the key concern. CTT would create essentially naturalistic plays on a piece of local history. WSI operated on a more abstract, symbolic level.
<b>Ethos</b>	These companies value participation in creative projects as a positive experience and aim to reach new audiences.
<b>Structure</b>	A benign hierarchy with a strong demarcation of role between the professional company and the amateur participants. The company's authority lies predominantly in the organisational aspects, in creating the framework score and in the fixing and rehearsal stages. The material generation stage is deemed an important phase, as much for the benefits afforded to its participants as for the generation of material.
<b>Key features of the process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An extended conception stage, leading to a shared vision of relevance to its participants.</li> <li>• The creation of a 'framework' score. This step in the process often marks the transition from the company's authorship to that of the participant group.</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Models of Devising: The Ensemble

The Ensemble model of devising is used by companies and practitioners who are seeking to create new theatrical forms and whose work is characterised by aesthetic and stylistic innovation. In the post-war British context, this emphasis on innovation usually means a rejection of literary naturalism in favour of visual, physical, aural theatrical languages and an expressionistic mode. This may be coupled with a serious belief in performance and theatre training as a powerful, near-mystical experience. The genres that have emerged from this impetus include the director's theatre of the immediate post-war period (some of which was devised, though it more often involved reworking of canonical texts), as well as the visual, physical and dance theatre that emerged in the 1970s, flourished in the late 1980s and which continues to be an important site of devising practice to the present day. What links companies working in these contexts is their visionary approach.

The defining feature of the Ensemble model is its organisational structure: at its purest, it consists of a tight-knit group that trains together over an extended period of time. The long-term commitment promotes technical mastery in the unique theatrical language that constitutes the company's 'big vision'<sup>348</sup> and ensures that the participants share a common language. Ideally, the company becomes "a permanent group, breathing as one" whose members share "a single-minded commitment to company objectives" and in which "its practices are symbiotically bound up with its principles".<sup>349</sup> In some cases, the 'big vision' (its principles) becomes more important than the production of work (its practices), as when Lev Dodin himself describes an ensemble as, "... the place where people search for spiritual values and where a theatre production is a sort of by-product, but spiritual life, spiritual exploration and spiritual research are the main things".<sup>350</sup> Such commitment, and indeed

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<sup>348</sup> See Chapter Two and Appendix Five

<sup>349</sup> Maria Shevtsova; *Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre: Process to Performance* New York: Routledge 2004 p. 36

<sup>350</sup> Lev Dodin interviewed in Maria Delgado and Paul Heritage (eds.); *In Contact with The Gods?: Directors Talk Theatre*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1996 p. 71

permanence, is rare, particularly within the British economic and cultural climate. Thus, the genuine permanent ensemble remains an ideal rather than a reality. Many of the contemporary companies operating the Ensemble model compromise by adopting a core-and-pool structure (as discussed in Chapter Two), recruiting from a pool of performers who are trained in appropriate physical skills (for example, those who have graduated from the Lecoq school in Paris) and who are therefore assumed to share at least the rudiments of a common language<sup>351</sup>, even if they cannot share the group's spiritual values and 'big vision'. As a result, a common feature of the Ensemble process is a period of bespoke training for new and temporary participants and, with this, inculcation into the group's ethos and practices. Training thus becomes an integral aspect of the process.

The main context in which the model operates today is in physical theatre, a form that has risen in popularity over the past thirty years through the success of such companies as The Right Size, Kaos Theatre and Théâtre de Complicité.<sup>352</sup> Lamden—who identifies Théâtre de Complicité and Steven Berkoff as important popularisers of the form—points out that “new genre” is “ideally suited to devising companies”.<sup>353</sup> While Lamden sees physical theatre as a recent phenomenon, it is possible to trace its history in Britain to at least as far back as Barrault's first appearance at the Edinburgh festival in 1948. In doing so, this research draws a connecting line between contemporary physical theatre and the director's theatre of the 1950s and early 1960s; and through this to the international canon of director-auteurs such as Barrault; and through him to Artaud. Christopher Innes describes Barrault as the “direct link between Artaud and the modern avant-garde”<sup>354</sup> but it is apparent that Barrault also inspired a distinctive physical style of performance that was perhaps easier to emulate than

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<sup>351</sup> Complicite manages to sustain something akin to an ensemble by inviting an extended pool of performers to take part in general training and workshop explorations between projects and in the early development of projects in which they are not cast. This sustained training and development, together with the company's ability to retain a body of practitioners over an extended period of time may be a factor in its success. However, this system is not always satisfying to its participants. Joyce Henderson, who described the system to me, suggested that taking part in training and development without being involved in a production can be ultimately frustrating and constricting to a performer who needs to be available for other work opportunities (interview with Joyce Henderson, 17/03/04).

<sup>352</sup> This history is described in Dymphna Callery; *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, London & New York: Routledge & Nick Hern Books 2001 pp. 6–8

<sup>353</sup> Gill Lamden; *Devising: A Handbook for Drama and Theatre Students*, London: Hodder & Stoughton 2000 p. 4

<sup>354</sup> Christopher Innes; *Avant Garde Theatre 1892–1992*, London: Routledge 1993 p. 95

Artaud's theories were to put into practice. Harold Hobson's very British account of Barrault's first appearance in the UK<sup>355</sup> demonstrates just how different Barrault's aesthetic was from the prevailing forms:

Now, according to what were the West End standards (which he himself did much to change by his example) Barrault was a highly incorrect actor. He used every aspect of himself instead of confining himself merely to the voice, as British actors then largely did. Like a good cricketer he played with every part of his body.<sup>356</sup>

Barrault's impact was so revelatory that Hobson goes on to describe Lawrence Olivier's presentation of Barrault's company at the St James Theatre in 1951 as "one of the greatest services that Olivier had rendered the British stage".<sup>357</sup> What Barrault exemplified was the superiority of expressionistic theatrical style over the staid naturalism of the prevailing forms. This desire to offer something different was taken up by Peter Brook—the key representative of director's theatre in the UK—who collaborated with Barrault in the late 1960s.

Director's theatre<sup>358</sup> is characterised by a unique, visionary approach that is invariably inspired by an auteur-director, as we see in the case of Barrault and Brook. Arnold Hinchcliffe, writing in the late 1970s, describes the form as:

... that significant part of recent theatre in which the producer plays a more than usually dominant role, in which interpretation becomes creation; where there is either no text or where the text is used merely as the beginning of a production ....<sup>359</sup>

In the director's theatre of the post-war period, the director became the "central power source" of a group, in a way that can be likened to Handy's power culture, which, as we saw in Chapter One:

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<sup>355</sup> In an adaptation of Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* at the second Edinburgh Festival in 1948

<sup>356</sup> Harold Hobson; *Theatre In Britain: A Personal View*, Oxford: Phaidon 1984 p. 159

<sup>357</sup> Ibid. p. 166

<sup>358</sup> Director's theatre is occasionally referred to as 'producer's theatre' (see Hinchcliffe below).

<sup>359</sup> Arnold P. Hinchcliffe; *British Theatre 1950/70*, Oxford: Basil Black 1974 p. 172



... depends on a central power source, with rays of power and influence spreading out from that central figure .... The organisation depends on trust and empathy for its effectiveness and on telepathy and personal conversation for communication.<sup>360</sup>

In director's theatre, the director's vision earns her something akin to Max Weber's notion of charismatic authority:

The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His success determines whether he finds them .... If they recognize him, he is their master—so long as he knows how to maintain recognition through 'proving' himself. But he does not derive his 'right' from their will, in the manner of an election. Rather, the reverse holds true: it is the duty of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader.<sup>361</sup>

The charismatic director inspires the commitment, loyalty and creative dedication of the other participants by communicating a belief in her vision. Although cohered by shared values, each individual participant's primary source of authority is the director herself and, while they may collaborate with each other during the process of creation, the final authority is, again, that of the director. The reliance on what Handy calls "telepathy" indicates the emphasis that such Power Cultures place on tacit behavioural codes and interpersonal relationships. As a result of such features, director's theatre ensembles have become notorious for holding their performers under the sway of an autocratic director. Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright describe Meyerhold's company as running on his belief that "Freedom is in subordination" and quote one of his actors as saying:

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<sup>360</sup> Charles Handy: *Understanding Organisations*, London: Penguin Books 1993 p. 184

<sup>361</sup> Max Weber; 'The Sociology of Charismatic Authority' in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.); *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, London & New York: Routledge 1991 pp. 246–247. Charles Lindholme; *Charisma*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1999 exposes the potentially devastating consequences of the sort of blind obedience inspired by charismatic leaders in a range of contexts.

He built a production as they built a house. And we were happy to be even a doorknob in this house.<sup>362</sup>

Innes suggests that this was the case with Barrault, whose particular performance style could not be achieved without a director who enforced discipline, who was demanding in his training of the performers and who was in control of his vision:

... the effect of spontaneity and anarchistic frenzy was always created from conscious and disciplined rehearsal ... to achieve it required the director as autocrat.<sup>363</sup>

Yet even as Brook and other director-auteurs were gaining prominence<sup>364</sup>, British culture was already moving towards the spirit of collectivity and social inclusion that typified the late 1960s and early 1970s. By the 1970s, a key tenet of politically-motivated and collective theatre companies, such as those described in Chapter Three, would be the emancipation of the actor from conventional hierarchical structures:

... it was the notion and practice of the collective that allowed the individual to flower rather than the ailing market system, which claimed to be based on individual freedom while putting a few on a pedestal for a time and dumping the rest in the scrap-heap. Likewise, it was radical, egalitarian co-operation that allowed the individual actor to be more expressive and creative rather than the authoritarian relationships of the conventional theatre.<sup>365</sup>

While not all theatre companies responded to the prevailing counter-cultural climate by forming full-on collectives, directors seemed to soon become uncomfortable with the notion

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<sup>362</sup> Quoted in Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright; *Changing Stages: A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century*, London: Bloomsbury 2000 p. 349

<sup>363</sup> Innes op. cit. p. 107

<sup>364</sup> For accounts of Brook's career, see J.C. Trewin; *Peter Brook: A Biography*, London: Macdonald 1971

<sup>365</sup> Colin Chambers; 'Product in Process: Actor-based Workshops' in Sandy Craig (ed.); *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*, London: Amber Lane Press 1980 p. 106. Chambers attributes this drive towards the creative emancipation of the actor to the visits of US companies such as Café La Mama and the Open Theatre in the early 1960s.

of the director as auteur and as autocrat, tempering their authority in order to develop more egalitarian and collaborative working strategies that exploited the creativity of the actor. Joan Littlewood, for example, is acknowledged for pioneering a method of "... rehearsal as collective thought-process, piloted by the director":

Littlewood must be recognised as the great pioneer of the growing collaborative flexibility we now enjoy. In the early Sixties she was the only important director in England to allow actors to contribute creatively to a text.<sup>366</sup>

Note, however, that although Littlewood's methodology allowed the actor to creatively contribute to the theatre-making process (in advance of many of the more radical collectives), this was very much on the director's terms: only Littlewood could "allow" the performers to do so and only within a process that she herself "piloted". Hinchcliffe suggests that the advent of the "collaborative flexibility" that Littlewood pioneered effectively killed off director's theatre. It is my view, however, that the new collaborative approach that followed Littlewood softened but did not eliminate the director's role as key authority figure and power source of companies operating in these contexts. As Alison Hodge points out, it is in fact the rise of the director as visionary and innovator that granted the actor "a new or revitalised role as a theatre maker".<sup>367</sup> The actor's authority and authorship is, again, dependent on the director. Because of these, essentially ideological, twists in the history of its methodological development, the contemporary Ensemble model tends to constitute a tacit hierarchy: groups claim to operate collaboratively and through an egalitarian system (and indeed, they often do at particular points in the process) but they are ultimately a director-led hierarchy.

The physical theatre practice that emerged in the 1980s, and especially the early 1990s, most effectively realised the collaborative aspirations that Hinchcliffe observed in

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<sup>366</sup> Ronald Hayman; *British Theatre since 1955: A Reassessment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1979 p. 134

<sup>367</sup> Alison Hodge (ed.); *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, London & New York: Routledge 2000 p. 2

Littlewood.<sup>368</sup> The success in 1992 of *The Street of Crocodiles*—the first production of Lecoq alumni Théâtre de Complicité at the National Theatre “marked the legitimisation ... of a process of theatre-making that has its roots in the workshop rather than written text”.<sup>369</sup> Moreover, their Lecoq-derived techniques foreshadowed the eventual dominance of devising as the key methodology in physical theatre. Lecoq’s approach seemed to represent the emancipation of the performer from the script-led model:

Lecoq’s emphasis on provoking the actor’s imagination and creativity is a means of freeing actors from the ‘tyranny of text’ in order to create their own scenarios.<sup>370</sup>

The same pattern is reflected in the development of new dance and dance theatre. DV8 and other companies<sup>371</sup> that typified the English arm of the “new liaison between dance and theatre”<sup>372</sup> represented a seam of practice that “was formed out of a desire to enable the development of the dancer as a creative artist with something to say”.<sup>373</sup> As part of the new dance’s rejection of classical ballet, dance theatre sought to grant the performer a greater degree of creative autonomy in the process.

Since the 1990s, the association between physical and dance theatre and purportedly collaborative approaches has been firmly established in the minds of practitioners and scholars alike. It has become almost unquestionable that these forms represent the height of the actors’ creative involvement. Indeed, the most recent publication on physical theatre

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<sup>368</sup> In fact, physical theatre’s earliest roots in Britain lie within the literary and sometimes mainstream context. Jacques Copeau’s ideas and approach came to Britain through Michel St Denis and George Devine at the Old Vic theatre school (1947–1952) and during the early days of the Royal Court, where they were used in “the actor’s service to the text”. See Sears A. Eldredge and Hollis W. Huston; ‘Actor Training in the Neutral Mask’ in Philip Zarrilli (ed.) *Acting (Re)Considered: Theories and Practices*, London & New York: Routledge 1995 p. 122.

<sup>369</sup> Andy Lavender ‘Turns and Transformations’ in Vera Gottlieb and Colin Counsell (eds.); *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, London: Amber Lane Press 1999 p. 181

<sup>370</sup> Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow (eds.); *Lecoq and the British Theatre*, London & New York: Routledge 2002 p. 4

<sup>371</sup> Other examples of dance theatre are Moving Being (founded by Geoff Moore), which operated in the 60s and 70s and Laurie Booth, who collaborated Welfare with State International and Triple Action in the 1980s (cited by Judith Mackrell; *Out of Line: The Story of British New Dance*, London: Dance Books 1990 p. 20)

<sup>372</sup> Isa Partsch-Bergson ‘Dance Theatre from Rudolph Laban to Pina Bausch’ in *Dance Theatre Journal* Vol. 6, No. 2, 1988 p. 38

<sup>373</sup> Chamberlain and Yarrow op. cit. p. 7

defines the form as one in which the “working process is collaborative” and that involves the “actor-as-creator rather than the actor-as-interpreter”.<sup>374</sup> Besides misrepresenting the degree of self-determination that any actor has, even in the script-led process that Callery associates with the interpretive role<sup>375</sup>, this polarity creates what I suggest is an exaggerated historical division between director’s theatre on the one hand and physical and dance theatre on the other. It also promotes a false impression of company power structure among physical and dance theatre companies. This false impression is rife: the belief that their approach is “collaborative” is intrinsic to the methodologies of most companies operating in these contexts. Complicite, for example, state that, “What is essential is collaboration. A collaboration between individuals to establish an ensemble with a common physical and imaginative language”.<sup>376</sup> Contemporary physical and dance theatre practitioners of these forms go to some lengths to distinguish their approach from the “more than usually dominant” role of the director.<sup>377</sup> Rather than an auteur or autocrat, the director is now construed as a trusted and admired expert in the expressive language of that company—often one who has prior experience of performing herself. Somewhat like the coach of a sports team<sup>378</sup>, this breed of director trains and motivates the actors to succeed in a shared goal, concerning herself with any aspect of the performers’ physical, emotional and private life that might impact on their ability to perform. It is an embracing and holistic approach.<sup>379</sup> For example, DV8 director Lloyd Newsom (a trained therapist) sees his role as meeting the

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<sup>374</sup> Callery op. cit. p. 5

<sup>375</sup> As suggested in Chapter Two, this research is based on the belief that performance is constructed of responses to directions. While in script-led theatre practice the script essentially constitutes a preconceived body of directions, there is nevertheless a degree of play in the performer’s response to these directions.

<sup>376</sup> See ‘About Us’; available from: [www.complicite.org/about/](http://www.complicite.org/about/) (visited 01/07/05)

<sup>377</sup> The fact that Complicite’s director McBurney is being recognised as one of the great directors reinforces my point. *The Street of Crocodiles* led critic Michael Billington to suggest that McBurney was worthy of comparison with “great directors like Peter Brook” (interview in the Late Show documentary on the making of *The Street of Crocodiles*). Michael Kustow; *Theatre@Risk*, London: Methuen 2000, lists Simon McBurney alongside other ‘greats’ of theatre such as Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Hall (p. xiii).

<sup>378</sup> This analogy to sports is not so far-fetched. Many of the physical performer training systems were inspired by sport. For example, Lecoq describes his career as proceeding from ‘sports to theatre’: Jacques Lecoq with Jean-Gabriel Carasso and Jean-Claude Lallias; *The Moving Body*, London: Methuen 2000 pp. 3–4. Decroux was supposedly inspired by boxer Chapentier (see, for example, Deidre Sklar ‘Etienne Decroux’s Promethean Mime’ in Zarrilli op. cit. p. 114).

<sup>379</sup> Rehearsal footage of in the *Streets of Crocodile* documentary shows McBurney’s perhaps rather clumsy expressions of concern for performer Hayley Carmichael (op. cit. time code 0:44:50–0:45:50)

emotional and other “demands” of his performers. “I try to structure the devising day by finding a balance between the physical, psychological and emotional demands of the performer.”<sup>380</sup>

Another important feature of this contemporary collaborative version of the Ensemble is that the director refrains from imposing her own particular vision on a production (though inculcation into the company’s ‘big vision’ and belief system is a key aspect of this process). This, it is assumed, will grant the performers more authority and authorship and allow them to feel ownership of the performance. Complicite’s Simon McBurney compares his own practice to that of directors who “work out everything in advance”.<sup>381</sup> He suggests that the latter method produces theatre that is “constricted by a straitjacket of ideas and concepts, having no natural relationship to itself, no natural growth”.<sup>382</sup> He goes on to criticise systems where:

... a producer has an idea and goes to a director and designer, who help to shape it, then they find an actor and they fill in the rest of the company around that actor. I’m not saying that this system can’t work but on the whole it squeezes the lifeblood out of theatre and it works against the natural origins of the piece.<sup>383</sup>

His own approach, he implies, is “natural” and organic, concerned with “releasing the creativity of the actor”<sup>384</sup> in order to achieve “the moment of collective imagining”.<sup>385</sup> By not imposing a preconceived vision, directors like McBurney seek to grant the performers a high level of responsibility and, with this, a sense of ownership in the creation and performance of the piece:

A piece of theatre is, ultimately, in the hands of those who are performing it. The actors. It is they not the director who must have the whole piece in their every

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<sup>380</sup> Gabriella Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (eds.); *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, London: Faber & Faber 1999 p. 110

<sup>381</sup> Ibid. p. 69

<sup>382</sup> Ibid. p. 67

<sup>383</sup> Ibid. p. 69

<sup>384</sup> Ibid. p. 74

<sup>385</sup> Ibid. p. 71

gesture, hearing the meaning in each word. And to do that I think, as an actor, you have to feel that you possess the piece. And to possess the piece you have to be part of its creation. Involved intimately in the process of its making.<sup>386</sup>

For McBurney, this suggests it is the actor who is in the front-line of creation and the success of the production rests not only on her training and talent but above all on her personal investment in the material and the process. Newsom also believes that it is important to cultivate his performers' sense of ownership over the material they author:

The performers' creativity and devising as a process are what excites me about the way DV8 work .... I've given up saying 'Move like this' and 'here are the steps, learn them'. This allows the performers a greater sense of ownership and authenticity over the final material.<sup>387</sup>

Even Brook is described as having this 'hands-off' approach. Leiter suggests that in the creation of *U.S.*, Brook opened the fifteen-week process with a period in which he "refuses to impose his own interpretation on the actors"<sup>388</sup> who were to "deal improvisationally with their own responses to Vietnam"<sup>389</sup> and to "try anything they want to".<sup>390</sup>

Companies operating this model of devising tend to place a great value on material that comes from the body (Callery calls this "somatic" creation<sup>391</sup>), the unconscious, the unintended, or from inspiration—indeed anywhere but a director's preconceived vision. Artaud's description of the director as "... a kind of organiser of magic", whereby "the

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<sup>386</sup> The Complicite website op. cit.

<sup>387</sup> Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. 109

<sup>388</sup> Samuel L. Leiter; *From Belasco to Brook: Representative Directors of the English-Speaking Stage*, London & New York: Greenwood 1991 p. 253

<sup>389</sup> Ibid. p. 229

<sup>390</sup> Ibid. p. 253

<sup>391</sup> Callery op. cit. p. 4. In her survey of body-based art, Tracey Warr notes that "... the belief that the body can produce knowledge which is not purely rational or empirical is prevalent at the end of the twentieth century". Tracey Warr (ed.) *The Artist's Body*, London & New York: Phaidon 2002 p. 15

material on which he works, the subjects he makes thrilling are not his own”<sup>392</sup> might be the origin of this view. By trying “anything they want to”, the performers of Brook’s *U.S.* become the source of the magic. In order to organise the magic—the material that has been generated by the performers—the director engages in a “painstaking process of elimination”.<sup>393</sup> I return to Brook’s account of directorial process that was touched on in Chapter Two. For Brook, the fixing phase takes place when:

... the director cuts away all that’s extraneous, all that belongs just to the actor and not to the actor’s intuitive connection with the play .... Because the form is not ideas imposed on a play ....<sup>394</sup>

Thus, we see that process in the contemporary version of the Ensemble model centres around two main periods. The first period is one in which the participants are trained in a common, often bespoke, theatrical language, are inducted into the ‘big vision’ and belief system through which it operates and engage in intuitive, spontaneous, ‘automatic’ creation and activities such as vigorous physical and mental training, research and improvisations designed to trigger unexpected responses. During this phase, the director may offer direction but does not directly impose her own vision. In the second phase, the director engages in what I referred to in Chapter Three as ‘live editing’, carving a score that best realises the vision she has conceived through observing the performers’ responses from the wealth of material generated.<sup>395</sup> The result of the two phases is ideally a performance that organises the magic of the playful first phase into an innovative piece of theatre.

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<sup>392</sup> Antonin Artaud ‘On the Balinese Theatre’ in Antonin Artaud; *The Theatre and its Double*, London: Calder Publications 1993 p. 42

<sup>393</sup> Leiter op. cit. p. 253

<sup>394</sup> Peter Brook; ‘The Formless Hunch’ in *Peter Brook; The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera 1946–1987*, New York: Harper & Row 1987 p. 4

<sup>395</sup> While preferring a delayed vision, the large-scale and intricate nature of some physical and dance theatre productions means that it is practically preferable to base this phase on a framework score—something like that of the Participatory model described in Chapter Four. In DV8’s “largest ever show”, for example, the company spent ten weeks creating a “framework” which, in the absence of a “linear narrative”, would be centred on “a core theme to link the work together” (Lloyd Newsom and Rob Tannon ‘Perfection and Pretence’ in *Dance Theatre Journal* Vol. 16, No. 3, 2000 p. 9)



## The Process of the Ensemble Model

### Phase 1: Conception

Ensemble companies are built around a strong, shared 'big vision' that often determines the likely style and content of any individual production. An initial training and/or induction period for each project will ensure that the performers begin to build a 'common language' and develop the physical or other expressive skills required for this 'big vision'. The particular vision for any one production, however, is likely to emerge late in the process. Either the director has a private vision that she refrains from imposing on the process (at least explicitly) or it is possible that she genuinely does not have a vision until after the majority of the material has been generated.

### Phase 2: Generating material

This phase is characterised by the generation of a great amount and broad range of material through activities that favour spontaneous, intuitive forms of creativity. The director may act as a provoker of unexpected responses, perhaps through setting up demanding exercises or training systems, or may allow the performers free reign to 'try anything'. It is during this phase that we see the actor-as-creator, though what she creates is still provisional and subject to the fixing process that follows.

### Phase 3: Fixing

This phase is likely to emerge organically from the previous phase as the director begins to get a sense of the vision as an organising system. Acting through an intuitive sense of this vision, the director edits the material that has been generated in the previous phase. Eventually, a tight score will be formalised, incorporating material generated by the performers during phases 1 and 2 and which, ideally, they feel that they 'own'. This score typically does not take an explicit form, particularly in the context of physical theatre, leaving the company reliant on the director's verbal 'blocking'.

#### **Phase 4: rehearsal**

Once a score has been formulated, an extensive period of highly technical organisation is required through which the performance is honed and production elements integrated. At the same time, however, the late conception of the vision may mean that fixing processes often continue through the last days of rehearsal, sometimes even into the run of performances. These contrasting activities may represent a site of stress and conflict, with performers struggling to learn a score that is being continually changed as the director refines her vision.<sup>396</sup>

#### **Phase 5: Performance**

The search for innovation tends to result in work that is abstract and complex, relying on specialised performance and theatrical skills. Thus, the performance score is likely to be tight and fixed and to require considerable practice and refinement. Directors of Ensembles are likely to continue to give 'notes' well beyond the opening night.

A genuinely collaborative version of the Ensemble model is perhaps as much an ideal as the permanent ensemble company. The claim that McBurney and other directors make that they do not have—or at least do not impose—a preconceived vision is particularly questionable. McBurney states that even during a process he has 'no answers'. "The great paradox for the director is that one feels, or perhaps the expectation demands, that one comes up with an answer .... I have no answers at all."<sup>397</sup> Interviewed more recently at an RNT (Royal National Theatre) Platform<sup>398</sup>, McBurney was emphatic in repeating the assertion that he starts a process from a position of 'not knowing', claiming that "I don't go into a piece because I understand it, or have a concept of it". However, the testimony of performers who have worked with McBurney suggests that in fact:

<sup>396</sup> Complicite guards against this by having a two week preview period for each production, during which McBurney extensively reworks the production, partly in response to the preview audience's reactions.

<sup>397</sup> Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. 71

<sup>398</sup> RNT Platform discussion with Simon McBurney, Olivier Theatre, 02/06/04

Simon comes to rehearsals, perhaps unconsciously, with a strong sense of some of the shapes that he's going to use and some of the key ideas .... There's always a collective feeling about things but in the end it's always going to be Simon's call

....<sup>399</sup>

Of course, the fact that McBurney does have an initial vision does not make him an autocrat but it might suggest that there is a hint of the 'auteur' about him.<sup>400</sup> Film footage of Théâtre de Complicité in rehearsal for *The Street of Crocodiles* shows McBurney blocking the later rehearsals in a way that echoes the sort of "here are the steps, learn them" approach that Newsom criticised<sup>401</sup>—"you start breaking up the party and he spins off there ... you go there, you go there".<sup>402</sup> He exhibits the sort of control of vision and sense of discipline described by Innes in relation to Barrault. More telling, however, is what McBurney says in an interview during rehearsal:

The main anxieties of the actors is that they don't know what they're doing and they're trusting me when I say 'It's perfectly alright and this is what you're doing' because there's going to be a lot of their friends who come up and say 'I don't know what that was about and I don't have the first clue what you were doing'. So it's an enormous leap of faith in their part or else it's downright lying on my part; I don't know which.<sup>403</sup>

What this statement suggests is that the performers are undertaking to embody McBurney's vision. They do not fully understand it and are instead reliant on McBurney's reassurance

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<sup>399</sup> Charlotte Medcalf, interviewed by Steven Knapper 26/06/02 and quoted in Steven Knapper 'Complicite's Comintern, Internationalism and The Noise of Time' *Contemporary Theatre Review* Vol. 14, Issue 1, February 2004 pp. 65–66

<sup>400</sup> That McBurney is the key decision-maker in the company was clear when I approached Complicite regarding the possibility of observing their rehearsal process—a common request that is almost always refused on the grounds that "... our work is constantly changing, there is no Complicite formula and there are no straight answers or explanations"; available from: [www.complicite.org/faqs.html](http://www.complicite.org/faqs.html). 2003 (visited 4/12/03). Natasha Freedman (Education Officer) deferred continually to McBurney; the phrase "Simon says ..." occurred at least three times in the short conversation (17/05/02).

<sup>401</sup> See Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit.

<sup>402</sup> 'The Street of Crocodiles': BBC Late Show documentary 1993; time code 0:43:09–0:44:00BBC

<sup>403</sup> 'The Street of Crocodiles' op. cit.; time code 0:44:00–0:44:25

that, “It’s perfectly alright” and must place their trust in his vision. That they “don’t know what they’re doing” is a far cry from the level of ‘ownership’ McBurney claims to promote.

In a recent article on Complicite’s *Noise of Time*<sup>404</sup>, Steve Knapper suggests that it is “false and facile” to call McBurney a “dictatorial director” on the basis of the sort of account Medcalf gives.<sup>405</sup> If I risk this accusation by emphasising the strong role the director plays in the Ensemble model, my defence is that I am not out to ‘expose’ McBurney as an autocrat. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the success of the Ensemble model of devising is due in part to the charismatic and visionary leadership of directors such as Brook, Littlewood, Newsom and McBurney. The Ensemble model is defined by a process that negotiates between the playful, ‘collaborative’ approach on the one hand and, on the other, the discipline and rigour required by a complex performance score, a display of honed physical skills and the creation of a genuinely visionary product. These seemingly conflicting demands coalesce into the two-part process described above. In the first part, the director is a coach—the actor is the creator—and the main activity involves the generation of ‘magic’ through collaborative activities. However, in the second part, this magic is organised by a director as a visionary (and sometimes as an ‘autocrat’), at which point the actors becomes an interpreter of this vision. Callery’s definition of physical theatre and McBurney’s of his own practice—as intrinsically collaborative and organic—fails to take into account not only the demand for discipline and clear vision required when innovating new forms but also the lineage of important “more than usually dominant”<sup>406</sup> directors who still leave their mark on current practice.

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<sup>404</sup> John Jay College Theatre, Lincoln Center, New York City as part of the *Great Performers Series*, March 2000

<sup>405</sup> Knapper op. cit. p. 69

<sup>406</sup> Hinchcliffe op. cit. p. 172

## Summary of Model

Model	Ensemble Model
<b>Context</b>	Director's theatre of the 1950s and 1960s Physical theatre from the 1950s Some visual theatre from the 1960s
<b>Illustrative examples</b>	Peter Brook Joan Littlewood Complicite DV8
<b>Style</b>	An abstract, expressionistic theatrical language; often a physical language. Mostly large-scale imagistic productions.
<b>Ethos</b>	Groups are held together by a strong—sometimes almost spiritual—set of beliefs regarding the role of theatre. Companies will develop their own performer training systems that relate to this 'big vision'.
<b>Structure</b>	Ideally, a permanent group that is continually training and developing its vision. The Ensemble invariably has at its heart a charismatic and visionary director. Power in the ensemble is dependent on personal relations with the director, on a participant's longevity in the company, and on their fluency in the theatrical language that constitutes its aesthetic. Power Culture.

<p><b>Key features of the process</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An initial period (conception and material generation), in which the performers are inducted into the 'big vision' of the company and during which they are the main authority in terms of material generated.</li> <li>• A fixing stage, in which the director sculpts the material generated to date and creates a tight performance score. This moment often marks a change from 'playfulness' to rigour and discipline.</li> </ul>
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The case-study of the David Glass Ensemble (Chapter Eight of this thesis) will illustrate in more detail the structure and process of the Ensemble model of devising. An analysis of Glass' 'big vision' and how it impacts on the interpersonal dynamic of the company will serve to expose some of the methodological issues inherent in the model.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Models of Devising: The System Model

Performance art and live art, the main contexts of the model of devising outlined in this chapter, emerge from a particularly tangled set of lineages that cross disciplinary as well as geographical boundaries. In this research, the term 'performance art' will refer to a lineage that grew from action painting, body art, conceptual art and similar visual-based practices originating in New York, Japan and some areas of Europe in the 1950s.<sup>407</sup> Often motivated by a rejection of traditional and commercial notions of art as product<sup>408</sup>, visual artists operating in this context turned to performance as a new field of experimentation and expression:

Performance has been considered as a way of bringing to life the many formal and conceptual ideas of which the making of art is based.<sup>409</sup>

In Britain, there was an important manifestation of performance art during the alternative theatre movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Kershaw refers to companies such as The People Show, early Welfare State, Exploding Galaxy, Mark Boyle's Sensual Laboratory and John Bull Puncture Repair Kit as examples of "carnavalesque" theatre.<sup>410</sup> Such companies, he suggests, were united by a taste for symbolic, synaesthetic, multi-layered and hallucinogenic performance. Operating from a more implicit political agenda than the agit-

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<sup>407</sup> See Paul Schimmel (ed.); *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, New York: Thames & Hudson 1998, Tracey Warr; *The Artist's Body: Themes and Movements* London & New York: Phaidon Press 2002, and A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (eds.); *Performance by Artists*, Toronto: Art Metropole 1979 for detailed surveys of this history.

<sup>408</sup> A view strongly influenced by Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood'. See Michael Fried; *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1998. RoseLee Goldberg sums this up as "an art of ideas over product, and an art that could not be bought or sold". RoseLee Goldberg; *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, London: Thames & Hudson 2001 p. 7

<sup>409</sup> Goldberg *ibid.* p. 7

<sup>410</sup> Kershaw uses the term to define companies that "challenged the dominant ideologies through the production of alternative pleasures" (Baz Kershaw; *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* Routledge 1992 p. 40) and thus attributes to them a radical intention influenced by Bakhtin. See Michel Bakhtin; *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky, Indiana: Indiana University Press 1964

prop companies from which Kershaw distinguishes them, these companies aimed to “shock the audience into a new kind of ‘expanded’ liberated consciousness”.<sup>411</sup> Sobieski identifies such work as having a predominantly visual and aural language, a narrative structure that is more akin to music than traditional theatre plot and a somewhat troubled relationship with technology.<sup>412</sup> Performance art survives in the work of such companies as the People Show and Station House Opera and in the work of single artist-practitioners such as Bobby Baker, Gilbert & George<sup>413</sup> and Gary Stevens.

‘Live art’ is defined in this research as a field of practice that started in the 1980s at a point when “... performance art proper split off from the visual arts, aligning itself with theatre”.<sup>414</sup> MacRitchie<sup>415</sup> cites the London production of Robert Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach*<sup>416</sup> as the British manifestation of this transition. The British arm of live art was represented by groups such as Impact, IOU and Forced Entertainment. University-educated, these practitioners were more closely aligned to conceptual ideas (and indeed academic institutions) than their ‘carnavalesque’ predecessors. They operated from a basis in theory and, increasingly, a familiarity with the canon of American and European practitioners, such as the Wooster Group, Jan Fabre, Pina Bausch and Richard Foreman, as well as Robert Wilson. The current generation of live art companies see their work as belonging to what is now a tradition in its own right. For example, in reviving Impact’s *The Carrier Frequency*<sup>417</sup>, Stan’s Café acknowledged the live art canon:

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<sup>411</sup> Kershaw op. cit. p. 71

<sup>412</sup> Lynn Sobieski ‘Breaking the Boundaries: The People Show, Lumière & Son and Hesitate and Demonstrate’ in Theodore Shank; *Contemporary British Theatre*, London: Macmillan 1996 p. 103

<sup>413</sup> Gilbert & George regard themselves as a single artist. When asked to respond to the theme of ‘collaboration’ by the organiser of a symposium (*Collaborations* Camden People’s Theatre, London, 6 April 2002) they responded by saying, “we are not a collaboration. We are two people as one artist” (unpublished letter to Chris Goode, March 2002).

<sup>414</sup> Amelia Jones ‘Survey’ in Warr op. cit. p. 36

<sup>415</sup> Lynn MacRitchie ‘Introduction’ in Nikki Childs and Jeni Walwin (eds.); *A Split Second of Paradise*, London: River Oram 1998 p. 29

<sup>416</sup> This revival of the 1976 production opened at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Opera House, New York City as part of the *Next Wave Festival* 11–23 December 1984 and subsequently toured Europe.

<sup>417</sup> The revival took place at the Crescent Gallery, Birmingham, 30 May – 1 April 1999. The original production premiered at The Ralph Thursby Community Centre, Leeds on 30 October 1984



There is a generation of practitioners for whom *Impact* and *The Carrier Frequency* is a touchstone, a highly influential piece that seemed to capture the imagination of those who saw it .... For some of the next generation down, *Stan's Café* included, the piece exists as a myth. We were taught by Pete Brooks (*Impact's* director) and recognise this piece as part of our heritage without having seen it.<sup>418</sup>

The distinction made here between performance and live art is, for convenience, rather broad: the companies discussed in the literature on which this study is based seem to attract both terms interchangeably and are also sometimes referred to as 'visual', 'image-based' or 'post-modern' theatre. There is a shared heritage that makes the distinctions between the visual arts and the theatre lineages and between art-school and university backgrounds—between what I call performance art and live art—redundant and contestable. Nick Kaye, for example, calls for a blurring of such a distinction, identifying both live and performance art as “inter-disciplinary exchanges and engagements in art and theatre”<sup>419</sup>, with the UK-based performance groups dating from the 1980s constituting an art-theatre “hybrid”: “a work functioning between recognisable forms or schemes”.<sup>420</sup> Moreover, the two lineages sketched out here fail to account for the wider range of contexts that contribute to the development of the forms.<sup>421</sup> Pontbriand points out that the form is “difficult to define, characterised by the multiplicity of tendencies and forms” and that it:

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<sup>418</sup> 'The Carrier Frequency', *Stan's Café* on the *Live Art Magazine* website (visited 12/06/04). The link to this article is no longer active but Philip Stainer's interview of James Yarker covers similar ground (available at [www.liveartmagazine.com/core/reviews.php?action=show&key=195](http://www.liveartmagazine.com/core/reviews.php?action=show&key=195), visited 04/07/05).

<sup>419</sup> Nick Kaye; *Art into Theatre: Performance, Interviews and Documents*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers 1996 p. 1

<sup>420</sup> Kaye *ibid.* p. 12

<sup>421</sup> However, Peggy Phelan made an important case for regarding such practice not as “an add-on to the main field” of either visual art or theatre but as a form in its own right, with its own lineage. She posited three new historical roots that place the form “centre-stage”. The first originates in political action following the Second World War and particularly in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s; the second sees it as a branch of embodied existentialism or phenomenology—with Beckett as the precedent; and the third is the response of such artists as Yves Klein and Hayley Newman to the rise of photography, which precipitated a questioning of representation of reality. Peggy Phelan; 'Dear Marina or Stories of the History of Performance Art' lecture delivered at the *Live Culture* event at the Tate Modern, London, 29 March 2003. The 'Marina' of the lecture's title is Marina Abramovich.

... borrows from the known territory of music, theatre [and] dance ... it is an extension of visual and spatial problems [and] ... uses simultaneously the givens of each of the possibilities noted ....<sup>422</sup>

However, the primary concern of this chapter is not to delineate the intricacies of these two lineages but to identify a particular model of devising: the System model. While this model is used in both performance and live art, each of these lineages employs a slightly different version of it.

Live and performance art share a number of characteristics. They both originate in a rejection of the canon and established practices of their originating disciplines (including the visual arts, theatre, music and literature). Even today, the work tends to blur the boundaries between existing disciplines (for example, art and theatre) and between 'high' and 'low' art.<sup>423</sup> This can result in a "punk aesthetic"<sup>424</sup> that mixes and juxtaposes seemingly incompatible forms, styles, allusions and objects in a way that alludes to the use of 'cut up' and 'found objects' by the Dadaists and their followers and to the aesthetics of post-modernism (in fact the term 'post-modern theatre' is often used synonymously with what is here defined as live or performance art<sup>425</sup>). In some cases, the blurring of disciplinary boundaries also means an expansion of the typical range of theatrical languages and elements. The People Show—an important example of English performance art—states as its policy a commitment to creating "multi-disciplinary, multi-media live theatre" through a process that "draws together a diverse range of practitioners into the mix".<sup>426</sup> Although these forms share with director's and physical theatre the creation of new theatrical languages (in fact some of the 'carnavalesque' practice of the 1960s and 1970s might fit either context),

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<sup>422</sup> Chantal Pontbriand 'Introduction: Notion(s) of Performance' in Bronson and Gale op. cit. p. 9

<sup>423</sup> MacRitchie in Childs & Walwin op. cit. p. 25

<sup>424</sup> Goldberg op. cit. p. 181

<sup>425</sup> This area is discussed in Nick Kaye; *Postmodernism and Performance*, Basingstoke: Macmillan 1994 and Jon Whitmore; *Directing Postmodern Theater: Shaping Signification in Performance*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1994

<sup>426</sup> The People Show; 'Artistic Policy'; available from: [www.peopleshow.co.uk/site/html/index2.htm](http://www.peopleshow.co.uk/site/html/index2.htm) (visited 23/06/05)

performance and live art generally represent a more radical renegotiation of the traditional element hierarchy.

Work in this context also radicalises the traditional role of the audience. Early performance art, especially the Happening, would sometimes literally reconfigure the conventional spatial relationship, requiring the audience to physically participate in the performance or having performers cross the audience-performer divide. In recent incarnations, the work more typically seeks to escape 'literal' reading or meaning-making processes so that it is to be experienced rather than to be understood. Russell Hoban, the novelist who participated in the making of Impact's seminal *The Carrier Frequency*, sums up this attitude:

I haven't really made clear what *The Carrier Frequency* is about. If we're doing it right it isn't about something. It is something.<sup>427</sup>

For more recent live art, this radicalising of the audience's role has coalesced into a preoccupation with "liveness" as an escape from representation (Peggy Phelan defined performance as "representation without representation"<sup>428</sup>) and, with this, an emphasis on the 'reality' of audience, performer and their meeting in real time. Tim Etchells' notion of the audience as "witness"<sup>429</sup>, MacRitchie's focus on the "shared responsibility" of performer and audience<sup>430</sup> and Goldberg's "concentration on the personality and appearance of the artist"<sup>431</sup> are aspects of this. In order to produce work that avoids representation and the imposition of meaning, the live artist will operate by "confounding intentions"<sup>432</sup> or attempt to

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<sup>427</sup> Russell Hoban; 'Working with Impact', *Performance Magazine* No. 32, Nov/Dec 1984 p. 14

<sup>428</sup> Peggy Phelan; *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. 3. Auslander shows a justifiable impatience with "traditional, unreflective assumptions that fail to get much further in their attempts to explicate the value of 'liveness' than invoking clichés and mystifications like 'the magic of theatre', the 'energy' that supposedly exists between performers and spectators in a live event ...". He aims his critique at Phelan specifically. Philip Auslander; *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, London & New York: Routledge 1992 p. 2

<sup>429</sup> See, for example, Childs & Walwin op. cit. p. 35

<sup>430</sup> Childs & Walwin ibid. p. 23

<sup>431</sup> Goldberg op. cit. p. 153

<sup>432</sup> Tim Etchells; *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, London & New York: Routledge 1999 p. 55

“short-circuit human intentions”<sup>433</sup>, ensuring that the creation of work comes from outside of the conscious control of its participants. The 1960s in particular produced work that stood “against interpretations that posited an artwork as a fixed synopsis of the artist’s intentions ...”<sup>434</sup> Thus, work created through the System model represents a decisive split from the Romantic notion of the director as an individual creative force and from the expressionistic mode that ultimately underlies the Ensemble model. Composer Michael Nyman’s description of experimental music, as exemplified in the work of Cage, in fact provides a good summary of the principles underlying live and performance art:

Experimental composers are by and large not concerned with prescribing a defined *time-object* whose materials, structuring and relationships are calculated and arranged in advance, but are excited by the prospect of outlining a *situation* in which sounds [read ‘actions’] may occur, a *process* of generating action (sounding or otherwise), a *field* delineated by certain compositional ‘rules’.<sup>435</sup>

This notion of performance as “a *situation*” and “a *process* of generating action” is typified in the Happening—the seminal form of performance art that originated in the United States with John Cage’s event at Black Mountain College and Alan Kaprow’s *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (from which the name is taken).<sup>436</sup> The Happenings came to the UK in the early 1960s. *The*

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<sup>433</sup> Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner; ‘An Interview with John Cage’ in Mariellen R. Sandford (ed.) *Happenings and Other Acts*, London & New York: Routledge 1995 p. 56

<sup>434</sup> Warr op. cit. p. 12

<sup>435</sup> Michael Nyman; *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999 p. 4

<sup>436</sup> The Black Mountain College event took place in Black Mountain, North Carolina, USA in the summer of 1952 with John Cage’s students of experimental music from the New School of Social Research, New York. Kaprow’s event took place at the Reuben Gallery, New York City in 1959. As with performance and, to a lesser extent, live art, there is a debate about which field of practice Happenings are derived from. While “at first sight” it may appear to be “a cross between art exhibit and theatrical performance” (Susan Sontag; ‘Happenings: an Act of Radical Juxtaposition’ in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, New York: Octagon Books 1982 p. 263), critical opinion divides between those who view it as constituting a “new theatre” in its own right (Michael Kirby; ‘Happenings. An Introduction’ in Sandford op. cit. p. 3) and those who insist that it represents “a clear separation ... from the idea of theatre despite the fact that the dual elements of performance and spectacle are central to [it]” (Kenneth Coutts-Smith ‘Role Art and Social Context’ in Gale and Bronson op. cit. p. 222) and that “... the frequent presentation of happenings in art galleries underscored their emergence from the tradition of modern painting and sculpture—specifically, from action painting and assemblage” (Schimmel op. cit. p. 58–59).

*Edinburgh Theatre of the Future Conference*<sup>437</sup> is generally regarded as marking their arrival, though Berghaus also identifies *The Merseyside Arts Festival* in 1962, *The Festival of Misfits* in 1962 and *The Destruction of Art Symposium* in 1966 as early examples of British Happenings.<sup>438</sup> While the Happenings featured at these events were very much derived from the US Happening and from Kaprow's ideas, Berghaus suggests that "the specific structure of the British art scene quickly led to a distinct British brand of the Happening and related forms"<sup>439</sup> and that this in turn was a key component of the 'carnavalesque' theatre<sup>440</sup> of the alternative theatre movement. He states that the adoption of performance art by the rock music scene and its synthesis with vaudeville forms and comedy in the style of Monty Python<sup>441</sup> led to "a mushrooming of groups who combined the inspiration they had received from the Happenings genre with their artistic training and/or literary and dramatic interests".<sup>442</sup>

New York artist Dick Higgins' account of his Happening, *Graphis 82*<sup>443</sup>, demonstrates how the Happenings artists sought to "confound intentions" by setting up a system "delineated by certain compositional 'rules'".<sup>444</sup> *Graphis 82* was one of a series of pieces initiated in 1958, through which Dick Higgins and Letty Eisenhauer were "trying to set up a form that was unsemantic, even choreographic, in conception" and which derived from experimental music's "extraordinary notations".<sup>445</sup> A sort of map was enlarged onto a polyethylene sheet and stretched on the stage. This map was made up of what appeared to be "a series of half-connected lines and curves recalling the automatic writing used in some paintings (Matthieu, Tobey)". It had actually been created by "making incomplete and overlapping outlines from a pair of tin snips lying on a piece of paper" and using words culled from a Puerto Rican dream

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<sup>437</sup> Traverse Theatre, 7 September 1963

<sup>438</sup> Gunter Berghaus; 'Happenings in Europe: Trends, Events, and Leading Figures' in Sandford op. cit. p. 368

<sup>439</sup> Berghaus op. cit. p. 368

<sup>440</sup> Berghaus uses the same term as Kershaw. For example, Berghaus in Sandford ibid. p. 370

<sup>441</sup> Berghaus ibid. p. 370

<sup>442</sup> Berghaus cites Marowitz, WSI, People Show, John Bull's Puncture Repair Kit, the Yorkshire Gnomes, Cyclamen Cyclists and New Fol-de-Roi. Berghaus ibid. p. 369

<sup>443</sup> Performed 1–2 May 1962 at the Living Theatre, New York, USA. I have not been able to locate an account of the process of a British Happening to serve as illustration.

<sup>444</sup> Dick Higgins and Letty Eisenhauer; 'Graphis' in Sandford op. cit. p. 125

<sup>445</sup> Ibid. p. 125

book “randomly superimposed on the diagram”.<sup>446</sup> The rules of the piece were explained to performers at the first rehearsal. They were to individually create an action corresponding to each word on the map and a way of moving from one word to another:

The performers used the graphis like a map—following each line and arriving at a word where the appropriate activity was performed. Usually there was no preconceived route. Decisions were made by the actor on the spot.<sup>447</sup>

A set of time-based rules were devised to determine when the performers were to move from one word to another. These rules included those determined by the performer herself (for example, her counting to a predetermined number before moving), by another actor, or by the audience (for example, if an audience member coughed). The performance ended once the background music came to an end. Thus, we see that a great deal of the authorship and authority of the Happenings artist (the term ‘director’ seems inappropriate in this context) is delegated to the performer, to chance, to contextual circumstances. In the purest version of the System model, the artist “relinquishes complete control over the final realization of a composition”<sup>448</sup> and thereby opens the process almost entirely to the operations of chance or to the performer’s authority in the moment of performance. George Brecht’s “event scores” are an example of a system that allows an unusual degree of individual interpretation so that the performer “can enact the score in any way s/he chooses, or merely receive the message conceptually, or ignore it”.<sup>449</sup> Some systems are so simple as to constitute little more than a framing device, such as the four minutes and thirty-three seconds of Cage’s famous piece for piano.

In this, the very simplest form of the System model process, a system (a fixed score) is established at the outset and simply allowed to run its course in front of an audience. A single rehearsal may test and prepare an accepted range of responses to the directions of

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid. p. 125

<sup>447</sup> Higgins & Eisenhauer *ibid.* p. 126

<sup>448</sup> Schimmel ‘Leap in the Void: Performance and the Object’ in Schimmel *op. cit.* p. 21

<sup>449</sup> Kristine Stiles ‘Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Action’ in Schimmel *op. cit.* p. 231

the score but the process and performance are essentially indistinguishable, so that process is no longer “actions performed with the goals of producing objects” but “the execution of performative actions whose primary goal was the process of creation”.<sup>450</sup> In fact, it was rare for even the earliest forms of Happenings to take this pure form—though the myth that Happenings were entirely improvised is still with us, as can be seen from Amelia Jones’ comment that “... the loosely scripted actions of the Happening are generally unrehearsed”.<sup>451</sup> Susan Sontag dismissed this idea as early as 1962 in her important essay heralding the form:

... it is not true (as some Happening-goers suppose) that Happenings are improvised on the spot. They are carefully rehearsed for any time from a week to several months .... Much of what goes on in the performance has been worked out or choreographed in rehearsal by the performers themselves ....<sup>452</sup>

Higgins and Eisenhauer emphasise that:

However haphazard this might seem, all actions, words, and cueing situations are individually examined ahead of time by the director.<sup>453</sup>

In the case of *Graphis 82*, the director and performers worked for “many hours” to “perfect a sense of time and sensitivity to each other” and to control the “bunching up and spreading out” of the performers across the map.<sup>454</sup> Thus, process in the System model is likely to include some degree of fixing in terms of the action and of the material, as well as a period of ‘rehearsal’. At the very least, this will “continue till there is no longer any technical obstacle to performance—and no longer”.<sup>455</sup> Indeed, we will see that the live art version of the System model allows an even greater degree of individual authority.

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<sup>450</sup> Schimmel op. cit. p. 17

<sup>451</sup> Amelia Jones in Warr op. cit. p. 28

<sup>452</sup> Sontag op. cit. p. 266–267

<sup>453</sup> Higgins & Eisenhauer in Sandford op. cit. p. 127

<sup>454</sup> Higgins & Eisenhauer in Sandford ibid. p. 127

<sup>455</sup> Dick Higgins; ‘The Tart, or Miss America’ in Sandford ibid. p. 132

Whether rehearsed or not, a defining factor of the System model is its “indeterminacy”, which Nyman defines as, “... the way in which ... notation systems ... provide a bounded, limited range of possible events or actions”.<sup>456</sup> Nyman offers a framework of five ‘processes’ used to categorise the way in which intentions are confounded within a bounded frame in experimental music. These have direct application to performance and live art. They are: process determined by chance; process determined by performers (particularly through improvisation in dance and music); contextual process (which takes account of other performers or the audience); repetitive process (that has a predetermined, repetitive structure); and electronic process.<sup>457</sup> The Happening described above used several of these: the chance principle operated in the creation of the *Graphis* score and in the particular coincidences of action and movement of different performers in relation to each other, the map and the music; the performers were responsible for determining some elements of the action, both in advance (they prepared a set of actions and systems of moving) and in the moment of performance (decisions as to when and where to move); while the use of ‘outside’ elements, including involuntary and unrelated events such as an audience member coughing, demonstrates the use of a contextual system.

The more complex version of the System model, which tends to operate in the context of live rather than performance art, differs from the pure Happenings version in two respects. Firstly, rather than starting with a pre-established system, the whole group participates in the creation of the system (in which case the system constitutes the working vision that ends the conception phase of rehearsal). Thus, the creation of the system can become part of the process:

Just as the interpretation of the rules may be taken out of the [director’s] hands and become the private concern of the performer, so may the rules themselves.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Nyman op. cit. p. 21

<sup>457</sup> Nyman op. cit. pp. 5–7

<sup>458</sup> Nyman op. cit. p. 19



Secondly, the System is used as a method of generating material that will subsequently be fixed and rehearsed. In this case, fixing and rehearsal phases are more extensive and important than they are in the Happenings version of the model. The case-study of Forced Entertainment will illustrate this version of the model in more detail.

## The Process of the System Model

### Phase 1: Conception

Occasionally, this phase will be omitted or extremely curtailed—the process begins with a preconceived system that will be used to generate material in the moment of performance. In most processes, however, the conception phase will involve a search for a set of rules and a mode of operation that will form a framework score for the following phases and the performance. In other words, the central activity of this phase is the creation of a system.

### Phase 2: Generating Material

There are three aspects to this phase of the process: the system, the mode of performance and the material generated. In most cases, the participants will be 'testing' the system in order to establish the acceptable range of responses that it is likely to produce in the moment of performance. Often, there cannot be an accurate prediction of what will 'work' in performance because the indeterminate system is designed to rely on contextual processes, improvisation and chance events in the moment of rehearsal. At the same time, there will be a focus on the mode of performance and other stylistic features (for example, Higgins' attention to the performers' sense of timing and stage composition) and, in some cases, on the material that is generated (we will see an example of this in the Forced Entertainment case-study).

### Phase 3: Fixing

In the purest form, little is in fact 'fixed' in the System process (except for the system itself). Some processes will focus on the fixing of material generated during the previous phase. In most cases, there is a resistance to fixing and a performance may be designed to give the impression that there has been little intentional 'interference'.

**Phase 4: Rehearsal**

The length and nature of the rehearsal varies across the range of practice. A small-scale piece may require no rehearsal or only as much as will eliminate technical obstacles to its performance. Larger-scale and more complex cases may require an extensive rehearsal period but, again, the impression may be deliberately given that the piece is unrehearsed.

**Phase 5: Performance**

In its purest form, the performance will constitute a one-off enactment of the score. More elaborate processes use the System model to generate a body of material that is rehearsed and performed, in which case the performance is more fixed and likely to be less changeable from performance to performance.

The organisational structure of the System model varies between two extremes. At one end is a structure in which the main visioning capacity is the domain of an individual artist or director. This figure masterminds the particular system and choreographs the performers' actions. If operating the more complex live art version of the System, the director's role in fixing and rehearsal will be comparable with that of the Ensemble director: he edits the material generated to create the rehearsal score. At the other end of the scale is a structure in which there is no central authority figure and the participants themselves determine the system and its enactment, possibly through an egalitarian or collective approach. Most examples of practice sit between the two extremes. This research suggests that there is a tendency for work derived from visual arts practice to be the product of an individual artist: there is a strong lineage of solo performance and a tradition of work that sought "means of enacting and asserting the self within the social".<sup>459</sup> In the early days of performance art:

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<sup>459</sup> Warr op. cit. p. 22

... the artist (was) still operating in an environment over which he (*sic*) has total authority. He is the individual *maker*, the only animating focus of an invented world which he, as creator is bringing into being.<sup>460</sup>

Live art companies tend to constitute groups rather than individuals. Peter Frank traces the origins of such work to the New York of the late 1970s, when “performance artists (took) a(n) ... interest in ensemble presentations, despite the difficulties—personal and economic—involved in coordinating people”.<sup>461</sup> Having said this, it is important to reiterate that even the most seemingly artist-led process in these contexts resists the Romantic notion of the individual artist. There is a “fruitful paradox” to even the most seemingly individual-centred work, whereby “... the appearance of the visual artist in the role of ‘actor’ was simultaneously a destruction and an expansion of the notion of the protagonist”.<sup>462</sup> Whether working with a centralised power position or not, this model is characterised by the degree of individual authority and authorship granted to its participants, at least within the parameters delineated by the system. Schimmel describes Cage’s Black Mountain College event as one that sought to “contest the hierarchical relationships between composer and performers (by writing composition in which the latter did not simply execute the former’s instructions but made their own compositional decisions as they performed)”.<sup>463</sup> Moreover, each participant’s response to the directions of the system is self-determined, so that participants in the System model remain “compartmented” (one of the defining features of the Happening, according to Michael Kirby<sup>464</sup>), each operating along separate, independent lines of creative development. In fact, this compartmentalisation of the participants becomes an integral part of its system. Cage said of group work that “... if you have a number of people, then a nonknowledge on the part of each of what the other is going to do would be useful”.<sup>465</sup> This “nonknowledge” allows companies in this category to deliberately exploit “a mis-seeing, a

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<sup>460</sup> Coultis-Smith in Bronson & Gale op. cit. p. 225

<sup>461</sup> Peter Frank ‘Performance in New York: Towards the 1980s’ in Bronson & Gale *ibid.* p. 289

<sup>462</sup> Guy Brett ‘Life Strategies: Overview and Selection’ in Schimmel op. cit. p. 219

<sup>463</sup> Schimmel in Schimmel *ibid.* p. 22

<sup>464</sup> Michael Kirby in Sandford op. cit. p. 4

<sup>465</sup> Kirby & Schechner in Sandford op. cit. p. 57

mis-hearing, a deliberate lack of unity”<sup>466</sup> that comes about in group process. Practitioner roles (in terms of the element responsibilities) and indeed the practitioners themselves, allow the possibility of innovation through the “radical juxtaposition” of different elements and personalities. We see a hint of this in Hoban’s description of the defined areas of responsibility of *The Carrier Frequency* process. Writing just twenty-eight days prior to opening night, Hoban describes the process in which he is engaged:

At this stage of getting *The Carrier Frequency* together Graeme Miller and Steve Shill are working mainly on the sound and music and radio clips for the background track, while I’ve been writing text inserts for that and full texts for the other two planes of speech. Pete Brook, Claire MacDonald, Niki Johnson, Richard Hawley and Heather Ackroyd are concentrating on the vocabulary of the performance. Tyrone Huggins and Pete Higgs are finishing construction on the set.<sup>467</sup>

This compartmented structure is also an important distinction between the System model and the Ensemble, which is often characterised by collaboration between participants. The System and Ensemble models are also distinguishable by their different lineages and by key features of their organisational structure, culture and creative process. In terms of structure, the Ensemble’s reliance on a shared ‘big vision’ and the value placed on a ‘common language’ form a marked contrast to the ‘compartmented’ System model. While the Ensemble model values individuals—their beliefs, talent, skills and, above all, commitment to a shared vision—processes relying on systems can, in theory at least, be carried out by anyone, regardless of talent or skill—only in rare cases are individual participants’ personal philosophies of relevance. The most obvious difference in terms of process is that the Ensemble model relies on delayed, tacit scoring, while the System model utilises an early (sometimes almost preconceived), explicit system as its starting point. Despite these contrasts, the two models share a desire for innovation, an urge to create work that is distinct

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<sup>466</sup> Etchells op. cit. p. 56

<sup>467</sup> Hoban op. cit. p. 14. As Hoban explains, *The Carrier Frequency* includes three planes of text: the background transmission, the middle ground ‘Song of the Longdream Runner and, in the foreground, The Moanspeak Ritual.

from the mainstream and a belief that avoiding intention and imposition will generate work of this nature.

## Summary of Model

<b>Model</b>	<b>System Model</b>
<b>Context</b>	Happenings, performance art and 'carnavalesque' alternative art from the 1950s Live art from the 1980s
<b>Illustrative examples</b>	US Happenings: John Cage, Kaprow, Dick Higgins Britain: People Show, Station House Opera, Impact
<b>Style</b>	Live events characterised by a post-modern aesthetic. Non-literary, non-representational and not expressionistic.
<b>Ethos</b>	Born out of rejection of established forms and particularly the Romantic notion of the artist. Aims at confounding the individual and personal expression of the artists by the imposition of an external system.
<b>Structure</b>	A group of independent practitioners. At its extreme, they engage in independent creative acts, united only by time, space and perhaps a system of cueing. Some versions have a director who is the main authority and, in some senses, author. Person Culture.
<b>Key features of the process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The vision and score consists of a system designed to generate material in performance.</li> <li>• More elaborate versions of the process will 'rehearse' the material generated by the system, often while maintaining the illusion that the work is being created in the moment of performance.</li> </ul>

The case-study on Forced Entertainment (Chapter Nine) will develop some of the points made here regarding the characteristics and practice of live art. While an important example of live art and the System model, Forced Entertainment will also be shown to carry some of

the characteristics of the Ensemble model. Chapter Ten will look at a much shorter and, in some ways, simpler process by Gary Stevens—an artist whose work derives from a performance art tradition. It will consider some of the issues that stem from cross-disciplinary practice.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Double Act and the Network Models

This chapter describes two models of devising that are emerging at the present time in response to certain shifts in the cultural and, to some degree, the socio-economic climate of Britain. The Double Act model, which occurs in the context of physical comedy, has grown from physical theatre traditions and therefore takes on some elements from the Ensemble model, particularly the two-part structure that seeks to organise the 'magic' of creativity. Physical comedy is also strongly influenced by a tradition of populist forms, as well as Dada and Surrealism—precedents it shares with some of the performance art of the 1960s. With this, the physical comedy model takes on aspects of the System model. The Network model is developing in response to the adoption by some contemporary theatre companies of new technologies as a theatrical language. Like the System model, it relies on a score established early in the process and on the compartmentalisation of its participants, although the new technology-led performance does not always share the prevailing ethos of companies in the live art context. We will see that the Network model deviates most strongly from the models outlined so far in this thesis.

### The Double Act in Physical Comedy

Physical comedy is a form that typifies the early work of many physical theatre companies. While their more mature work might be termed 'high art', the early productions of Théâtre de Complicité<sup>468</sup>, for example, drew on popular comedy traditions and practices dating as far back as Commedia Dell'Arte<sup>469</sup>, ones which Jacques Lecoq has formalised into systems

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<sup>468</sup> For example, *A Minute Too Late* (ICA, London, *International Mime Festival*, October 1984) and *More Bigger Snacks Now* (The Assembly Rooms, *Edinburgh Fringe Festival*, August 1985)

<sup>469</sup> See Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards; *The Commedia Dell'Arte: A Documentary History*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990, for a useful description and account of the form.

such as clowning and bouffon.<sup>470</sup> The physical comedy companies that followed Complicite—there has been a proliferation of them since the mid-1990s—also display a taste for the surreal (making use of creative techniques that, like the System model, bear the hallmarks of Dada and surrealist games) and for stage and screen comedy such as the Monty Python, Morecambe and Wise, Laurel and Hardy.<sup>471</sup> Companies such as The Right Size, Peepolykus, the clown Angela De Castro, Spymonkey and Ridiculusmus (though the latter distinguishes itself from these “shallow but fun”<sup>472</sup> examples) share an approach that Peepolykus’ Javier Marzan summarises thus: “all we’re interested in is making people laugh and amusing ourselves”.<sup>473</sup>

This determination to remain populist may well be due to economic as well as aesthetic considerations. Physical comedy companies set out to widen their audiences through accessible productions. Their shows are also cheaper to make, employing fewer participants<sup>474</sup> and shorter development times than some of the more large-scale and serious works of, for example, Complicite. The most pared down of these companies consist of just a pair of performer-directors who undertake all visioning, authority and authorship functions (though they may delegate some for the length of a single project), as well as performing. Examples include Hamish McColl and Sean Foley in the Right Size and David Woods and Jon Hough in Ridiculusmus. In an interesting inversion of the usual core-and-pool structure, this core of performers will sometimes bring a ‘freelance’ director in on a single project (Cal McCrystal and Angela de Castro regularly direct other companies’ work),

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<sup>470</sup> See Jacques Lecoq with Jean-Gabriel Carasso and Jean-Claude Lallias; *The Moving Body (Le Corps Poétique): Teaching Creative Theatre*, translated by David Bradby, London: Methuen 2000 pp. 108–116 on Commedia Dell’Arte, pp. 117–125 for Bouffons and pp. 143–154 for Clowns

<sup>471</sup> This borrowing of popular form is not without precedent: Artaud, for example, makes reference to the Marx Brothers: ‘Production and Metaphysics’ in Antonin Artaud; *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by Victor Corti, London: Calder Publications 2001 p. 32

<sup>472</sup> David Woods; *Ridiculusmus: An Analysis of the Current Practice of Ridiculusmus Theatre Company*: manuscript of thesis for submission for Master’s degree in Practice as Research at the University of Kent 2003 p. 104

<sup>473</sup> Post-show audience discussion following a production of *Let the Donkey Go* at the Lyric Studio, Hammersmith, London, 25 September 2001

<sup>474</sup> In his survey of Lecoq’s influence on young British theatre companies, Franc Chamberlain notes that physical comedy companies such as Peepolykus, Broohaha, Hoipolloi and Bouge-de-Là tend to be small in size because of funding issues. Franc Chamberlain and Ralph Yarrow (eds.); *Lecoq and the British theatre*, London: Routledge 2002 p. 14

or employ other performers and participants from their pool or beyond. The double act share authority and authorship functions in a structure that allows them to 'riff off each other', provoking unexpected responses through the sort of brain-storming and improvisational activities that characterise their processes. Like the long traditions of both comic and 'straight' double acts<sup>475</sup>, the new physical comedy double act enjoys the friction between participants whose contrasting personalities send sparks flying. As with the surrealists, there is a suspension of 'straight' thinking and a taste for the gleefully inventive. We are reminded of de Bono's notion of lateral thinking or Koestler's bi-sociation (see Chapter Two). Callery's brief account of the Right Size's production of *Bewilderness*<sup>476</sup> shows the value the company places on inventive ideas:

It's the idea that comes first. Going into rehearsal they only know that they would like to meet Freddie Jones down the back of the sofa.

Or

'Wouldn't it be great if someone was in a broom costume?' said Alice [Power, design] in a design meeting. 'Yes. Hilarious. We'll do it', agreed Hamish [McColl] and Sean [Foley], without the faintest notion of how to fit it into the show.<sup>477</sup>

In their operational strategy, the ideas come first. By committing to such ideas, the performers set themselves a score that consists of a series of fixed moments. They now have to connect these moments, filling the gaps in order to put the material into a workable form. At the time of Callery's account, the Right Size was still struggling with this process: "... we're constantly trying to rationalise the storylines ...".<sup>478</sup>

David Woods and Jon Hough of Ridiculusmus have developed a process in which a large proportion of the time is spent on the conception and material-generation phase, before

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<sup>475</sup> The archetype of master and servant in classical Greek and Roman comedy and Commedia Dell'Arte are early precedents of the double act form. Other examples range from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, to Morecambe and Wise, to Vic Reeves and Bob Mortimer.

<sup>476</sup> Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, 25 April 2001

<sup>477</sup> Dymphna Callery; 'More Props – and a Bigger Set' in *Total Theatre* 13/01/01 p. 11

<sup>478</sup> Hamish McColl, quoted in Callery *ibid.* p. 11

entering the fixing phase. The initial phases of their process involve the two performers in extravagant and foolhardy activities, including “putting ourselves into life situations that will inform the work rather than drawing on personal experience we’ve already had”. This includes ‘undercover’ work, organising shams, “walkabouts” and observations, collecting and absorbing themselves into relevant literature and other resources and “freeform” extended improvisations—in some cases within the “life situations”.<sup>479</sup> The later stages of the process involve the transcription of the freeform improvisations to form “draft scripts”—the basis of informal public performances that are recorded on video as an aid to further revision and restructuring. Thus, we see that, in some respects, the Double Act process shares the two-part structure of the Ensemble, where the ‘magic’ of the first phase is organised in the second. However, unlike the Ensemble model, the Double Act allows provisional scores (ideas such as including a broom costume in the Right Size process described above) to be fixed relatively early. The separate ideas may generate an assortment of seemingly mismatched ‘turns’ and it is the work of phase 3 to unite these. The Double Act is unusual in that a framework score (or more accurately a collection of unrelated but fixed scores) can occur before a precise vision of the whole production is fully conceived.

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<sup>479</sup> Woods op. cit. p. 14

## The Process of the Double Act Model

### **Phase 1: Conception**

The conception phase is particularly long and elaborate, characterised by activities designed to provoke unexpected responses and creative risks. Typically, the participants will commit to outlandish tasks or ideas that they will subsequently attempt to fit into the show. The sum of these 'ideas' in fact constitutes a framework score, even though the company might have a strong resistance to a preconceived vision.

### **Phase 2: Generating Material**

The shift from phase 1 to 2 occurs gradually, at the point when the performers feel they have a surfeit of 'ideas'. Phase 2 will centre on the generation of a number of set pieces (in response to the ideas of phase 1), with perhaps little consideration as to how these fit together. Only towards the end of the phase will the participants start filling in the gaps between the set pieces and attempt to construct a narrative structure.

### **Phase 3: Fixing**

As both McColl and Woods suggest, the transition into this phase tends to be problematic—not in terms of the authorship issues of the Collective model but in terms of the challenge of creating order out of the deliberately chaotic range of ideas and material generated thus far. As with the Ensemble model (though in a very different register), the 'magic' must be 'organised' in a way that retains its spontaneous, intuitive qualities. It is often the case that some sort of written form of the score marks the outcome of this phase of activity.

### **Phase 4: Rehearsal**

There is often a deliberate, unfinished style to some of the productions, which suggests a loose performance score. However, this is often a result of extensive rehearsal and physical discipline, despite the seeming casualness of performance style.

## Phase 5: Performance

Physical comedy will often allow for interaction with the audience and routines that play on the liveness of the performance situation (e.g. Peepolykus 'corpsing' in *Let the Donkey Go*<sup>480</sup> or Ridiculusmus apparently forgetting their lines in *Ideas Men*<sup>481</sup>).

In practice, as well as in policy<sup>482</sup>, the physical comedy groups tend to exemplify a particularly egalitarian model of process. This is due, in part no doubt, to the small size of the companies as well as their relative youth. It is also likely to be an outcome of the extended conception phase and the participants' willingness to take on quirky ideas, even when they seem at first to have no relevance to the initial vision: ideas are valued irrespective of where they come from. The Double Act therefore represents a model that is unusually egalitarian and organic.

### The Network Model in Design- and Technology-led Theatre

In his overview of the emerging theatrical forms at the turn of this century, Lavender lists "the increasing presence of multi-media performance" as one of three "major explorations in British theatre in the 1990s" and cites Robert Lepage as a key influence on the British incarnation of the form.<sup>483</sup> More recently, he has described the recent emergence of performance technologies as having an explosive impact:

... the ferment around the use of 'new' technology in the theatre has been bubbling at a rate which suggests something more than merely routine is happening. The seep of video and graphic imagery into performances has become a deluge, and

<sup>480</sup> The Pleasance Theatre, Edinburgh, August 1996

<sup>481</sup> The Pit, Barbican Theatre, London, 30 September 2003 as part of the *BITE:03 festival*

<sup>482</sup> For example, Woods describes the "joint ownership agreement" the pair drew up in 2002 and explains that they are "mindful to acknowledge everyone's contribution under our direction and editing in the programme" when working in large cast shows (Woods op. cit. p. 29).

<sup>483</sup> Andy Lavender; 'Turns and Transformations' in Colin Chambers and Vera Gottlieb (eds.); *Theatre in a Cool Climate*, London: Amber Lane Press 1999 p. 180

ours is perhaps not dissimilar to the moment when electric lighting altered what it was possible to show in the theatre.<sup>484</sup>

Lavender's history sketches out three phases of technology's incursion into theatre practice: 'modernism' (associated by Lavender with Piscator's work of the late 1920s), which uses film images to provide a "window on the world" and produce a realist effect that attempts to authenticate the message of the performance<sup>485</sup>; 'post-modernism' (the example given is the Wooster Group's *Route 1 & 9*<sup>486</sup>), which uses analogue video and television to subvert and pastiche, producing an effect that is deconstructive, fragmenting and decentring; and the 'Network Age', which is influenced by the advent of Internet technology. Lavender uses the example of the Japanese company Dumb Type's *MemoRandum*<sup>487</sup> to show how the principles of "interactivity", "swift communication of meaning" and "democratisation" are "embedded in the very artworks which spring from this modern matrix".<sup>488</sup> The 'Network Age', then, uses technology to expand the theatrical experience rather than to teach (as does the modernist) or to disorientate (as does the post-modernist).<sup>489</sup> Contemporary British manifestations of theatre of the 'Network Age' include Station House Opera's *How to Behave*<sup>490</sup>, Shunt's *Dance Bear Dance*<sup>491</sup>, Blast Theory's work since the late 1990s in 'mixed reality' contexts such as computer simulations and gaming and the recent work of Random Dance.

Devising is a common methodology in technology-led theatre. This is partly an outcome of its practitioners' desire to distinguish their work from the forms and values of script-led theatre but is often also a matter of practicality. The companies will include participants who have

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<sup>484</sup> Andy Lavender; '2D/3D' in *Performance/Technologies, A User's Guide* (published by King Alfred's Winchester 2003 p. 4). This publication was developed from the *Re:Visions* seminar that opened the *Visions Festival* in Brighton in 2002—an event which reflected the growing importance of technology-driven theatre.

<sup>484</sup> Lavender 2002 *ibid.* p. 4

<sup>485</sup> Lavender 2002 *op. cit.* p. 5

<sup>486</sup> The Performing Garage, New York, 1981–82

<sup>487</sup> Le Manège-Scène Nationale, Théâtre du Manège, Maubeuge, France, *Festival de Danse* 1999

<sup>488</sup> Lavender 2002 *op. cit.* p. 6

<sup>489</sup> Lavender 2002 *op. cit.* p. 7

<sup>490</sup> Hampstead Theatre, Hampstead, London, February 2003

<sup>491</sup> The Arch, Bethnal Green, London, May 2003

expertise in the relevant technology in positions where they are likely to enjoy more visioning, authority and authorship than they might in more typical practice or in other contexts. The process is unusual in that the vision and score, or at least key elements of it, are set relatively early. In fact, certain fixed elements will act as the organising system, operating something like the system of the System model. This is, again, an outcome of practical considerations: recorded sound scores, film and some set design require time and effort to create and are more 'fixed' in their nature than performance. They are less changed, if at all, by an ongoing scoring process. For this reason, the less fixed elements (typically the performance) develop in response to these 'givens'. Outlining the creative process of *Frankenstein*<sup>492</sup>, Tim Britton and Penny Saunders of Forkbeard Fantasy described how making the filmed elements effectively set other aspects of the production early in the process: "once you've made the film, you're stuck with the characters".<sup>493</sup> Another common outcome of this emphasis on design and technology is that a considerable amount of planning takes place in advance of the project, particularly in relation to expensive and time-consuming fixed elements. Saunders went on to explain that the early "devising" takes place "with everyone around a table".

Lightwork (Andy Lavender's company) serves to exemplify the structure and process of the Network model of devising.<sup>494</sup> *London/My Lover*<sup>495</sup> brought together the director and his assistant, a designer, two performers, a movement trainer, a sound designer/engineer, two professional filmmakers, two camera-operators and two people who operated the vision mixers. The creative process took place over a two-month period. Early meetings took place 'round a table' as a framework score was drawn up: essentially a time-line that identified each scene in terms of its time and location. The next phase consisted of a series of practical trials in which the whole company explored possibilities for each of the scenes in the time-line. While the performers improvised actions appropriate to each scene: the

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<sup>492</sup> Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, London, 7 November 2001

<sup>493</sup> Post-show audience discussion following a production of *Frankenstein* at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, London, 19 November 2001

<sup>494</sup> As a young company, Lightwork has not yet achieved the recognition of other companies featured in this chapter. However, I have chosen it as a case because I had access to (in fact, participated in) the creative process of their most recent production, *London/My Lover* and am therefore able to give a detailed account of the process.

<sup>495</sup> ICA, London, *International Mime Festival 2002*, 21 January 2002



camera operators and vision mixers explored potential shots and effects, the designer tested different materials from which to create a projection screen and showed a series of model sets, and the sound designer experimented with sound ideas. Each trial resulted in a more defined set of ideas for each of the scenes so that, by the end of the first month, the director was able to organise the participants into teams that would each take responsibility for a particular element, setting them independent projects (often outside of the rehearsal studio).<sup>496</sup> Each team was armed with a general sense of the vision (established through the trial period) and, in some cases, a set of guiding principles. For example, the video-makers were told that:

The video material shows the texture of the environment: no more, no less. It does so predominantly through close-up>extreme close-up. The camera is locked off and usually static to enhance the cool, factual, observational feel.<sup>497</sup>

The final period of rehearsal involved the bringing together of the separate elements and the establishing of very tight performance scores for all elements, with the last two weeks characterised by attention to fine detail and, in particular, practising the highly complex system of 'cues' that could come from almost any of the other elements. Operating one of the two vision mixers, I was taking cues from my on-stage camera operator (so as to bring in her live feed only once she had got her shot), from my fellow vision mixer (the pre-recorded footage for each projection was designed to be shown in a particular relation to the other and our fades needed to be synchronised), from the performers and from the soundscape. At the same time, the sound operator was taking cues from the performers and from the projected footage; the on-stage camera operators from the performers and from each other. The result was a complex network of 'cues'.

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<sup>496</sup> The sound designer set about capturing sound and composing; the outdoor scenes were filmed; the designer organised the build of the set; the performers worked on their live performances.

<sup>497</sup> E-mail correspondence from Andy Lavender to Detsky Forsythe-Graffam, 24 November 2001

## The Process of the Network Model

<b>Phase 1: Conception</b>
<p>The conception phase tends to take place 'round a table' rather than in a rehearsal room and a vision will be established early in the process through discussion. Tools such as story-boards, models, drawings and so on will be used to give explicit form to the vision. By the end of this phase, a detailed framework score is produced.</p>
<b>Phase 2: Generating Material</b>
<p>The company is likely to be broken into teams, with each one responsible for the stage element that relates to their particular technical expertise—something like the compartmented structure of the System model or the teams in large-scale versions of the Participatory model. The detailed framework score ensures that little extraneous material is generated. The director will take on an overseeing role, 'dipping into' each team and liaising between them to ensure that their work can eventually be integrated.</p>
<b>Phase 3: Fixing</b>
<p>In this phase, the elements that have been worked separately are brought together and integrated. The ease with which this happens depends on the clarity of the phase 1 vision and on technical issues.</p>
<b>Phase 4: Rehearsal</b>
<p>This phase is likely to be relatively long to allow for technical glitches that may occur and for the participants to learn the complex scores (including cues) that will characterise the performance. At least as much attention is given to the technical elements as to the performance—which can be disconcerting for performers accustomed to receiving much more attention and direction.</p>

### Phase 5: Performance

The performances are characterised by a tight, fixed and highly complex performance score built on a network of cues. Loose or improvisational performance tends to be rare and restricted to moments in the production where performers play a more dominant role.

There are two factors that typify the Network model. The first is the way in which the structure of the company is democratised in relation to the relatively flat hierarchy of performance elements. In design-led theatre, this democratisation might constitute a renegotiation of traditional status distribution so that, for example, the technical crew might be recognised as being as 'creative' as the creative team (director, designers and performers, by tradition). Technology-led devising may also involve participants or activities that fall outside of the conventional participant roles. In technology-led practices in particular, the democratisation filters down to the micro-level, so that in the direction-response cycle the 'direction'—in the form of both creative 'input' in the theatre-making process and the cues that structure the performance—can come from any of the elements. We have seen that the scoring process, like the 'Network Age' itself, is defined by "interactivity", "swift exchanges of information" and "random sites of exchange".<sup>498</sup> The democratised structure does not necessarily negate the leadership of the director. Her responsibilities start with setting a clear framework and vision to ensure the work of the teams will eventually result in a coherent whole and managing the reintegration of the separate teams and their work as the process nears its end. The second key feature is the vertical splitting of responsibility in relation to production elements and the participants' areas of expertise. Individual practitioners often have a great deal of visioning, authority and authorship within a prescribed area of expertise and might work independently for periods of time. Because the material produced tends to constitute highly fixed elements (pre-recorded footage or sound composition in the case of the Lightwork project described above), an important role for the director is to find a way of integrating these into the final production.

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<sup>498</sup> Lavender *op. cit.* p. 6

The Network model of devising retains the element of the 'magic' that exemplifies the Ensemble model. The processes of both models set up a structure for unexpected discovery, particularly in relation to the untapped potential of the technology used.<sup>499</sup> Work in this context places value on "the Unique Moment"<sup>500</sup> that emerges as an unexpected, 'magical' response outside of the intention and control of any one participant.

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<sup>499</sup> In his study on the surprising links between new technologies and spirituality, Erik Davis argues that "new technologies are magical because they function as magic, opening up novel and protean spaces of possibility ...". Erik Davis; *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*, London: Serpent's Tail 1999 p. 181. He cites Arthur C. Clarke's maxim that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (p. 180).

<sup>500</sup> Michael Nyman; *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999 p. 8

## Summary of Models

Model	Double Act Model
<b>Context</b>	Physical comedy from the 1980s
<b>Illustrative examples</b>	<p>Early Théâtre de Complicité</p> <p>The Right Size</p> <p>Ridiculusmus</p>
<b>Style</b>	A surreal, lightweight comedic approach.
<b>Ethos</b>	<p>Aims to make 'accessible' theatre that appeals to young audiences. Companies are typified by a risk-taking approach and a willingness to commit to new, unexpected ideas.</p>
<b>Structure</b>	<p>A core of two performers who are the key authorities in the process and who may employ other practitioners (including the director) on a project-by-project basis. Informality in terms of practitioner roles. A Person Culture.</p>
<b>Key features of the process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An extended 'creative' period, which produces an abundance of potential visions, ideas and material. Material will be generated as a series of moments or 'turns'.</li> <li>• A fixing stage, which brings together the 'turns' produced during the earlier phases. The performance score may retain a seemingly 'thrown together' feel.</li> </ul>

Model	Network Model
<b>Context</b>	Technology-led theatre from the 1980s. Some visual and design-led theatre from the 1970s
<b>Illustrative examples</b>	Forkbeard Fantasy Lightwork
<b>Style</b>	The inclusion of technology that is not traditionally used in theatre contexts such as film, video or digital image projection, or internet technology. Often, a structure that is more akin to music than traditional narrative.
<b>Ethos</b>	An interest in the 'magical' effects of using new technology in a theatrical context. A practical approach to the organisational complexities of using new technology.
<b>Structure</b>	A group of practitioners whose roles are defined according to expertise. There tends to be a fairly egalitarian approach, growing from a shared vision. A Person Culture.
<b>Key features of the process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A vision and framework score are conceived relatively quickly. The framework score determines the work of the participant group and sets parameters for their independent explorations.</li> <li>• The fixing stage is unlikely to bring about any radical changes in terms of the vision but will focus on integrating element-scores that have been created separately.</li> </ul>

## Part III: Case-Studies

### Chapter 8:

David Glass Ensemble

'The Unheimlich Spine'

The Ensemble and the Participatory Model

### Chapter 9:

Forced Entertainment

'The Travels'

The System and the Ensemble Model

### Chapter 10:

Gary Stevens

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The System Model

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Case-Studies: The David Glass Ensemble

The David Glass Ensemble (DGE) is, in many ways, exemplary of the Ensemble model of devising and the forms of theatre associated with it. This is most apparent in the company's visionary approach and its search for innovation. In discussing the reception of his work, the DGE's director, David Glass, referred to practitioners such as Pina Bausch, Jan Fabre and Lindsay Kemp, whom he saw as:

... trying to find a language which they don't see around them ... their thinking is quite evolved beyond what is happening at the centre, and there won't be many forms that will easily sit with that vision .... [New companies] have usually seen a show they've liked, they've been inspired by it. It's not often that it has come from a personal vision of theatre: something they're *not* seeing.<sup>501</sup>

It is clear that Glass feels a strong allegiance with these auteur-directors and their mission to create theatre that "they don't see around them", describing himself in the company literature as "an *enfant terrible*, searching constantly for new forms, new themes and new audiences".<sup>502</sup> His own "personal vision of theatre" is typical of practitioners who developed their approach during the 1970s and who work in forms that set them apart from the pervading literary tradition and from other companies' approaches. The DGE's touring theatre productions (which the DGE refers to as its 'Productions' strand<sup>503</sup>) are characterised by the use of physical theatre techniques and a distinctive visual aesthetic, both of which resist the realist approach in favour of stage metaphor and abstract representation: Glass believes that "literalisation is anathema to theatre".<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Interview with David Glass, 3 April 2001

<sup>502</sup> The *Lost Child Trilogy* brochure produced by the David Glass Ensemble, London 2000. An updated version was published in March 2005

<sup>503</sup> David Glass; 'Strands' on the David Glass Ensemble website; available from: [www.davidglassensemble.com/strands.htm](http://www.davidglassensemble.com/strands.htm) (visited 23/12/04)

<sup>504</sup> David Glass interviewed in Gabrielle Giannachi and Mary Luckhurst (eds.); *On Directing: Interviews with Directors*, London: Faber & Faber 1999 p. 44



Most of the DGE's theatre work is devised using popular or cult texts as a starting point, for example, from cartoon (e.g. *Popeye in Exile*<sup>505</sup>), film (e.g. *Les Enfants du Paradis*<sup>506</sup>, *La Dolce Vita*<sup>507</sup> and *The Tingler*<sup>508</sup>, which inspired *Unheimlich Spine*), novels (e.g. *Gormenghast*<sup>509</sup>) and fairy tales (e.g. *The Hansel Gretel Machine*<sup>510</sup> and *The Red Thread*<sup>511</sup>). The productions are laboriously crafted, taking an average of eighteen months intensive work to complete before touring. Glass invariably casts performers whose physical theatre training is similar to—if less extensive than—his own, or who at least have a strong physical expressiveness. The creative processes are characterised by a great emphasis on training<sup>512</sup>, particularly the acquisition of new physical skills for each production. *Gormenghast*, for example, utilised gothic and romantic melodrama, capoeira, Chinese opera and chorus work<sup>513</sup>, as well as intensive research into relevant areas of knowledge. The visual aesthetic means that design is of particular importance in Glass' work and in his process. He states that, "I form very specific design concepts before I start work on rehearsals .... These visual metaphors are an inherent part of the form and the story-telling, and I spend a lot of time with a designer discussing how to capture them".<sup>514</sup>

Glass complains of "the marginalisation of visual and physical theatre" in the UK<sup>515</sup> and the misapprehension of his work by critics:

I have felt that my work is increasingly misunderstood by critics in this country .... I find that fundamental intellectual aspects of my work are not perceived by critics at all, as though they are baffled by theatre-making which does not conform to certain traditions.<sup>516</sup>

<sup>505</sup> The Robin Howard Theatre, The Place, London, 23 January 1993

<sup>506</sup> Cambridge Theatre Company, Cambridge, 1993 (co-directed with Mike Alfreds)

<sup>507</sup> Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, London, 9 April 1996

<sup>508</sup> Directed by William Castles, 1959, US

<sup>509</sup> The Studio, Alhambra Theatre, 22 January 1992

<sup>510</sup> The Purcell Room, London, 1998

<sup>511</sup> *The Young Vic*, London, 2000 (developed in Manila, The Philippines, in 1999)

<sup>512</sup> In fact, the DGE operates another strand of activity in the form of 'Training and Learning', featuring workshops, residencies, research and development, and other activities.

<sup>513</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. 43

<sup>514</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst ibid. p. 41

<sup>515</sup> *The Lost Child Trilogy* brochure op. cit.

<sup>516</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. 46

However, it is evident that Glass wants to be seen as working ‘on the edge’ and as confronting the mainstream. Whether or not critics do indeed overlook or misunderstand his work and—if this is the case—whether this is due to intolerance of innovative ideas and non-British traditions, is debatable. What is important is that Glass’ sense of himself as ‘marginalised’ is integral to his “personal vision of the theatre”; in fact it is the *raison d’être* of his company. This is also one of the features that makes his work typical of the Ensemble model.

Glass developed his methodology in contexts that place him firmly within the lineage of physical theatre outlined in Chapter Five. Prior to establishing the DGE in 1989, Glass enjoyed a successful career as a solo performer, innovating on his training with practitioners such as Decroux, Barrault, Lecoq, Gaulier, Théâtre du Mouvement, Alvin Ailey and Peter Brook, as well as circus performers.<sup>517</sup> As a pioneer of new mime, Glass was of the first generation of Lecoq-trained practitioners to come back to the UK from Paris (although Lecoq is only one of a vast range of training systems from which he borrows). This, together with the critical success of early productions such as *The Mosquito Coast*<sup>518</sup>, should perhaps make him more popular than he is within a field of scholarship concerned with the tradition and practice of non-literary forms of theatre-making. Likewise, his influence on contemporary practice is not as widely acknowledged by the current generation of practitioners and scholars as it might be, though it is noted from time to time:

... his influence on the wider British theatrical community has been incalculable. every director, actor or student who works in a physical style, uses acrobatics, Noh or design-based techniques to express texts, owes something to Glass.<sup>519</sup>

As suggested in Chapter Seven, the popularity in England of relatively large-scale, serious physical theatre is perhaps beginning to wane, replaced by the more accessible and

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<sup>517</sup> *The Lost Child Trilogy* brochure op. cit.

<sup>518</sup> Nuffield Theatre, Southampton, 1994

<sup>519</sup> Gillian Piggot; ‘Theseus and the Minotaur at the Polka Theatre’ *Croydon Advertiser*, 21 May 1999

commercial second generation of physical comedy companies. Likewise, the positive critical reception that the DGE achieved in the early 1990s has never really been matched by the work since. The DGE now seems to attract a small yet loyal fan-base and, in terms of press coverage, rarely more than reviews of productions in the national papers (in other words, there are few extended features or interviews)—the quotation above, for example, is taken from a local newspaper. This suggests that Glass is perhaps justified in his belief that his work does not receive the recognition it deserves in the UK. Whether his marginalisation is due to his being an *enfant terrible* or simply that the aesthetic of his work is perhaps somewhat old-fashioned is, as mentioned above, a matter of debate.

DGE is also typical of the Ensemble model in terms of its aspiration towards an ensemble structure. While it is an economic impossibility for the company to retain a permanent group of participants, efforts are made to sustain a pool of regular participants who share a set of values, a 'big vision' and a sense of their mission. The pool, which includes two participants of the case-study process (designer Ruth Finn and performer Amit Lahav), is centred around a permanent core made up of Glass (as artistic director) and his producer Matthew Jones<sup>520</sup>.

A company document describes the structure of the DGE as:

... a pool of creative individuals ... who share similar creative values and similar creative vocabularies. Whilst not always working together, they come together in different combinations on a project by project basis but are bound by their shared vision of performing arts being of intrinsic cultural and social value.<sup>521</sup>

It is this "shared vision", "creative values ... and creative vocabularies" that makes this pool something close to a true ensemble. One aspect of the vision—the belief that performing arts are of "intrinsic cultural and social value"—has also inspired Glass to expand his work beyond the theatre-based context into community, education and development work through

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<sup>520</sup> At the time of this case-study, the company also had two other members of administrative staff (Jennie McClure and Marleen Mikhail) and was located in The Leathermarket, London Bridge, London. Currently, the company is constituted of Jones and Glass, with Athena Mandis in a role that encompasses both administrative and creative functions. The company has relocated to an office in Brewer Street, London.

<sup>521</sup> The David Glass Ensemble induction document for *Unheimlich Spine* participants.

a third strand of activity: the Lost Child Project. Set up in 1997, this project organises and facilitates workshops and productions with disadvantaged children around the world. It represents a rapidly expanding strand of the DGE's work, particularly following the foundation of their Centre for Creative Development in Cambodia, which currently occupies Glass for much of the year.<sup>522</sup> Like the theatre work, this participatory work can be seen as a realisation of Glass' "personal vision of the theatre". Glass claims that his interest in working with children stems from a job he took in the 1970s, teaching mime to autistic children at a school in Montpellier, France.<sup>523</sup> Thus, as well as typifying the Ensemble model of devising, the DGE also operates in an applied theatre context through a Participatory model. Glass' statements concerning the potential of theatrical process to enhance personal, social and other aspects echo, and perhaps even surpass, the sort of claims made by the companies discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis:

... the idea of the companies (*sic*) founder David Glass that creativity is a life enhancing and fundamentally positive outcome of 'good relationships (*sic*) building'. That the process of creative relationship building is fundamental to life long development, learning and celebration. Thus it renews and enhances self worth, self development, kinship and community development and feeds broader cultural development. This central principle is thought to be of increased importance at this time of unprecedented change and global upheaval. David Glass feels that more than ever in this time of cold technologies and electronic culture, simple human creative activities that nurture emotional, physical, imaginative and spiritual development are key in the work of the ensemble.<sup>524</sup>

Like other companies operating in applied theatre contexts, Glass makes a strong claim for the efficacy of performance for building individual, interpersonal and, eventually, cultural

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<sup>522</sup> See *The Lost Child* brochure op. cit.

<sup>523</sup> David Glass 'Human Rights/Human Rites' keynote speech at the *Staging Human Rights* conference, Palace People's Projects, Queen Mary, University of London, 11 July 2001

<sup>524</sup> The David Glass Ensemble induction document op. cit. David Glass has subsequently published a handbook which outlines his approach to participatory and process-oriented devising. David Glass; *Creative Practice: a Guide to Creativity in Development*, Phnom Penh and London: VBNK and the David Glass Ensemble 2003

well-being—what I have elsewhere called the ‘process-oriented’ qualities of theatre practice. What is unusual about Glass’ statement is the emphasis placed on “good relationship building”. This phrase reinforces the importance the company places on interpersonal contact, the recruitment of like-minded participants and a shared set of values that unites the group to the extent that the binding force of this shared vision is, itself, an aspect of the vision.

There is a symbiotic relationship between the DGE’s Productions strand (of which the process covered by this case-study is an example) and the participatory work undertaken in the Lost Child Project and the Learning and Training strands of the company’s activities.<sup>525</sup> This is most evident in the way that company members’ experiences of working with children form an important part of the research for theatre productions—the three productions of the Lost Child Trilogy (*The Hansel Gretel Machine*, *The Lost Child* and *The Red Thread*) grew directly out of the Lost Child Project activities. The work abroad is also a powerful tool for binding together the pool of participants that constitute the ensemble: performers who have worked with disadvantaged children on behalf of the DGE show a great commitment to the company and seem to genuinely take its values to heart.<sup>526</sup> The symbiotic relationship is also expressed in the more subtle ways that Glass attempts to “nurture emotional, physical, imaginative and spiritual development” in those who participate in his theatre work.

Glass’ interest in the participatory, therapeutic, process-oriented nature of devising on the one hand and his product-oriented mission to create innovative, visionary theatre on the other is reflected in a description he gives of what he sees as the dual role of the director. As “the organizer of space, time and bodies”<sup>527</sup>, Glass is the auteur-director, expressing his visual and physical aesthetic and developing the new forms and languages that characterise his ongoing vision. We will see in the following account of a DGE process that Glass takes

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<sup>525</sup> The fourth strand of the company’s activities is Film and Media, which includes the production of documentary film and music CDs.

<sup>526</sup> Subsequent to writing this chapter, I interviewed a performer who had participated in both Lost Child projects abroad and toured with a production in the UK. This performer expressed grave concern for what he saw as Glass’ “unethical” conduct in relation to both the workshop participants and the performers themselves. The performer wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>527</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. 43

on a great deal of authority and authorship in respect to this aspect of the role, expecting participants to defer to his own vision to the extent that one of the participants in this process described his own role as that of a 'warm prop'. An analogy Glass himself has made on more than one occasion between the theatrical process and an etching plate (described in Chapter Two) inadvertently echoes this performer's criticism. According to the analogy, the experiences of the process (exercises engineered by the director; individual research undertaken by the performer; unintended, coincidental occurrences) etch a line on the plate that represents the actor's psyche and body. A pattern emerges as these lines multiply and overlap. Whilst the rehearsals are likened to preparing the etching plate, the performances are like the prints made from the plate so that "like a run of prints, each of the performances looks similar to the another (*sic*) but is in fact very different".<sup>528</sup> This evocative image ultimately sees the performer as a passive recipient of experiences that inform her performance but which by-pass her conscious awareness and intention. Like the performers that Complicite's Simon McBurney described on the first night of *Street of Crocodiles*, they "don't know what they're doing".<sup>529</sup> Their role is to embody, but not necessarily to understand, agree with, 'own', or participate in creating, Glass' vision. The performer is not just an actor-as-interpreter—as opposed to an actor-as-creator—but an unconscious interpreter at that.

The second aspect of directing, according to Glass, is:

... dealing with sensitive individuals and their psychic lives. Certain subject matters can be delicate and the psyche is vulnerable; delving below the surface of the conscious mind can release enormous creative energy but it can also release psychoses and problems. As a director you must be alert to all this and know how to manage it.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst *ibid.* p. 42

<sup>529</sup> See Chapter Five of this thesis.

<sup>530</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst *op. cit.* p. 43

In fact Glass does more than “manage” the psychic lives of sensitive individuals; he takes on the task of providing a ‘therapeutic’ creative experience for his participants. In his theatre work, as much as in his work with children, Glass attempts to live out a highly-evolved theory of human psychology, which regards creativity and play as fundamental to the emotional, social and cultural development of children and adults.<sup>531</sup> As suggested by the etching plate analogy, what is most problematic about this dual aspect of the director is “delving below the surface of the conscious mind”. It questions the importance of the performer’s consciousness in the creation of work and blurs the line between being “nurtured” and being the passive, silent, “unconscious” subject of the director’s vision. This case-study considers the way in which Glass’ visionary approach—which seems to require the passivity of his performers and seems closest to the more extreme ‘auteur’ versions of the Ensemble model—can be reconciled with a commitment to process-oriented creativity that would suggest the more benign hierarchical structure of the Participatory model.

## **Account**

This account and the analysis that follows examine the process undertaken by the DGE to create *The Unheimlich Spine – The Unhomely Spine*. The observed portion of the process was the three and a half week dedicated creative period and a short run (at the Riverside Studios, London) that opened on 8 March 2001.<sup>532</sup> The project was ‘developmental’: it was intended to test the production in public before going onto the second phase of work towards a more developed touring production. It is unusual for the company to work in this way: more often there will be a single dedicated period of about eight weeks before the work is shown in public.

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<sup>531</sup> Glass outlined some of this theory in a keynote speech he gave at the *Staging Human Rights* conference (op. cit.). He referred in this speech to the notion of play as “curious exploration, plus pleasure” and outlined ideas about the physical, spatial and spoken literacies that determine social engagement and personal development. This suggests a familiarity with Huizinga and other writers on play and on human psychology that Glass integrates with his expertise in particular performance traditions (see Johan Huizinga; *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, London: Palladin 1970).

<sup>532</sup> A production diary of the creative process is provided in Appendix Two of this thesis and is accompanied by an outline of the plot of *The Unheimlich Spine*, along with an analysis of its audience and critical reception.

I originally approached Glass at a workshop he led at Camden People's Theatre<sup>533</sup> and was subsequently invited to attend the *Unheimlich Spine* rehearsals that took place at Toynbee Studios, London, in February 2001. Glass' experience as a teacher in university, drama school<sup>534</sup> and workshop contexts, together with his previous acceptance of students as placements in productions meant that my presence as an observer of the process was exceptional only because I was engaged in doctoral rather than bachelor's level research. The presence of other non-performers in the studio (including the 'technical' team, a student placement acting as assistant dramaturge, an artist who was sketching the performers during their morning training sessions and a disability assistant for performer Sophie Partridge, together with occasional visits from Jones, the office staff and from members of the DGE's 'pool' of performers) meant that I was not the only observer—a fact that helped soften the potentially invasive nature of rehearsal observation.

There were two features of the process, however, that represented challenges to my observer position and the process of research. The first was the intensely personal and exposing nature of some of the exercises that Glass set his performers, particularly in the first week of rehearsal. Had I opted to remain a passive observer to these exercises, I believe that this might have had a detrimental effect, both on the outcome of the exercises (which depended on the performers' avoidance of self-consciousness) and on the trust I was attempting to build with the performers. I therefore accepted the invitation to participate in the first week of training. This also gave me first-hand experience of Glass' approach and techniques, including his efforts to inculcate the participant group into the 'big vision' of the DGE through set exercises. The second challenging feature of the research was the fact that the process itself was marked by an unusual lack of social bonding (noted by most of the performers). This was partly a result of the pragmatics of the progress. The nature of the work meant that the performers were often engaged in different activities simultaneously, so that Glass might be working with one pair while the other three were engaged in separate

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<sup>533</sup> David Glass; untitled workshop featured in the *Sprint Festival of Physical, Visual and Unusual Theatre* at Camden People's Theatre, London, 25 March 2000

<sup>534</sup> For example, Mandis joined the company after meeting Glass when he took up a residency on the Central School of Speech and Drama's Advance Theatre Practice Master's degree in 1999.



individual or paired projects. Breaks tended to be taken at different times, so there were few opportunities for the performers—most of whom did not know each other prior to the process—to build relationships. Some performers suspected that there was a deliberate strategy on Glass' behalf to discourage too much social interaction. While this cannot be proven, it did seem that his desire to make each character appear to come from a different 'world' meant that he did not want too much creative collaboration in terms of character development. Whatever the reasons, the formality of social interaction between participants meant that I was rarely able to gain their confidence and therefore missed out on an aspect of rehearsal observation that usually gives me a sense of a company's culture and group dynamics, as well as an insight into the performers' experience of the process. The interviews conducted with most of the participants following the run became a way of accessing some of this data, albeit retrospectively.

### **Background to project**

The main participants in the process were Glass as director, Athena Mandis as dramaturge, Ruth Finn as designer, Emily Hallesey as production assistant, and the five performers. These were: Therese Bradley (playing Gracie Gale), Richard (Dickie) Clews (Bobby Bangs), Kathryn Hunter (Close-Up Alice), Amit Lahav (Doctor Dorothy Belle-Merde) and Sophie Partridge (the *unheimlich* / Faraway Alice). Other participants included assistants to the dramaturge and designer, and a lighting designer who joined the team for the technical rehearsal. Marcello Magni directed some of the rehearsals during the run in Glass' absence.

The *Unheimlich Spine – The Unhomely Spine* is the first work to emerge from 'The Body Project', a long-term project (in fact, still ongoing) of research and exploration concerned with "... how we view ourselves: do we inhabit our bodies or are we imprisoned by them; do we control our bodies or do they control us; are we at one with ourselves or at odds ..." <sup>535</sup> Each project that comes under the umbrella of The Body Project is concerned with a different part

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<sup>535</sup> David Glass Ensemble press document, 2000

or function of the body. For example, Glass' recent theatre piece, *The Chimp that Spoke*<sup>536</sup>, looks at speech and vocal function as the thing that separates man from animal and at Roger Fouts' investigations into chimp communication—research that challenges the traditional distinction between man and beast.<sup>537</sup> For the *Unheimlich Spine*, the area of investigation was the backbone, which Glass describes as the oldest artefact in the body. Glass sees the spine as the most basic body part (common to most forms of life and the first to develop in any vertebrate foetus) and yet the most sophisticated in construction. He believes that its integrity is essential for our survival and our sense of security—the spinal cord is the most fundamentally protected body part, armoured as it is by the vertebrae. He also ascribes the spine with symbolic values: it is linear in form, like a story, but is silent, unlike the heart and lungs, which Glass perceives as uniting a three-beat Waltz rhythm (the heartbeat) and a two-beat rhythm (breathing); it connects the head (centre of logic and reason) with the bowels (centre of instinct and emotion). Most significantly for the theme and content of the production it inspires, the spine is seen as the repository in the body of deep-seated, intensely private fear and of anger, which Glass believes is a version of fear.

The exploration of fear and anger finds its form in the *Unheimlich Spine* through the genre of horror. The play's main inspiration is the cult horror film *The Tingler*<sup>538</sup>, in which a scientist discovers that extreme fear causes a creature to grow in the human spine, crushing it and “killing a man—to death”, as the character Doctor Belle-Merde says in *The Unheimlich*. There are obvious points connecting this film to Glass' chosen theme of the spine and to distinctive features of the DGE style. Moreover, David Glass claims that *The Tingler* has enormous personal resonance for him. He remembers seeing it for the first time as a child and associated this with his memories of a difficult childhood.<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> Battersea Arts Centre, London, 10 June 2003

<sup>537</sup> See Roger Fouts with Stephen Tuckel Mills; *Next of Kin. What My Conversations With Chimpanzees Have Taught Me About Intelligence, Compassion and Being Human*, London: Penguin Books 1998

<sup>538</sup> Directed by William Castle, 1959, US

<sup>539</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 19 February 2001

Stylistically, the play was intended as a “Frankenstein’s monster”<sup>540</sup>, forcing together disparate performance styles in the same way that 1950s B movies—according to Glass—brought together performers from very different genres, with no attempt to harmonise their acting styles. The *Unheimlich Spine* performers were asked to think about their ‘actor’ as well as their ‘characters’. Amit Lahav, for example, studied films featuring Vincent Price and Christopher Lee, absorbing their acting styles and the stereotypy of the ‘mad scientist’ character. Doctor Dorothy is a highly layered construct: Amit Lahav pretending to be a 1950s actor pretending to be a mad scientist who, in his stereotypy, is a construct and spoof of other mad scientists from Shelley’s ‘Frankenstein’ onwards. Gracie Gale (played by Therese Bradley) on the other hand, seemed to be intended as a wholehearted representation of a 1950s diva. The particular performance mode and costume (a Monroe-style white dress) made her character an anachronism, as though she had been transplanted wholesale from a 1950s film to this piece of experimental theatre. The ‘Frankenstein’s monster’ quality was also apparent in the production’s borrowing from a wider range of sources, including 1950s horror films, later horror (especially David Lynch), film noir (especially Hitchcock) and Grand Guignol. These ‘borrowings’ were most obvious in terms of the dialogue, which was constructed from adapted film quotations.

The intended qualities of the piece are described in the Dream Scenarios<sup>541</sup> as “Horrific, Comic, Beautiful and Sad. Eluding (*sic*) to pastiche, but not being pastiche”.<sup>542</sup> Glass later described the effect he was aiming for:

I think what’s interesting about *the Unheimlich* is that it does what Grand Guignol helps to do—to slightly shake the audience up, leave them a little bit shaky, shaken up, be it through laughter or shock or whatever because it works fundamentally

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<sup>540</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 12 February 2001

<sup>541</sup> The Dream Scenarios are a series of documents produced by Glass and Mandis describing Glass’ vision for the piece. These documents outlined the intended features of the production and elements of the storyline.

<sup>542</sup> Dream Scenario 3, written 11 February 2001

inside their bodies. And I think this is very interesting because we live in very, very vulgar times and we need to be punished; we think being punched is love ....<sup>543</sup>

Glass also had a particular atmospheric quality in mind: the sense of “unheimlich” (usually translated as ‘uncanny’) described in an essay by Sigmund Freud.<sup>544</sup> The desired effect was one of an unsettling ‘defamiliarising’ of the everyday. The performers were encouraged to come to an understanding of this quality and, in the initial week of rehearsal, participants were asked to describe ‘unheimlich’ experiences of their own (dreams figured a great deal) and to collate newspaper cuttings that seemed to express this quality.

We see from this that Glass had a strong initial vision of the piece. He had already identified his source material—a whole body of theory concerning the human body and the spine—and particular stylistic and atmospheric qualities prior to the beginning of the dedicated period of creative process. An indication of this initial vision was given in Dream Scenario 3, a document distributed to performers at the start of the process. Glass described this vision as, “if you watched *The Tangler* then had a dream about it, this might be the story of the dream”.<sup>545</sup> The fact that this was the third version (neither myself nor any of the participants who joined the company for the dedicated rehearsal period had sight of the first two Dream Scenarios) indicates just how much of the conception phase had occurred with Glass, Mandis and Finn (who had been working on it since September 2000) prior to the dedicated creative period and the performers’ introduction to the vision.

The rich theatrical language suggested in the Dream Scenario meant that elements of design, costume, performance (including spoken text), soundscape, film and so on, were worked on alongside each other, with the aim of integrating the elements as soon as possible (rather than, for example, having the design set before scene work began). The intention of working on all elements together was reflected in the layout of the rehearsal

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<sup>543</sup> David Glass interview op. cit.

<sup>544</sup> Sigmund Freud; ‘The Uncanny’ in James Strachey (ed.); *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. XVII* Translated by James Strachey, London: Hogarth 1953 pp. 219–252

<sup>545</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit.

room (the main theatre space in Toynbee Studios), which acted as a workshop for the design elements and properties, as a sound and film studio, as a writing room and resource centre, and as a rehearsal room. The area to the right of the stage was designated as a 'resource area' (where books, videos, visual aids and so on were kept), while left of the stage was a 'story area' (reserved for the activity of structuring the play and displaying the storyboard). Performance work took place on and around the stage: performers' preparatory work on scenes and their individual research and writing took place in the café, in corridors and in the auditorium; prop painting was conducted at the back of the auditorium.

## **Core Activities**

### Research and Development

The dedicated creative period at Toynbee Studios was preceded by a lengthy research and development period that involved Glass, designer Finn and dramaturge Mandis. In a meeting five months prior to the dedicated creative period, Glass met with Mandis and Finn to introduce them to his vision and to set them specific tasks and areas of research related to its themes and his own explorations. Following this, Glass corresponded with each participant by e-mail and fax (he was often abroad during this period) to exchange ideas and make some initial decisions. There was a significant meeting in late December at which both Mandis and Finn formally presented their findings. Three Dream Scenarios were produced during this time, the third of which became the basis for the first day's work of the dedicated creative process. After being cast in November 2000, the performers were also set tasks and encouraged to research the relevant themes and source texts. The tasks seemed to be character-related: Clews was to wear "old women's slippers"<sup>546</sup> every night, and Bradley was to sing to herself in a mirror at the same time every evening. The performers were expected to continue with their independent research once the dedicated period began.

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<sup>546</sup> Interview with Richard Clews, 4 April 2001

The dedicated creative process took place between 12 February and the opening night on 8 March. Work with the performers during this period fell into three distinct areas of activity: the training (this was called the 'morning work'), the forum discussions and the scene work.

### Training

The full mornings of the first week of rehearsal were dedicated to physical training and other exercises. During the second and third week, the sessions were gradually abbreviated to a daily two or three hour session and, by the fourth week, to a relatively brief warm-up of under an hour. These morning sessions served as physical and imaginative 'warm-ups' and, particularly in the first week, as an inducted into the themes of the play through physical and emotional explorations, as well as through Glass' teaching (he would explain the intentions, derivation and philosophy behind certain exercises and his approach to physical and imaginative work). Glass used exercises from a variety of physical theatre and mime traditions. One morning was spent training in Laban Efforts and some elements of Noh<sup>547</sup>; another on 'impulse work' derived, Glass suggested, from Gaulier.<sup>548</sup> This sort of training gave the group shared terms of references, which Glass could use to meaningfully inform the later scene work: "Make it more direct" or, "Where's the impulse in there?"<sup>549</sup> In other words, this kind of work allowed the group to develop the 'common language' required in Ensemble processes. Many of the exercises would be familiar to physical theatre practitioners, except that there was a notable absence of the sort of 'ensemble' and 'group work' that characterises many of the Lecoq-derived training techniques. Instead, Glass led exercises that involved the performers working simultaneously but very much on their own, although the morning training sessions tended to end with the performers coming together for a group clapping meditation.

Other exercises are likely to be less familiar to physical theatre practitioners. In fact, these seemed closer to therapy or personal development work. One example is a series of guided visualisations, in which performers were asked to envisage particular parts of their interior

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<sup>547</sup> Rehearsal, 20 February 2001

<sup>548</sup> Rehearsal, 19 February 2001

<sup>549</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 20 February 2001

anatomy (e.g. the heart and lungs or the spine) and subsequently draw them.<sup>550</sup> Other 'therapeutic' exercises engaged the performers in a powerful emotional experience of the play's themes. A significant example of this took place on the morning of the second day. It began with the performers lying on their backs and systematically placing tennis balls on designated points of their spines so that the weight of the ball caused pressure to build up where it was in contact with their bodies. Glass suggested that each of these pressure points contained a particular set of repressed emotions and memories that would be released through the application of pressure and the associated sensations of pleasure and pain. In exploring these points, performers were asked to vocalise and find a physical form for their emotions. This resulted in an outpouring of emotion—one or two performers were openly weeping—that left some participants shaken and feeling exposed. One effect of such exercises was, as Glass described, to build a palette from which particular qualities, revealed in the exercises, could be selected. In this way, Glass could ask Kathryn Hunter, "What were some of the noises you made with grief? Could you bring in some of those at this point?"<sup>551</sup> Such exercises were also intended by Glass as therapeutic experiences for the performers and had a major role to play in building up the particular power relations of the group.

### Discussion

The forum—essentially an occasion for discussion and planning—is a device that features in all Glass' processes (including the community work) and which he endows with particular significance. It always takes the form of a circle of seated participants, the perfect setting for anti-hierarchical communication in Glass' view because it gives each participant equal, face-to-face access to each other and because sitting on the floor puts the participants on an approximately equal level. Moreover, he suggests, the circle is traditionally a protective space: it allows the tribe both to guard against threats from outside—as they can watch the backs of those opposite them—and to gather around a fire, itself a source of protection and

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<sup>550</sup> Rehearsals, 12 and 13 February 2001. Such exercises may derive from Anna Halprin's work (see Anna Halprin; *Moving Towards Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance*, New England: Wesleyan University Press 1995), though Glass claimed no knowledge of her when I mentioned her name in the meeting we had prior to the case-study (5 February 2001).

<sup>551</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 19 February 2001

survival.<sup>552</sup> In the *Unheimlich* project, a brief forum took place almost every day, emerging from the clapping meditation that also followed the circle format. Any other participants present would be invited to join Glass and the performers in the circle. In the second day's forum, Glass told the participants that the forums were there if anyone wanted "to talk" (presumably to contribute ideas, comment on the process or express difficulties) and added that "asking questions is the way of the process. You won't know if the question is right until it has been asked".<sup>553</sup> He thereby set up the forum as a place for discussion and transparency. In fact, performers tended not to take up the invitation "to talk" unless they were faced with a new draft of the script (the so-called Dream Scenarios) or following a run. Glass therefore used the meetings primarily to summarise what he called the 'discoveries' that had been made during the previous days of rehearsal, to outline his plans for forthcoming work and to update the participants on the general development of the piece (keeping the performers informed of progress with design, film and sound elements, for example). Some of the forums were dedicated to particular topics. That of the 14 February, for example, looked at Sophie Partridge's needs as a performer with a disability. These included practical needs (such as an understanding of her physical stamina; finding a safe and comfortable way in which she could be lifted and moved) as well as emotional requirements (reassurance that her safety was being considered).

### Scene Work

Glass described his approach as 'organic', which to him meant that, "each stage of the process creates a new layer and affects all previous layers".<sup>554</sup> The Statement of Process in Dream Scenario 3 described the system of layering used in what I call the 'scene work', whereby Glass would visit and revisit scenes, focusing on a different aspect each time. There were basically two main 'layers' of scene work, though each of these was made up of further minor layering processes. In the creative period from Monday 12 to Tuesday 27 February, Glass and the performers worked through the entire narrative as it stood at the time in more-or-less chronological order while Mandis incorporated the 'discoveries' and new

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<sup>552</sup> David Glass, keynote speech at the *Staging Human Rights* conference op. cit.

<sup>553</sup> Rehearsal, 13 February 2001

<sup>554</sup> Dream Scenario 3 op. cit.



scenes (particularly the last Act) into drafts of the Dream Scenario. In this layer, the focus was on establishing the basic narrative (cutting and adding new scenes) and, within each surviving scene, setting down the plot-points and some elements of the dialogue. During this first layer, performers were given time away from Glass to prepare provisional versions of each scene. Taking the basic plot points from this Dream Scenario as a trigger, they would work to test movement possibilities and generate dialogue (they used Dictaphones to record their improvisations<sup>555</sup>). Mandis also worked with performers on some of the scenes, guiding verbal improvisations and feeding in quoted dialogue from films that might be incorporated into the scene. Once the performers presented these prepared scenes on stage, Glass tended to intervene quickly to request alternative actions, qualities or, occasionally, lines of dialogue, often moving from his position at the front of the auditorium onto the stage to guide or manipulate the performers or demonstrate an action. Mandis would observe and take notes of each presentation: particularly moments that Glass had designated as “right” or otherwise deemed successful. These notes would be incorporated into the revisions of the Dream Scenario. In the more structured phase from 28 February to 6 March, Glass finalised some of these decisions but focused mainly on ‘layering in’ the details of the performance qualities. This would involve the performers in exercises and explorations of performance or atmospheric qualities rather than on work directly based on the scene in question. Overall, the work on the scenes felt rather unstructured: Glass would often spend a disproportionate amount of time on one scene rather than another and decisions that he had made on one occasion may be forgotten by the time he returned to the same scene.

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<sup>555</sup> The spoken text of the production consisted entirely of adapted quotes from films. In some cases, the performers improvised provisional dialogue that was ‘translated’ into film quote by Mandis. In others, Mandis provided the dialogue for given scenes in advance of their improvisations.

## Summary of the Process

### **Phase 1: Conception**

The conception phase took place in the five-month research period preceding the dedicated creative process and culminated in the creation of the Dream Scenario 3, an articulation of Glass's vision for the production. Some material generation had also occurred during this period: Mandis was collecting potential lines of dialogue that would later be incorporated into the script, for example.

### **Phase 2: Material generation**

The period from 12–27 February covered the material generation phase. The system whereby pairs or small groups of performers worked independently to prepare a scene before showing it to Glass gave them some temporary authority in this phase, at least within the framework delineated by the Dream Scenarios. These provisional scenes would quickly be subjected to Glass' assessment and re-scoring, provoking his ideas and clarifying his vision.

### **Phase 3: Fixing**

The process of formally scoring the 'discoveries' of the first two phases occurred gradually throughout the dedicated creative period as Mandis incorporated material generated in the scene work, along with some of her own material (introducing the quoted film dialogue for example), into the Dream Scenario. The presentation of the script on 28 February, with the statement that all future changes were to be made 'officially', marked the end of the formal fixing stage.

#### **Phase 4: Rehearsal**

Very little time was dedicated to runs. The final days of work were designed to open up new performance possibilities, widening the acceptable range of responses. The work of fixing and rehearsal continued during the run in the afternoon sessions, prior to the evening performances.

#### **Phase 5: Performance**

By the opening night, some scenes of the performance were tightly blocked while others required a greater degree of improvisation on the part of the performers. The extent to which this variety was intentional is not clear. Glass' desire to create a stylistically fractured piece may justify this variety of approach. At the same time, Glass admitted to wanting the process to be a bit of a "holiday"<sup>556</sup>, so that he might be less concerned with meeting his own deadlines and could open and explore more possibilities in terms of the story and the performance quality. As the public showing at the Riverside Studios was intended as 'developmental', Glass perhaps did not feel obliged to create a 'finished' piece.

In Chapter Five, we saw that process in the Ensemble model is characterised by two specific features. Firstly, the director refrains from imposing a particular vision on the production in order to allow an 'organic' and collaborative process to emerge from the group's activities. Secondly, the process as a whole centres around two main periods of activity: a 'playful' material generation phase, followed by a more disciplined period designed to carve out and realise this score. Glass' process deviates somewhat from this model of process. We saw in Chapter Five that McBurney claimed to begin processes with no preconceptions of what the outcome might be. Glass, on the other hand, entered the dedicated creative period with the Dream Scenario 3 already in place, with much of the design elements settled, and with a strong sense of the stylistic and atmospheric qualities he wanted in the piece. The process as a whole was consequently more 'fixed' than contemporary Ensemble devising tends to

<sup>556</sup> David Glass, in company 'de-brief' meeting at the Riverside Studios, 18 March 2001

be, with a less 'playful', collaborative and organic material generation phase<sup>557</sup> (as we will see, the performers complained that their attempts to 'play' with the material and to have a creative say were curtailed). In this respect, Glass' approach seems much more akin to the auteur-director version of the Ensemble model, where the director plays a "more than usually dominant role"<sup>558</sup> and is motivated by a personal rather than a shared vision.

The *Unheimlich Spine* process followed the Ensemble model in its two-part structure with the introduction of the script on 28 February marking the point of transition. However, there was not as distinct a division between the two phases as might be the case in other examples of Ensemble processes. In fact, the blend of "messy" magic on the one hand and discipline on the other that defines the Ensemble process occurred throughout the process of the *Unheimlich Spine*. Thus, while the first part of the process was more 'fixed' and imposed in its activities and culture than the typical process, the second phase was, in some ways, more playful, opening new possibilities and areas of exploration when other processes would be working to fix and rehearse established scores.

While by lineage, context and methodological approach, the DGE is very much an Ensemble model, the process of the *Unheimlich Spine* also bears some resemblance to the Participatory model described in Chapter Four. This is most evident in Glass' claims to work in response to the participants' emotional needs. Glass' personal vision of the theatre involves shaking up his participants in much the same way that the *Unheimlich Spine's* Grand Guignol approach was designed to shake up its audience. "Delving below the surface of the conscious"<sup>559</sup> and taking his performers through the emotionally demanding exercises that characterised the first week of the *Unheimlich* process is, for Glass, an expression of his belief in the therapeutic value of participatory and process-oriented creativity. What is of note is that Glass' method does not necessarily respond to the expressed or conscious needs of his participants. Nevertheless, this likeness to the Participatory model of devising also goes

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<sup>557</sup> This is not to suggest that Glass does not typify the Ensemble's valuing of 'organic', somatic or otherwise intuitive creativity. We will see that he very much preserved for himself and for his performers the right to avoid articulating what feels "right" or what the piece is 'about' and, as will be discussed later, favoured the 'unconscious' input of his performers.

<sup>558</sup> Arnold P. Hinchcliffe; *British Theatre 1950/70*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1974 p. 172

<sup>559</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. 43

some way towards clarifying the role of the Dream Scenario in the *Unheimlich Spine* process. By imposing a set of parameters, it delineated clear channels for the creative contribution of the participants; it was the device that “allows everything else to happen”.<sup>560</sup>

## Analysis

The introduction to this case-study touched on the way in which Glass’ personal vision of theatre serves to marginalise him from what he perceives to be the dominant cultural forms, and I suggested that, in this respect, Glass is a typical example of the Ensemble model of devising. This vision is what binds together the members of the Ensemble, forming a set of shared values and beliefs that inspires commitment, loyalty and the dedication to train and work with the company over longer periods of time. The same paradigm of a vision that alienates its adherents from the surrounding culture, while uniting them as a micro-society, is apparent on a smaller scale in the *Unheimlich Spine* project. The vision that determined the creative process of this production was one that seemed alien to most of the process participants—particularly the newer performers. Despite being a fairly detailed and explicit score of Glass’ vision as it stood on the first day of the dedicated creative period, Dream Scenario 3 exemplified just how different that vision was from what the performers were “seeing around them”.<sup>561</sup> Although Glass claims to operate on a “shared vision” and an “imagination” that is “fused with that of the group”<sup>562</sup>, in this project at least, the vision was very much his own. Thus, the process involved the participants in a struggle to understand a vision with which they did not feel immediately familiar. Mandis describes it as a process of “trying to really get to grips with what David wanted to do”.<sup>563</sup>

The independent researches that Glass asked the participants to undertake (and subsequently the studio explorations) were the means by which the participants approached a sense of Glass’ intentions. Thus, it was through immersing herself in the source material during the conception phase of the process that Mandis went from “I don’t get it ... I’m not a

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<sup>560</sup> Ann Jellicoe; *Community Plays: How to Put them On*, London: Methuen 1987 p. 127

<sup>561</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit.

<sup>562</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. 43

<sup>563</sup> Interview with Athena Mandis, 17 April 2001

horror film buff” to “It’s only by seeing so many [horror films] at the same time that you see the weirdness of it ... which is very theatrical and which David is quite interested in” and eventually to a position where she felt, “we [Mandis, Finn and Glass] were all thinking and seeing the same world”.<sup>564</sup> Performer Amit Lahav has worked on a number of productions and projects with Glass and through this achieved an intuitive understanding of Glass’s vision:

I have a connection with David. I understand him. I understand what he’s doing quite well. I think he sees that. We’re kind of like minds in a lot of ways, even though I feel that I’m learning from him, obviously. I think when he’s talking I can see, a lot of the time, I can see where he’s heading with things. He says, ‘I want you to ...’ and I know what he’s going to say about that trolley and me and so I’m, ‘You want me to stand on my head, don’t you?’ That happens a lot.<sup>565</sup>

This was not, however, a “connection” that the newer performers in the process immediately enjoyed.

Although Glass set research tasks and exercises designed to induct the participants into his vision, at the same time, he resisted ‘explaining’ it. This was in keeping with the characterisation of the process as ‘organic’: a journey of discovery from which the vision emerges through intuitive, spontaneous and unconscious creativity (in fact, Glass introduced a number of new ‘ideas’ as things he had seen in his dreams) and where decisions are not ‘imposed’. In the ‘de-brief’ meeting following the process, Glass spoke of the difficulty of articulating and explaining moments that he knew worked but did not know why. He wanted to be able to say, “I don’t know what it means”.<sup>566</sup> This unwillingness or inability to articulate the vision, together with the uniqueness of the developing vision itself, meant that the participants’ knowledge of the vision and therefore their authority in this process were limited (relative to other models of devising). At the same time, it was a vision and a process that demanded a great deal from the performers: the morning work included ‘therapeutic’

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<sup>564</sup> Interview with Athena Mandis *ibid.*

<sup>565</sup> Interview with Amit Lahav, 27 March 2001

<sup>566</sup> David Glass in ‘de-brief’ *op. cit.*

exercises that they were unlikely to have encountered with other companies and that might be regarded as invasive or exposing. The scene work seemed to push at their boundaries in terms of the directions given, the range of acceptable responses and, on some occasions, what they considered appropriate on a personal level. The newer performers found themselves in a position where they were expected to respond outside of their habitual performance and, sometimes, behavioural modes, even though they had only a partial understanding of what ends this served.

Glass' approach seems, in fact, to question the extent to which the performers need to share the director's vision at all. The system of working was one in which the participants' role was to unearth (in this case, through Finn and Mandis) and then inspire (through the performers) the "formless hunch"<sup>567</sup> that constituted Glass' developing vision. Mandis said of the early stages of the process that, "our creativity came from teasing the vision out of David".<sup>568</sup> Performer Lahav likened Glass' approach to that of Lindsay Kemp (with whom he had worked):

Both of them need to be inspired ... both of them put people around them that inspire them .... Sometimes for Lindsay, for example, it's like, 'here are some people who are beautiful' and it's, 'God, look at him, what a fabulous body—ah, I'm inspired!' [laughs] .... For David ... it's, 'make me laugh'....

Lahav went on to explain that the performers themselves may be unaware of what it is about them that 'inspires' Glass:

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<sup>567</sup> Peter Brook; 'The Formless Hunch' in Peter Brook; *The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera 1946–1987*, New York: Harper & Row 1989 p. 3

<sup>568</sup> Interview with Athena Mandis op. cit.

... sometimes, you don't know what it is about you that is inspiring. I think David thinks, 'I can see there's that kind of really shitty little nuisance about that kiddie, about that little laddie, that really makes me laugh for some reason' ... and he might not tell you about that because he doesn't want you to play on it.<sup>569</sup>

This is something that Glass himself acknowledged:

I'm really interested in the bio-neurological presence of people in a creative situation .... I wasn't interested in what was coming out of the conscious mind of the actor as deviser; I was interested in the unconscious mind .... It's kind of difficult, because they don't know they're actually producing things, even though it's come from them.<sup>570</sup>

We are reminded in this of the analogy Glass makes to an etching plate, where the experiences of the process are scored into the performer's psyche and body. The image is of a performer who is subjected to a process: a passive recipient of experiences that have a cumulative effect, irrespective of the performer's conscious understanding or even awareness of this effect. The performer almost blindly generates material that the director may or may not identify as "right" and that therefore may or may not survive the scoring process.

On the first day of rehearsal, Glass told the performers, "You must each have a vision of what it [the play] might be. If you don't, it is your responsibility to find that".<sup>571</sup> With this, he may have raised the expectation that performers would have a creative input into the project, some direct authority, at least within the scope of their own character role. However, the rehearsals allowed very few opportunities for performers to articulate any individual visions they had developed—their "creative say"<sup>572</sup>—at least not verbally. In interview, Glass

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<sup>569</sup> Interview with Amit Lahav op. cit.

<sup>570</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit.

<sup>571</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 12 February 2001

<sup>572</sup> This term was used in the *Unheimlich Spine* programme in regard to the audience's input into the developing piece through post-show discussions.



explained to me how the performers' vision, even if not verbalised, gave him something "to push against". Not having a vision, he suggested, was "a kind of stubbornness".<sup>573</sup>

We see then that the organic nature of the DGE process leads to a structure in which the director has ultimate authority: it is his vision and only he can tell when a response authored by other participants is "right" and therefore eligible for fixing. Glass' is a process that expects the participants—particularly the performers—to be open, malleable and trusting of the director but not entirely passive or unthinking. Glass described his ideal performer in the example of some "Russian actors" he had worked with on a former occasion: "They just explore things physically rather than discuss things. I like to work like that. I like people to just keep on giving new possibilities".<sup>574</sup>

While the performers have some authorship in provisional scores (their prepared scenes), their authority in the process was limited by their initial unfamiliarity with Glass' vision, by the Dream Scenario (which precluded the introduction of new scenes, for example) and particularly by a culture that valued their "bio-neurological presence" above their creative say. There was also a culture of 'openness' that effectively silenced the performers even when they had personal misgivings about what they were being asked to perform. Bradley related her experience of this:

... when you speak in a rehearsal room, inevitably, you know you say, 'that's my boundary here'; you create an atmosphere that might not be conducive to creating the work. Sometimes, I would sacrifice my boundaries in order to create a good working atmosphere.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit. In retrospect, some of the performers doubted the relevance of this research, particularly of the tasks. Clews, for example, stated, "Personally, I felt that some of it was a waste of time; time that was very precious, I have to say. I do. And drawing your heart? I mean; the amount of time that I spent beforehand doing some of these little projects; I thought, 'Well, where does that fit in?' And one can work backwards and one can say, 'Well, maybe this is something to do with Bobby Bangs the character' ... I did question some of that ... because we could have achieved what we achieved without going through some of that and it would have saved time" (interview with Richard Clews op. cit.).

<sup>574</sup> Company 'de-brief' meeting op. cit.

<sup>575</sup> Interview with Therese Bradley, 6 April 2001

Glass referred to filmmaker Federico Fellini to justify this demanding approach. If Fellini wants to see “big tits everywhere”, Glass suggested, his actresses will comply because if this amuses or excites the director, it will amuse or excite the audience.<sup>576</sup> It is ironic, but not surprising, that this highly organic process was, in fact, experienced as imposed (the term came up unsolicited in three of the four performers’ interviews). Partridge, Clews and Bradley all reported a strong sense of being “guided” in a particular direction:

I found that a lot of things were imposed ... and I felt occasionally there were areas that we didn’t go into because he guided very, very strongly. And one did feel slightly manipulated occasionally ... and not knowing necessarily why you were getting into that area.<sup>577</sup>

This strong direction suggested that Glass was operating from a fixed, although hidden vision that left little room for the performers to ‘play’:

As an actor, for me, the way I lighten up those situations [when a scene becomes overly complex] is to go into this with a game in my head; ‘my game today is to be Marilyn Monroe; my game today is I’m a silly bimbo or I’m light-hearted’ or I’m lightening my voice, I’m changing my vocal range in order to allow me to explore and to play. So I did that one day—it was only half way through the process—and at the end of the day David said, ‘no, she’s much more (*sic*) stronger, faster, direct’ and I thought, ‘well, I was only playing. Why am I being told where she’s going now?’ .... I wondered whether David did from the very start, have some of his characters very firmly planted in his mind.<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit. (off tape)

<sup>577</sup> Interview with Richard Clews op. cit.

<sup>578</sup> Interview with Therese Bradley op. cit.

Like Glass' "personal vision of the theatre", this director-led, 'imposed'<sup>579</sup> methodology is not one that fits with the experience and expectations of performers in this country. The newer performers in the group tended to compare it negatively with companies such as Told by an Idiot ('the Idiots'). Bradley had trained with John Wright and Clews participated in two of their productions. Clews described the Idiots' method of operating on a shared vision, giving the performers scope for 'play' and allowing them a large degree of creative say, not only in relation to their character role but in other aspects of the production. Their process, he said, starts with:

... a germ of an idea, which everybody sits down and explores and discusses ... there was no preconceived vision. And what grew from that germ of an idea and the interest of those three people in that period of time could actually have been much different. That was the route that we followed, but it was proactive on everybody's part from day one, including the person that did the music, the person that designed it. They were in the rehearsal room; we had meetings. We discussed some of our needs as performers; what we thought about design, music.<sup>580</sup>

The Idiots favour an approach that sits more easily with the assumed characterisation of devising, and physical theatre in particular, as a collaborative methodology.<sup>581</sup> Glass' unusual approach made this process a difficult one, at least for the newer performers unused to his style. Hunter, Partridge, Bradley and Clews all exhibited signs of stress, with Clews in particular reportedly feeling "violated" by the process.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>579</sup> While the term "imposed" tends to have a negative connotation, it is not by definition negative. As Bradley pointed out, there can be a creative and satisfying process of 'assimilation', whereby a performer comes to understand or 'own' the imposed material. Given enough time, performers can make their own sense of 'imposed' material and can assimilate it into their understanding of their character or the world. This might mean finding an 'emotional logic' in a simplistic psychological justification (why does Doctor Dorothy come in with lipstick on? Because he has accepted his caring, feminine side) or it might mean coming to an understanding of the performance strategies (it's just a bit of fun to weird the audience out). Interview with Therese Bradley op. cit. (off tape)

<sup>580</sup> Interview with Richard Clews op. cit.

<sup>581</sup> My observation of the first phase of Told by an Idiot's production *I Spit on your Graves*—first performed as a 'Scratch' (work-in-progress) performance at the Battersea Arts Centre, London, on 14 May 2002—did give the impression of a more 'collaborative' atmosphere, with far less formal role allocations and a smaller, more socially integrated group.

<sup>582</sup> Interview with Richard Clews op. cit.

At first sight, it might seem difficult to square Glass' approach with his own explicit commitment to process-oriented creativity. A process that prefers its performers "confused"<sup>583</sup>, uses them as "warm props"<sup>584</sup> and directs them in line with the director's, rather than their own vision might not immediately strike one as beneficial on a personal, social and interpersonal level. We expect a process-oriented process to be more 'benign': to give greater opportunity to participants to 'play' and greater autonomy in visioning and authoring, at least during the initial stages and within a framework.<sup>585</sup> Yet Glass' belief in the 'therapeutic' powers of creativity is at least as strong as his product-oriented intentions: his search for new theatrical forms and themes. This suggests that product- and process-oriented forms of creativity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Glass' stated commitment to process-oriented aspects of creativity may be, on one level at least, a case of practical people management. It might be fair to say that Glass is obliged to develop strategies for "dealing with sensitive individuals and their psychic lives"<sup>586</sup> because the performers he works with tend to find his approach 'difficult', leading to interpersonal conflicts that may hinder the process. Indeed, Glass has come to regard a certain amount of "discontent" as an "inevitable" part of the creative process, however established its director:

There are usually very definite stages [in the creative process] ... and one is the stage of raised expectations, which inevitably are not going to be fulfilled .... I know Pina Bausch's company quite well. I know Jan Fabre's company and, you know, these are companies that work always for weeks together in some way or other, and there is still enormous discontent .... It's an inevitable part of being creative and working.<sup>587</sup>

His first strategy in managing this discontent is—no doubt quite wisely—to listen to but, in the end, disregard performers' complaints or expressions of difficulty as another thing that

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<sup>583</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit.

<sup>584</sup> Interview with Richard Clews op. cit.

<sup>585</sup> See Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>586</sup> Glass in Giannachi & Luckhurst op. cit. p. 43

<sup>587</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit.

comes from “the conscious mind of the performer”.<sup>588</sup> Instead, he sets about inducting the participants into the culture and belief system of the Ensemble by providing documentation about the company and by ‘teaching’ aspects of his belief system during the morning work. This induction into Glass’ ‘big vision’ of theatre, creativity, human psychology and Buddhism has the effect of reassuring and settling the performers. Those participants who begin to share, or at least understand, these beliefs tend to find the process less difficult (Lahav and Finn were key examples of participants who had been inculcated into the culture). In revealing aspects of this culture, Glass also demonstrates his close interest in the performers’ ultimate well-being, taking account of their physical, emotional and psychological needs and thereby earning his participants’ trust. At the same time, the way in which his vision cleverly synthesises an impressive range of knowledge serves to confirm Glass’ experience, expertise and wisdom. Thus, Glass’ strategy for dealing with “discontent” is to cultivate a persona which identifies him as a knowledgeable, experienced, trustworthy and, above all, charismatic leader.<sup>589</sup> The longer-term Ensemble participants have come to believe in, and perhaps depend on, this persona. Thus, Finn explained that, while recognising Glass’ strong authority in the process, she experienced working with him as utterly “creative”:

David has the amazing ability to make you feel 110% creative. He opens you up. I feel more creative than with a director who’s solely handing every decision over to me. So you feel you’re being creative, yet within all of that, he knows exactly what he wants and he’s guiding you there.<sup>590</sup>

It would seem that this feeling of being “creative” can only come about once Glass has earned the participants’ trust. Finn, for example, described an incident that occurred during the creative process of *Blue Remembered Hills*<sup>591</sup>, which became the pivotal moment for her:

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<sup>588</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit.

<sup>589</sup> See Chapter Five for a discussion of charismatic authority, a term derived from Max Weber; ‘The Sociology of Charismatic Authority’ in Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.); *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, London & New York: Routledge 1991 pp. 245–252

<sup>590</sup> Interview with Ruth Finn, 2 April 2001

<sup>591</sup> Produced by Yellow Earth Theatre, 2000

[Glass] tricked the character who was playing Donald Duck, who's the abused child and the bullied child of the group. He took her emotionally to a place where it was Tina [the performer]; it wasn't Donald Duck. And he literally talked her through a dream state for twenty minutes or so ... and he took her to the place where she was really howling from here [indicates her stomach area]. And that moment, I sat back and I thought, 'now watch, Ruth; this is a very dangerous place for her. Watch what David's going to do'. And he dealt with it brilliantly. And from that moment on, I thought, 'I've got every faith in this sort of situation'.<sup>592</sup>

Finn saw this as evidence of Glass' ability to take his participants to emotionally dangerous places that not only serve his own aesthetic intentions but meet his participants' needs in regard to their personal development. Finn attributes to Glass a "caring" personality that can intuitively recognise what a participant needs and offer an opportunity for them to meet this need. She regarded the task that Glass set—to draw a story-board of the Dream Scenario—as one example of this:

... as a caring human being, I think he knows what you need to explore to help yourself on your journey too ... I think ... maybe the story-board was a little bit also of David saying, 'I'd like to see you draw more, Ruth. You need to draw more'.<sup>593</sup>

As we saw in Chapter Three in regard to the Collective and in Chapter Four with the Participatory model of devising, process-oriented devising is most effective when there is a strong leadership position and a clear hierarchy. Thus, the very thing that constituted the target of the performers' complaints (Glass' 'imposition' on the process) might eventually give them the structure and stability to feel "safe" and "creative". However, Glass' culture of process-oriented creativity is more than a matter of circumventing his participants' inevitable discontent and their difficulty with the process. In fact, according to his personal belief system, this difficulty—the pain of overcoming personal boundaries—is an essential part of personal and creative development. Speaking at a conference on human rights, Glass

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<sup>592</sup> Interview with Ruth Finn op. cit.

<sup>593</sup> Interview with Ruth Finn ibid.

outlined the importance of play in personal, social, cultural and spiritual development and likened his work of introducing “lost children” to the “the healing process of play” to showing people how to dig for water. While noting “the by-product of this engagement [in play] is pleasure”, he made a special point of stating that “just like in life, we are likely to get hurt in playing”.<sup>594</sup>

The extent to which allowing participants to “get hurt” is justified remains a matter of debate. However, it is clear that, overall, the David Glass Ensemble illustrates a company that negotiates fairly effectively between its own process-oriented ambitions and a highly “personal vision of theatre” that exemplifies product-oriented devising. It does so through a culture based on the director’s extensively researched belief system and a view of itself as being distinct from the mainstream. We also see that both the process- and the product-oriented intentions are served by a structure based on the charismatic power of its director.

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<sup>594</sup> David Glass at *Staging Human Rights* op. cit.

## CHAPTER NINE

### Case-Studies: Forced Entertainment

Forced Entertainment (FE) is a company that typifies, perhaps even defines, British live art. Although it uses a System process, structurally speaking, Forced Entertainment is the closest we have to the Ensemble structure more usually associated with physical theatre, consisting of almost the same “core group of six artists”<sup>595</sup> who have worked together continuously for twenty years.<sup>596</sup> This chapter will analyse FE and the process of creating *The Travels* as an example of the System model of devising that also incorporates some of the methodological features of the Ensemble model. The first hint that Forced Entertainment veers towards the culture of the Ensemble model is the company’s sense of itself as being unique. FE’s artistic director Tim Etchells describes the company as “completely isolated”:

There's nobody ahead of us on the road that we can look to that we can say 'that's how we want to do it'. We lost that probably when Impact folded in '86 ... we were quite a young company when our parents died, so to speak, and we've had to make up our own theatre stuff. I think the aesthetic that we have evolved in such a way is quite unique to the world and the way we have spread out across different forms and the ways that we have survived are pretty unique in the UK.<sup>597</sup>

Performer and designer Richard Lowdon suggests that their approach has “very much been a backlash against” what he calls “the ‘three cubes can be a bus if you want it to be’ approach”<sup>598</sup> that they experienced at Exeter University. However, their ex-tutor at Exeter, Peter Thomas, believes that they are, “... probably more influenced than they realise [by

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<sup>595</sup> *The Forced Entertainment Educational Resource Pack*, produced by Forced Entertainment’s education project, Interactions, 2002 p. 1

<sup>596</sup> Most of the company members met on a degree courses at Exeter University, England in the mid 1980s

<sup>597</sup> Katja Hilevaara; Interview with Tim Etchells, the Showroom Gallery, Sheffield, 9 July 2002 (unpublished)

<sup>598</sup> Robert Halliday; ‘A Show of Force’ *Lighting and Sound International*, published by PLASA Media Ltd, March 1995; available in the *Forced Entertainment Educational Resource Pack* op. cit.



their university training]. They have a 'project' approach to each new piece of work and they challenge the comfortable distinction between the private and the public in ways which hark back to those sometimes gruelling studio sessions.<sup>599</sup> Indeed, it is possible to discern a wider range of influences than Etchells acknowledged in the interview quoted above: the work sits clearly within European (including English) performance and live art traditions in terms of its aesthetic and performance concerns. Etchells does acknowledge elsewhere “the classicism, beauty and anguish of the European avant-garde, the postmodern formalism of American performance and the peculiar specificities of British performance”<sup>600</sup> as formative for the Forced Entertainment aesthetic. He also cites a list of influences that includes the Wooster Group, Robert Wilson, Joseph Beuys, Bobby Baker, Station House Opera, Pina Bausch, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Gary Stevens, Neil Bartlett and—especially—Impact.<sup>601</sup> It is a lineage that Etchells describes as “a huge Chinese whispers which started in Wuppertal and ended up in Sheffield with us taking our clothes off in a gallery”.<sup>602</sup>

Forced Entertainment is now very much part of this canon and is often used to exemplify British live art. The company actively cultivates a student audience in its marketing policies and through its decision to tour small and middle-scale venues.<sup>603</sup> Thus, Forced Entertainment is already spawning imitators:

By passing through university studio theatres year after year, bewildering and exhilarating each new set of theatre students, they've ensured that, in drama departments up and down the country, waif-like boys and girls in second-hand

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<sup>599</sup> Correspondence from Peter Thomas, 4 February 2003

<sup>600</sup> Tim Etchells; *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, London: Routledge 1999 p. 19

<sup>601</sup> Etchells 1999 op. cit. p. 19

<sup>602</sup> Anon; 'Addicted to Real Time - From an Interview with Tim Etchells 5/9/97' *Entropy No 3*. Available from 10 Narford Road, London E5

<sup>603</sup> The company has actively promoted study of its productions and approaches through the Arts Council-funded educational project, Interactions. This has enabled them to create thorough and extensive public archives and resources, available through the company and the National Sound Archive at the British Library, London. They have also published educational resources such as *Making Performance: The Forced Entertainment Educational Video* (produced by Forced Entertainment; directed and edited by Tim Etchells, Terry O'Connor and Helen Russell, 2001) and the CD *Imaginary Evidence* (by Tim Etchells and Forced Entertainment, 2003)

clothes are mumbling nervously into microphones about cities, stars, movies and love.<sup>604</sup>

Tied in with the company's identity (and self-image) as innovators in their field and their willingness to respond to the interest this reputation generates is the fact that Etchells is a prolific and engaging spokesperson for the company and also a commentator on the field of contemporary practice, particularly experimental theatre and live art. This means that there is a substantial body of published writing dealing with the company's artistic aims, current preoccupations, the context in which they see themselves working and their methodology. A key tool in promoting this understanding of their work is the publication of Etchells' *Certain Fragments*<sup>605</sup>, now a key text for many university drama courses. This book establishes Etchells as a thought-leader as well as a commentator on the concerns and theories underlying twentieth and twenty-first century performance. The company, then, is very much aware of its own place in the contemporary context and current areas of debate.

As suggested by Etchells' characterisation of the company as "unique", Forced Entertainment's work has a distinctive aesthetic. This aesthetic has changed somewhat over the company's long history. It is possible to identify two distinct styles, which date to either side of the company's tenth anniversary in 1994—a crisis period that that occurred when the Arts Council decided to cut funding, citing poor quality work.<sup>606</sup> The work typical of the earlier phase includes the shows *Jessica in the Room of Lights*<sup>607</sup>, *(Let the Water run its course) to the Sea that made the promise*<sup>608</sup>, *200%* and *Bloody Thirsty*<sup>609</sup>, *Some Confusions in the Law about Love*<sup>610</sup>, *Marina & Lee*<sup>611</sup>, *Emmanuelle Enchanted (or a Description of this World as if it Were a Beautiful Place)*<sup>612</sup>, *Club of No Regrets*<sup>613</sup> and *Hidden J*<sup>614</sup> and is predominantly

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<sup>604</sup> *Entropy* op. cit.

<sup>605</sup> Etchells 1999 op. cit.

<sup>606</sup> A letter-writing campaign in support and praise of the company's work succeeded in reinstating the company's funding. This is referred to in *Entropy* op. cit.

<sup>607</sup> Yorkshire Arts Space Society, Sheffield, UK, 14 December 1984

<sup>608</sup> Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham, 6 October 1986

<sup>609</sup> Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham, 10 October 1988

<sup>610</sup> Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham, 30 October 1989

<sup>611</sup> Nuffield Studio, Lancaster, UK, 18 March 1991

<sup>612</sup> Nuffield Studio, Lancaster, 6 October 1992

<sup>613</sup> Nuffield Studio, Lancaster, 5 October 1993

concerned with presenting the experience of living in late-twentieth-century urban England. This contemporary landscape is depicted in apocalyptic stage images consisting of built environments that are often reminiscent of scaffolding and that include video screens and soundscapes. The work is typified by a layering of fictions, broken and repeated narratives and, within this, a constant reframing of what purports to be 'real'. There is a questioning of the concept of identity through personas or characters that are obviously imposed: a key example of this is the cardboard character signs that recur through various productions.<sup>615</sup> The work is threaded through with myths built out of ready-mades of contemporary culture, allusions to items of contemporary life and the subtly subversive use of naïve objects: for example, the animal costumes of *Showtime*<sup>616</sup> and *Pleasure*<sup>617</sup> or the nativity play in *200% and Bloody Thirsty*. The juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated, often 'found' objects on stage—which defines the production as “a kind of endless coincidence machine”<sup>618</sup>—echoes live and performance art's roots in Dada and produces a *dérèglement* of logic that throws the onus of meaning-making onto the audience. There is “a collision of fragments that don't quite belong, fragments that mis-see and mis-hear each other”<sup>619</sup>, resulting in a performance that “puts you in a situation rather than describing a world. It puts you in the deep end rather than articulating an argument”.<sup>620</sup>

The second phase of the company's work is preoccupied with notions of liveness and the 'reality' of the performance moment. While continuing to play with transparent layers of fictions, the heart of the work lies in the fact of a group of people performing in front of another. 'Audience Tactics'<sup>621</sup> is very much the manifesto of this period of work. In this text, Etchells states that, “... each project for us is an attempt to find new and appropriate

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<sup>614</sup> Nuffield Studio, Lancaster, 10 October 1994

<sup>615</sup> For example, *Emmanuel Enchanted* (1992), *12am: Awake and Looking Down* (National Review of Live Art, ICA, London, UK, 22 October 1993) and *Hidden J* (1994)

<sup>616</sup> Alsager Arts Centre, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, 25 September 1996

<sup>617</sup> Nieuwpoorttheater, Ghent, Belgium, 2 November 1997

<sup>618</sup> Etchells 1999 op. cit. p. 42

<sup>619</sup> Etchells 1999 ibid. p. 56

<sup>620</sup> Tim Etchells; untitled lecture given to postgraduate students at Goldsmiths College, University of London, 15 November 2000

<sup>621</sup> Tim Etchells; 'Audience Tactics – Notes on First Night' 2001 in the *Forced Entertainment Educational Resource Pack* op. cit. Tim Etchells used this as the basis of a lecture he gave at the *Live Culture* event at the Tate Modern, London, 29 March 2003. *Live Culture: A Programme of Live Art Performances, Debates and Presentations*, curated by the Live Art Development Agency and Adrian Heathfield. The Tate Modern, 27–30 March 2003

solutions to the situation of standing up and trying to speak before a crowd of people whom one does not know and cannot trust". Rather than staging a seeming chaos of provisional and shifting narratives and fictions, shows like *Speak Bitterness*<sup>622</sup>, *Dirty Work*<sup>623</sup> and *First Night*<sup>624</sup> consist of a single, relatively static setting and activity:

They [the shows] are all about the striving for something, the achievement or non-achievement of some kind of order or sense or the ability of the protagonists to, just for a moment, hold the world and to know it and see it properly. The newer pieces don't move off into other worlds or places anymore. They tend to get stuck here.<sup>625</sup>

The focus is no longer on the depiction of a world that resembles the one we live in but rather on the present situation of performers and audience—something more akin to Nyman's "situation".<sup>626</sup> There is a sense of compulsion underlying much of this work that is expressed in a seeming need to enumerate every possibility: to testify, to exhaust. This is particularly exemplified in the durational pieces such as *Speak Bitterness*, *Quizoola!*, *And on the Thousandth Night...*<sup>627</sup> and *Who Can Sing a Song to Unfrighten Me?*, work that stretches beyond the conventional length of a theatrical performance. The sense of liveness comes through what Etchells refers to as 'Risk and Investment'<sup>628</sup>, which are brought about by the genuine exhaustion that overtakes the performers in the durational work or their seeming discomfort in front of an audience. The shows are also demanding for the audience, requiring a level of attention that is difficult to sustain in the face of such unrelenting rhythm and absence of events. Such work seems to deliberately withhold the possibility of empathy with the characters and avoids the changes of pace, moments of revelation or clarity and

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<sup>622</sup> Durational version: National Review of live Art, Glasgow, UK, 23 October 1994. Theatre version: Alsager Arts Centre, Stoke-on-Trent, UK, 26 September 1995

<sup>623</sup> Phoenix Arts, Leicester, UK, 12 November 1998

<sup>624</sup> Rotterdamse Schouwberg, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 15 September 2001. Other works in this mode include *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* (ICA, London, UK, 13 December 1994), *Quizoola!* (National Review of Live Arts, ICA Live Arts, 29 October 1996) and *Who can sing a Song to Unfrighten Me?* (London International Festival of Theatre, Royal Festival Hall, London, UK, 18 June 1999).

<sup>625</sup> Etchells in *Entropy* op. cit.

<sup>626</sup> Michael Nyman; *Experimental Music: John Cage and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press 1999

<sup>627</sup> Festival Aylool, Beirut, Lebanon, 3 September 2000

<sup>628</sup> Etchells 1999 op. cit. p. 48–49

jokes that more conventional work might use to sustain an audience's engagement.

Performance in this later work is characterised as an activity or task that is imposed (often by the fact of being in public) and one with which the performers engage with varying degrees of willingness and success. Thus, the performers are enjoined to:

... (b)e 'a group of people who are doing a job in front of another group of people'.

Think about task, about 'work' (labour), about the strange yet simple situation of being paid by others so that they can watch you do things. Construct an onstage presence that is 'human-scale', everyday. The interest for the audience, then, is in the performers' response to engaging with the task and to being public.<sup>629</sup>

There is an emphasis on the performers apparently working from 'themselves'<sup>630</sup> so that we seem to be watching recognisable people (who we might know to be Cathy Naden, Claire Marshall, Richard Lowdon and so on) rather than characters engaged in a series of activities to which they may have an attitude or response. Forced Entertainment's performance mode plays with what Erving Goffman referred to as "the presentation of self"<sup>631</sup>, the habitual self-dramatisation we all practice in order to express those aspects of our personality that are relevant to a given social situation and to thereby create a particular impression.<sup>632</sup> While Goffman uses a theatrical analogy to describe this social process, Forced Entertainment's performers use the expressive signs of the social process in a dramatic context. Their seeming rejection of artifice and theatrical illusion (in favour of everyday social behaviour) in fact requires a particularly sophisticated and skilful performance mode. The performers are obviously aware that they are in public and reveal their response (often discomfort or embarrassment) to being watched, but this discomfort or embarrassment is, in fact,

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<sup>629</sup> Etchells 2001 op. cit.

<sup>630</sup> David Glass used the same expression in the *Unheimlich Spine* process to refer to a different process. In Glass' case, 'working from themselves' required the performers to examine their personal reactions to the themes and topics expressed in the work in order to underpin their characterisations with some sense of personal investment (using personal experience as background research). In the case of Forced Entertainment, the performers were to create characters that were indistinguishable from their own off-stage personas, recreating their habitual social behaviour in the theatrical environment, using their social selves as a model for their characterisation.

<sup>631</sup> Erving Goffman; *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London: Penguin Books 1982

<sup>632</sup> Goffman *ibid.* p. 14

performed, exaggerated and faked. The gap between the performer as a person and her performance as a task is deliberately problematised. A recent production of an Etchells text<sup>633</sup> by a young company revealed how conventional performance skills are inadequate and inappropriate for this particular brand of extreme naturalism. The young performers in his production of *Motherfucker Island* chose to 'cartoon' their characters' fictitious drunkenness. In *Disco Relax*<sup>634</sup>, an enactment of a morose and drunken party, the Forced Entertainment performers maintained such a convincing and sinister portrayal of drunkenness that at least one reviewer believed that they had in fact consumed quantities of drink in advance of the performance.<sup>635</sup>

This deliberate blurring of social and dramatic conventions is reflected in the use of design and sound. While background soundtracks were a feature of the first phase of work, the current phase is typified by either an absence of sound or else music that is activated by the performers themselves: for example, the onstage record player in *Dirty Work*. Video is still an occasional feature of their work and the same shift from externally imposed events to internal ones is evident. For example, in *200% and Bloody Thirsty*, video screens project the images of two 'angels', of which the other onstage characters seem unaware – the video monitors are invisible to all but the audience-while in *A Decade of Forced Entertainment*, Etchells simply plays videos on the monitor – the video monitors and the process of their use are totally visible to both audience and performer.. Etchells' article 'On Performance and Technology' introduces *Speak Bitterness* as a new development in the company's use of technology:

...as I write this Forced Entertainment are presenting a piece of work called *Speak Bitterness* (1995) – a kind of degree-zero piece for us in which the microphones, cameras, video monitors, continuous soundtrack and filmic lighting of the previous work have all but disappeared – replaced by a long table, seven performers and a

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<sup>633</sup> *Motherfucker Island* The Arts Theatre, Cambridge *Hotbed Festival of New Writing*, June 2002

<sup>634</sup> Forced Entertainment Studio, The Workstation, Sheffield, UK, 19 October 1999

<sup>635</sup> Olly Lassman 'Physical Theatre – Disco Relax' review in *The List*, 2–16 Dec 1999. Available in the *Forced Entertainment Educational Resource Pack* op. cit.

strewn pile of papers, the whole scene presented in bright white lights. As if after years of evading it we've finally come down to some awful irreducible fact of theatre – actors and an audience to whom they must speak, and, in this case, confess.<sup>636</sup>

*Speak Bitterness*, like the production that forms the subject of this case-study, pares the “irreducible fact of theatre” to its basics: the performers face the audience with no more than a table and, in this case, microphones and an overhead projector to soften the encounter. The boundary between social and theatrical is thereby blurred.

### **Account**

In its current incarnation, Forced Entertainment consists of a core of members: Tim Etchells, Claire Marshall (since 1989), Cathy Naden, Terry O'Connor (since 1986), Robin Arthur and Richard Lowdon, with a small pool of long-standing performers and artists who occasionally participate in individual projects. Since 1996, the company has been based at the Workstation—a venue with an office, rehearsal and performance space—in central Sheffield. There is an administrative team, with staff responsible for marketing, education and administration, with Andy Clarke working as production manager. The company is sustained by core funding from the Arts Council, Yorkshire Arts, Sheffield City Council and the National Lottery Fund, which allows the core artistic and administrative team to work exclusively for the company throughout the year. It produces one major theatre project a year, usually as a commission from European festivals. This allows the company to schedule a tour and set a budget before dedicated work has begun on the production in question. Additional smaller projects, including film, photography, print-, CD- and internet-based projects also form part of the company's activities, and individual members sometimes work with outside collaborators

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<sup>636</sup> Etchells 1999 op. cit. p. 94

on these. The company tends to operate a system whereby development work on a new piece of theatre is punctuated by periods of touring other shows.<sup>637</sup>

The production on which this case-study is based—*The Travels* (original working title: *In the Think Tank at Dawn*)—was commissioned by the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt to open there on 26 September 2002. It subsequently toured the UK from 4 October to mid-December. There were two dedicated periods of work on this piece falling either side of a European tour. The first phase took place from 21 March to 24 April 2002, though some work had been done earlier. This month of research and development was intended to culminate in a work-in-progress show at Toynbee Studios in London on 19 April and at the Workstation in Sheffield on 23 April. However, due to concerns over Etchells' health during this period and to personal commitments of some of the company members, work was more intermittent than originally scheduled. The company felt the formal work-in-progress would not represent a useful exercise in the circumstances and it was therefore cancelled. The second period of dedicated work took place from 22 July to 26 September 2002, with the last week of this in Frankfurt.

The participants in the process were Tim Etchells as director, with performers Richard Lowdon, Cathy Naden, Terry O'Conner, Claire Marshall, John Rowley and Jerry Killick. Robin Arthur took part in the first period of work but was on sabbatical during the second.

Following an approach to Eileen Evans, the Education Officer at the time<sup>638</sup>, I was granted unlimited access to the seven-month dedicated creative period which took place at the Workstation in Sheffield and was able to attend two or three days a week for the majority of this time. I also joined the company in Frankfurt for the last week of rehearsal prior to the show's première. Access to the process was conditional on my being an 'invisible'

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<sup>637</sup> We will see in this case-study that these touring periods do not, as one might imagine, constitute a complete break in the creative process but that discussions will continue during the tours. As this suggests, there is a distinct melding of the company members' daily lives and their work in the company. Though there is structure and discipline to the working week, a proportion of the 'work' is done during the time the company members spend together socially, outside of the studio (particularly Etchells and Lowdon).

<sup>638</sup> With the departure of then Marketing Officer Helen Burgen in 2002, Eileen Evans took on administrative and marketing duties.



observer<sup>639</sup> and it was indicated that I was not to 'join in' or comment on the work (occasional visitors—who were aspiring practitioners—were invited to comment).

The observation process was relatively unproblematic. The main disappointment was that the participants were unavailable for interview immediately following the tour of the production. However, the sheer length of the observation time allowed for more informal communication with the participants during the process than I encountered in other case-studies. Moreover, the availability of published interviews and other writings means that the intentions and views of at least some of the participants can be represented in this account through direct quotations.

Since this research was conducted, Forced Entertainment has celebrated its twentieth anniversary, an occasion marked by revivals of some of their productions as part of a festival of European work curated by the company<sup>640</sup>, the publication of an edited volume on their work<sup>641</sup> and a symposium held at the University of Lancaster.<sup>642</sup> Without wishing to underestimate the importance of these events I have chosen not to incorporate this new material into the main body of this chapter to any substantial extent. This is because the information was not available when the major research and initial drafts of this chapter were underway. Artificially amalgamating these later sources would, I believe, give a false

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<sup>639</sup> It is, of course, impossible to be truly 'invisible' in the process; the participants cannot help but realise they are being observed and—probably unintentionally—adjust their behaviour accordingly. My article, 'Silent Witness' (*Total Theatre* 14/4, Winter 2002/2003) touches on this, as well as on the impossibility of remaining truly objective as an observer over an extended piece of fieldwork of this nature.

<sup>640</sup> *Indoor Fireworks: Two Weeks of Volatile Performances presented by Forced Entertainment and LIFT* Riverside Studios, London, 25 October to 6 November 2004. The festival included revivals of *Instructions for Forgetting* (25 October 2004; originally premiered at Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, Austria, 31 May 2001) and *The Voices* (30 October 2004; originally premiered at Prater der Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxenburg-Platz, Berlin, Germany, 24 January 2003), as well as the first London showing of *Bloody Mess* (1 November 2004).

<sup>641</sup> Judith Helmer and Florian Malzacher (eds.); *Not Even A Game Anymore: The Theatre of Forced Entertainment*, Berlin: Alexander Verlag Berlin 2004

<sup>642</sup> *The Forced Entertainment Symposium* produced by the Centre for Advanced Study of Contemporary Performance Practice, Lancaster University and curated by Andrew Quick. Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster, UK, 16–17 October 2004

impression of the scope of my research at the time and perhaps misrepresent its originality.<sup>643</sup>

During the first phase of the dedicated creative period, the company experimented with a wide range of provisional 'ideas', discussing them and trying them out 'on the floor'. There was little sense of progress during this period: particular ideas were often exhausted within three days and then Etchells or another participant would suggest a new, often unrelated starting point. In retrospect however, it was possible to identify two themes that ran through the seemingly fragmentary work of this period. The first was the notion of a "virtual world"<sup>644</sup>: the performers would refer on stage to an event that they had shared or rather, playfully purported to have shared. These events—examples included several fictitious theatrical performances and films—would be conjured for the audience through spoken text and other evidence. For example, the performers might describe their characters' actions in the fictitious films or plays. This became an imaginative game, in which the characters seemed to create a world as they described it. The second feature was the requirement that the show had "an excuse for being in public"<sup>645</sup> (essentially a "set-up"<sup>646</sup>) and a performance mode that referred or alluded to given public situations—for example, a theatre, a "panel of experts"<sup>647</sup>, "half-way between a beauty and a talent contest"<sup>648</sup>, an "inquest"<sup>649</sup>, "a press conference for a film".<sup>650</sup> Comments on trials such as, "I can't imagine who they're talking to"<sup>651</sup> would be indications that a good excuse for being in public had not been achieved. This resemblance to some sort of known public situation should not be mistaken for attempts to deliberately

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<sup>643</sup> Of course, my ongoing research into the company will take account of these important events. The publication of an edited volume was long overdue; Etchells is an articulate commentator on the company's work and for this reason it can be extremely difficult to assess the work except through his perspective and his expression of the company's intentions. Helmer and Malzacher's consolidated body of critical commentary represented a welcome opportunity to access alternative perspectives on the work. However, my sense is that neither the book nor the symposium quite escaped the pervasive force of Etchells' influence—to the extent that conference speakers often adopted modes of presentation not dissimilar to Etchells' own seemingly nonchalant tone and text (which weaves together personal anecdote, factual accounts and serious commentary).

<sup>644</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 25 March 2002

<sup>645</sup> Etchells 2001 op. cit.

<sup>646</sup> Richard Lowdon in rehearsal, 23 September 2002

<sup>647</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 21 March 2002

<sup>648</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 22 March 2002

<sup>649</sup> Claire Marshall in rehearsal, 22 March 2002

<sup>650</sup> Jerry Killick in rehearsal, 22 March 2002

<sup>651</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 21 March 2002

depict a particular situation, as might be the case in a more conventional production (such as the scenes 'set' in the lab, the nightclub and so forth in the David Glass production). Rather, it is a way of simply being "a group of people doing something in front of another group of people".<sup>652</sup>

By the time of the second phase of the process (which followed a break for touring), the company had hit on what amounted to the process' system. This took the form of a series of projects that the performers undertook on an individual basis (this will be described in more detail shortly) and on which they reported back to the rest of the group. Their individual 'reports' of their experiences in these projects became the raw material for the script that Etchells compiled during the last weeks of the creative period.

The 'set-up' (stage design) for the performance evolved from formats that were already in place as early as the second week of the first period of work. The most commonly used stage configuration from this point on was some variation of one or two long tables (usually downstage centre), with the performers on chairs around them or behind them. By 25 September, the final format consisted of two tables separated by a small gap, with an overhead projector positioned stage left. Each performer was allocated a table-top microphone and stand (Etchells commented that the microphones served to put the performer 'on the spot'). Copies of the performance script were visible on stage and the performers read from these, as well as from their own notebooks. As a finishing touch, Lowdon shifted the tables so that they slanted away from the "front line".<sup>653</sup> Before reaching this final 'set-up', the company tried and rejected a number of alternatives. They were

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<sup>652</sup> Etchells 2001 op. cit.

<sup>653</sup> Richard Lowdon in rehearsal, 23 September 2002

particularly preoccupied with the problem of projecting images of the photographs and maps that had been collated for the production.<sup>654</sup>

### **Core Activities**

The four core activities of the creative process were group discussions, group trials of provisional material, the individual projects undertaken by the performers, and Etchells' scripting of the material generated by these projects.

### Discussion

Forced Entertainment spent considerably more time in discussion than any other company encountered in the process of this research. Discussion or, more accurately, verbal articulation was used to propose new ideas and attempt to predict the results they might produce in practice (this sometimes culminated in a decision not to try out a particular idea); to give directions about initiating and developing trials; to plan projects; to assess the success of trials and runs; to summarise discoveries to date and outline the options for further work; and to identify whether further discussion was required. The participants showed themselves to be highly articulate and insightful in analysing their own work, very capable of expressing the subtle effects of particular trials and relating the work in hand to a range of reference points within the body of Forced Entertainment's work and the broader cultural sphere. The discussions themselves tended to be rather informal (no gathering around a table, for example), with company members pacing about and sometimes leaving the room, smoking and drinking coffee. They rarely engaged with each other very directly, so there was a tendency for one member (usually Etchells) to reflect aloud for some time, not particularly addressing any one member of the group and only occasionally asking questions

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<sup>654</sup> Where to locate the overhead projector for the maps was a question that occupied Etchells and Lowdon throughout the time in Frankfurt. It was decided that standing the performers by the projector as they showed transparencies of maps of the places they had visited allowed them to speak in a more discursive and personal register ("go long" in the terminology of the company) but that it was "hard" for the performers to get up from the table and move to the projector. Once it was decided that the projected maps did not need to be presented by individual performers (on 24 September 2002), the final position for the projector was set as stage left of the tables, and Lowdon (whose chair happened to be the closest one to the projector) was directed to stand by it and show the maps while other performers spoke.

or drawing conclusions. There were long silences, during which the company members seemed to be engaged in solitary reflection or waiting. Etchells spoke considerably more than other participants of the process. Analysing the transcripts of the observed rehearsals revealed that Etchells spoke over 70% of the total word-count, with Arthur and Lowdon being the most vocal of the other participants during the first period, and Lowdon and O'Connor in the period after the break for touring (Arthur was not present for the later phase). The relative newcomers John Rowley and Jeremy Kellick spoke the least. Etchells also engaged in a wider variety of the spoken activities listed above and used subtle techniques for retaining the discourse, for example by stating the number of points he was about to make ("I want to say three things about that ..."<sup>655</sup>) and thereby claiming the space in which to make that number of statements without interruption. Nevertheless, there was always an invitation to others for comment ("does anyone have anything to say about that?"<sup>656</sup>) and Etchells rarely discouraged others' contributions deliberately or explicitly.

### Trials

During the first period of work, the company were quite selective about what ideas to try out, often taking up to three days to assess the value of a particular trial and decide how to proceed. Once 'on a roll', they would usually go through a number of variations of a single idea. There were more trials during the second period of dedicated work once they had hit on the 'street names project' as their system. Most of the more formal trials were recorded on digital camcorder but were rarely played back: I witnessed only three showings of video material during the process.<sup>657</sup>

### Projects

The projects were essentially mechanisms for the production of material that would become the basis of the show—the production's system. The project that became the main system for the production was what became known as the 'street names project'. There were several variations on this, but it essentially consisted of allocating a particular street from

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<sup>655</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 23 July 2002

<sup>656</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 22 July 2002

<sup>657</sup> Forced Entertainment has provided the National Sound Archive (at the British Library, London) with an archive of rehearsal footage.

anywhere in the UK to a given performer who then had to visit the street, sometimes carry out what became known as a 'sub-project' while there, and bring back some sort of report or evidence of their visit (in some cases, maps and photographs). At first, performers chose streets on the basis of their names but later, these were allocated at random, sometimes from a collection of streets chosen according to theme (for example, streets with mythological names: 'story streets') or geography (to ensure a spread across the country) from street-finder websites. To begin with, quite specific 'sub-projects' were set: for example, participants might be given a series of questions to ask local inhabitants. By August, the performers were being given little direction as to what to do in their allotted destinations, so they would either make up their own sub-projects or simply visit the streets. Different methods of recording and disseminating their experiences were also tried: photographing street signs, sketching maps, recording whatever events occurred on the street, writing more formal 'letters to Tim' about the journey to the street and their experience on it. The projects were designed to broaden the show's frame of reference, to "get [the performers] into trouble"<sup>658</sup> (particularly variations that required them to engage with other people). It also meant that the 'virtual world' created by the performers' lines would have a precedent in the real world, although there was a deliberate ambiguity in the performance as to whether the events described as having happened, were in fact fictional.

The 'street names project' has its precedents in similar walking or mapping projects throughout the history of performance art. A recent incarnation is Graeme Miller and Mary Lemley's work, which includes mapping projects such as *Reconnaissance* and *Listening Ground, Lost Acres*.<sup>659</sup> As Graeme Miller said, such projects are appealing because the notion of mapping implies a futile attempt to impose order on chaos and because they expose the artist or participants to elements of chance: a way to "invite coincidence into the

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<sup>658</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 21 March 2002

<sup>659</sup> In *Reconnaissance*, Miller and Mary Lemley mapped the 1,200 acres of Norbury Park in Surrey using contributions from a range of participants (commissioned by Surrey County Council, South East Arts and the Arts Council of England for the Norbury Park Arts Project, 1998). In *Listening Ground, Lost Acres*, the artists created a series of walks that were accompanied by sound recordings in a particular area of Salisbury. The project was funded by The Arts Council of England and Southern Arts and commissioned by Salisbury Festival and Artangel in 1994.

process”.<sup>660</sup> Such concepts evidently chime with Forced Entertainment’s ethos and aesthetic. There is perhaps also a broad similarity in terms of a methodological approach, which Graeme Miller describes as “more architectural than creative”.<sup>661</sup>

### Scripting

The written material that was generated as a result of the ‘street names project’ was compiled by Etchells into a file that was referred to as the ‘30-page document’. This document contained short reports—one from each street visited—which were listed thematically. From mid-September, Etchells took on the task of adapting this into a script that would form the basis of the performance score. Etchells identified several categories of report—based on their theme (for example, the ‘sub-projects’ or ‘story streets’) or their mode of delivery (for example, ‘raw’ rather than ‘boiled’, short or long)—that could be used as separate sections in structuring the script. In addition, Etchells himself wrote a strand of reports that recounted the creation of the show (that is, the group’s actions and experience of the project as a whole, rather than any one individual’s experiences on a particular street or journey). The script retained the format of the reports. In performance, the reports were not necessarily delivered by the performer who had originally created them (although this was the preferred format). Successive drafts of the scripts centred on sorting the reports according to category and there were many discussions as to the order and the ‘voice’ in which the material was to be presented at different points in the performance. There was a high turnover of script drafts. In the performance, each performer had a copy of the script on the table in front of them, together with some notebooks and scraps of paper and they would sometimes read aloud from these documents.

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<sup>660</sup> Graeme Miller, untitled talk to postgraduate students at Goldsmiths College, University of London, 5 February 2003

<sup>661</sup> Miller *ibid.*

## Summary of the process

### Phase 1: Conception

The conception phase (from 21 March to 5 August 2002, approximately) was characterised by a great variety of 'ideas' that were not necessarily sequential 'improvements' on each other but rather seemed to go off at a tangent or were abandoned in favour of starting again from scratch. New ideas seemed to come from a store of rudimentary visions that were the basis of potential shows. Over the period, however, a new vision was formed (the idea of the 'virtual world' created by the utterances of the performers seated around a table) and the 'street names project' system was agreed.

### Phase 2: Material Generation

There was a fairly clear distinction between the conception phase and the material generation phase, marked by the point at which the 'street names project' became the primary mechanism for generating material—from about 5 August. The attention during this period was on the collation and preservation of a range of material, including performers' 'reports' (written or mental notes on their experiences in the streets they had visited, which were presented to the rest of the company), maps they had drawn of the streets they visited and photographs of streets and street signs.<sup>662</sup> This phase lasted until approximately 15 September. The reports were compiled in the '30-page document'.

<sup>662</sup>Several attempts were made in early September to stage the photographs (as digital projections). However, by the second week of work in Frankfurt, it was decided that the photographs had no place in the show. Etchells explained to me (informal interview, the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm bar, 24 September 2002) that presenting visual material had the effect of interfering with audience members' ability to listen to the spoken reports and visualise the objects related in them.



### **Phase 3: Fixing**

The fixing phase of the process coincided with the company's move to Frankfurt on 15 September. It was from this point that scripts were introduced as a form of explicit score. The main activity during this period was Etchells' drafting of successive scripts that were 'tested' on stage by the company through runs and lengthy discussion. The fixing phase also involved Lowdon and Etchells making final decisions about the 'set-up'.

### **Phase 4: Rehearsal**

The rehearsal period proper of *The Travels* was short: there was only one full run before the opening night at the Künstlerhaus Mousonturm, Frankfurt on 26 September. However, the performers had been dealing with the same material (the reports of the '30-page document') for a full month before the opening night, although the exact phraseology of the reports and, indeed, who was to speak each of them, went through a number of transformations. The process also allocated little time to explicitly directing the performers, either in terms of the delivery of the text or the non-verbal 'business'. The only explicit direction in terms of the performance style was for the company to react to each other as though the material being spoken was new—"not as though you've heard them a million times before".<sup>663</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 26 September 2002

### Phase 5: Performance

There was a certain amount of fictionalisation as to what was improvised and what was scripted in performance. The seemingly improvised 'raw' reports were performed as though for the first time: the performers seemed to be finding their words, trying to remember what they had experienced. Actually, most of the 'reports' on the streets had been performed in runs and trials and were, to a great extent, learned. Having said this, small changes to the phrasing of individual reports took place throughout the run. In addition, some significant changes in the structure were made during the first week of performance in Frankfurt, so that by the time the show opened in the UK<sup>664</sup>, there was some significant reordering of the material.

We see from this summary that the methodology for *The Travels* is typical of companies operating the System model of devising outlined in Chapter Six—particularly in its seeming intention to avoid a preconceived vision, an expressionist mode and meaning-making through the use of a system that is outside of the intentions of any one participant. The chosen system (the 'street names project') involved several processes: the allocation of the street names (mostly a chance-determined process); the requirement for performers to travel to the destination and engage in a number of pre-designed or self-generated projects (a process determined by the performers, but which also includes chance and contextual elements); and the need to prepare a report of this experience (another performer-determined process<sup>665</sup>). Unlike the Happening version of the System model outlined in Chapter Six, the system here was used to generate material that would be built into a fixed performance score (in this case, represented by the script) rather than being a performance score in its own right. Moreover, rather than simply enacting the task set by the director, *The Travels* dramatises this situation: a group of performers pretending to give their personal reports (in fact, half-fictionalised through the system of writing and rewriting), as if for the first time. Ironically, this attempt at making the performance moment seem more live through the

<sup>664</sup> Forced Entertainment Studio, the Workstation Sheffield, 4 October 2002

<sup>665</sup> Nyman op. cit. pp. 5–7

feigned social business actually betrays the anti-illusionary and anti-theatrical stance of the company's vision: the pretence that the performers have not heard this show night after night is obviously an illusion.

This process of dramatising the reports meant that the fixing stage of *The Travels* process was one of its longest and most important phases, essentially encompassing the final two months of the process and constituting the main focus of the intensive work in the last weeks. This phase also generated a heavy paper trail, from the performers' individual notes to the '30-page document' that compiled transcriptions of their reports, through the many drafts of the script that Etchells was responsible for creating and through which the performers' reports were written and rewritten. As with other models of devising, this fixing phase reveals the particular authorship and authority pattern of the company. In this case, we can consider the extent to which Etchells' role in writing the script gave him authorship in the process and how this can be squared with live art's determination to escape individual expression by "confounding intentions".<sup>666</sup> Whereas a purer version of the System model would not include processes determined by the director (leaving that to the performers, chance and so on), here Etchells not only determined the structure of the piece (the selection, order and length of the reports) but also authored some of the reports himself. In his essay 'On Performance Writing', Etchells claims that the company's work is akin to what he calls "radio porridge"<sup>667</sup>, where the writing is not the expression of an authorial voice but a "gabbling voice composed of scraps and layers, fragments, quotations. No editorial, or at least no centre"<sup>668</sup> and that it constitutes "writing that's more like sampling. Mixing, matching, cutting, pasting. Conscious, strategic, and sometimes unconscious, out of control. I'm quoting and I don't even know it".<sup>669</sup> In the case of *The Travels*, it was Etchells who took on the role of 'sampling' the "scraps and layers" that made up the performers' reports. At the same time, the extent to which Etchells retold, rewrote and, in some cases, allocated these reports to performers who had not generated them, suggests that he had a level of authorship akin to those promoters of the "voice ... which comes from *themselves*", from

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<sup>666</sup> Etchells 1999 op. cit. p. 55

<sup>667</sup> Etchells 1999 ibid. p. 99

<sup>668</sup> Ibid. p. 99

<sup>669</sup> Ibid. p. 101

whom Etchells wishes to distinguish himself.<sup>670</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that Etchells represents either the individual Romantic artist (discussed in relation to performance art in Chapter Six) or the auteur-director associated with the director's theatre version of the Ensemble model (as discussed in Chapter Five). The performers had a great deal of authority throughout the process, even though their authorship was subject to Etchells' editing and rewriting.

What makes *The Travels* process less hierarchical and Etchells less of an auteur than we would expect in these models is a culture of transparency that grants all participants a degree of authority in most phases of the process. While the most basic versions of the System model will begin with a pre-established system, the conception phase of *The Travels* engaged the whole company in a search for a system, giving the performers as well as the director authority to create "the rules themselves" rather than just the "interpretation of the rules".<sup>671</sup> Throughout the process, even in the fixing stage that represents the most obvious expression of Etchells' authorship, Etchells' most important role was in making explicit the tacit aspects of the creative and decision-making process. By speaking eloquently and at length about the effect of a particular trial or the reasons for a particular restructuring of the script, Etchells ensured that the whole company had equal knowledge and understanding of the vision and therefore that they had the potential for authorship and authority within the process. This is in sharp contrast to David Glass' reluctance to articulate his highly personal vision, which essentially limited the other participants' authorship and authority. The difference of approach is also reflected in the directors' activities: while Glass gave more time to setting exercises and improvisations and then 'editing' these through detailed instructional direction-giving, Etchells' main activity was commenting as an 'outside eye' on most of the trials. Etchells functioned as a trusted audience substitute and mirror for the company, which involved him in articulating the process in order to make it accessible to the performers. Thus, we see that the seemingly uneven distribution of authority is in fact an agreed strategy developed to enable group authority through an articulation of the vision. Having said this, it should be noted that *The Travels* participants varied in the extent to which

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<sup>670</sup> Ibid. p. 101

<sup>671</sup> Nyman op. cit. p. 19

they used their knowledge of the vision to express authority in the process. Lowdon had a previously established authority and responsibility over 'set-ups' and, after Etchells, he was the main source of new ideas or directions. Relative newcomers were more willing to leave decisions to the others. Responding to my enquiry as to how he felt the work was going as the opening night approached, John Rowley stated that he believed that it would be good because he trusted the company.<sup>672</sup> Such comments compounded an impression received throughout my observations that the performers tended to leave decision-making to Etchells.

One area in which the performers had a great deal of authority was in the performance and mode of delivery of their individual reports. Etchells gave little explicit direction to the performers regarding the style and 'choreography' of the piece, particularly in comparison to the attention to detail in these areas that a physical theatre company such as the DGE is likely to require. This is no doubt partly to do with the fact that Forced Entertainment's particular hyper-naturalistic, 'invisible' performance blurs the distinction between social and performance behaviour: the performers act 'as themselves', using their own habitual social behaviour as a model for the performance.<sup>673</sup> Their performance is therefore not 'imposed' by the director in the same way as a set piece of choreography.

We see from this that Forced Entertainment bears all the hallmarks of the System model of devising, even if it is an elaborate version of this model. At the same time, the company also exemplifies the Ensemble model in one important respect: its ensemble structure. We saw in Chapter Five that an ensemble consists of a tight-knit group that is inculcated into a particular physical or visual training system and philosophy (the 'big vision') and that this allows a company to develop an innovative approach and distinctive aesthetic. While not centred on any obvious training in performance skills<sup>674</sup>, Forced Entertainment's members are certainly bound together by a shared 'big vision'. The company's longevity is partly an

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<sup>672</sup> John Rowley in rehearsal, 25 September 2002

<sup>673</sup> This was also evident in the use of costume. In performing *The Travels*, the performers did not dress in costumes to indicate a fictional casualness equivalent to their low-key delivery (their rehearsal clothes, for example) but chose to dress slightly more formally (the women wore make-up, for example) in acknowledgement of the performance situation; after all, they were appearing in public.

<sup>674</sup> Forced Entertainment's hyper-naturalistic performance must nevertheless not be confused with a lack of a skill.

outcome of the participants' shared political agenda—what they call their “pragmatic socialism”—which determines the “collaborative way that we work”.<sup>675</sup> Key to this is their “hands-on approach”, which means that they avoid delegating work to outside participants: “I don't think it will ever come to the stage where Richard sits down, designs a set and hands it over to someone and they build it”.<sup>676</sup> The ‘big vision’ also constitutes a set of clearly defined aesthetic principles and current preoccupations: a frame of reference that includes the body of their own work as well as key figures in the lineage and current practice of live and performance art and a developed area of theory concerning ‘liveness’ and the role of performance in the twenty first century.

The company's longevity means that Forced Entertainment's methodology is extremely streamlined in comparison to that of younger companies or those operating on a core-and-pool structure. For example, Forced Entertainment has no need for formal processes designed to nurture group identity and mutual trust to train the performers and induct the group into a particular vision or methodology.<sup>677</sup> The long-term relationship between company members also seems to mitigate some of the negative side-effects experienced by the newer participants in the David Glass Ensemble as they sought to acclimatise to the company's distinct culture and vision. The newer participants in the FE process (Jerry Killick and John Rowley) displayed no signs of stress nor did they raise the sort of issues of authority and trust that characterised the making of *The Unheimlich Spine*.

Unlike the classic ensemble, Forced Entertainment's structure is a flattened hierarchy, with little specialisation in terms of role (again, a marked contrast to the David Glass Ensemble structure). The only formal distinctions mark Etchells' role as director and writer (though he does perform) and Richard Lowdon's interest in design.<sup>678</sup> While some aspects of *The Travels* process might suggest that Etchells is the key authority within the company (he

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<sup>675</sup> Robin Arthur interviewed in Michelle McGuire; ‘Forced Entertainment on Politics and Pleasure’ in *Variant* Vol. 2 No. 5, Spring 1998 p. 12

<sup>676</sup> Claire Marshall in McGuire *ibid.* p. 13

<sup>677</sup> These were the aims of the ‘Morning Work’ of the DGE process. See Chapter Eight of this thesis.

<sup>678</sup> This formalisation of role is something that has occurred over time. In the early years, O'Connor, Lowdon and others also directed.

leads the discussions in which the creative work is done and does the writing), this structure of authority is much more benign than that of the David Glass Ensemble.

The longevity of the company also means that they can have a longer-term view about their work than other companies. There is a large stock of ideas that are potential areas of exploration in rehearsal. For example, it seems habitual for Etchells to initiate a new area of exploration with a statement such as, “there’s this idea Robin and I had in Iceland”.<sup>679</sup> This pool of shared knowledge is evident in the preoccupations, themes and techniques that recur over a number of shows. Many of the ideas that were tested and rejected in *The Travels* are likely to appear in a future production. For example, the so-called ‘apology show’ that had a trial in the rehearsal of the 22 March 2002 has been in existence for some time.<sup>680</sup> Forced Entertainment’s most recent production, *Bloody Mess*<sup>681</sup>, includes a section derived from the ‘I hope you’re thinking’ trial in *The Travels* process<sup>682</sup>. We do not see the sort of changes of direction in the history of FE’s shows that may occur in companies that are open to some of the fresh insights that a quicker turnover of membership might bring. The play between the ‘theatricality’ of performance and the undercutting of the same that constitutes Forced Entertainment’s current preoccupation seems to have been a recurrent theme since the late 1990s. Etchells himself acknowledges that the company moves in “tiny grandmother steps”<sup>683</sup>, so that each production represents only a slight advance from, or in many cases a return to, the concerns explored in previous work.

Having said this, there has nevertheless been a significant shift in terms of the company’s aesthetic away from what was referred to earlier as the ‘post-modern’ phase of work.

Inevitably, this shift in aesthetic both determined and was determined by a development in the company’s creative methodology. This is revealed in Oddey’s account of the creative

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<sup>679</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 25 March 2002

<sup>680</sup> See Tim Etchells; ‘The Small Failures’ 2002 in the *Institute of Failure* website; available from: [www.institute-of-failure.com](http://www.institute-of-failure.com) (visited 12/06/04)

<sup>681</sup> SpielARt Festival, Munich, Germany, 1 November 2003

<sup>682</sup> Rehearsal, 18 April 2002

<sup>683</sup> McGuire op. cit.

process of *Some Confusions in the Law about Love*<sup>684</sup>, a show that sits safely within the performance aesthetic of the first phase and which Oddey saw through a year-long developmental process. A comparison between the process witnessed by Oddey and that of *The Travels* reveals some developments in terms of Forced Entertainment's creative process.<sup>685</sup>

The company Oddey describes in her account of *Some Confusions* was still in the process of discovering and constructing its methodology. Oddey notes "the company acknowledges that it will change the process or way of working for the next show by concentrating on more areas of work before rehearsals begin".<sup>686</sup> Ten years on, the company is much surer of its methodology and more concerned with the work in hand than with the refinement of its methods. It is also a quite different process. In Oddey's summary of the process "the company gathers together an almost random pile of text, images, ideas and personal experiences, out of which comes the subject matter for the piece"<sup>687</sup> and it "generates and discards a vast amount of material".<sup>688</sup> This pattern of producing a large amount of provisional material that is subsequently subjected to the interrogation and filtering of the director is akin to the Ensemble model. A delayed initial vision and an extended material generation phase results in a process where there is a lot of 'wastage': material that does not survive the ongoing scoring process. Moreover, the rejection of material in the Ensemble model tends to occur at key formal moments. *Some Confusions* used several work-in-progress showings (at Nottingham Polytechnic and at the ICA, prior to touring) to substantially rework the production.

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<sup>684</sup> Alison Oddey; *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, London & New York: Routledge 1999 pp. 85–104

<sup>685</sup> We must, however, remain aware that Alison Oddey's agenda is different from that of this research; Oddey's case-studies seek to draw principles that the reader (the book is targeted towards the undergraduate devising student) might apply in their own practice. My own research is not intended as a guide for student practitioners but instead looks at examples of practice in order to identify the characteristics of different models of devising and develop a methodology for writing about practice.

<sup>686</sup> Oddey op. cit. p. 99

<sup>687</sup> Oddey ibid. p. 87

<sup>688</sup> Oddey ibid. p. 101



Inherent in this pattern of work is a negotiation between organic, collaborative 'magic' on the one hand and disciplined organisation on the other: a negotiation we recognise from the Ensemble model of devising. Etchells' description of a creative strategy he called "Nice Cop/Nasty Cop" echoes this. According to Etchells, the company would alternate between "playing, thinking, doing, well, whatever came to mind" and "Improvisations [that] ... were long and relatively unstructured. The mood would be, well, 'see what happens' ..."<sup>689</sup> on the one hand and, on the other, "a process of interrogating the material ..."<sup>690</sup> that would "bring down a conceptual grid or frame onto whatever they were doing"<sup>691</sup> and during which:

They'd ask the questions that were largely denied until this point: what is that doing there? What might that mean? What does this imply about structure? Would this work be sustainable as a 'show?' What is missing from it? What does it remind one of? ... and they'd make demands of the material—for more sense (or less), for more joy (or less), for more pain (or less), for some intelligence (or less).<sup>692</sup>

By the time of *The Travels*, the company were much less inclined to try 'whatever came to mind'. In fact, a process of interrogation preceded every trial and no improvisation was attempted unless the company agreed that it was likely to generate either important material or, particularly in the first phase of the process, answer questions that had already been posed as to the direction of the work. Thus, in Forced Entertainment's current methodology, the organic 'magic' and the 'organisation' of the Ensemble model take place in parallel throughout the process.

It is in its earlier period of development that Forced Entertainment's methodology was most akin to the Ensemble model of devising. The company viewed itself an innovator of new forms of theatre and saw the formation of a permanent creative team as essential for developing this vision. The company's creative processes during this period were also typical of those of an Ensemble company: a 'messy' period that produced an abundance of material

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<sup>689</sup> Etchells 1999 op. cit. p. 52

<sup>690</sup> Etchells *ibid.* p. 52

<sup>691</sup> Etchells *ibid.* p. 53

<sup>692</sup> Etchells *ibid.* p. 52

from which the director then sculpted the rehearsal score. The company still retains some features of the Ensemble model and, in fact, its longevity as a stable core of participants who share a vision makes it a rare example in Britain of a true ensemble. The result is a company with a distinct 'big vision' of the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of its own work and a highly developed and unique mode of performance. However, while the company is now structured as an ensemble, its process is that of the System model of devising. Thus, the effort during the creative process is directed towards creating a *mechanism* for the generation of material (the system) rather than the material in its own right. Such a process results in work that is no longer the expression of an individual director-auteur but that uses elements of chance, game-like elements and 'compartmented' structures to short-circuit intentional individual expression. In coupling the structure of the Ensemble model with the process of the System model of devising, Forced Entertainment has developed a unique approach to devising.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Case-Studies: Gary Stevens

I have always worked and taught in an art context, but I often get caught between sculpture and theatre. I like this dangerous ground.<sup>693</sup>

It would perhaps be unwise to accept at face value Gary Stevens' claim that he occupies a position entirely between known fields or disciplines (usually, he refers to theatre and sculpture) and that he therefore escapes categorisation within any one context that might temporarily house his work (be it theatre, art gallery, dance festival or, as in this case, sculpture garden). He has almost twenty years' experience of performing in theatre (as well as gallery and site-specific) contexts and of working in group processes where his role is, in all but name, that of a director. However, Stevens has inherited from his background in sculpture and visual arts a feature that makes him an important case-study in this research. In many ways, Stevens exemplifies the figure of the individual artist discussed in Chapter Six in relation to the lineage from visual and conceptual art into performance art. Stevens is not an auteur-director: his work is not a straightforward enactment of his preconceived vision. He uses the System model of devising not to escape individual intention entirely but certainly to allow chance-, context- and performer-determined material into this work. At the same time, he readily admits that he does not wish to 'collaborate' with the participants of his projects, a characteristic that makes him rare among the practitioners studied in the course of this research—all of whom made some claims as to the 'collaborative' nature of their processes. This chapter, then, examines how such an artist can operate in a group context and analyses the particular methodological strategies required to manage the interpersonal repercussions of 20 participants responding to one man's authority.

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<sup>693</sup> Gary Stevens and Paul Bonaventura; 'Working Blind: Gary Stevens in conversation with Paul Bonaventura'. This document was produced to accompany the production of *Slow Life* at Matt's Gallery, London, 15 January to 2 March 2003.

The *Pieces of People* creative process illustrates the Happenings version of the System model illustrated in the Chapter Six. While Forced Entertainment used their system (the 'street names project') as a means of generating material that was then composed for performance, we will see that in Gary Stevens' methodology the set of 'rules' that constitutes the score is simply enacted in performance. This chapter will also discuss the role that vision plays in this model of devising, examining the extent to which a director's vision impacts on a process that seems designed to subvert preconceived and individual intentions.

Stevens is well respected by his peers and collaborators (indeed, he is acknowledged by Etchells as an influence on Forced Entertainment<sup>694</sup>) but believes that he has little recognition outside of his immediate field of practice. There is perhaps some truth in this view: there is little coverage of his work in academic journals or critical writing other than press listings and reviews of specific projects.<sup>695</sup> Stevens attributes this lack of serious attention to his alleged position between established fields. During the course of this case-study, Stevens told an anecdote regarding the press' perceived inability to cope with his between-the-gaps position. For a number of years, he says, both visual arts and theatre critics had been reviewing his work but, on one occasion, a paper realised that he had been receiving double exposure. From that time, he said, no critic from either of those disciplines would review his work. However, the press cuttings archive held at Artsadmin reveals that it is largely the context (literally, the venue) that determines whether a particular production will be previewed or reviewed, and in which section of the publication.<sup>696</sup> Is it not easy to prove that it is Stevens' alleged cross-disciplinary position that effectively marginalises his work.

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<sup>694</sup> Tim Etchells; *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, London & New York: Routledge 1999 p. 19. See also Tim Etchells; 'Teddy's Dead' *City Limits*, 16–23 November 1989, which reveals common themes between Forced Entertainment and Stevens' work.

<sup>695</sup> He has, however, won a number of awards, including the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts in New York (1996) and the Paul Hamlyn Award for Visual Arts (1998).

<sup>696</sup> For example, *Slow Life*, an installation involving five film projections, was shown in Matt's Gallery, London and was reviewed in *Art Monthly* (Dan Smith, March 2003), *ArtReview* (Duncan McLaren Vol. LIV, March 2003) and in the Arts pages of *Time Out* (Sarah Kent, January 29 to February 5 2003), whereas *Different Ghosts* was reviewed in the Theatre pages of *The Guardian* (David Adams, 15 March 1988) and *The Times* (Jeremy Kingston, 24 February 1988).

The issue of how to categorise Stevens' work is the subject of artist Yves Lomax' rather florid chapter in *A Split Second of Paradise*. She structures the chapter as a series of questions designed to highlight the impossibility of designating his work to any one field of practice:

Would you speak of a fine-art practice? Would you speak of the practice of theatre?  
Would you speak of performance art? Would you speak of the extended field of sculpture?<sup>697</sup>

While acknowledging Stevens' wide experience of different practices and his own desire to be seen to operate outside of discipline boundaries, I believe that there is a short answer to Lomax' questions: Stevens' work is performance art.<sup>698</sup> His work, as we will see, echoes many of the characteristics of performance art outlined in Chapter Six: it is structured as a "situation"<sup>699</sup>, in which a process of action may occur. Stevens' stated influences lie in the performance art lineage. Moreover, Stevens' view that he eludes traditional disciplinary delineations is typical of the form and is no doubt a remnant of the 1970s arts school ethos. Goldsmiths Fine Art Department, where he studied as an undergraduate, was known for its:

... interdisciplinary version of fine art practice ... a version of practice which sought to dissolve the conventional boundaries of practice, and to broaden the range of possibilities of expression available to young artists, while retaining practice with strong conceptual underpinning.<sup>700</sup>

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<sup>697</sup> Yves Lomax; 'Never/As Simple as ABC: the Work of Gary Stevens' in Nikki Childs and Jeni Walwin; *A Split Second of Paradise: Live Art, Installation and Performance*, London: River Oram 1998

<sup>698</sup> I am aware that this bold statement suggests a reductive approach and perhaps an over-eagerness to categorise the work. However, I believe it is useful to 'pigeon-hole' the work of my case-study practitioners in order to set them within a particular context and model of process.

<sup>699</sup> Michael Nyman; *Experimental Music: John Cage and Beyond*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999

<sup>700</sup> Brian Falconbridge, Head of Visual Arts at Goldsmith College, University of London, in a tribute to Michael Craig-Martin on his retirement in 2000; *Goldsmiths Research Newsletter, Hallmark 117*, 20 July 2000; available from Goldsmiths website: [www.gold.ac.uk/hallmark/117/](http://www.gold.ac.uk/hallmark/117/) (visited 30/09/03). Stevens believes that Falconbridge's description of the course gives an inaccurate impression. His own experience, he told me, was that the course still allowed individual students to pursue single disciplines. Not every student's work was cross- or inter-disciplinary (interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004).

The “interdisciplinary version of practice” that was going on in most art schools in the 1970s was an integral part of the development of performance art and its establishment as a recognised field of practice and tradition in Britain. It is a context in which Stevens’ work sits quite comfortably. This is not to deny, however, that Stevens’ work exploits to innovative effect the disciplinary clashes that exist within a tradition that has grown from both “fine art practice” and theatre-based performance. Thus, *Pieces of People* (the case-study project) relies for its humour and effect on the use of ‘people’ as sculptural material:

I want to say I’m an artist and not a performer. I’m working in a broader context because working with people and sculptures of people is funny. You’re not bronze .... If I’m a performer I’m supposed to be working with people and it’s not funny.<sup>701</sup>

Another factor in Stevens’ seemingly marginalised status is his reluctance to augment his reputation “on the conference circuit”: a strategy—which he attributed particularly to Forced Entertainment—of deliberately marketing to the student body and seeking to appeal to the academic community.<sup>702</sup> Although easily Etchells’ equal in relevant knowledge and critical intelligence, Stevens rarely speaks or writes about his own work in academic contexts. His self-professed carelessness in documenting and archiving his own work (compared to Forced Entertainment’s extensive archives and careful documentation) reflects his comparatively nonchalant attitude as regards his own reputation in the field.<sup>703</sup> Nevertheless, students and aspiring live art practitioners represent the core component of his audience.<sup>704</sup> Moreover, he intends his work to be considered in terms of current critical debate. “I’ve always seen the work as a kind of conversation,, a contribution to an ongoing conversation”<sup>705</sup> and “I put a great deal of weight on the critical perception of the work. That

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<sup>701</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 25 June 2003

<sup>702</sup> Informal interview with Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 20 June 2003

<sup>703</sup> In fact, Stevens deliberately destroyed the traces of much of his early work or made work that left no trace. This was in line with an ethos that sought to avoid the commercialisation of visual art (interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004).

<sup>704</sup> Stevens’ background as a university lecturer (particularly at Goldsmiths College, University of London) and his continuing work with students (about half of Stevens’ site-specific commissions since 1989 have been student productions) means that he is often in direct contact with such an audience.

<sup>705</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 3 July 2003. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from this interview.

is what it is for".<sup>706</sup> We see that Stevens, like Forced Entertainment, seeks to develop an informed audience, 'trained' to understand the work in relatively sophisticated terms. Stevens' education of the project participants, whom he referred to as 'my primary audience'<sup>707</sup>, is not just a methodological strategy, but also a marketing tool.

Stevens studied at Goldsmith College from 1973–1979, taking Foundation and Bachelor's degrees there. The prevailing culture of experimentation, the blurring of traditional boundaries and the conceptually-driven, disposable artwork fed into Stevens' work, which took the form of installations "in which a text appeared as a report or document which fictionalised found objects"<sup>708</sup> and which were almost instantly destroyed following their exhibition. Stevens cites as key influences Gilbert & George (particularly their living sculptures of the 1970s) and Bruce McLean's *Nice Style*, artists who moved into live performance from an art school background as a way of both reacting against and commenting on the notion of the art academy and its canon.

In the early 1980s, Stevens' interest in text led him to film-based performance, a field he pursued through his MA course at the Slade School of Art (1981–83). It was also during this period that he began his personal research into the comic tradition, looking in particular at the films of Laurel and Hardy. While he would move away from film fairly rapidly once he encountered live performance in 1984, his exploration into the comic tradition remains an important aspect of his heritage and his practice. In this, Stevens' development parallels that of the many physical theatre companies that used popular comedic forms in their early work (see Chapters Five and Seven), although his use of traditional comic forms is not so much a bid for popularity as for conceptual ends:

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<sup>706</sup> Stevens & Bonaventura 2003 op. cit.

<sup>707</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 25 June 2003

<sup>708</sup> Gary Stevens: biography and introduction to *Animal* in ICA catalogue 1989 p. 106

I have used the idea of slapstick to talk about an attack on representation; instead of setting up a stage to tell a story, it is set up only to be demolished .... I use humour to create critical space.<sup>709</sup>

As Tim Etchells says in his review of *Animal*<sup>710</sup>, “[the work] uses comic, engaging surfaces to tackle questions of identity, fiction and consciousness ...”.<sup>711</sup>

A key moment in Stevens’ career was his first encounter with live performance, which came when he invited Julian Maynard Smith (then of Theatre of Mistakes) to perform with him on a piece that would become *Invisible Work*.<sup>712</sup> The experience would have a significant effect on him. “As soon as I started to do live performance, I knew that this is what I was about.” The work of this period<sup>713</sup> marked a transition of his interest from “the image”—the centre of his focus in film—to “encounters with people”. He discovered that working with “people” in the live context allowed him to continue to question disciplinary boundaries and the notion of objecthood (“people can’t be contained”<sup>714</sup>). The work of this period tends to be theatre-based and to involve small numbers of performers. Stevens describes how the productions of the period up until 1995 “had a life” (by which he means they have a rudimentary narrative) and were “about making interesting worlds through texts”. During this time, he felt that the individual performers were essential to the piece: were “crucial and couldn’t be replaced”. By 1995, however, Stevens was “looking around for some other approach to work and a way of allowing spectators to have their own thoughts”. His show *Sampler*<sup>715</sup> seemed to suggest the way forward and marks the pivotal point between the work of the first and second period. Operating on a system-based approach that he derived from his early

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<sup>709</sup> Stevens & Bonaventura 2003 op. cit.

<sup>710</sup> *National Review of Live Art*, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow 1989

<sup>711</sup> Etchells 1989 op. cit.

<sup>712</sup> Acme Studios, London 1984

<sup>713</sup> Group shows during this period include *Invisible Work*, performed by Gary Stevens and Julian Maynard Smith; *If the Cap Fits* (Acme Studios, London 1985), performed by Caroline Wilkinson and Gary Stevens; *Different Ghosts*, with seven performers, including Gary Stevens; and *Animal*, with five performers, including Gary Stevens.

<sup>714</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 3 July 2003

<sup>715</sup> ICA, London, *London International Festival of Theatre*, 14 June 1995



experience with Station House Opera (which he described as “the mad son of Theatre of Mistakes”<sup>716</sup>), this piece was “very formal, not dealing with the individual and not acting”.<sup>717</sup>

His current approach is characterised by a move away from theatre spaces and towards working with larger groups of performers in gallery and site-specific contexts. It also represents an interest in the ‘how’ of live performance, finding systems with which to generate material, rather than in the material itself (the ‘what’). This, in turn, involves a new relationship with collaborators and participants: they are interchangeable and dispensable “vehicle(s) for the piece”. The first production of the new phase of work was the gallery show *And*<sup>718</sup> which, subsequent to its première in Brazil, was performed at the South London Gallery, at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford and at the *Desviaciones* dance festival in Madrid. On each occasion, a different set of performers took part.

Stevens sums up his current preoccupations (in rather obfuscating terms) on the Artsadmin website:

One [of two main themes] was to consider the spectator as the protagonist and the perception of the event as part of the model. The interpretation of events by the spectator became the main action. The other theme concerned the representation of people. The notion of a person was not identified with a human body, but displace [sic] onto the structure of the work.<sup>719</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004

<sup>717</sup> By ‘formal’, Stevens meant that it worked according to a series of rules, not that the performers were formal in their behaviour. In *Sampler*, an off-stage sound operator built a virtual world for the performers through a system of sound cues (for example, by playing the sound of footsteps on a hard surface when the performer walked on one part of the stage, then changing this to footsteps on carpet as they moved to another). Through a process of trial and error, the performers learnt certain non-mimetic cues by which they could open imaginary doors, go into different rooms and so on (the sound operator would not give the appropriate sound effect until they had performed a particular series of movements correctly).

<sup>718</sup> Panorama RioArte de Danca Festival, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 8 November 2002

<sup>719</sup> In the Introduction to Gary Stevens on the Artsadmin website; available from: [www.artsadmin.co.uk/artists/gs/index.html](http://www.artsadmin.co.uk/artists/gs/index.html) (visited 27/06/05)

The first “theme” refers (if I have understood Stevens correctly) to the involvement of the audience in the meaning-making process; as we have seen, it is characteristic of live and performance art to renegotiate the audience role sometimes physically and almost universally by refusing to explain (or even know) what a piece is about. Stevens stated that his work is not “anti-meaning” to the same extent as that of Impact (see Chapter Six), but although he wants it to “resonate”<sup>720</sup>, we will see that it certainly avoids a representative approach. The second “theme” configures the performer not as an expressive and articulate human being but as ‘material’ and thus interchangeable. This, in turn, has the effect of throwing the audience’s attention onto the group of performers and the work itself. In playful subversion of live art’s current preoccupation with the body as the site of performance<sup>721</sup>, Stevens shifts the site to the body of the work itself.<sup>722</sup>

This account of Stevens’ development might at first glance suggest the naïve sailing “into the theatrical world from art school, without baggage, without self-consciousness” described by Julian Maynard Smith as the route of early performance artists.<sup>723</sup> Yet, as revealed in interview, Stevens’ interest in and indeed serious study of performance began at least as far back as his Slade years. This suggests that, in fact, his methodology is derived as much from models of theatre and performance practice as it is from his early visual arts background.<sup>724</sup>

Stevens now creates, and often performs in, both solo and group productions for touring and is regularly commissioned to work with local participants or student groups to create new work for a particular festival or event. He is represented by Artsadmin, a management agency and resource for live artists.<sup>725</sup> His primary form is live performance, though there are

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<sup>720</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004

<sup>721</sup> See Tracey Warr (ed.); *The Artist’s Body*, London & New York: Phaidon 2003

<sup>722</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004

<sup>723</sup> Quoted Sarah Kent; ‘An Act in Several Parts: The Work of Station House Opera’ in Childs & Walwin (ed.) op. cit. p. 125

<sup>724</sup> Stevens was keen to point out that these are not mutually exclusive areas and that, by working in the cross-over area, he is not necessarily falling outside of a tradition (interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004).

<sup>725</sup> In fact, Artsadmin is behind most of the artists that characterise contemporary British live art: Bobby Baker, Rose English, Graeme Miller (formerly of Impact), Station House Opera and so on.

exceptions to this: for example, *Slow Life*<sup>726</sup>, a gallery-based video installation and *Robin Hood: the Stuff*<sup>727</sup> a radio piece. Stevens' work is funded on a project-to-project basis, a financial situation that is no doubt only feasible because Stevens operates as a solo artist. Collaborators and participants are also recruited on a project-to-project basis, either from the locality of the project or, in the UK, through the Artsadmin mailing lists and e-digest. One ongoing seam of work is his Performance Lab, a monthly workshop he runs at Artsadmin through which a number of artists share their work and ideas.

Partly because of the funding situation, and possibly also because it suits him, the yearly schedule of projects is more sporadic than that of regularly funded companies such as the David Glass Ensemble or Forced Entertainment, who produce a major project every eighteen months and every twelve months respectively. Nevertheless, Stevens is rarely without a project and often has more than one to work on. Stevens' work tends to emanate from his ongoing research and preoccupation with different aspects of performance. For example, *And*, *Slow Life* and *Pieces of People* are all, to some degree, preoccupied with the representation of human 'mind' and thought-process: the discontinuities caused by the repetition in *And*, the elongated movement in *Slow Life*, and the impression of a 'group mind' in *Pieces of People* all subvert conventional notions of how the mind works.

## **Account**

*Pieces of People* was commissioned by David Thorp (Curator of Contemporary Projects, a department charged with organising events with artists at the Henry Moore Foundation's sculpture garden<sup>728</sup>) as a one-off event, set in the grounds of the Perry Green sculpture garden on 28 June 2003. The piece was intended for a 'lay' audience, whose primary interest was in the Henry Moore gardens, rather than Stevens himself. It was promoted by both Contemporary Projects and Artsadmin through e-mail shots and flyers as a free, 'invitation only' event.

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<sup>726</sup> Exhibition at Matt's Gallery, London, 15 January – 2 March 2003

<sup>727</sup> Broadcast by NOWfm for the *NOW ninety8 Festival* in Nottingham, 1998

<sup>728</sup> The department has subsequently closed.

Stevens had chosen to work with 20 participants as performers: ideally 10 women and 10 men. Performers were recruited through the Artsadmin e-digest and from the Performance Lab. A shortage of men led to a more active drive for male performers, so that some were brought on board through Stevens' and other participants' personal contacts. In the event, only six men were recruited. In describing the audition, one participant noted "... it [wasn't] so much selecting on merit but selecting on the fact that you ain't got no choice".<sup>729</sup> The performers came from a variety of backgrounds and training contexts, encompassing both performance (in dance, theatre and live art) and visual arts (photography, sculpture and painting), both students and those more advanced in their careers. In interview, Stevens suggested that he deliberately recruited participants from a variety of backgrounds because he enjoyed creating "a community of people" and that it was important to him that all participants were, in some way, "artists".

The Contemporary Projects website describes the project as follows:

*Pieces of People* is conceived as a collection of clustered elements that constitute larger objects. The 'elements' are people who form into temporary, often momentary configurations that appear around the grounds at different times. These structures are sometimes interwoven within the environment and amongst the spectators, blurring the distinction between objects and events.<sup>730</sup>

This developed into a show that consisted of five 'pieces' taking place in four of the sculpture garden's sites. The audience were led through the garden, stopping at each of the relevant sites. Each of these pieces might be described as a "temporary sculpture", made out of the performers. Moving in an everyday manner<sup>731</sup>—walking, running, standing and so on—the

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<sup>729</sup> Interview with Philip Lee, 5 August 2003

<sup>730</sup> The Henry Moore Foundation website, Contemporary Projects page; original published on [www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk/site/thesite/contemporary/garystevens.html](http://www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk/site/thesite/contemporary/garystevens.html) (visited 11/06/03), but no longer available. The Henry Moore Foundation website is available on [www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk/matrix\\_engine/content.php?page\\_id=31](http://www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk/matrix_engine/content.php?page_id=31)

<sup>731</sup> This echoes the use of found movement by US artists such as Bruce Nauman and Yvonne Rainer.

group of performers created shapes and formations on the landscape that were somewhat reminiscent of the movement of animals or of sub-atomic particles and which suggested an “artificial group psychology”.<sup>732</sup> The pieces made no formal attempt to relate to or imitate the Henry Moore sculptures exhibited within the areas, though the audience were free to make their own associations between Stevens’ temporary sculptures and Moore’s more monumental edifices. However, it may be possible to read the production as a mild ridiculing of Moore<sup>733</sup>, which would put it in a direct line with Bruce McLean’s 1970 *Pose Work for Plinths*:

By inserting his living body in place of the art object one would normally see on such plinths, and specifically parodying the dignified reclining maternal figure of Henry Moore, McLean subverted the monumental rhetoric of traditional sculpture.<sup>734</sup>

In describing the show and its process of creation, I will be using the following names to identify the five pieces in the show. The names are derived from those used informally during the rehearsal. Performance sites are shown in brackets.

- i. Rabbits (Sheep Field and adjacent field<sup>735</sup>)
- ii. Herd Formation (also called ‘Coming out of Bushes and Chasing’), Amoeba and Train (Sheep Field)
- iii. Swarm (Arch Space)
- iv. Embracing or Hugging and Knotted Rope (Hay Field)
- v. Slow Firework or Breathing (Sheep Field)

Stevens’ way of working in this project was based on two themes: what he called an “equal picture” (that is, identical performance roles for each performer) and the use of what he called “principles” (in other words, the rules used to generate and structure material both in

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<sup>732</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, Monday 23 June 2003

<sup>733</sup> Stevens was keen to point out that he did not intend to ridicule Moore’s work but that he expected the piece to “ruffle the feathers” of those who regarded Moore with awe (interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004).

<sup>734</sup> Warr op. cit. p. 86

<sup>735</sup> See map of Perry Green, p. 229

the creation and the performance of the show). These “principles” were what constituted the system that defines the *Pieces of People* process as a clear example of the System Model.

Stevens described two conflicting sides of the “equal picture” performance:

I want you to work very much as a team with each other so we get the idea that you're like a herd of animals. You lose yourself as an individual. Of course, we don't lose you as individuals. One of the best ways to highlight performers is making you all do the same thing. I know it can't be homogenous.<sup>736</sup>

Thus, each performer was equally responsible for her individual execution of rules that are held in common. The effect of a company of 20 or so performers operating by rules that were invisible to the audience produced the uncanny impression that the group consisted of a single entity or that they shared a group mind: “I give you an individual rule and when you're all obeying it something larger comes out of it”.<sup>737</sup> The features of the work outlined so far directly echo Yvonne Rainer's survey of minimalist tendencies in dance, which lists found movement, equality of parts, repetitive or discrete events, neutral performance and task or task-like activity as important characteristics of the form.<sup>738</sup>

In conducting this research, my first point of contact was with Artsadmin and it was Bia Oliveira (the project co-ordinator) who suggested Gary Stevens as a suitable case-study subject. Within a week of first speaking to Oliveira, I joined the performers at Toynbee Studios for the induction meeting. There was little formal discussion as to the conditions or limits of my attendance. I was given access to as many rehearsals as I liked (I attended all but two rehearsal days) and transport to and from the venue was arranged (with a fairly regular carload of performers).

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<sup>736</sup> Gary Stevens on the Induction Day, 13 June 2003

<sup>737</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 16 June 2003

<sup>738</sup> Yvonne Rainer; 'A Quasi Survey of some 'Minimalist' tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A' in Gregory Battcock (ed.); *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, New York: Dutton & Co 1968. Quoted in A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (eds.); *Performance by Artists* Toronto: Art Metropole 1979 p. 18

The working atmosphere for this project was by far the most pleasant and relaxed of those I have attended in the course of this research. This was partly due to the site-specific nature of the project (the sculpture garden is beautiful and its rural location made the rehearsal feel “like a holiday”<sup>739</sup>) and the pleasure of working with a large number of interesting people from a variety of backgrounds. Stevens also makes a deliberate effort to make his processes “fun”, in opposition to other artists, who see the devising process as a painful experience (he cited Graeme Miller and Julian Maynard Smith as examples).<sup>740</sup> While this atmosphere no doubt had its effect on the process, I was careful not to be swayed into an overly rosy reading of the experience. This meant making an effort to retain a polite distance from the performers within the emerging ‘hot-house’ intimacy and retaining an objective distance in my subsequent analysis of the process.

As well as interviewing Stevens himself, I interviewed as many of the participants as were willing and available: six out of the 20 performers. These included a performance artist working from a background in textiles, a theatre/ live art performer, an MA visual arts student, a performance artist with a background in contemporary dance, a performance artist working in ceramics and a contemporary dancer. A second interview with Stevens was conducted about a year after the original project in which he commented on an early draft of this chapter.

The dedicated creative period was two weeks long and took place on site at Perry Green (the short period was due to Gary’s involvement in another project in Vienna). The initial audition and an introductory workshop session with the selected participants (the ‘Induction Day’ on 13 June 2003) had both taken place in London prior to the dedicated period. The creative period was much shorter than is usual for Stevens. He therefore planned a simple performance that could be comfortably created and rehearsed within the available time.

The first days of rehearsal were spent experimenting with a number of rule-based systems. There was a high turnover of ideas. A number of the pieces that would survive the process

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<sup>739</sup> Interview with Philip Lee, 5 August 2003

<sup>740</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004

were generated at this point, though a few ideas were rejected. While on the Induction Day, Stevens explained that the work would be based on the idea of hiding and revelation. However, by the Wednesday of the first week, Stevens stated that his vision had shifted somewhat: rather than notions of hiding and revelation, his interest was now in the seeming 'life' of the group as an entity and the individuals within it. As Stevens said, it was "more like physics and particles and not so much about hiding". The rest of the week was spent defining the separate 'pieces' that had emerged up to that point. By the Monday of the second week, Stevens had decided on the order in which the pieces created so far would be performed. He spent the first half of the week walking the performers through this and, on the Wednesday, consolidating his ideas and explaining them to the performers. The rest of the week was spent rehearsing runs of the show.

### **Core activities**

#### Trials

The main activity throughout the creative process was the setting up, execution and refinement of successive trials (trying out 'new ideas' and refining established ones). The attention was on establishing the principles and strategies that determined the performers' behaviour in each of these pieces. Setting up the trials would take an unusual amount of effort because of the site-specific nature of the project. As the largeness of the space rarely allowed Stevens to direct moment-to-moment, he was obliged to give quite complex directions with the performers gathered around him before sending them off into the space to execute his instructions. This would occasionally cause anxiety for the performers, as some found it difficult to remember the full set of instructions or the subtleties within them. Stevens also sought to tread a fine line between giving clear and concise instruction on the one hand and overly determining the outcome on the other. He argued that "nice things happen by accident, so let's not plan".<sup>741</sup>

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<sup>741</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 16 June 2003



Following a trial, Stevens would attempt to describe its effect—whether it ‘worked’ or not—with a view to choosing whether or not to develop it and if so, in what way. These descriptions were fairly extensive and he made efforts to ensure the participants understood them. One of his most commonly used phrases was “I hope you can see how that’s working”. On the occasions when a trial was rejected outright (mainly on the second day of rehearsal), his comments were brief (“it’s not working”) and he would gently restrain performers’ attempts to salvage the piece. Most of the experiments, however, ‘survived’ in some form to the final show.

As the work involved a large number of performers following the same principles, Stevens could afford to allow two or three performers at a time to sit out of a particular trial and watch rather than participate. Allowing the performers to see “what it looks like on the outside”<sup>742</sup> helped induct them into the vision and thereby determine their responses in subsequent trials.

### Exercises

In addition to the trials, Stevens initiated a small number of exercises designed to establish and refine technical skills required for the pieces: for example, practicing the embraces used in Piece IV. More often, Stevens would demonstrate a particular movement or the required performance mode (he called this the “attitude”).<sup>743</sup> His skill at performing in these brief demonstrations was impressive and entertaining, a fact pointed out by a number of the performers I interviewed.<sup>744</sup>

### Discussion

There were two relatively formal discussions, which took place on each of the two Wednesdays of the process and which followed a similar format to that of the Induction Day. In these ‘consolidations’, Stevens summarised the progress made to date, invited feedback from the performers and addressed any questions or concerns they raised. Stevens did the

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<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

<sup>744</sup> “I mean, when he demonstrates something, he just does it so well ... he does it so well that none of us can really do that” (interview with Rachel Gomme, 22 July 2003).

majority of the talking. With rare exceptions, the performers' comments consisted of clarifying questions concerning particular pieces and the principles behind them or practical concerns regarding the performance (for example, requesting that bottles of water be put aside for them during the performance). Stevens addressed all comments and concerns seriously and thoughtfully.

#### Other activities

At the performers' request, a daily warm-up was instituted (the physically demanding aspect of the work had caused the performers some stiffness during the first days). In principle, each participant would have the opportunity to lead a warm-up; in practice, it was only those performers who had dance or physical theatre training or Stevens himself who led them. When not leading, Stevens would take part in warm-ups himself. The site-specific nature of the work (we were housed in a gallery which had some seating, a kitchen, storage and toilet facilities) meant that performers tended to be in close contact throughout the day and were engaged in an unusual amount of shared 'domestic' tasks (washing up, food making, liaising with staff of the Henry Moore Sculpture Garden). I believe that this contributed to a working atmosphere that valued individual contribution and loyalty to the group, not only in helping out, but more importantly in supporting each other through the process.

## Summary of process

### Phase 1: Conception

The conception phase took place prior to the dedicated creative period in the first three days of the process (16–18 June 2003). Although Stevens claimed at the outset that he was working from a position of not knowing<sup>745</sup>, the Induction Day indicated that he began with a fairly detailed vision of the show. By the third day, this initial vision had been tested and revised so that it shifted from “a fusion of Benny Hill and Henry Moore”<sup>746</sup> to something that plays “with something about the communication between you and the isolation of individuals” and “a question about what is permanent and what is temporary” (the difference between the seemingly permanent Moore sculptures and the moving shapes made by the performers).<sup>747</sup>

### Phase 2: Material generation

The ‘material’ that was generated in this phase of the process—from 18–20 June approximately—took the form of different sets of ‘principles’, which would be formulated into the five “pieces”. During this phase of the process, Stevens worked on different “chunks of movement”<sup>748</sup>, without as yet considering how they connected. These “chunks of movement” would quickly coalesce into the “pieces” that would constitute the final show.

<sup>745</sup> “There’s a fallacy about things being preconceived. I have very little at the beginning .... It is being made as I look at it, as everyone else is looking at it” (interview with Gary Stevens, 3 July 2003 op. cit.).

<sup>746</sup> Induction Day op. cit.

<sup>747</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 18 June 2003

<sup>748</sup> Clare Wright in rehearsal, 25 June 2003

### Phase 3: Fixing

In the last consolidation discussion of the process, one of the performers requested a written version of the 'play-list' of pieces.<sup>749</sup> Stevens agreed to provide one if it proved necessary but there was no further mention of it and a written version of the score never materialised.<sup>750</sup> Instead, the most formal fixing phase took place on Monday of the second week (23 June). Stevens talked through the order of events he had planned over the weekend, then walked the performers through a detailed and extensive "ghost version" of it ("as it's a case of fixing it in our minds"), thereby making explicit the performance score. This process took place over two and a half days until the consolidating discussion of 25 June. This score essentially put the pieces that had been established to date into an order and added connecting passages. There was very little new material.

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<sup>749</sup> "When you know what we're doing, could you write it down for us?"; Julia Keller in rehearsal, 25 June 2003

<sup>750</sup> There are a number of reasons why a written score was inappropriate for this production; the show was relatively simple and the rehearsal process short; it did not contain spoken text, which would have to be memorised; the principle-based methodology meant that directions were explicitly given throughout the rehearsal process (with daily reminders, the performers did not need a written text to refer to); and, as a system operating in the moment of performance, the precise interpretation of the directions could not be prescribed in advance.

#### **Phase 4: Rehearsal**

There were only two complete runs of the show prior to the public showing, representing an abbreviated rehearsal phase. This was partly due to the principle-based System, which allowed performers a large degree of autonomy in their interpretation of the principles and a wide range of acceptable responses to the directions that this score represented.

During the rehearsal phase (25 and 26 June), the performers pushed for a more explicit performance score, asking a series of questions. For example, preceding a run of piece I, they asked, “what do we do if there are kids there?”; “what if the ‘danger’ [a spectator whose movements should trigger them to run in the ‘rabbits’ piece] is just at one end?”; “how far into the orchard can we go?”; “do we end up closer to each other?”<sup>751</sup> Most of these questions reflected their concern regarding a particularly unpredictable factor in the performance: the spectators.

#### **Phase 5: Performance**

There was little choreographic direction of the piece: the performers knew the principles that would determine each piece and the order in which the pieces were to be played. They had also practiced the desired performance mode. Within these parameters, there was a large element of performer-determined authority as well as action determined by the context—particularly the audience, whose actions at points determined those of the performers. In fact, the audience would often behave in ways that had not been predicted, which had a significant impact on the performance.

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<sup>751</sup> Various performers in rehearsal, 23 June 2003

## Analysis

I probably have an approach but I haven't formulated it.<sup>752</sup>

Stevens' background in both visual art and performance might suggest that he does not follow a single methodology or training system, at least not explicitly and not, if we can take the quote above at face value, consciously. In interview, he suggested that his background allows him to work outside of any one discipline, an approach that he distinguished from that of a craftsman:

If you are a ceramicist or whatever you don't necessarily have a critical perspective on your craft, you don't see outside it. It's the difference between a photographer, who is expected to know what he's doing, and an artist working with photography who might know as much about grain or whatever, but also sees outside of the craft.<sup>753</sup>

The implication is that Stevens is a visual artist working, in this case, in performance but without taking on the established practices of performance or theatre wholesale. This outlook is coupled with a resistance to achieving mastery of any particular craft—getting too slick or formulaic—perhaps as a reaction against the emphasis on virtuosity in the fine arts canon.<sup>754</sup> Stevens wants to avoid the position of knowing too well how to do something. “I have to be careful that I don't get too good at the thing I do. If I do, I have start again. I need to keep starting again.”<sup>755</sup> The work thereby becomes less a display of skill and more about the development of conceptual ideas. Moreover, by not defining his work and his way of working as ‘theatre’ or ‘performance’, Stevens is able to work with practitioners from a variety of backgrounds who do not necessarily have a particular performance or physical training. Unlike the companies operating the Ensemble model, there is no need for participants to create a ‘common language,’ nor to have extensive skills, such as those associated with

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<sup>752</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 3 July 2003

<sup>753</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 3 July 2003

<sup>754</sup> Gary Stevens is, in fact, a highly skilled performer.

<sup>755</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 3 July 2003

physical theatre. In fact, their not being “too good at the thing [they] do” is an aspect of the aesthetic: Stevens’ work plays with the gaps between the intended effect and the effort to enact it. In *Slow Life*, for example, the interest was in the performers’ failure to entirely convince us they were in a slow motion film:

The performers have to concentrate very hard on their movements but they do not have to have the technical ability to do perfect slow motion. There is a tension about the piece, as there is in a high-wire act. I do not want any of the performers to achieve a slow-motion effect—to give the idea that time has slowed down.<sup>756</sup>

In fact, *Pieces of People* did require a quite particular performance mode in which performers were to avoid both stylised or exaggerated ‘theatrical’ movements and overly relaxed, unconscious gestures (something like Yvonne Rainer’s “neutral performance” and also the ‘neutrality’ in Lecoq training<sup>757</sup>). Alongside this, the performance demanded a keen kinaesthetic awareness (so as to be able to determine relative distances and one’s position in the space) and sensitivity to the other performers (so as to be able to respond quickly to their actions): what in physical theatre training might be called ‘complicité’. The ‘equal picture’ performance style also presented challenges for the performers, both in mastering the performance skills needed to lose oneself as an individual without completely submerging into the group, and also in overcoming the “ego-tremors”<sup>758</sup> that resulted when individual performers felt that there was no opportunity to be:

... particularly maybe proud of your individual performance because you don’t necessarily do anything particularly. You can’t sort of say, ‘well I was the leading person, I was the support or I was whatever and I made a particular contribution’ because almost, if one of us had been ill, it wouldn’t have made any difference.<sup>759</sup>

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<sup>756</sup> Stevens & Bonaventura, 2003 op. cit. p. 1

<sup>757</sup> See Rainer op. cit. and Jacques Lecoq with Jean-Gabrielle Carasso and Jean-Claude Lallias; *The Moving Body (Le Corps Poétique): Teaching Creative Theatre*, London: Methuen 2000 p. 36

<sup>758</sup> Interview with Martha Wildman, 25 July 2003

<sup>759</sup> Interview with Clare Wright, 4 August 2003

By 'equalising' the performers, Stevens also effectively rendered them passive subjects to his vision. In this respect, Stevens' methodology is more akin to that of a visual artist's individual process of creation than that of collaborative theatre. He is very much the authority of the show and it is his taste and judgement that determined the scoring process. A group of artists who normally work in a self-determined, individual context may find it difficult to co-operate on someone else's vision: performer Clare Wright mentioned a fellow Performance Lab artist who chose not to participate in *Pieces of People* precisely because he felt that he would "lose something by working on it; he would lose some control or part of himself by working on it".<sup>760</sup> The artists that did participate, however, found this surrender to another person's vision liberating. One stated, "It was beautiful, actually ... not making all of those decisions and not having to go through 'oh, what am I going to do?' or 'what do I want to say?'"<sup>761</sup> This performer went on to express envy for performers and dancers who, she imagined "are brought into somebody else's vision and basically put into it". Indeed, another participant (a contemporary dancer) contrasts her own approach to the production with that of the 'artists' in the group:

I suppose I'm used to being in processes where things happen around me almost, and I question decisions occasionally but essentially I leave those decisions to somebody else. I suppose Philip [Lee, a performance artist working with ceramics techniques] does a lot of work where he is constantly asking himself what it means and what it is: what his role in it is. And I suppose, for some people, it's the look of the thing, stylistically or pattern-orientated ....<sup>762</sup>

However, Wildman's approach of leaving the decisions to somebody else (presumably the director or choreographer) was one that Stevens resisted. When I mentioned her view to Stevens, he stated that:

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<sup>760</sup> Interview with Clare Wright, 4 August 2003

<sup>761</sup> Interview with Sarah Buist, 29 July 2003

<sup>762</sup> Interview with Martha Wildman, 25 July 2003



I work against the idea of the dancer as a subordinate and a tool. I want them there as a fully-formed person. I want them to understand what they're doing, even if what they're doing is being an object. I don't care what dancers expect, I want them to have the headache of understanding the work. If they understand the game, they have some kind of freedom.

As we saw in Chapter Two, there are two levels of understanding that relate to the vision. The first is the sense of understanding “what works and doesn't work. It might not be what they would do, but they have to know why I keep something or not”—that is the working vision. Stevens also expected the participants to develop an understanding of the ‘big vision’, which in this case encompassed the conceptual and contextual basis of the work—the sort of considerations Stevens expressed in statements such as, “I'm trying to blur the difference between an object and an event.”<sup>763</sup> In long-term groups such as Forced Entertainment, it is expected that the participants share and contribute to this ‘big vision’. Stevens makes the assumption that his participants would quickly develop an understanding of the work in these terms because they themselves are artists: “What's exciting about working with you is that you're intelligent human beings and artists. You have a broader understanding of what you're doing. You're, in a way, my primary audience”.<sup>764</sup> In fact, participants from different disciplines tended to ‘understand’ the work in relation to their respective disciplines. For example, choreography student Daniel Vais' comments after watching a trial related to visual effect and performance quality:

... the beginning is quite stunning. It's very interesting when people are doing it mechanically ... it's nice to see the different energies and speeds of people. It's spectacular, it's hooking [*sic*], fascinating.<sup>765</sup>

On the other hand, sculpture student Tariq Hussein associates the work with that of one of his favourite artists: “It's like a people version of Richard Long's slates”.<sup>766</sup> For the most part,

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<sup>763</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 25 June 2003

<sup>764</sup> Ibid.

<sup>765</sup> Daniel Vais in rehearsal, 23 June 2003

however, the performers tended to avoid conceptual considerations: "I don't really want to understand the concept".<sup>767</sup>

Most of us, we were interested in it ['the process behind it'] in so far as how did it affect us; what did we need to do? And there wasn't much opportunity ... to have a look at it and contextualise it through art history or within his work or with anybody else's.<sup>768</sup>

Whether the participants' apparent failure to engage with the 'big vision' had any impact on the production is impossible to assess. In a short process, it was inevitable that their focus was primarily on the 'working vision' that would have the more immediate impact on their work. Although the 'working vision' was deliberately simple and explicit, there were discrepancies in terms of individual performers' understandings of it. For example, in interview, Wildman distinguished between performers such as herself, who believed that the overriding principle was to be sensitive in the moment of performance and those performers who, she thought, were overly obedient to a single rule. She gave as an example a small incident that occurred at the end of a run of piece III:<sup>769</sup>

I meandered off down the bottom and I think Rachel [Gomme] was following me, and I speeded up, and Rachel called out and said, 'don't speed up, we're supposed to be meandering' ... [but] what you don't want to do is you don't want the whole group meandering and one guy hot-footing it up there ... so what you do is you have to ... act as a bridge between the people who are doing it the way they think they should and the people that are doing it the way that they think they should but are doing it a little bit wrong. So you have to constantly monitor your position and stay in the

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<sup>766</sup> Tariq Hussein in rehearsal, 23 June 2003

<sup>767</sup> Daniel Vais in rehearsal, 25 June 2003

<sup>768</sup> Interview with Philip Lee, 5 August 2003. It is not entirely accurate for Lee to suggest that there was no opportunity to engage in such discussions; the two formal consolidation discussions were designed for just that and there were ample informal opportunities to broach the subject (Stevens joined the group for meals and breaks). However, it might be fair to say that it was mostly Stevens who spoke during the formal discussion sessions and that his own willingness to explain the piece might have precluded further conversation.

<sup>769</sup> Rehearsal, 26 June 2003

middle of it. Otherwise, you know, this person suddenly looks like they're very separate from the group and that's not what the concept was about. The concept was about being a whole group all the time.<sup>770</sup>

Thus, Wildman's understanding of the vision is that it is about "being a whole group all the time" and she acts accordingly (speeding up to bridge the gap), whereas in Gomme's view (according to Wildman's account of the incident) the aim is precise obedience to the directions given: to 'meander'.<sup>771</sup> This incident also illustrates another area of tension in the process: the power dynamics between the performers. One example of this manifested itself in ongoing friction regarding the extent to which performers should instruct each other once out of Stevens' 'range' (there was often a delay between Stevens setting up a trial and the performers getting to their starting positions). As is inevitable in an imposed 'equality', individuals who felt they had more knowledge (in this case through their previous experience, either as performers or with Stevens) attempted to exercise greater authority within the process:

When you do have a little bit more experience, you do get in a position where you feel you can make a valuable contribution to what's happening and I think there were many situations ... where I felt that I could say things and suggest things and that they would be valuable.<sup>772</sup>

However, the only formally recognised source of authority when it came to giving the directions that determined the score was Stevens himself. In interview, Stevens discussed

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<sup>770</sup> Interview with Martha Wildman, 25 July 2003

<sup>771</sup> Any judgement as to which of these views is the correct one would be subjective. Stevens made various statements about that particular piece and about the general principle of being sensitive to the group which could justify either view. However, a preoccupation of Stevens' recent work is the performer's failure to enact an intention, which Stevens regards as potentially more interesting than a successful, skilled performance (he used *Slow Life* as an example). We might also remember his personal resistance to becoming "too good" at one thing. Given this, both Wildman and Gomme's approaches might represent a failure to appreciate that "one guy hot-footing it up there" could be an acceptable response within a vision that recognises that "one of the best ways to highlight performers is making you all do the same thing. I know it can't be homogenous" (Gary Stevens on Induction Day, 13 June 2003).

<sup>772</sup> Interview with Martha Wildman, 25 July 2003

how, in the theatre community, his role in the process might be considered 'fascist' (we used the term lightly). He likened his own methodology to that of the creative processes in visual arts: "I don't think it's any more fascist than painting a painting or a sculptor making a sculpture". While the analogy to visual arts processes makes his desire to "control what I do" seem justified, it also positions the performers as the passive media of this work. In this respect, Stevens' approach was not collaborative: a fact he openly admits by describing it as "not collaborative but co-operative"<sup>773</sup>, adding, "It's nice working with intelligent people, but one of the important things about a director is taste. On the whole, I'm not collaborative." Despite the lack of 'collaboration'—a quality that devising scholars and practitioners seem to view as not only essential but definitive of the methodology—this was one of the most successful processes studied in this research, both in terms of process and product. A key factor in this successful negotiation of the process and interpersonal dynamics of the production was Stevens' personality and his manner of wearing his power lightly. He described himself as "a benign dictator, though it's definitely a paper crown". The benignity of his directorship is due in part to his personal charm and 'people skills'. This was a feature of the rehearsal that was mentioned by most of the performers who were interviewed.

Comments regarding Stevens included:

... he just thinks quite sensitively, you know, really a gem .... He did everything for other human beings, including me. How to look out for other people, you know, whatever.

He cared for every one of us. He treated everyone of us as special, as valuable human beings.<sup>774</sup>

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<sup>773</sup> Gary Stevens quoted by Clare Wright (interview with Clare Wright, 4 August 2003). By 'co-operative', Stevens meant that the participants co-operate with him, enabling him to realise his vision. This should not be confused with the co-operative model outlined in Chapter Three, which refers strictly to companies with allocated participant roles within a non-hierarchical structure.

<sup>774</sup> Interview with Sarah Buist, 29 July 2003

... I think one of the things about the project that really inspired me was the way that Gary handled people and handled the participants. ... I thought that he was very sensitive, very considerate, in a very low-key way.<sup>775</sup>

Stevens' 'caring' persona was projected, for example, in his equal and respectful treatment of all performers (taking their questions and requests seriously) and in his taking responsibility for practical matters, which showed a concern for the performers' well-being (for example, small things like keeping up to date with the weather forecast and warning participants to bring rainwear when necessary). The performers quoted above (and others) also gave examples of subtle ways in which Stevens managed to assert discipline or diffuse potential friction without having to appear disciplinarian. One participant stated that, "If Gary wasn't ... such a nice person, there's almost a chance we could have felt manipulated".<sup>776</sup> Manipulation is too strong a word to describe Stevens' approach. There was no sense that performers were doing anything against their will.<sup>777</sup> Stevens' success depended very much on his openness, especially his efforts to induct the performers into the vision of the project. At the same time, he maintained the performers' trust (even though he emphasised the fact that he did not have a clear vision of the final show: "I want them to know what I know, which might not be much".<sup>778</sup> His own skill as a practitioner was no doubt a factor in this: "He's this little guy with big eyes who does a demonstration and everyone laughs ...", but this is tempered by his erudition: "He's read his Nietzsche .... He's read all his philosophy and history of theatre and ... there was one point when he was talking fifteenth century painting"<sup>779</sup> and the seriousness with which he discussed and approached his work. The performers, then, regarded Stevens as worthy of their obedience because, "... taking instructions from people who I feel are in the position to give instructions: that's no problem at all".<sup>780</sup> Thus, this process represents a director-led model of process that allows that director to claim vision, authority and a degree of authorship but avoids creating

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<sup>775</sup> Interview with Martha Wildman, 25 July 2003

<sup>776</sup> Interview with Clare Wright, 4 August 2003

<sup>777</sup> In contrast, performers in the David Glass process did report that they were occasionally manipulated to do things they later regretted.

<sup>778</sup> Interview with Gary Stevens, 21 July 2004

<sup>779</sup> Interview with Clare Wright, 4 August 2003

<sup>780</sup> Interview with Martha Wildman, 25 July 2003

dissatisfaction or significant friction among the participants. The way in which this is negotiated is through the personality and behaviour of the director, who becomes recognised both as an artist worthy of obedience (presumably because he makes the participants believe that the work will be good) and as a leader who is sensitive and caring enough to elicit rather than assert discipline.

Another factor in the success of this process was its particular use of the System model of devising. Stevens involved the process participants in the formulation of the various game-like systems on which the show's "pieces" were based. He did this by seeking to articulate and educate the participants as to the intended effect and about "what worked." The systems themselves consisted of deliberately simple sets of rules that could be followed quite easily by the performers: it was the visual effect of 20 participants following undisclosed rules that made the performance effective. In this respect, the process was an only slightly more elaborate version of the Happenings model described in Chapter Six, which in its purest form consisted of a simple set of rules followed once only in performance (with no rehearsal). What Stevens was able to do in this process was create a system that was not a means of avoiding individual taste (a goal of many of the live art practices described in Chapter Six) but rather a way of asserting his personal vision, without apology or paying lip-service to the notion of collaboration. While in many respects Stevens' methodology goes back to the conceptual and visual arts lineage of performance art, his disregard of the 'collaborative' ethos so pervasive among devising practitioners since the 1970s makes him one of the most advanced creators examined in this research.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Thesis Conclusion

The creative process of this thesis was a convoluted one. When my research first began, the aim was to focus exclusively on the interpersonal dynamics of devising processes, in particular on the role of the 'writer' in British devising companies. This focus broadened as I recognised that the dearth of critical studies on the subject of devising necessitated further ground-work to be done on the practice as a whole: few serious studies of the subject have been published since Oddey's seminal text and her call for "more critically analytical works"<sup>781</sup> has yet to be answered. A search for a system that might give my study of devising processes the sort of analytical rigour that Oddey admits was missing in her work, led, in turn, to the recognition that few analytical frameworks exist for the study of process and that those that do are inadequate for the study of interactive, transactional processes, ones that are often pioneered by practitioners who are intent on forging their own methodologies rather than accepting established practice. What resulted, then, was yet another shift of focus. The primary aim of this research became to propose a framework for the analysis of group theatre-making processes. The validity of this framework would be tested by its ability to frame the substantial research I had conducted into devising processes into a survey of post-war British devising practice. Thus the secondary aim of the research was to begin to lay the foundations for further studies of devising practice by mapping out the various lineages and current seams of devising practice.

There are several reasons why devising proved an appropriate body of practice through which to develop and demonstrate the analytical framework. Firstly, even within the limited scope of the British commercial sector, it represents a wide range of practices and lineages. A framework that can facilitate the description and delineation of these various examples of practice proves itself sufficiently flexible to have application beyond the scope of this research. Secondly, devising is—at least historically—less standardised in its methodology

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<sup>781</sup> *Ibid.* p. xii

than the script-led practices that are the mainstay of established theatre institutions. In its focus on the material actions of the participants, this framework not only offers an alternative to the semiotic model discussed in Chapter Two but also avoids imposing an assumed model of process on practice itself. Finally, the emphasis that devising places on the interpersonal dimension—both in terms of determining the organisational structures of its companies and the value it often places on acknowledging the individual psyche of process participants—calls for a framework that provides a set of concepts and terminology that can deal with this dimension. In summary, if it has successfully met these challenges, the framework offered here will provide a flexible, broadly applicable, yet rigorous tool for the analysis of diverse and potentially experimental practices.

In Chapter One, it was suggested that the first step towards giving devising its due scholarly attention would be to provide an analytical framework capable of mapping its eclectic field of practice. A robust analytical framework is a prerequisite for pursuing two of the most urgent lines of research: the project of tracing a history of devising across the full range of contexts in which it operates and the associated task of documenting and analysing contemporary devising methodologies. This chapter will first summarise the findings generated by this research on the subject of post-war British devising practice. It will close with an evaluation of the analytical framework that was outlined in Chapter Two and of the thesis in general.

### **Towards a Comprehensive History of Devising**

The absence of a comprehensive history of devising—by which is meant one that takes account of the various distinct traditions, contexts and practices in which devising occurs—is a notable gap in the existing literature<sup>782</sup>. We saw in Chapter One that the historical accounts of devising offered in current literature are limited. Even as they acknowledge the eclecticism

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<sup>782</sup> Since this thesis was written, just such a comprehensive history of devising has been published: Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling; *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, Hampshire & New York: Palgrave 2006 traces the development of various strands of devising practice (similar to the contexts those delineated in this thesis) in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. The authors draw many of the same conclusions as to the development of devising as I have. They do not go so far as to identify models of devising process.



of devising, the brevity of these accounts precludes a detailed delineation of its various strands. More extensive histories of individual areas of practice do exist—Callery's careful and rich account of the development of physical theatre is one example<sup>783</sup>—but it is not the purpose of such accounts to encompass the broad range of devising practices. A fully comprehensive and detailed history of devising is, of course, beyond the scope of this doctoral research and it is essential to emphasise that the history offered in Part II of the thesis, and in summary form here, is primarily a test of the analytical framework developed through this research. It is therefore, by necessity, outlined in broad brush strokes. In focusing on England and on the commercial context, my partial history skims over the applied theatre context and leaves out devising practice in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as abroad. However, the exercise of sketching out the main lineages, identifying the practitioners and companies that inform contemporary commercial devising in England and, through this, providing a taxonomy of models of devising is nevertheless a useful contribution to the field in its own right. It is hoped that this groundwork will pave the way for a dedicated and comprehensive history, one that acknowledges more fully Britain's place in the European and American canon of innovative theatre practice.

Recognising the broad range of practices that constitute devising is not simply a matter of historical accuracy. It also serves to re-evaluate how we define devising today. In Chapter One, I argued that the literature on post-war British theatre is shot through with generalisations and misapprehensions as to what devising is. While some writers perceive it as amateur, politically-ineffective, lacking in tradition and just generally inferior to new writing (in Chapter One, Ella Wildridge, Steven Daldry and John Arden voiced these widely-held views), ardent proponents of devising tend to romanticise it as a practice that is inherently and by definition organic, collaborative (by which they often mean egalitarian) and process-oriented. The effect, in both cases, is to create vague generalisations as to the nature of devising. Recognising that *some but not all* devising is amateur, pedagogical, organic, egalitarian and so on allows for a more accurate understanding of the practice.

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<sup>783</sup> Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, London: Nick Hern Books pp. 8–13

The central strategy used in the historical component of this research was to isolate distinct models of devising, each of which relates to a particular lineage and area of practice. In fact, what Part II of this thesis offers is not so much a history of devising as a series of histories.

The chart that precedes Part II of this thesis gives a basic summary of the characteristics of each model and the context to which it pertains, formatted to allow for comparisons between them. For convenience, however, a brief review of the contexts of devising practice and their relevant models is set out below:

Chapter Three recognised an area of political theatre in which devising was seen not only as a means of creating performances with political content but as an opportunity for practitioners to work in ways that mirrored their political ideals. The ethos of collectivity, manifested as an aspiration to enforce egalitarian structures, continues to pervade contemporary practice despite the demise of the Collective, which was as much due to methodological limitations as to shifts in the cultural and economic climate. The same chapter outlined the Devising Playwright model, which was seen to have evolved in some political theatre companies as a solution to the methodological limits of the Collective model of devising (its inability to negotiate “the gap ... that is the play”<sup>784</sup>) and as evidence of the changing role of the playwright pioneered at the Royal Court. The Devising Playwright is significant as an example of devising practice that refutes the assumed divide between script-led and devised theatre (voiced by John Ashford in Chapter One<sup>785</sup>).

To usefully distil the methodological principles of applied theatre that have filtered into the commercial sector, Chapter Four sought to create a single general model of participatory devising. In doing so, it drew attention to an area of tension in such practices that tends to emerge when there is an emphasis on the ‘quality’ of the public production (as is the case in commercial practice). In this case, participatory theatre-making often necessitates a hierarchical structure that sits somewhat uneasily with the ideological values commonly held

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<sup>784</sup> Lizbeth Goodman; *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own*, London & New York: Routledge, 1993. p. 55

<sup>785</sup> John Ashford interviewed by Roland Rees in Roland Rees *Fringe First: Pioneers of Fringe Theatre on Record*, London: Oberon Books 1992 p. 286

by its practitioners. Chapter Five used Maria Shevtsova's characterisation of the ensemble<sup>786</sup> to formulate the Ensemble model of devising. This model is distinguished by its visionary aspirations, its practitioners' shared desire to create unique stage languages and the strong role that the 'big vision' plays in binding the company together as a social group. Above all, the Ensemble model is one in which the director's charismatic authority plays an important role. In Chapter Six, we saw that the System model of devising is characterised by its practitioners' desire to avoid the single-authored vision and often the authorship or authority of any one participant. The model allows chance, along with performer and contextually-determined authorship to dominate the creative process. Finally, Chapter Seven outlined two methodological models that are emerging now in the increasingly popular contexts of physical comedy and technology-driven theatre. In the Double Act model of devising, a core of two performers takes on the main authority and authorship roles. A defining feature of the Network model is the distribution of authority in relation to specialist expertise within a compartmented structure. Both models demonstrate how the collectivist ideals of the 1960s and 1970s have given way to models driven by economic and methodological practicality.

In many respects, the model-by-model format of this history is a clumsy way to deal with the already rather unwieldy mass of material that constitutes the range of devising practices; it risks an almost nightmarish quality of repetition as each chapter retraces the same five or so decades. The possibly unusual decision to split what might have been a single chronological history into a series of longitudinal histories was based on the belief that it is more urgent to recognise the separate lineages that constitute devising practice and to differentiate the models that relate to each strand than to construct an elegant narrative.

This urgency to distinguish the different devising traditions and, through this, to enable more accurate characterisations of devising than are offered in the existing literature is also a justification for what might otherwise be criticised as a redundant and reductionist exercise in categorisation. Even when dealing with a far broader area of practice than this thesis, Huxley and Witts' *Twentieth Century Performance Reader* refuses to categorise the artists whose

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<sup>786</sup> Maria Shevtsova; *Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre: Process to Performance*, New York: Routledge 2004 p. 36

texts it compiles. The editors state that, “categorisations are artificial and at worst a sign of insecurity”.<sup>787</sup> This research does not deny that there is a degree of artificiality to the categorisations it proposes, nor that the exercise of mapping out the territory of devising practice is motivated by a desire for more secure footing. It could also be argued that seeking to fit companies into particular lineages already begins to misrepresent the realities of practice: practitioners do not function within an isolated tradition, emulating their direct ancestors and ignoring other ways of working. Indeed, individual practitioners may not be aware of or, even if they are, may not accept the lineage allocated to them in this thesis: Gary Stevens has already commented that categorising his work as performance art fails to acknowledge the uniqueness of his interdisciplinary practice and it is certain that Complicite’s Simon McBurney would resist the link drawn here between his approach and director’s theatre. My defence is, again, that such decisive distinctions are necessary in order to redress the tendency in the literature to make blanket generalisations about devising: to see it as a single (though eclectic) process, without fully appreciating just how diverse its influences have been. This research only begins the project of identifying the separate strands that inform contemporary devising practice; the fact that the case-study companies do not always sit comfortably within a single model of process emphasises the complexity of the subject.<sup>788</sup> Considerable refinements still need to be made, for example, in the process of identifying areas of practice that have been omitted or artificially subsumed into other lineages.<sup>789</sup> Only then might the rich eclecticism of devising’s lineage and current practice be reintroduced and the cross-pollinations, innovations and true exceptions fully recognised.

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<sup>787</sup> Michael Huxley and Noel Witts (eds.); *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, London & New York: Routledge 2002 p. 5

<sup>788</sup> We saw that David Glass combined aspects of the Participatory and the Ensemble models and Forced Entertainment’s methodology had features of both the Ensemble and the System models.

<sup>789</sup> One example of this might be the area of practice known as visual theatre. My account would categorise an individual case of what might be called visual theatre as either an attempt to create a new theatrical language emerging from an original vision (and therefore assume that it is likely to follow an Ensemble model), or, following the historical lineage from visual and conceptual arts practice into performance, as performance art (the System model) or as an example of area of design- and technology- led theatre (the Network model). Future studies, however, might choose to see it as an area of practice in its own right, perhaps with its own model of devising process.

It might seem contradictory that this thesis agrees with the current conceptions of devising as an eclectic practice that not only embraces a multitude of traditions and innovations but also attracts practitioners who are intent on forging iconoclastic ways of working, while at the same time claiming to be able to itemise this diversity within fixed models—and just seven of them at that. In defence, I return to the point made above: the need to address the generalisations of the current literature. The identification of seven models of devising offers a more valid understanding of how devising works in specific contexts than can be gained from either the raw information found in the few published process accounts or from the prescriptive models of process set out in the existing practical guides. In formulating the models, I have sought to strike a balance between being distinct and precise enough to acknowledge separate lineages and, at the same time, being open enough to take account of a great deal of individual variation. As future research begins to refine and expand the partial history offered here, it is inevitable that more complex models as well as more models will emerge.

Another shortcoming in the format of this historical account is that it renders more challenging the basic task of any well-drawn history: that of relating individual events to a broader chronology and thereby putting the significance of particular moments into perspective. This is partly an outcome of dealing with lineages of theatre-making within which devising might play a minor role. For example, I have allocated almost as much space to the Devising Playwright model (a relatively minor area of practice) as I do to the field of applied theatre practice (which is both a far more widespread area and one in which devising plays a more prominent role). An unevenness of representation is occasionally also the result of my reliance on limited existing resources: quite simply, where more information was available on given practices, more could be said about them.<sup>790</sup> In order to redress some of the distortion of perspective that results from my decision to isolate individual histories of devising and some of the unevenness of representation that occurs within this, there follows

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<sup>790</sup> For example, my chapter on the Collective model could not offer much in the way of illustrative examples as the small-scale fringe companies that operated the model had little occasion to document their processes. On the other hand, I had some choice of illustrative examples from which to draw when outlining the Ensemble model, particularly in the case of director's theatre; Peter Brook and Joan Littlewood are figures whose work and practice attracted plenty of interest and therefore documentary and critical coverage.

a chronological account of devising across the various strands of practice outlined in this thesis.

### **A Partial History of Post-War British Devising**

It is possible to identify two main waves of devising. The first wave reached its height in the late 1960s and 1970s, a period that saw a proliferation of devising in mostly small-scale, fringe and alternative contexts. The second came with the rise of physical theatre and live art that began to take root in the late 1980s and that led, by the mid 1990s, to a 'mainstreaming' of devising practices in these areas. It is important to note, however, that devising is not confined to these two periods. We saw, for example, that devising existed in certain areas of practice that predated the alternative theatre movement<sup>791</sup>: in director's theatre (with Peter Brook and Joan Littlewood as its key exponents), in educational drama (with Peter Slade, Brian Way and Dorothy Heathcote, among others) and in community theatre (Margaretta D'Arcy and John Arden's Kirbymoorside project is one example). We also saw that community theatre (with Ann Jellicoe's Colway Theatre Trust, for example), Theatre-in-Education<sup>792</sup>, physical theatre (including Théâtre de Complicité) and some devising playwrights (particularly Caryl Churchill) functioned successfully through the 1980s, a period that is often regarded as barren of innovative, experimental and counter-cultural theatre.

The first wave saw devising grow in popularity in a number of the contexts that constitute the alternative theatre movement's fractured landscape: the political theatre groups such as Women's Theatre Group and Monstrous Regiment; in various building-based and touring TIE companies; in community enterprises, such as those of Welfare State International; in performance art, with companies such as the People Show; and in design-led and visual

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<sup>791</sup> That is if, like Itzen and others, we take 1968 as its starting point (see Catherine Itzen; *Stages of the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968*, London: Methuen 1980).

<sup>792</sup> Persephone Sextou suggests that the heyday of British TIE lasted until the Educational Reform Act of 1988. Subsequent to this, changes in the way school budgets were managed (responsibility was devolved from the Local Educational Authorities to the schools themselves) and the introduction of the National Curriculum effectively constituted a death-blow for many TIE companies. Persephone Sextou; 'Theatre in Education in Britain: Current Practice and Future Potential' in *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 74, Part 2, May 2003 p. 177

theatre, such as Hesitate and Demonstrate. In many of these contexts, devising methodologies were developed through hybridisation with practices and disciplines other than those we would strictly designate as theatre or drama. School-based devising and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the forms of TIE that evolved from it, might be thought of as primarily pedagogical rather than theatrical strategies. Community theatre created devising methodologies out of participatory developmental practices; collective devising evolved from political experiments in egalitarian working practice and with performance art, visual and other artists came to performance and to devising from, and in rejection of, their own disciplines. The only models of devising that derived exclusively from the theatre context were the Devising Playwright and the Ensemble models.

Partly because of the egalitarian aspirations of some of these in-seminating disciplines (especially education and political activism) and partly in response to the general ideological climate, the first generation of devising practitioners were often preoccupied with power dynamics: they consciously and continuously wrestled with issues of inclusion, representation, egalitarian working structures and, in particular, group decision-making strategies. There were public discussions of such issues, exemplified by John Arden's criticism of political collectives<sup>793</sup> cited in Chapter One. Many of the devising methodologies in operation during this period represented attempts to reconcile the practicalities of people management with particular ideological ambitions. As a result of this preoccupation with collectivity, the processes that evolved in these early models tended to delay explicit scoring systems and decision-making in an effort to be inclusive. We saw that in several of the models, a 'free-for-all' conception and material generating phase would end with a marked fixing phase that sought to fill "the gap ... that was the play"<sup>794</sup>—the 'writer's gap' in the Devising Playwright model, or the "painstaking process of elimination"<sup>795</sup> in director's theatre. The interpersonal issues that could be triggered by the fixing phase in the process often exposed the friction that emerged from these attempts to negotiate ideology and practicality.

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<sup>793</sup> John Arden 'Playwrights and Play Writers' in John Arden; *To Present the Pretence: Essays on the Theatre and its Public*, London: Eyre Methuen 1977

<sup>794</sup> Goodman op. cit. p. 55

<sup>795</sup> Samuel L. Leiter; *From Belasco to Brook: Representative Directors of the English-Speaking Stage*, London & New York: Greenwood 1991 p. 253

It was suggested in Chapter Three that the demise of the Collective model of devising (and collective practice in general) can be attributed, at least in part, to these factors. The Platform discussion referred to in Chapter Three<sup>796</sup> marks the moment when politically-motivated theatre practitioners recognised some of these issues and began to lose faith in the possibility of fully egalitarian creative practices.

The current wave of devising, which came to the fore in the 1990s, consists of a narrower range of practices: community theatre continues to represent a steady, though relatively diminished, field of practice, while Lecoq-based physical theatre and live art now represent the main contexts for commercial devising practice. The emerging forms of physical comedy and technology-driven theatre are essentially variations of these: the former could be seen as a drive by young physical theatre practitioners towards accessibility, the latter as a sector of performance or live art that is responding to technological advances. We see from this that contemporary devising has consolidated the diversity of forms that typified its first generations of practitioners.<sup>797</sup> At the same time, devising has enjoyed a 'mainstreaming' both within physical theatre and live art (devising is now a predominant rather than an exceptional methodology in these areas of practice) and also in terms of its general status. Devising has become an established practice: its companies are often professional and core-funded and some are extremely successful. Emerging theatre practitioners today are likely to have early experience of devising throughout their school years and into higher education or vocational training. For physical theatre, there is a choice of recognised specialist training available through physical theatre schools such as the Lecoq school in Paris and, in London, the Desmond Jones School of Mime and Physical Theatre and École Philippe Gaulier, as well as the less formal workshop programmes offered by companies such as Complicite, Frantic Assembly, Trestle Theatre and The Wright School. Live and performance art has become the subject of many university drama degree course modules

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<sup>796</sup> Goodman op. cit. p. 53–54

<sup>797</sup> This observation may be contentious. I wrote to Professor Oddey and asked whether she still believed that devising is a process unique to each group employing it and that this makes it impossible to articulate a "single theory of how theatre is devised" (Oddey op. cit. p. 3). I explained that my belief is that there has been a homogenising of devising processes since the mid to late 1990s. She replied that she holds to her original view. Correspondence with Alison Oddey (e-mail), 12 June 2003



and the Advanced Theatre Practice Master's course offered by the Central School of Speech and Drama includes among its alumni Shunt, whose most recent events, *Tropicana*<sup>798</sup> and *Amato Saltone*<sup>799</sup> are produced with the involvement of the Royal National Theatre. There is a canon of devised work that aspiring practitioners can look to for inspiration: Théâtre de Complicité's *The Street of Crocodiles*<sup>800</sup>, Impact's *The Carrier Frequency*<sup>801</sup>, most of Forced Entertainment's work and Improbable's *Shockheaded Peter*<sup>802</sup> are key examples. This familiarisation with devising results in a generation of theatre-makers who might feel "uncomfortable approaching a proper play"<sup>803</sup>: they devise by default because that was their training rather than because they have made a conscious decision to experiment with egalitarian processes or to reject the literary mainstream—two important motives of first generation devisors.

The devising methodologies that gained prominence during the 1990s are more firmly embedded in the theatre context and are defined by more clearly theatrical and aesthetic agendas rather than pedagogical, political and developmental motivations. This second wave sees a more clearly defined association between product-oriented devising and the commercial sector, as well as a clearer distinction between the commercial and the applied theatre contexts.<sup>804</sup> Contemporary companies devise because this is seen as the best way to produce the sort of theatre work they value. With this, we see some resolution to the issues of power dynamics that concerned the practitioners of the alternative theatre movement. We saw in Chapter Seven that emerging models of devising tend to be less concerned with ideology. Future rehearsal observation of emerging companies is likely to demonstrate that the desire to impose egalitarian organisational structures and collective mechanisms for creative participation is less urgent than for the practitioners of the first wave. I suspect that

<sup>798</sup> Shunt Vaults, London Bridge, London, 22 October 2004. Shunt is a company that combines a collective ethos with the System model of devising.

<sup>799</sup> Shunt Vaults, London Bridge, London, 26 October 2005.

<sup>800</sup> The Cottesloe, The Royal National Theatre, August 1992

<sup>801</sup> The Ralph Thursby Community Centre, Leeds, 30 October 1984

<sup>802</sup> The Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, London, 22 February 1999

<sup>803</sup> Interview with Samantha Butler, director of *Fevered Sleep*, 4 December 1998. Also discussed in Alex Mermikides; 'Scared of Words' *Total Theatre magazine* 11/2 1999 pp. 13–14

<sup>804</sup> Although the 1990s saw the development by otherwise product-oriented companies of outreach and educational programmes that pertain to process-oriented models of devising, such projects are often ultimately motivated by commercial interests.

these companies will tend to spend less time explicitly discussing and negotiating systems which allow participants to have creative access and that there may be a more ready acceptance that fully egalitarian 'collaboration' is not always achievable. However, this shift should not suggest that contemporary devising companies are all returning to a hierarchical auteur-director structure. Rather, it is the case that company structure is more likely to be determined by issues of practicality: their structures are likely to be designed in such a way as to allocate authorship and authority according to specialist skills, creative contribution or simply the availability of participants, rather than ideological principles. Their processes may still avoid preconceived visions and resist imposition in the same way as the earlier models, but this is more concerned with fully exploiting the potential for innovative and unique material that an organic process is deemed to produce than enabling inclusive creative participation and decision-making. Of course, suppositions such as these require testing through research and it is hoped that studies of younger devising companies will provide the opportunity to verify this prediction.

## **Contemporary Devising: the Case-Studies**

The original intention of this research was that it should consist entirely of accounts and analyses of contemporary devising practice. My early instinct was that any study of devising must be based on a thorough sense of what goes on in the rehearsal room and that, given the scarcity of existing accounts of process, the most immediate access to this data could be gained through observing contemporary devising companies in the act of creating their work. A collection of case-studies would also contribute to the academic literature much needed accounts and analyses of contemporary devising processes, documenting the work of devising companies that perhaps deserved greater recognition. However, it quickly became apparent that this instinct was premature. Considerable groundwork had yet to be done if a collection of case-studies was to be of value—a substantial part of which included the development of an analytical framework. The case-studies nevertheless remain at the core of this research. It is predominantly through the case-study research that the analytical framework was developed: the experience of watching a range of companies at work allowed me to formulate a definition of group creativity and to identify the phases of the group theatre-making process that are applicable across the eclectic field of devising. It was through the case-studies that I came to an understanding of the importance of the interpersonal dynamics of the devising situation. At the same time, the need to write accounts and analyses of the observed processes in a format that encourages more general conclusions as to the nature of contemporary theatre-making determined the development of the analytical framework. The case-studies that make up Part III of this thesis can function as stand-alone accounts of individual processes but they are also designed in such a way as to allow comparisons between very different examples of practice: the framing concepts and terminology of the analytical framework allow us to compare individual cases along common areas of focus.

The differences between the case-studies served to confirm the conception of devising as a diverse practice encompassing a range of quite distinct methodologies. These differences were evident even at the most basic levels, such as the length of process (Gary Stevens'

was only two weeks long, whereas Forced Entertainment's lasted several months), the number and constitution of the participant groups and, above all, the core activities. We saw, for example, that while the day-to-day activities of the David Glass Ensemble process included training and exercises, Forced Entertainment spent much of the time in leisurely discussion and Gary Stevens concentrated on practical and pragmatic trials. The variation in terms of core activities relates to one of the most telling distinctions between case-studies: that of what we might call 'skill'<sup>805</sup> or, given the proliferation of opportunities for training in devising, 'professionalisation'. David Glass requires his performers to possess highly-developed physical theatre skills that he can further refine through daily physical training. Forced Entertainment's performance skills, on the other hand, are hidden, learned tacitly through continuing work rather than formal training. Gary Stevens, in contrast to both Glass and Forced Entertainment, places a certain value on his performers' apparent failure to fulfil certain tasks. These differences are, of course, endemic to the traditions in which each company operates; the virtuosity that underlies the physical theatre tradition is deliberately avoided in live and performance art. Different conceptions of skill are also, naturally, related to different stylistic approaches. *The Unheimlich Spine* is by no means naturalistic, but it does have a basis in characterisation, and in what we might call 'acting', which threads through its expressionistic, surreal and pastiche narrative. In *The Travels*, as with other works in Forced Entertainment's 'documentary' style, the mode is more akin to what might be termed 'performance', undercutting the theatricality of more traditional acting by blurring the edges between social and stage behaviour. Gary Stevens operates outside of the theatre spaces that are the main domain of both David Glass and Forced Entertainment, producing work that derives as much from his background in sculpture as it does from theatrical traditions, and in which the performer becomes a form of 'material'. The question of what constitutes the skills of devising, how these relate to the stylistic genre and how they determine or are determined by the creative process, is an area that merits further investigation.

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<sup>805</sup> The range of approaches to skill suggested by the case-studies goes some way to addressing the general assumption, referred to in Chapter One, that devising is an 'unskilled' and therefore uniquely accessible practice. This is far from true for at least two of the three case-study companies.

While it is important to acknowledge the differences between the case-studies (and how they relate to the distinct traditions and methodologies that constitute devising) the similarities are also of interest. One notable point is the consistency in the way 'vision' determined the interpersonal dynamics and process paradigm within each case-study. There were, of course, individual variations. David Glass evolves a highly personal and individual vision that he struggles to articulate and, in some respects, resists sharing with the participant group. In his processes, knowledge of the vision is earned through both the formal activity of research and a more tacit and long-term inculcation into the company's ethos. Forced Entertainment's process, on the other hand, is characterised by a transparency of vision: although the working vision developed late in *The Travels* process, Tim Etchells' capacity to articulate the convoluted journey through which it evolved meant that all participants had access to knowledge of the vision. Gary Stevens' approach is built, like Glass', on an individual vision, yet he shares with Etchells a policy of transparency that allows participants in his process to 'understand' the working vision. Indeed, he expects his fellow participants to have a level of conceptual understanding that goes beyond the working knowledge required to perform the piece. Whatever the individual variations, what remains consistent across the case-studies is the clear relationship that vision—or, more precisely, knowledge of the vision—has on the authority-authorship pattern of the theatre-making process. The topic of vision, like that of skill, is one that deserves further critical attention. In particular, there is scope for analysing the various forms of knowledge and knowledge-conversion that define the participants' access and contribution to the vision throughout the process. We might investigate, for example, the way in which explicit knowledge, including formal skills training, interrelates with a tacit dimension that may include what has been referred to in this research as the 'eureka' or 'magic' quality of creativity.

### **An Evaluation of the Analytical Framework of Theatre-Making**

While I have been avoiding the term 'theory' throughout this research, speaking instead of a *framework* for the analysis of process and of *models* of devising practice, it is perhaps time to acknowledge that, ultimately, what this thesis offers is the first step towards a *theory* of

practice. If I have been in denial about this, it is because such a project throws into relief what Susan Melrose calls the “theory-practice fit”<sup>806</sup>, introducing a dichotomy between theory and practice, between the theorist and the practitioner. In an article on the limits of theory, Julian Meyrick suggests that, in contrast with what he calls the “Renaissance” period, in which “theories of theatre” were written by practitioners such as Wagner, Appia, Craig, Stanislavski and Artaud<sup>807</sup>, the current academy-driven mechanisms by which “theory about theatre” is produced construct a problematic relationship between the academy on one hand and what he calls “professional practice” on the other:

When the academy scrutinises theatre, one industry instructs another .... Theatre practice has its own form of power with which to deflect the instruments of critique (largely by not reading them, I'm inclined to think). But the rules of discursive engagement establish a power claim, not just an orbit of knowledge.<sup>808</sup>

As a practitioner, it is indeed discomfoting to find myself positioning theatre practice as the passive object of academic study, especially in those moments when the felt experience of group theatre-making—the mix of intuitive and purposeful action, the subtlety of artistic vision and its communication, the joys and disappointments of creativity—are reduced to something as cold as the ‘direction-response cycle’. Moreover, in defining a framework of the theatre-making process as a tool for analysis rather than a tool for theatre-making, it may well be argued that this research perpetuates the hostility and ignorance between theory and theatre that Meyrick describes.<sup>809</sup> As a researcher and reluctant theorist on the other hand, my chosen methodology, with its reliance on observation and ‘outsider’ accounts of practice rather than participation, sometimes felt like a failure to share the growing recognition of practice as a valid form of research (a recognition articulated by the Practice as Research in

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<sup>806</sup> Susan Melrose; ‘Restaging “Theory” in the Postgraduate Performance Studies Workshop’ *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 57, Part 1, February 1999 p. 40

<sup>807</sup> Julian Meyrick; ‘The Limits of Theory: Academic Versus Professional Understanding of Theatre Problems’ in *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 75, Part 3, August 2003 p. 232

<sup>808</sup> *Ibid.* p. 233

<sup>809</sup> Indeed, by resolving not to take at face value practitioners’ statements as to their intentions and their working practices, I am directly contravening Meyrick’s suggestion for more thoroughly integrated theory and practice. *Ibid.* p. 239

Performance (PARIP) project<sup>810</sup>), that is, of practice as theory, or what Meyrick calls “theorized practice”.<sup>811</sup> As Huxley and Witts argue, “performance by its nature is a practical manifestation of a theorised position”.<sup>812</sup> While a practice-based outcome might not have been an appropriate contribution to the body of knowledge on devising, I do wonder whether researching *through* practice might not have allowed me to show a greater appreciation of the mysteries of the theatre-making process, to write from experience of both individual and interpersonal aspects of devising and, above all, to place practice on equal footing to theory. Given the thesis’ aim of mapping out a field of devising practice that has yet to receive adequate attention and to provide a framework through which to do this, along with the overview that this requires, the answer to this question is ‘No’: the experience of any one practitioner is too limited for such a task. Nevertheless, the relationship between theory and practice remains uncomfortable. While it is beyond the scope of this discussion to comment further on the relationship between theatre and the academy, what I would like to finish on is a consideration of the particular tension this thesis creates between the analytical framework that forms its theory and the theatre-making practice through which and for which the framework was developed.

The main argument that can be brought to bear on this research is the potential for slippage between theory and practice. It has already been suggested that, by asserting that there are a limited number of devising methodologies, this thesis seems to ignore the fact that practitioners’ processes and methodologies evolve and shift. It may be argued that in trying to fix a model of process, this research might miss a fundamental point about devising as a creative strategy: practitioners devise precisely in order to avoid working to preconceived or established systems of theatre-making. This argument has been addressed as far as it concerns individual cases of experimental practice and how they might fit into the models,

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<sup>810</sup> PARIP is an Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) funded research project, headed by Baz Kershaw, Angela Piccini and Caroline Rye. See Bella Merlin; ‘Practice as Research in Performance: A Personal Perspective’ in *New Theatre Quarterly* Vol. 77, Part 1, February 2004 pp. 36–44 for a summary of its aims as well as an account of its most recent conference.

<sup>811</sup> Meyrick *op. cit.* p. 233

<sup>812</sup> Huxley and Witts *op. cit.* p. 8. They go on to concede that the “theorised position does not always, indeed rarely, surface” (p. 8), a fact that makes the dissemination of practical research a potentially problematic area within academic frameworks.

but what needs consideration as I conclude the thesis is the way in which changes in the nature of devising itself might affect the relevance of the framework.

A central tenet of the framework was the attention it gave to process. While the emphasis on process still needs no apology in a study of devising, in retrospect it is clear that this thesis has given scant attention to the products of devising: the performance. Other than briefly summarising the sort of work each model of devising tends or aims to produce and giving brief summaries of the case-study productions, very little space has been allocated to this dimension. This is justified by the fact that, given that performances are generally more accessible for study than process, critical studies of the work of devising companies will always emerge: Huxley and Witts' statement that "...the manifestation of performance ... [is] central to the study of performance" holds true.<sup>813</sup> There is certainly more to be said about the products of devising; just as with its process, there are certain assumptions about the sort of work that devising produces, particularly in the way it is positioned as the antithesis to what was rather broadly characterised throughout this thesis as the 'literary' nature of scripted drama.

The second tenet of my analytical framework was the claim that a study of devising must entail a study of the interpersonal dimension. Yet the history of devising sketched out in this chapter identified a discernible trend away from the sort of issues of participation that typified the first wave of devising: we are beginning to escape the influence of the 'spirit of collectivity.' Contemporary devising is, generally speaking, more concerned with theatrical innovation—the creation of enterprising work of a high quality—than with issues of inclusion and egalitarianism. We might ask, then, whether the emphasis I have given in this thesis to the interpersonal dimension might become outdated: whether its concern with organisational dynamics smacks of the outdated collectivist ideologies that proved so destructive to the Collective model. Proving that supposedly collaborative and egalitarian companies in fact harbour hidden hierarchies is, ultimately perhaps, of limited value beyond redressing some of the assumptions surrounding the nature of devising. Focusing on the interpersonal

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<sup>813</sup> Ibid. p. 3



dynamics risks perpetuating the assumption that devising is primarily concerned with the process-oriented dimension: with people, their interrelationships as a creative group and their personal creative expressions. Is there a sense that as a large body of contemporary devising practice has its aspirations elsewhere, so should its scholars?

By questioning the general views of devising as a so-called 'collaborative' practice, preoccupied with the process-oriented aspect, this thesis traces this shift in focus from process to product. However, what remains constant in theatre-making, and what distinguishes it from many other forms of creativity, is that it is a group and transactional enterprise. As such, an awareness of the human dimension, of the play between tacit and explicit knowledge and of the interpersonal dimension will always be of relevance. If my analytical framework has at least provided future scholars with a framework through which to take this central aspect of theatre-making into account, if it has led to a recognition of the process of theatre-making as negotiating creativity, then it has served a worthwhile purpose.

## APPENDIX ONE

### British devising companies and practitioners referred to in this thesis

#### Arden, John

b. 1930<sup>814</sup>. Royal Court dramatist in the late 1950s. In collaboration with Margareta D'Arcy, he set up a residential community project at Kirbymoorside in Yorkshire in 1963.

#### Ashford, John

Founding Theatre Editor of *Time Out* magazine and currently director of The Place Theatre London.

#### Avon Touring Company

1970s. Bristol-based community theatre company co-founded by Tony Robinson.

#### Baker, Bobby

b. 1950. Performance artist based in London. Represented by Artsadmin.

#### Berkoff, Steven

b. 1937. Actor, director and playwright whose work includes *East, West, Greek*, and *Metamorphosis*. Cited by Lamden (2000) as a pioneer of physical theatre.

#### Belgrade TIE

1965–present day. The first TIE team in the UK. Based at The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry.

#### Ben-Tovim, Ruth

Director of Louder than Words. Currently a site-specific artist working with a range of creative media.

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<sup>814</sup> Throughout this appendix, dates are given where available.

**Blast Theory**

1991–present day. Technology-led live art company based in London.

**Bolton Octagon Theatre**

1967–present day. TIE company based in Bolton.

**Bolton, Gavin**

Proponent of drama-based pedagogies in the 1980s.

**Brook, Peter**

b. 1925. Well-known British director currently working at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris, France. His career spans a wide variety of work including experiments in devising during the 1960s and 1970s. Cited here as an example of director's theatre.

**Churchill, Caryl**

Leading playwright who, together with Joint Stock, pioneered a workshop-based creative methodology. Cited here as an example of the Devising Playwright model.

**Colway Theatre Trust**

Created in 1980 by Ann Jellicoe as a community theatre company. Made large-scale community plays, commissioning writers such as David Edgar.

**David Glass Ensemble**

1989–present day. Physical theatre company based in London.

**DV8 Physical Theatre**

1986–present day. Dance theatre company based in London. The coining of the term 'physical theatre' is attributed to its founder, Lloyd Newsome.

**Exploding Galaxy**

Performance art company founded in the late 1960s. Cited by Kershaw as one of the “carnavalesque ... psychedelically inclined” companies of the 1970s.<sup>815</sup>

**Faulty Optic**

1987–present day. Puppetry-led company based in Yorkshire.

**Forced Entertainment**

1984–present day. Sheffield-based live art company that tours internationally.

**Forkbeard Fantasy**

1974–present day. Devon-based company working with design-led methodologies.

**Foursight Theatre Company**

1988–present day. Wolverhampton-based theatre company focusing on women-centred subjects.

**Frantic Assembly**

1992–present day. Physical theatre company based in London.

**Gay Sweatshop**

1974–1997. London-based company focusing on gay issues. Created some of its early productions through collective devising methods.

**Gilbert & George**

Gilbert Proesch (b. 1943) and George Passmore (b. 1942). Visual and performance artists working in close collaboration since 1967.

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<sup>815</sup> Baz Kershaw *The Politics of Performance*, London & New York: Routledge 1991 p. 101

**Geese Theatre Company**

1987–present day. Birmingham-based community theatre company working with offenders.

**Gloria**

1988–present day. Production company based at the Lyric Hammersmith, London.

**Graeae**

1980–present day. London-based theatre company specialising in work with people who have physical or sensory disabilities.

**Hare, David**

b. 1947. Leading playwright. Co-founded Joint Stock in 1974 and has been an associate director of the Royal National Theatre since 1984.

**Heathcote, Dorothy**

b. 1926. Pioneer of educational drama techniques from the 1950s.

**Hesitate and Demonstrate**

1975–1986. Design-led/performance art company founded by Geraldine Pilgrim and Janet Goddard, graduates of the Fine Arts Department of Leeds Polytechnic.

**Hoipolloi**

1994–present day. Cambridge-based physical comedy company that uses improvisation techniques.

**Impact Theatre**

1977–1986. Leeds-based live art company.

**Improbable Theatre**

1996–present day. Visual and design-led theatre company based in London.

**IOU**

1976–present day. Live art company based in Halifax. Founded by Pete Brooks.

**Jellicoe, Ann**

b.1927. Royal Court dramatist of the 1960s who went on to found the Colway Theatre Trust.

**John Bull Puncture Repair Kit**

Performance art company of the late 1960s and 1970s.

**Jones, Marie**

b.1951. Playwright (and co-founder of Charabanc theatre company) cited here for her role in creating the *Stones in His Pocket*.

**Kaos Theatre**

1996–present day. Physical theatre company based in London.

**Kay, Jonathan**

Performer who makes use of audience participation techniques.

**Kneehigh Theatre Company**

1980–present day. Physical and visual theatre company based in Cornwall.

**Johnstone, Keith**

Practitioner whose special expertise in the use of masks and improvisational drama was developed at the Royal Court Theatre during the 1950s and 1960s. Author of *Improv* and *Improv for Storytellers*

**Joint Stock**

1974–1993. London-based theatre company that pioneered workshop-based writing techniques.

**Leigh, Mike**

b. 1943. Dramatist who developed writing methods based on character research and improvisation. Currently writes and directs cinema films.

**Lumière & Son**

1973 - 1991. Design-led and visual performance company established by Hilary Westlake, with David Gale writing text.

**Lightwork**

2000–present day. London-based company using a technology-led devising methodology.

**Littlewood, Joan**

1914–2002. Founder and director of Theatre Workshop.

**Louder than Words**

1994–2000. London-based theatre company closely associated with the Young Vic. Regularly collaborated with Pete Brooks (formerly of Impact).

**Mark Boyle's Sensory Laboratory**

Carnavalesque performance art company of the 1970s.

**Medium Fair**

1973–early 1980s. Rural community theatre company based in Devon. Founded by Baz Kershaw and John Rudlin.

**Monstrous Regiment**

1975–1993. London-based women's theatre company.

**NoFit State Circus**

1986–present day. Mixed-media circus company based in Cardiff.

**Northern Stage Ensemble**

1984–present day. Physical and visual theatre company based at the Newcastle Playhouse.

**Perpetual Motion**

1993–present day. London-based physical theatre company.

**Pete Brooks**

Founder member of Impact Theatre Co-operative and IOU. Currently with Insomniac Productions.

**Reckless Sleepers**

1989–present day. Nottingham-based live art company.

**Ridiculusmus**

1992–present day. London-based physical comedy company.

**Royal Shakespeare Company**

1932–present day. Shakespeare company based in Stratford and London. Responsible for two significant devised productions: Peter Brook's *US* in 1966 and the adaptation of Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1980.

**Slade, Peter**

1912–2004. Practitioner of educational drama and Theatre- and Drama-in-Education.

**Stafford-Clark, Max**

b. 1941. Co-founder of Joint Stock and currently artistic director of Out of Joint.

**Stan's Café**

1991–present day. Live art company based in Birmingham.



**Station House Opera**

1980–present day. Performance art company with a strongly physical and visual style.

Based in London.

**People Show**

1966–present day. The longest running devising company in the UK. Specialises in performance art.

**The Right Size**

1988–present day. Physical comedy company based in London.

**Théâtre de Complicité (now Complicite)**

1983–present day. London-based physical theatre company.

**Theatre Workshop**

1945–1975. Based at the Theatre Royal in London, the company was renowned for its community spirit and the creative techniques of its director, Joan Littlewood.

**Told by an Idiot**

1992–present day. Physical theatre company based in London. Founded by John Wright.

**Trestle Theatre**

1981–present day. Physical theatre company with a distinct, mask-based style. Founded by John Wright at Middlesex Polytechnic, the company is now based in St Albans.

**Wandor, Micheline**

Worked as a dramatist in the 1970s with devising companies such as Gay Sweatshop.

**Way, Brian**

Pioneer of educational drama technique and Theatre-in-Education.

**Welfare State International**

1968–present day. Known for their large-scale community events and their seven-year residency at Burrow-in-Furness, this company now has its own base in Ulverston.

**Women's Theatre Group**

1974–1991. Originated as a socialist-feminist theatre company devising collectively (Women's Street Theatre Group) but moved into new writing. Changed its name to Sphinx in 1991.

**Wright, John**

Director and founder of Trestle Theatre and *Told by an Idiot*, John Wright specialises in physical theatre techniques, particularly in the exploration of the use of mask and in clowning techniques.

## **Non-British devising companies and practitioners**

### **Abramovich, Marina**

b. 1945, Serbia. Performance artist.

### **Artaud, Antonin**

1934–1948, France. Poet, essayist, actor and director. Best known for his notion of 'theatre of cruelty'.

### **Barba, Eugenio**

b. 1936, Italy. Student of Grotowski and founder of the International School of Theatre Anthropology and the Odin Teatret.

### **Bausch, Pina**

b. 1940. German choreographer and founder of the Wuppertal Dance Theatre.

### **Boal, Augusto**

b. 1930, Brazil. Director and politician who pioneered 'forum theatre' techniques of participatory drama.

### **Bogart, Anne**

Founded the SITI company, USA in 1992 in collaboration with Tadashi Suzuki.

### **Cage, John**

1912–1992. US-born experimental musician and artist.

### **Copeau, Jacques**

1879–1949, France. Actor, critic, director and founder of the Vieux-Colombier theatre school outside Paris.

**Dodin, Lev**

b. 1944, Russia. Director and founder of the Maly Drama Theatre company.

**Fabre, Jan**

b. 1958, Belgium. Artist and director.

**Foreman, Richard**

b. 1937, USA. Director and founder of the Ontological-Hysteric Theatre.

**Grotowski, Jerzy**

1933–1999, Poland. Director known for his physical techniques. Proponent of 'poor theatre'.

**Kaprow, Alan**

b. 1927, USA. Performance artist credited with pioneering the Happenings form in New York, USA.

**Lecoq, Jacques**

1921–1999, France. In 1957, he founded a highly influential school of physical theatre training in Paris, France.

**Lepage, Robert**

b. 1957, Canada. Theatre and film director known for his elaborate set and technical design.

**Meyerhold, Vsevolod**

1874–1940. Russian theatre director and pioneer of 'biomechanic' techniques.

**Mnouchkine, Ariane**

b. 1938. Director and founder of Théâtre du Soleil, France.

**Performance Group**

1967–1975. Experimental theatre led by Richard Schechner in New York.

**SITI Company**

1992–present day. International theatre company that focuses on cross-cultural exchange.

Based in Saratoga, New York.

**Stanislavski, Constantin**

1863–1938, Russia. Actor, director and founder of the Moscow Arts Theatre. Pioneered a famous system of naturalistic acting.

**Théâtre du Soleil**

Paris-based theatre company known for its collaborative working methods.

**Wilson, Robert**

b. 1944, Texas, USA. Theatre director known for his distinctive aesthetic.

**Wooster Group**

1975–present day. Performance art company based in New York.

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **The David Glass Ensemble**

#### **Production Diary for *The Unheimlich Spine – the Unhomely Spine***

##### September 2000

Preliminary discussions take place between Matthew Jones and David Glass regarding the production. The Riverside Studios is booked. Ruth Finn (designer) and Athena Mandis (dramaturge) first meet with David Glass to discuss ideas for the play and he sets them some areas of research. Performer Amit Lahav (an established David Glass performer) is approached by David Glass and agrees to take part. Sophie Partridge is auditioned and offered the role of the Unheimlich.

##### October 2000

Glass spends a fortnight abroad working on the Dream Scenario. During this time, Finn and Mandis each undertake a series of research projects suggested by Glass. Finn explores ideas of glass, translucency and the body. Mandis researches horror films, film noir and the body. On Glass' return, Finn and Mandis make the first presentations of their findings to him.

##### November 2000

Glass, Finn and Mandis continue their research, work on drafts of the Dream Scenario and meet occasionally. In preparation for the auditions, Mandis and Glass establish some ideas about the characters. The main series of auditions takes place, at which point Richard Clews and Therese Bradley are selected. Glass decides to cast Kathryn Hunter, who has approached him independently.

##### December 2000 – January 2001

A significant meeting takes place between Glass, Finn and Mandis. This marks a transition in the research from the more generalised information gathering to practical decision-making.

Also at this meeting, David Glass presents Dream Scenario 3 and asks Finn to begin work on the storyboard. Casting and recruitment are finalised.

### February 2001

The chosen performers are sent a copy of Dream Scenario 3 and are set research tasks in advance of the formal creative period. These tasks include work on areas of shared knowledge (films, books, exhibitions and so on) and individual tasks, such as keeping a 'fear diary'. Finn and the design team begin to create set elements.

### **Dedicated creative period: Toynbee Studios**

Rehearsals mostly take place from 10am–6pm, Monday–Friday, with a half-day on Saturdays. During the final week, there are several late sessions (up to 10pm). Additional meetings and sessions take place outside of these hours, particularly in relation to the filming for the projections, set building and prop making.

### Monday 12 February – Saturday 17 February

During this first 'layer' of work, the mornings are spent in training and the afternoons on scene work that explores the basic situations sketched out in Dream Scenario 3 (this gives basic plot points for the first half of the show). Work starts with an hour of warm-up (yoga and Feldenkreis) and the morning ends with 'clapping meditation'. The warm-ups are deliberately gentle: Glass explains that rigorous and challenging activity can sometimes alienate the performer from their body and that this would be inappropriate for the production. Between the warm-up and the clapping meditation, Glass leads exercises of varying intensity relating to the stated themes of the play (fear, the body and the spine), to the period (the 1950s) and to the film genres it references (film noir and horror).

During the scene work in the afternoons, the performers are asked to improvise each scene using Dream Scenario 3 as a starting point. Until they discover more about their own characters (which they are asked to do proactively, keeping a journal of their discoveries),

the performers are told to work “from your own selves”<sup>816</sup> and presumably from the fear diaries they have been keeping. Dialogue at this point is adapted from Dream Scenario 3: mostly exposition and functional dialogue (that carries the plot). Increasingly, Athena Mandis feeds in phrases of dialogue which are direct quotations from the films she has been researching and the performers incorporate these into their improvisations. Glass seems to be looking to identify “something right”<sup>817</sup> in the improvisations offered by the performers in terms of emotional quality, stage images, gesture, movement, and so on.

#### Monday 19 February – Saturday 24 February

The second week begins with the introduction of Dream Scenario 4, which now includes the final act and is several scenes shorter than the previous Scenario. The trolleys, projection screen and some of the films also make their first appearance. Some time is spent watching the film and exploring the possibilities of the trolleys. Glass and the performers continue to work through the scenes of Dream Scenario 4. On the Saturday, there is a run-through, which consolidates some of the decisions made to date.

#### Monday 26 February – Tuesday 27 February

Draft 5 of the Scenario is introduced, which cuts more of the early scenes and streamlines the narrative. The scene work, which now takes up more of each day’s time, is interspersed with exercises designed to establish particular performance or atmospheric qualities. Glass states that Tuesday 27 will be “the last messy day”<sup>818</sup> and, by the time of the run-through on Tuesday evening, most scenes are fixed in terms of the basic units, physical blocking and some of the dialogue.

#### Wednesday 28 February – Saturday 3 March

Mandis presents the final script (Script 2) on Wednesday 28. From now on, Glass says, any changes will have to be made “officially”.<sup>819</sup> The script consists almost exclusively of dialogue for each scene, with some sparse stage direction. After some ‘tidying up’ on the

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<sup>816</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 19 February 2001

<sup>817</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 12 February 2001 and throughout

<sup>818</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 26 February 2001

<sup>819</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 28 February 2001



Wednesday, the rest of the week is spent in “intensive rehearsals”<sup>820</sup>, which are primarily directed towards intensifying the atmospheric and emotional quality of each scene.

#### Monday 5 March – Tuesday 6 March

This period is dedicated to work on selected scenes that Glass has identified as requiring more attention. These are broken down into units, each of which is explored through what Glass calls the ‘points of concentration’ exercise. In this exercise, Glass asks the performers to repeat the unit with a different suggestion in mind each time. This gives the performers a range of playing options.

#### Tuesday 6 March (evening) and Wednesday 7 March

##### *‘Get-in’ and technical rehearsal*

Glass uses the technical rehearsal to give particularly tight direction to the performance of the first scene. Consequently, the technical rehearsal overruns. The lighting design is simultaneously devised at this time.

#### Thursday 8 March

The dress rehearsal takes place on the afternoon of the opening night.

#### Thursday 8 March – Saturday 17 March

During the run, the performers are called at 2pm in order to spend the afternoon working on the production, integrating new insights (on the third night, for example, it is decided that the character Close-Up Alice will greet the audience as they enter) and ideas from the previous evening’s show and post-show discussion. Glass has to go abroad for a number of days in this period, so Marcello Magni steps in to work with the performers in these afternoon sessions.

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<sup>820</sup> David Glass in rehearsal, 28 February 2001

### Sunday 18 March

The main company 'de-brief' takes place; a meeting designed to give all the participants an opportunity to offer feedback to Glass and Matthew Jones on the process and production. During this meeting, Glass and Jones announce that, based on the participants' feeling that there is more to explore in the topic and the positive press and audience response, they have decided to develop *The Unheimlich Spine* for touring later in the year. The touring production opened at the Miskin Theatre, Dartford on 8 November 2001 but featured only two of the original cast (Lahav and Partridge). This second phase of the project is not covered by this research.

### **Story Outline**

#### Character Background

Dr Dorothy Belle-Merde believes that repressed fear turns into a creature in the human spine—the unheimlich—and has spent twenty years researching this phenomenon. His obsession with creating an Unheimlich Device to isolate a living unheimlich is alienating his wife, Gracie Gale (a nightclub singer).

Bobby Bangs finds living with his wife, Close-Up Alice (a deaf-mute), oppressive. She can read his thoughts through his throat glands and she keeps all the profits from *The Dark* (the cinema she runs) locked in a safe. Bobby Bangs writes captions for films that are never made.

#### Summary of the Story-Line:

Bobby Bangs comes to Dr Dorothy's laboratory asking him to forge a death certificate for Alice's dog, Baby Jack (whom he has accidentally killed in an elevator). On hearing about Dr Dorothy's research, he is inspired to kill his wife by frightening her to death with Baby Jack's heart. Having cut his own glands from his neck—so preventing her from reading his thoughts—Bobby Bangs murders Close-Up Alice. He takes her body to Dr Dorothy, who

successfully removes a living unheimlich from her spine. Dr Dorothy names the unheimlich "Faraway Alice".

After one failed attempt, Gracie Gale manages to tell her husband Dr Dorothy that she is pregnant; he responds with violence. She meets Bobby Bangs at the Exit Club (the nightclub where she sings) and allows herself to be seduced by him in the hope that sex with Bobby will kill Dr Dorothy's child. Bobby Bangs gives her a gun (hidden in Baby Jack's heart) and urges her to kill Dr Dorothy. He reveals his plan to return to Dr Dorothy's lab to reclaim the key to the safe that Close-Up Alice keeps in her ear.

Meanwhile, back at the lab, Close-Up Alice comes back to life and, on being confronted with Faraway Alice, verbalises her anger and frustration at being held back by her own fear for so long. She smashes the unheimlich with a telephone and chokes Dorothy with the receiver. The unheimlich comes back to life as a fairy (a visual reference to Glenda in the *Wizard of Oz*<sup>821</sup>) and appeals to characters and audience alike to understand the place of fear in their lives. She shares one dance with the doctor before he returns her to Close-Up Alice's body.

Dr Dorothy, enlightened by his experience with the unheimlich, comforts Close-Up Alice, then leaves, vowing to be reunited with his wife. On coming to the lab to steal the key, Bobby Bangs is confronted with a living and talking Close-Up Alice. He confesses his misdemeanours and Close-Up Alice agrees to give him the key and the deeds to the cinema on condition that they make love one last time.

Dr Dorothy re-enters, interrupting the deal. Gracie Gale enters with the gun. Dr Dorothy reveals that he has changed and now knows how much he loves and values her. Gracie Gale reveals that she has killed their child by having sex with Bobby Bangs. Bobby Bangs learns that Close-Up Alice still loves him and asks to be reunited with her. Gracie Gale goes to shoot herself but accidentally shoots Dr Dorothy as he tries to save her. As Dr Dorothy lies

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<sup>821</sup> Directed by Victor Fleming, 1939, US

dying in Gracie Gale's arms, Close-Up Alice senses that Gracie Gale is still pregnant and uses the *Unheimlich Device* to reveal the living fetus inside her.

### **Reception**

The play is constructed as a barrage of unexpected shocks. The opening credit sequence (film projected onto the screen that lines the back wall of the stage) begins with music loud enough to reverberate in the audience's ribcages and film images that suggest that a dog is being subjected to violence. The extremeness of the characters' actions (Bobby Bangs' cutting out his own glands; the cruelty of his killing of Close-Up Alice; Dr Dorothy's viciousness to his wife) and the dialogue (for example, the repetition of Bobby Bangs' line "that's my penis, I have an erection") are also often unnerving and surprising. Each audience member's response to the show no doubt depended to a large extent on their personal reaction to these 'shock tactics'. It is unlikely that many were genuinely affronted, offended or significantly challenged by them (most audience members had come prepared thanks to their awareness of Glass' work and the publicity material). Instead, the audience seemed to divide between those who were excited and thrilled by this daring and distinctiveness and those who saw it as somewhat 'cheap' and gratuitous in its exploitation of sex and violence. Both reactions would accord with David Glass' intention to "shake up" the audience, and the more negative response provoked by his challenge to expectations of good taste may even have pleased him more. In interview, he praised Lindsay Kemp's ability to mix 'high' and 'low art': "when you look at his work, you see great traditions of Cocteau and ballet and all these sort of influences, and vulgar traditions of strip-tease".<sup>822</sup>

The play's distinctiveness also lies in a layer of more subtle surprise effects involving a playfulness of theatrical style and allusions to particular film genres and individual films—what Glass called its 'Frankenstein's Monster' quality. Each scene was presented in a very different style: for example, performer Clews (Bobby Bangs)<sup>823</sup> likened the first lab scene (in which his character meets Dr Dorothy for the first time) to the style of the *Right Size*; it was comedic, quirky even, and self-aware. This is followed by a scene in which Dr Dorothy and

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<sup>822</sup> Interview with David Glass op. cit.

<sup>823</sup> Informal interview, 20 February 2001

Gracie Gale conduct a rapid-fire exchange of veiled insults reminiscent of the film noir genre. Dr Dorothy and Gracie Gale's exchange is repeated word-for-word several scenes later, this time delivered in a world-weary tone and accompanied by a jazz rhythm tapped out on glasses and medical instruments. A romantic scene in which Bobby Bangs and Gracie Gale dance as though in a Hollywood musical is followed by a film image depicting an anatomical cross-section of a penis repeatedly penetrating a vagina.

The dialogue of the show consisted entirely of quotations from 1950s films and there were some gestural 'quotations', as well as general allusions to a variety of films. While this gave many scenes in the play the feel of a twisted or pastiche film noir or horror film, most of the direct quotations were not recognisable as such by the audience. One or two allusions did strike home: a reference to a shower (a momentary allusion to Hitchcock's *Psycho*<sup>824</sup>) elicited laughs from the audience in most performances.

The response of audience, press and the company itself seemed to raise two central criticisms: that the show was not "finished" (it was advertised as a "developmental piece"<sup>825</sup>) and that it was shallow, a criticism raised by the *Time Out* review: "The pleasures afforded by the arch, Technicolor mania currently on show are keen but shallow".<sup>826</sup> Performer Clews voiced the opinion that the emotional impact of the show had been lost: "If I was watching it as an audience ... I think I would find it hard and harsh and I think I would be very sad that there wasn't much heart and soul in the piece".<sup>827</sup> This accusation of shallowness may have been justified: the stylistic ingenuity was appealing, entertaining and exciting but may well have had the effect of alienating the audience from the characters and the themes (particularly the in-depth exploration of fear). However, my own feeling—that there was something of worth in the play, beyond the surface entertainment—was echoed by other reviews of the production:

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<sup>824</sup> Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1960, US

<sup>825</sup> *The Unheimlich Spine* programme

<sup>826</sup> Brian Logan; 'The Unheimlich Spine' *Time Out* magazine, 14 March 2001

<sup>827</sup> Interview with Richard Clews, 4 April 2001

You wouldn't call it wholesome. You could think it overreaches itself. You can see it's not finished. And yet this new production from the David Glass Ensemble ... keeps snagging at your mind.<sup>828</sup>

And...

The plot may be tosh, but not as I feared, sadistic tosh. Indeed, what strike one is Glass's mixture of spiritual benignity and theatrical inventiveness.<sup>829</sup>

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<sup>828</sup> Susannah Clapp; 'Chambers of Love and Horror' *The Observer*, 11 March 2001  
<sup>829</sup> Michael Billington; 'The Unheimlich Spine' *The Guardian*, 10 March 2001

## APPENDIX THREE

### Forced Entertainment

#### Production Diary for *The Travels*

##### Period One: Thursday 21 March – Wednesday 24 April 2002

The working day is not strictly scheduled. Participants are expected to arrive about 10.30 but are often late. Mornings tend to be spent in discussion while the company drink coffee and smoke. Breaks for lunch and at the end of the day are scheduled on-the-spot, depending on how the work is going. During this period, the day ends once the company runs out of steam—usually between 3 and 4pm.

On the first day, Tim Etchells tells me that the company “want it [the show] to be more formal than *First Night*” and that they want to “put more pressure on themselves”.<sup>830</sup> They are interested in exploring three starting points: posing moral dilemmas; the telling of “really bad, sexist, racist jokes” in a tone of voice that subverts their intended humour (this was introduced as “Terry’s idea”); and Readers Digest *Emergency What To Do*.<sup>831</sup> The first improvisation is set up on the third of these ideas. Etchells has prepared some text that imitates the format of the Readers Digest book but poses absurd emergencies (“What to do if you can’t stop crying”; “What to do if you wake up dead”) and offers what the company call “bad advice” (sticking splinters into the tear ducts in the first case).

The company is seated around a long table, each participant negotiating their turn to speak (their ‘utterances’ in the company’s terminology) in the moment of performance. Several versions of this are tried out, each of which is discussed and evaluated in some detail. By the second day, they find it “boring” and become “tired of the condition of absurdity that is the bedrock of it”.<sup>832</sup> They criticise the “semi-reasonable, slightly melancholic tone”.<sup>833</sup> They

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<sup>830</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 21 March 2002

<sup>831</sup> Readers Digest *Emergency What to Do*, London: Random House, 1988

<sup>832</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 22 March 2002

discuss the fact that it does not “stick” (seem to get the performer ‘into trouble’) and that, “as a live game, it’s not got a great deal of grace”. One of the central problems is its “relation to being in public” or its “excuse for being in public”.<sup>834</sup> Various formats are explored, including varying the performance space (for example, seated around a central table, then on a podium with a microphone) in order to make it more “dynamic”. There is no firm conclusion to the discussions and the next phase of work is precipitated by Etchells proposing a new idea for exploration: “a little while ago, Rich and I talked about doing an apology show. I wouldn’t mind having a quick look at that”.<sup>835</sup> The directions he offers are as follows:

Terry comes on and starts and apologises that there’s not a performance and explains why not; things that might have been in it, injuries, things that didn’t arrive .... The rest of you in the chairs looking apologetic, including Rob in the gorilla [suit].

Several versions are tried and evaluated. Positive comments concern “the raggedness of it and the virtual show”<sup>836</sup>, the fact that it “posits itself as endless vamping, filling of time”<sup>837</sup> and “the potential spaciousness, which means that utterances butt up against each other”.<sup>838</sup> However, they decide against it because they find it difficult to effect a shift from a mode of apology into description and demonstration of the show and to ‘up the stakes’ in a way that they feel needs to happen. They also feel that it is potentially too self-referential; in danger of being “too Forced Entertainment”.<sup>839</sup>

From Wednesday 3 April, a range of what would be called “virtual world” scenarios is tried out. In these, an event or world is evoked through the performers’ verbal descriptions of it; like the imagined cancelled show in the trial described above. The first of these consists of the performers sitting around a table describing their purported actions in an imaginary amateur dramatics farce. There follows a series of trials involving other obviously fictitious

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<sup>833</sup> Robin Arthur in rehearsal, 22 March 2002

<sup>834</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 22 March 2002

<sup>835</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 23 March 2002

<sup>836</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 23 March 2002

<sup>837</sup> Cathy Naden in rehearsal, 23 March 2002

<sup>838</sup> Terry O’Connor in rehearsal, 23 March 2002

<sup>839</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 23 March 2002



performance projects: a murder mystery, a pornographic film, a slapstick clown comedy, a cartoon and finally a 'genre-jumping one'. By Friday 12 April, Etchells is evaluating the problem of the required first-person case of these fictitious narratives, which he says:

... cements you very much to the 'I', which is why after forty minutes you're left saying, 'is the telling of it just your little story?'... For a while, you read people's decisions as reasonably strategic and provisional, but because there's no device for changing 'I', you cement yourself into an identity.<sup>840</sup>

In the 'the gods' experiments that follow, the performers are again seated around a long table, this time laid with a white cloth, a messy floral centrepiece and drink bottles. The system is that each performer has to describe herself as though she were a god in the act of creating the world, (or parts of it), the creatures on it and the objects occupying it. This idea is abandoned by 18 April after Etchells declares that "it's not good at knowing why/how it is in public" and because the "personal investment level" is showing "no signs of getting hotter".<sup>841</sup> Etchells states that he's "happy to contemplate returning to any of the things we've been working on" but suggests a new starting point:

OK, something totally unrelated to anything we've done, that I'd be interested in seeing for a minute or two .... This is something Rob and I spoke briefly about in the pub.<sup>842</sup>

The performers are asked to enter, line up in front of the closed front curtain and "say who you are and then what you'd like me to be thinking about you. The formula could be: 'I hope you're starting to notice I'm the pretty one' or something".<sup>843</sup> The resulting improvisation is the most sustained yet (an hour and forty minutes). The video of this is assessed and transcribed over the next two days and a small-scale 'work in progress' is shown to the other members of staff at the Workstation. The evaluation of the first improvisation is very positive.

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<sup>840</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 12 April 2002

<sup>841</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 18 April 2002

<sup>842</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 18 April 2002

<sup>843</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 18 April 2002

However, they find the work-in-progress difficult and become disillusioned with “skimming the surface of the performance moment”.<sup>844</sup> In speaking to me on a later occasion<sup>845</sup>, Etchells also mentioned that there was a feeling that they wanted to move away from shows about theatricality (such as *Dirty Work* and *First Night*).

### **Period Two: Monday 22 July – Monday 16 September**

In the gap between the two periods of work, the company has been touring abroad, mostly with *First Night* and *Instructions for Forgetting*. During this time, there have been some ‘on-the-road’ discussions about the current show and these have brought them to a new point of departure. As Etchells explains to me, the new starting point for the show is the theme of ‘mapping’ and in this it bears a similarity to *A Decade of Forced Entertainment*.<sup>846</sup> The company has decided to set the participants a series of individual projects (on the theme of mapping and forecasting) that take them outside the studio and that will give them a ‘real’ rather than a ‘virtual’ object to which to refer in their ‘virtual world’ format.

#### Monday 22 July – Sunday 4 August

The first formal project of this period involves the performers having their fortunes read. They each organise and undertake this independently, then meet to present their experiences in a similar format to the previous experiments; narrating them (sometimes from notes) to each other and the audience while seated at the long table.

#### Monday 5 August – Saturday 31 August

The company introduces the ‘street names’ project: visiting streets in the UK with interesting names and reporting on them. Various sub-projects are undertaken within this. At first, it is assumed that material from the fortune-telling project will also be included in the show and that they may still undertake additional projects. By the end of August however, the company has dropped the other material in order to create a piece based entirely on the ‘street names’ project. Except for a week in which Etchells is absent (he is conducting a workshop at the

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<sup>844</sup> Tim Etchells in rehearsal, 20 April 2002

<sup>845</sup> Informal interview, the Place Theatre, London, 3 May 2002 (London première of *First Night*)

<sup>846</sup> Informal interview in rehearsal, 22 July 2002

Mousonturm in Frankfurt), the company meet only two or so days a week at the studio. During these sessions, they present their 'reports' from their travels, refine the projects, identify sub-projects and make some decisions about the nature of the reports. Meanwhile, Etchells is collating the performers' written reports into the so-called '30-page document', compiling them under various categories such as 'Love Lanes' and 'Violent Places'. The performers also collect the photographs they have taken of the street signs, together with hand-drawn maps and other notes.

#### Sunday 1 September – Friday 13 September

The street visits continue but the company meet in the studio more often. During the days in the studio, the predominant concern is how to 'stage' the huge volume of reports in the '30-page document'. Various set-ups and means of presenting the material are tested: for example, using an overhead projector to show the photographs and maps. At the same time, the attention is on how to order the spoken material. To aid this, Etchells creates a script that is tried out on the last day in Sheffield.

#### Monday 16 September – Thursday 26 September (Frankfurt)

The move to Frankfurt and the approach of the opening night precipitate an intensification of work. From this point, the working day is structured around Etchells' rewrites and runs of the newly-structured material. In the last week, the call is for 10am on most days and work continues into the night. Discussions and occasional read-throughs take place in the dressing room; runs are tried out on stage. Work stops when it is felt that the best course of action is for Etchells to go away and re-draft the script. These breaks are usually no more than three hours long (apart from the overnight breaks). Breaks for lunch either tend to be abbreviated or else discussion continues over sandwiches. Each evening, there is a more formal run of the show (usually the whole show as it stands, or at least two or three sections of it). There are usually one or two guests present at these runs (in addition to myself): for example, staff or other artists working at the Mousonturm, students or academics with an interest in the company. These runs also afford Lowdon and Etchells opportunities to experiment with different set-ups, different media for presenting the visual material and

different lighting states. The final set-up is decided on the day before opening. The evening runs are followed by further discussions, including both 'private' consultations with the company and more informal talks in the bar of the Mousonturm, during which Etchells fields the guests' comments.

### **The Show**

The show consists almost entirely of the performers, who are seated at the tables, taking turns to describe their experience of a particular street or, more rarely, give an overview of the 'street name' project. The only respite from this static set-up is when Richard Lowdon gets up to put a new transparency onto the overhead projector, at one point standing at the projector for some time in order to show a series of transparencies. This pared-down aesthetic uses the different voices of each participant, variations in pace, shifts in the mode and register of the speech and some degree of 'social business' (the reactions of the silent performers to the report that is being heard) to sustain the audience's interest, playing up the humour or pathos of particular reports. In addition, there is a degree of playfulness about the 'authenticity' of this "distorted, intimate and even fictional documentary".<sup>847</sup>

By the time of the opening night, the show is structured around three sections, each of which is introduced by Lowdon projecting a heading onto the screen (stage left behind the overhead projector). Each of these sections represents something of a shift in terms of subject matter and mode of delivery. 'Part I: Tuning In' begins with each performer giving an account of a fairly extended 'sub-project' and then some introduction to the 'street names' project. In 'Part II: Just Girls', Terry O'Connor, Claire Marshall and Cathy Naden each 'go long' (that is, give an extended, often quite personal, report), while the relevant transparencies of maps are projected onto the back screen by Richard Lowdon. In 'Part III: Stories', the whole company give accounts of their experiences and the stories they find on

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<sup>847</sup> Judith Helmer regards *The Travels* as the latest in a strand of "poetic" documentaries (Judith Helmer; 'From Speak Bitterness to Bloody Mess' in Judith Helmer and Florian Malzacher (eds.); *Not Even a Game Anymore: The Theatre of Forced Entertainment*, Berlin: Alexander Verlag 2004 p. 64). Others in the strand include *A Decade of Forced Entertainment* (1994), *Nights in this City* (site-specific bus tour and installation, Sheffield, 16 May 1995; also performed at the R Festival/Rotterdamse Schouwberg, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, 23 September 1997) and *Instructions for Forgetting* (2001).

the 'story streets' (that is, streets or roads with names such as 'Story', 'Storey' or 'Stories') they have visited.

### **Reception**

The production was received positively by the audiences at the three UK performances I witnessed, playing to near or full houses on each occasion. At the Workstation, Sheffield (4 October 2002), the audience consisted predominantly of 'regulars' or friends of the company, while at the Gardner Arts Centre in Brighton (14 November) and London's Robin Howard Dance Theatre (The Place, 5 December) there was a younger crowd, with a high proportion of students (sometimes in groups). The two latter productions seemed to be more successful. Comments at the Workstation were warm but there were reservations: one audience member commented that the reports were "short, sharp and present tense" but complained that the production as a whole was not adequately "composed"<sup>848</sup>, and there were moments when it became a struggle to sustain the audience's attention. The more positive responses to the other productions was probably due partly to the refinement of the performers' delivery (my personal evaluation of the Workstation production was that they were playing too 'hard' for laughs or other reaction) and partly to the younger 'fans' in the audience. At the same time, the size of the venue seems to make a difference. At the Gardner Arts Centre, with its large auditorium and raised stage, the "excuse for being in public" was less of an "intimate" documentary and more of a panel discussion at a conference (a buzzing speaker drew attention to the microphones). The formal setting emphasised the absurdity of presenting such banal and personal experience to a slightly comical effect.

The production was reviewed mostly by local and online press, with *The Times* providing the only national newspaper review. The critical reception was cooler than the audience reaction. Reviewer Jen Ogilvie pointed out two "problems" with the production: the "deliberate mundanity" of some stories and the overtly performative aspects of others, which

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<sup>848</sup> The Forced Entertainment Studio, the Workstation, Sheffield, 4 October 2002

she suggests makes them “feel awkward and pretentious”.<sup>849</sup> These criticisms were shared by other reviewers: the “stories” were seen to be banal, dull or pedestrian and the performers were criticised for drawing overly portentous conclusions from their experiences (Rebecca Nesvett<sup>850</sup>, Jackie Fletcher<sup>851</sup>, Phil Smith<sup>852</sup> and Joshua Sofaer<sup>853</sup>). Smith also criticised the “studied acting of not acting” and Ogilvie the “rehearsed insouciance; an artificial sincerity”. The most negative review likened the project to “the worst clichés of Renaissance and Mediaval (*sic*) travel writing” in its perceived patronising of the areas visited during the project (Nesvett). Positive comments were confined to the effectiveness of individual stories.

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<sup>849</sup> Jen Ogilvie ‘NOW Festival 02: *The Travels* – Forced Entertainment’ (at Sandfield Theatre) in *You are Here (visual arts resource for Nottingham and beyond)* 2 November 2002; available from: [www.yah.org.uk/comments.php?id=57\\_0\\_1\\_0\\_C](http://www.yah.org.uk/comments.php?id=57_0_1_0_C) (visited 30/06/2005)

<sup>850</sup> Rebecca Nesvett review on Theatre Wales website 31 October 2002; available on [www.theatre-wales.co.uk/reviews/reviews\\_details.asp?offset=75&reviewID=354](http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/reviews/reviews_details.asp?offset=75&reviewID=354) (visited 06/07/2005)

<sup>851</sup> Jackie Fletcher on *The British Theatre Guide* website 4 December 2002; available from: [www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/thetravels-rev.htm](http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/thetravels-rev.htm) (visited 30/06/2005)

<sup>852</sup> Phil Smith; ‘Forced Entertainment – the Travels’ Review in *Total Theatre Magazine* 14/4 2002/2003 p. 28

<sup>853</sup> Joshua Sofaer; ‘Forced Entertainment – the Travels’ Review in *Live Art Magazine* December 2002; available from: [www.liveartmagazine.com/core/reviews.php?action=show&key=139](http://www.liveartmagazine.com/core/reviews.php?action=show&key=139) (visited 30/06/2005)

## APPENDIX FOUR

### Gary Stevens

#### Production diary for *Pieces of People*

The performers in *Pieces of People* were:

Robert Allwood*:	Theatre and live art performer
Samantha Bell:	Contemporary dancer and children's dance teacher
Sarah Buist*:	MA visual arts student at Wimbledon School of Art
Claire Blundell Jones:	BA visual arts student at Wimbledon School of Art
Heather Burton:	Live art and theatre performer
Christina Frank:	BA visual arts at Chelsea School of Art
Rachel Gomme*:	Contemporary dancer turned performance artist. Participant in Performance Lab and performer in <i>Slow Life</i>
Eduardo Gutierrez:	Life model
Tariq Hussein:	BA visual arts at Wimbledon School of Art
Marianne Hyatt:	'Folktronica' singer with a background in ballet
Katherine Hymers:	BA visual arts at Wimbledon School of Art
Julia Keller:	BA visual arts at Central St. Martins
Philip Lee*:	Sculptor/performance artist. Participant in Performance Lab
Sally Marie:	Contemporary dancer/performer
Ingrid Pollard:	Photographer. Participant in Performance Lab
Valentin Ratchev:	Performer (works with Robert Allwood), living sculpture
Valerie Renay:	Dancer. Participant in Performance Lab
Daniel Vais:	Student in MA Choreography at the Laban Centre
Martha Wildman*:	Contemporary dancer
Claire Wright*:	Textile designer/performance artist. Participant in Performance Lab

\*I conducted interviews with these performers

Other participants in the process were Artsadmin staff Bia Oliveira (who co-ordinated the project and was on site for about five days during the process) and Nicky Clark (project manager). Charu Vallabhbai, Project Organiser at Contemporary Projects, oversaw the company's stay at the Henry Moore Sculpture Garden.

Induction day, Friday 13 June 2003, Artsadmin, London

Gary Stevens talks through his vision for the piece and his own background, and gives some practical advice in terms of transport and behaviour on site. After the introductory talk, there is a workshop session in which Stevens leads the performers through some of the potential ideas.

In the introductory, talk Stevens describes the working method as “strategy rather than choreography”, using strict rules that cause the performers to move in herd-like ways (a witty allusion to Moore’s preoccupation with sheep). The project will be based on a “simple premise, a conceptual starting point” which acts as “motivating principle(s) rather than prescription”. He seems to have a clear idea of what it will look like: he will use the 20 performers to create “clusters of people” in the landscape, making up “complex objects”; the effect might be “a fusion of Benny Hill and Henry Moore”. The audience, he suggests, will be led on “a sort of journey” through the sculptures. Groups of performers will be doing different things simultaneously and will be discovered at certain points by the spectators, sometimes at a distance. The audience might “lose” the performers for extended periods. He has made the following decisions: that it will be “anti-spectacle—conceptually interesting rather than visually stunning”; that there will be no audible speech or other imposed sound; that there will be no explicit effort to make the performance relate to the existing Henry Moore sculptures; and that the performers will be wearing their own clothes, so that only their behaviour will distinguish them from the audience.

He identifies some areas that he intends to explore in rehearsal: group movement derived from animal behaviour; “stupid hiding” (again, derived from animal behaviour: attempting to hide by, for example, freezing, hiding behind objects that are too small or simply facing a



wall); creating scenes designed to be seen at a long distance; and “playing with near and far”. The effect, he suggests, will be “child-like and annoyingly simple” and will constitute a blurring of “the distinction between object and event”.

In the workshop session, the group try a movement that he calls “The Swarm”, versions of “stupid hiding” and exercises that involve performing everyday movements (standing, sitting and lying down) in unison.

#### Monday 16 June – Wednesday 18 June

The morning call is 10.30 for an 11am start (after a few days, a daily warm-up is introduced during this half-hour at the performers’ request) and there are three formal breaks (including a lunch break) over the course of the day. The working day ends some time between 4pm and 6pm, depending on how work is progressing.

Gary Stevens tries out many potential moments and movements with the performers. There is a high turnover of ideas in these first days and a number of trials are rejected. On the afternoon of the second day, a particularly high number of ideas are deemed to “not work”<sup>854</sup>, which seems to mean that they failed to interest or elicit amusement from Stevens. However, by Wednesday 18 June, a rudimentary version of what would later become each of the five pieces has been seen.

#### Wednesday 18 June

A relatively formal discussion is called. Stevens states, “I’m beginning to see that it’s about the dynamics between you”. His vision has shifted away from notions of hiding and revelation (the long-distance scenes, the “stupid hiding” and the spectators’ discovery of the performers) to the apparent ‘life’ of the group as an entity and to the individuals within it. As Stevens said, it is “more like physics and particles and not so much about hiding”. Although the implications are not discussed, in retrospect it is apparent that this constitutes quite a substantial modification of the vision in terms of the structure and shape of the piece.

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<sup>854</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 17 June 2003

Although Stevens says that “I’m still envisioning it as a journey, and in definite spaces”, his interest in the group’s dynamics implies that, for the most part, the performers will be seen as a complete group and that they will be on view most of the time. The notion of “playing with near and far” is less urgent now, as is the idea that small groups of performers will be discovered separately. The premise of temporary structures, in which “the posited objects are made of the same stuff as the audience” and which overlay the landscape is reinforced. Stevens expresses a wish to explore further “how far we can stretch and hold the bands between you”, that is, to what extent the performers can be geographically separate yet, because they are operating on the same principles, seem to represent a single entity.

The performers are given an opportunity to comment. For the most part, these comments are positive (one of the pieces is described as “magic”) and coincide with Stevens’ vision. One performer mentions the “reverse anthropomorphism” of people adopting animal behaviour<sup>855</sup>; another approves of the “almost casual relationship to the space and the sculptures”.<sup>856</sup> Someone else wants to know how the “chunks of movement” that are being developed will flow into each other.<sup>857</sup>

#### Thursday 19 June – Friday 20 June

Ideas selected from the first phase are repeated and refined. Stevens’ focus is now on extending each piece, working out how the performers might move into and out of the moments that have already been established. The “chunks of movement” are beginning to coalesce into larger pieces, with recognisable identities.

#### Monday 23 June – Wednesday 25 June (morning)

Stevens arrives on Monday 23 having conceived a provisional order for the pieces. In outlining this order and his thinking as regards “the management of the spectators”, Stevens explains how he has been surprised by the way it has developed from “a map which is followed, and you’re discovered in 10 or so locations” to his current vision, in which he wants

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<sup>855</sup> Philip Lee in rehearsal, 18 June 2003

<sup>856</sup> Rachel Gomme in rehearsal, 18 June 2003

<sup>857</sup> Claire Wright in rehearsal, 18 June 2003

to lead the spectators, without a map, through three or four locations. Thus, each piece will be “more sculptural” and will be held for a longer period of time.<sup>858</sup> After introducing the structure, Stevens runs the performers through the pieces in order, stopping to revise certain pieces. Due to the detailed work done on each piece, this run takes two and a half days.

#### Wednesday 25 June (early afternoon)

In the second consolidating discussion of the process, Stevens repeats one of the descriptions he has made of the piece: that it is based on the simple conceptual starting point of clusters of people forming temporary objects that overlay or are hidden by the landscape and that stand in contrast to the existing Henry Moore sculptures. It is not, he says, about elegance or creating a mood. One performer asks Stevens what he is trying to achieve in the piece.<sup>859</sup> His response is to describe it as “like architecture, but there’s a process of coming together and falling apart”. He explains the difficulty of making it “rich and open” without being vague. For example, he hopes that the audience will make associations between the performers’ behaviour and that of animals, but he does not want this association to be confirmed by specific animal-like behaviour. Stevens identifies two key aspects of the show: that it plays “with something about the communication between you and the isolation of individuals”, and that “I’m layering a question about what is permanent and what is temporary” (the difference between the permanent Moore sculptures and those made by the performers). Finally, he reminds the performers of a point he made in the Induction meeting; that the piece is serious but essentially funny.

#### Wednesday 25 June (late afternoon) – Friday 27 June

During this phase, the main activities comprise very detailed work on selected sections interwoven with increasingly long and formal runs. The runs culminate in a dress rehearsal on Friday afternoon, attended by a handful of Henry Moore staff. Revisions to the order and broad detail of the pieces are still being made on Thursday 26, although, by this stage, attention is mostly focused on the subtle detail.

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<sup>858</sup> Gary Stevens in rehearsal, 23 June 2003

<sup>859</sup> Valentin Ratchev in rehearsal, 25 June 2003

Saturday 28 June 2003

The call is for midday, so that Stevens can run the performers through some of the trickier aspects of the show and allow them a good warm-up before it begins. The show is set to start at 3.30pm (in fact, it starts a little later) and is ninety minutes long.

## **The Show**

### **Sheep Field (pieces i, ii and v)**

The field in front of the Aisled Barn ('G' on the map of Perry Green: see p. 228) is a large round shape, defined by a line of bushes to the right (with entrances to the adjacent field), trees and the Foundation's offices to the left, and an orchard opposite. Within the space are several sculptures, most prominent of which is Moore's Double Oval piece (no. 11 on the map). The patio in front of the Aisled Barn creates a rudimentary audience area, although Stevens was keen to stress that audience members might sit anywhere within the space. For the performance, tea and cakes were served from this area, making it a focus point for incoming audience members. Bordering (to the right of) the sheep field is a smaller lawn area, defined by bushes and containing some small Moore pieces.

### **Piece i: Rabbits**

The show has a soft start, with performers scattered across the Sheep Field and the adjacent field. The performers' instructions were to lie down on their backs when they are alone, but to sit, squat, stand and then run away whenever anyone approaches within a certain critical distance. As they run from wandering spectators and each other, they eventually find themselves in the same Sheep Field and, still sensitive to possible alarms, they squat, sit and lie down all at the same time, lying some distance from each other. Triggered by a real or fabricated noise, they all dash into the bushes, leaving the field empty of performers.

This piece was intended to last about ten minutes. In performance, it took significantly longer because audience members intentionally 'set-off' the performers (approaching them so they would run away) to a greater degree than had been anticipated.

#### Piece ii: Herd Formation, Amoeba and Train

A single performer enters the space and stands alone in an exposed area in the Sheep Field. Another enters and, when this second performer approaches the first, a chase ensues, with the first performer running into the bushes and leaving the second performer exposed in the space. This process is repeated about five times. After this, variations occur. For example, two people may enter the field at the same time; the performer occupying the space may chase off the new entrant; or the chaser may catch up with the first performer, in which case both remain in the exposed space. This last permutation becomes the norm, so that the performers gradually form a group to continue the game. Formed groups may then split and regroup, at which point chases and 'stand-offs' occur between groups as well as between groups and individuals and between single individuals. Gradually, a single group forms and stabilises. It then begins to move in what is called 'conversational mode', whereby performers move fairly slowly within the group, making eye contact. While individual performers seem to be meandering within the group, the group itself moves slowly across the field.

In the 'Amoeba' movement, a single individual drifts away from the group, which accelerates to catch up with the 'escaping' individual and re-engulf her. This causes a distinct change of rhythm and direction in the group. The Amoeba occurs about five times. Once settled, the group attempts to lie down, but external noise—either real or fabricated—causes it to stand again. Eventually, the group manages to squat, sit and lie down together; as before, but in closer proximity to each other. After a moment of lying down, the group stand and jog out of the field in a single-file, meandering line referred to as "The Train". The file goes through the adjacent field and then slows to a swift walk along a footpath to the Arch Space. The audience follows.

## Arch Space

### Piece iii: Swarm

The space has a central wide 'path' of mown lawn leading to The Arch (no. 6 on the map) at the far end of the field. This area is bordered along its two longer sides by a line of long grass and, behind this, by narrow dirt paths and trees.

The audience enters and is expected to line up along the two sides that face into the mown area, where the performers are discovered 'swarming' (in this movement, each performer is walking briskly in and out of each other, retaining a certain distance from each other). In fact, some members of the audience entered the mown path and some stood under the Arch Piece.

The swarm condenses and then moves down towards the Arch sculpture, 'pouring' through it into the grassy area behind. It then swarms back into the central space and forms a group that gradually shrinks in size. Once a fairly tight group is formed, the performers start to 'stick' by momentarily taking hold of each one's hands while still walking. Each time this occurs, they hold hands and make eye contact for longer and longer periods. Eventually, pairs are formed as two performers 'stick', move out a short distance together and stop. Once all participants have paired off, they all drop hands together and remain motionless.

This stillness is held for a substantial time. The performers have been instructed to wait thirty seconds, then move their eyes; count another thirty seconds, then move their head; count again, then move from waist. As the audience is too far away to see the eye movement, the initial wait is apparently a long one (Stevens referred to this as a 'trick' to ensure that the performers stayed still for long enough). The performers then move simultaneously, taking one step and then stepping back into their original positions. This is repeated, but with the performers taking two steps before returning to position. On the third occasion, the performers return to swarming. Once fully established, the swarm disintegrates, with about half the group coming to the top of the space and back down the side and the other half

going either side of the Arch sculpture. The audience follows the performers down a long path through a wooded area, over a small bridge, over a stile and into the Hay Field.

### **Hay Field**

#### Piece iv: Embracing

The audience enter by coming over a stile into the large Hay Field. There is a pond at the top end of the field (from where the audience enters) and a mound topped by the Large Upright Internal/External Form sculpture (no. 7 on the map). The mound forms a raised viewing area into the rest of the field below. A fence and line of trees separates this field from the next (in the direction the audience has come from) but there is a good view of the next field, which includes the Large Reclining Figure sculpture (no. 8 on the map). This Hay Field is rather exposed and wild, with dry grass and sheep in it.

As the audience enters, the performers are standing evenly spaced (about five to ten metres apart) across the field. In the first movement, two performers walk towards each other and embrace. After a few moments, one leaves the other and moves towards a third performer. These two walk towards each other and embrace. This pattern repeats itself. At first, just one pair moves at a time. After a while, it begins to occur more frequently and with two or more pairs moving simultaneously. In doing so, the performers draw together into a tighter group.

There comes a point at which all the performers embrace, hold, and then part, simultaneously. On parting, one of the performers leaves, walking slowly out of the field through an exit at the far right (opposite the viewing area). The remaining performers embrace new partners, holding the embrace until the single performer who is leaving reaches the gate into the next field. At this point, the performers change partners, again, leaving a single one out who then follows the first out of the field. The pattern repeats itself until, eventually, only one performer remains. S/he pauses and leaves at the given moment.

As they leave the field, each performer heads along the same path through the far fields towards the first space. This means that there is a single line leading the audience back to the first field, but going through the exposed fields rather than through the wooded area (the two routes back are parallel). This single line was entitled 'The Knotted Rope'. In performance, members of the audience left earlier than expected, accompanying the first performers to leave, so that 'The Knotted Rope' was not apparent to later audience members.

### **Sheep Field**

#### Piece v: Slow Firework

The field is empty as the audience enters, although one or two performers may be seen 'hiding' in the bushes. Once the audience settles, the performers appear simultaneously from the bushes that surround the space, all walking directly towards the central point of the space. They are equidistant and form a ring as they come together. As they approach the centre of the space, they form a tight knot and hold this position for a few moments. Then they turn and walk back out, again forming a circle. At a given distance they stop, turn and return to the centre. The pattern is repeated, with the distance walked from the centre growing longer and longer. Eventually, the performers are walking right out of the space, then reappearing simultaneously and walking back in to meet in the middle. After this has occurred several times, with longer and longer periods in which the performers are absent from the space, they meet a last time in the middle. From the central knot, they turn to face outwards; hold hands and bow; take a couple steps forwards; let go of each other's hands and bow again.

### **Reception**

The audience did not behave in the way that Stevens had predicted and this had an impact on the performance. The opening 'Rabbits' piece, for example, took considerably longer than expected because some audience members worked out that they could 'set off' the



performers by approaching them. In the 'Swarm' of piece iii, audience members stood in the space that the participants had assumed would be left clear for the performers. Whether or not certain members of the audience had deliberately 'disrupted' the performance became a matter of debate among the participants.

There were no reviews of the production and Stevens did not receive any feedback on it from Contemporary Projects (which has since closed down).

One of the performers, Sarah Buist, went on to write an MA thesis that featured her experience of *Pieces of People*.<sup>860</sup> In this, she emphasised the simplicity of the piece: "This was a piece in which the intellectual was not prominent. There was nothing to figure out".<sup>861</sup> Rather, she suggested, we respond to it on an emotional level: "We see a single person standing alone in a large empty space. We feel this".<sup>862</sup> Because of this empathic response to the performers, Buist believes that the show makes us "think of states of being ... about feelings"<sup>863</sup> and ultimately about our "hopes and desires for a more humane way of living—one away from fear and isolation, where co-operation and compassion replace fear and violence".<sup>864</sup> Although this is a reading that the piece can sustain, I am not convinced that it was in any way intended as a meditation on human relations. My experience watching it was that our tendency to empathise with individual 'people' (which occurred particularly when one was isolated from the group) was continually subverted by their role as "material". This put into question the extent to which their actions, behaviour and emotional responses were "their own" and therefore indicative of an inner life. As Stevens intended, the piece plays with the representation of human thought processes.

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<sup>860</sup> Sarah Buist; *From the Margin to the Centre* thesis submission for Wimbledon School of Art, MA Fine Art: Drawing 2003

<sup>861</sup> Buist *ibid.* p. 5

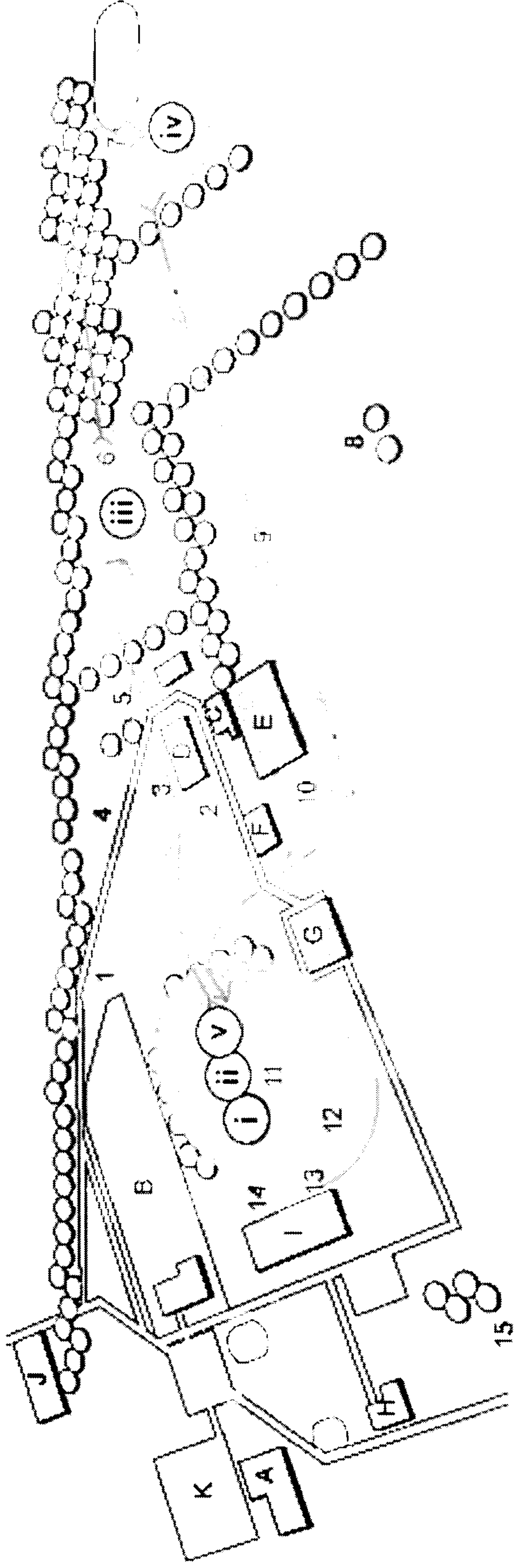
<sup>862</sup> Buist *ibid.* p. 5

<sup>863</sup> Buist *ibid.* p. 6

<sup>864</sup> Buist *ibid.* p. 7

### Map of the Henry Moore Foundation Sculpture Garden at Perry Green

This map is an adapted version of the one available on the Henry Moore Foundation website. It has been annotated to indicate the sites (shown as i–v) and route (the light grey arrowed line) of *Pieces of People*. Only those sculptures referred to in my account of *Pieces of People* are shown here (see overleaf).



#### *Pieces of People* 'Pieces' and Sites

- i: Rabbits (the Sheep Field)
- ii: Herd formation, Amoeba and Train (the Sheep Field)
- iii: Swarm (the Arch Space)
- iv: Embracing (the Hay Field)
- v: Slow Firework (the Sheep Field)

#### Buildings and Sculptures

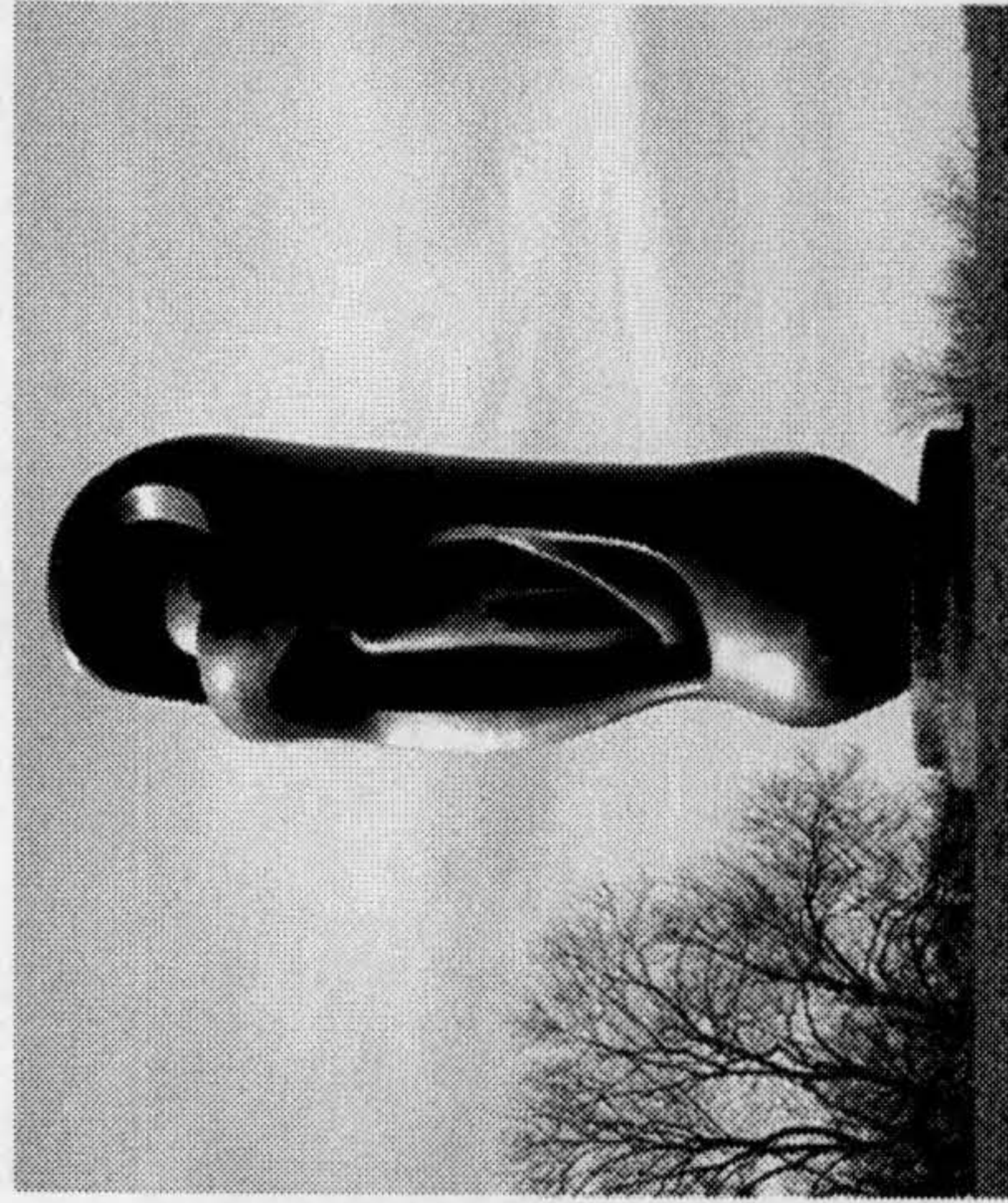
- G: The Aisled Barn
- 6: The Arch (1963–69)
- 7: Large Upright Internal/External Form (1981–82)
- 8: Large Reclining Figure (1984)
- 9: Sheep Piece (1971–72)
- 11: Double Oval (1966)

**Selected Sculptures**

6.



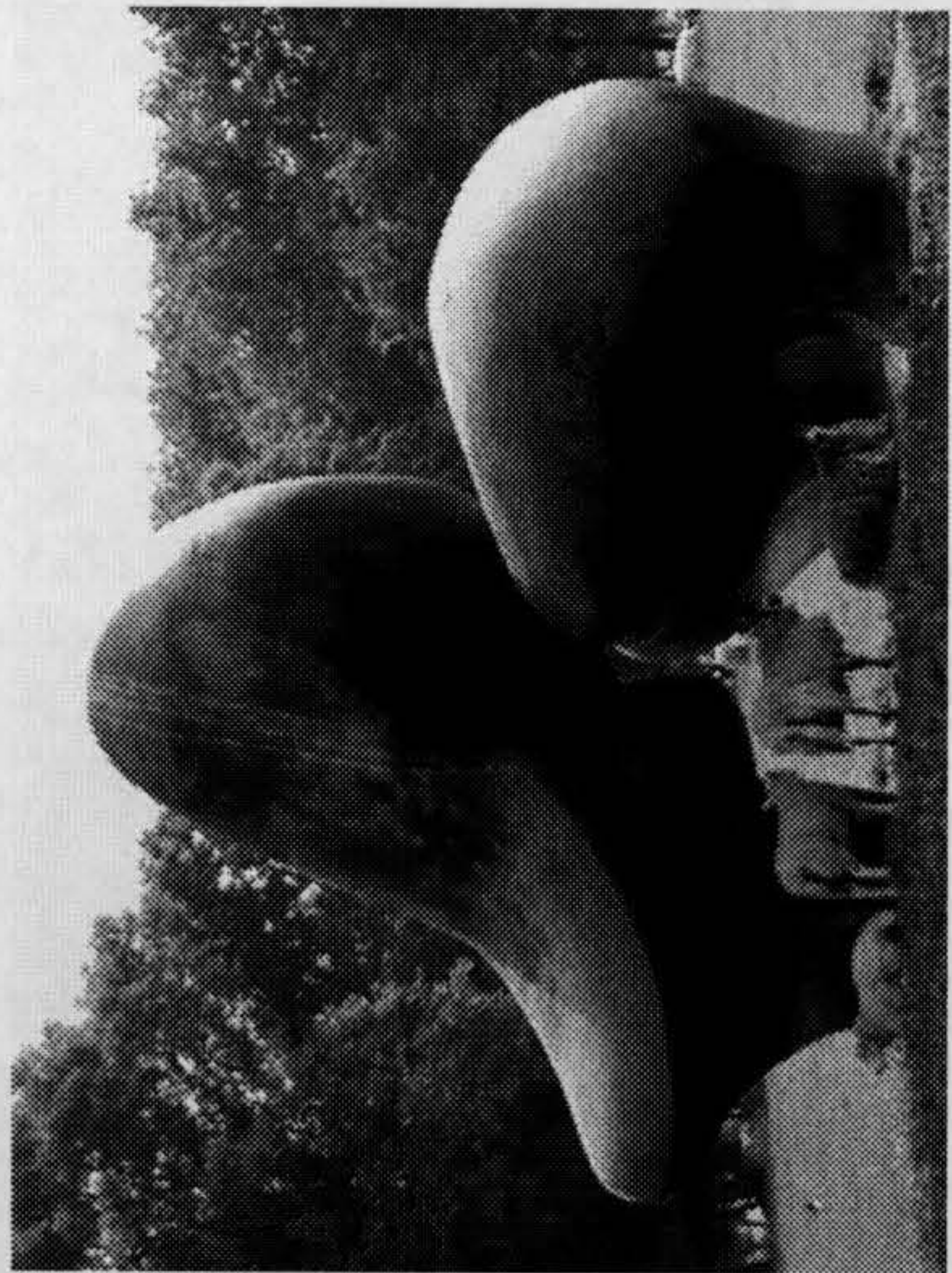
7.



8.



9.



11.



## APPENDIX FIVE

### Glossary of Terms

#### Categories of devising: process-oriented / product-oriented

There are two general orientations that motivate practitioners to devise. 'Process-oriented' refers to those forms of devising that are used as a tool for personal, group, social and/or cultural development: for example, in school drama and Theatre-in-Education, where devising might be used almost as a pedagogical instrument or in applied theatre contexts (for example, community theatre, TIE and Theatre-in-Healthcare, Theatre-in-Development), where it is used to empower its participants. Process-oriented devising is concerned with the participants' experience of process: it measures its success in terms of the benefits participants receive rather than the quality of the theatrical product. Product-oriented devising, on the other hand, refers to those forms of theatre-making more concerned with the innovative or artistic quality of the performance produced by the devising process. It relates to commercial rather than applied practice and to contexts such as physical theatre and live and performance art, which are the main expressions of devised theatre today. As seen in the David Glass case-study (Chapter Eight), elements of process-oriented devising also enter into contexts that are more usually associated with product-oriented devising.

#### Attributes of devising

The following terms are used to describe particular qualities of process and interpersonal dynamics in devising practice.

#### Organic / Imposed

In describing creative process, director Tim Etchells makes a distinction between "arriving at a decision and making a decision ... coming to a decision and forcing one".<sup>865</sup> Organic processes are those that delay decision-making and are characterised by a late-conceived vision, a tendency towards tacit scores and a favouring of intuitive, spontaneous, creative activities. They are associated with what I have referred to as the 'magic' quality of devising (see Chapter Five).

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<sup>865</sup> Tim Etchells; *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, London & New York: Routledge 1999 p. 53

Organic processes rely on the group having a shared tacit understanding of the vision. Proposals and directions that seem outside of the shared vision are likely to be experienced as 'imposition'. 'Imposed' ideas, scores, decisions and structures are those that seem to have come from outside of the shared understanding of the vision (as when an individual suggests an idea that is deemed inappropriate), that come too early or—in some cases—that do not comply with the behavioural norms of that company's ethos.

### Collaborative / Hierarchical processes

Many devising practitioners and scholars see devising as an intrinsically 'collaborative' practice, although they offer little definition as to what this means. For the purposes of this research, I assume that collaborative devising is that in which authority, authorship and power are equally distributed among the participants, particularly in cases where participants have equal responsibility over all areas of production—for example, the ultimately collaborative structure in the Collective model described in Chapter Three. In fact, most devising structures centralise the power, authority and authorship functions in the role of the director. In other words, they constitute a director-led hierarchy. Thus, while the ethos of many models and cases of devising resist hierarchical structures, the director-led hierarchy is in fact the most common organisational structure.

The term 'hierarchy' usually refers to a pyramidal structure, in which power is accorded according to level or 'rank'. In general, it is only unusually large companies such as Ann Jellicoe's Colway Theatre Trust that have more than two or three levels. Generally speaking, devising companies tend to represent 'flattened' hierarchies.

### **Process**

The following terms are used in accounts and analyses of process:

#### Vision

Vision can be thought of as an imagined version of the performance-to-be that guides the scoring process. The term usually describes the starting vision for the whole performance ('the initial

vision') but can also refer to provisional visions or those that relate to a small area. Thus, on a micro-level, a director's pre-established 'blocking' for a single scene or performance moment may be called a vision.

The term 'big vision' refers to a company's more general ideas about the sort of work they are or would like to be creating and it might represent an aspect of its ethos. For example, Peter Brook's rejection of "deadly theatre"<sup>866</sup> will colour all his work and will exist as a given in the initial vision of any one production.

The initial vision is one which predates the dedicated creative process and tends to be more playful and more individual than later visions. The working vision that evolves from this (typically towards the end of the conception phase) tends to be more explicit and more practical: an understanding of what responses would be most appropriate to particular directions or "what works".

### Score

The score is a set of directions that will determine a particular set of responses. The term refers primarily to those sets of directions that have been fixed and made explicit over the course of a process. It can also refer to the internalised and tacit knowledge that a participant gains over the course of the process and which will again determine aspects of the performance.

Individual scores (for each participant), such as the rehearsal score and the performance score, are combined to create global scores. Scores will typically go from being provisional to fixed and explicit.

### Direction-response, material, trials

Directions are instructions for performance or triggers for action that will impel participants towards the realisation or useful innovation of a vision. Directions can be explicit or tacit, relate to aesthetic or practical issues and take the form of spoken or written text, or any of the theatrical

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<sup>866</sup> Peter Brook; *The Empty Space*, London: Penguin 1968 pp. 11–46

modes of communication. Response is the fulfilment of a direction (by any participant), usually intentional but occasionally unintended or unexpected. No distinction is made in this thesis between responses within a fictional frame and those outside of it, so that a performer responding 'in character' is seen in the same way as a designer responding to a brief or a technician to a lighting cue. Responses are determined by the participant's vision.

Sets of provisional responses and scores will also be referred to as 'material'. It is common for a distinct period of the creative process to be given to generating material: that is, trying out a range of directions and responses. This research uses the term 'trial' to refer to the practice of testing provisional directions and responses and evaluating their relevance to the vision.

#### Scoring process

This is the process whereby ongoing cycles of direction and response become increasingly formalised into fixed scores as they progressively approximate the stage realisation of the vision. The scoring process, as conceived in this research, is an evolutionary 'survival of the fittest' model, in which material that approximates to or usefully innovates on the vision is most likely to be formalised through a succession of direction-response cycles.

#### Knowledge conversion: explicit and tacit

This term describes the systems by which knowledge (of the vision, of directions, of a company's ethos) is learned and communicated in group processes. There are four types of tacit and explicit knowledge conversion. Tacit knowledge is shared by socialisation and made explicit through externalisation. Explicit knowledge is shared by combination and made tacit through internalisation. It is possible to conceive the creative process in terms of a system for the conversion of knowledge.

#### **Interpersonal dynamics**

The following terminology will be used to describe and analyse aspects of models and examples of devising in terms of their politics:

### Authority

This refers to a participant's ability to affect the scoring process through their power to give directions, to choose what survives, and/or to contribute creatively to the ongoing process. These abilities are determined by factors such as the participant's role in the company's structure and their familiarity with that company's culture. The most vital factor is often their knowledge of the vision.

### Authorship / ownership

This is the degree to which a particular score includes the contributions (the material) of any one participant. A performer who writes or creates her own dialogue has more authority in this respect than one who does not. Authorship can give a participant a sense of ownership over the material: they feel they have invested in it and perhaps that it expresses (in some ways) their personal views or experience.

### Structure

This term refers to the role and status pattern of a company. The formal structure of a company is expressed in its job titles and so forth. However, this intended structure can be undermined by factors such as personal attributes and social processes, so that a participant may, for example, have greater authority than their job title would indicate. Thus, there may be a discrepancy between the intended and the actual structure of a company.

### Models of Organisational Culture

'Organisational culture' refers to Handy's four models for illustrating what is here referred to as the structure and ethos of organisations. The Power Culture, the Role Culture, the Task Culture and the People Culture each describe a distinct distribution of power and a particular set of values, goals and behavioural codes, as well as a unique tradition and lineage.<sup>867</sup>

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<sup>867</sup> Charles Handy; *Understanding Organisations*, London: Penguin Books 1993



### Social Processes

This term relates to the shifts and developments in the relationship between individuals. As a company works together over a period of time (particularly in the 'hot-house' climate of a rehearsal process), alliances, intimacies, emotional shifts and sometimes interpersonal friction are inevitable. These are relevant when they impact on the structure and ethos of the devising company.

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## **Workshops and Conferences**

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*Conference on Contracts in Devising and Theatre in Education*. Facilitated by Julie Wilkinson for the Theatre Writers' Union at the Actors' Centre, London, 18 March 1979 (not attended)

*A Forced Entertainment Symposium*. Facilitated by the Department of Theatre Studies, Lancaster University at the Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster, 16–17 October 2004

*Forkbeard Fantasy: Meet the Audience* at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith, London, 19 November 2001

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*Introduction to Lecoq*. Workshop led by Joyce Henderson (Complicite) at the University of Loughborough, 17 March 2004

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*Simon McBurney on Measure for Measure*. Royal National Theatre Platform at the Olivier Theatre, Royal National Theatre, London, 2 June 2004

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*Revisions: a Seminar of the Creative Application of New Media in Live Performance*. Facilitated by Total Theatre and the Central School of Speech and Drama at the University of Brighton, 23 October 2002

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#### **General Interviews and unpublished resources**

Interview with Ruth Ben-Tovim (*Louder than Words*) at The Elbow Room, London, 25 November 1998

Interview with Samantha Butler and David Harradine (*Fevered Sleep*) at their home, 4 December 1998

Telephone interview with Natasha Freeman (Education Officer, *Complicite*), 17 May 2002

Interview with Joyce Henderson (Performer, *Complicite*), University of Loughborough, Loughborough, 17 March 2004

Correspondence between Andy Lavender and Detsky Forsythe-Graffam (group e-mail for Lightwork participants), 24 November 2001

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## **Unpublished Case-Study Resources**

### *The David Glass Ensemble*

Interview with Therese Bradley at her home in London, 6 April 2001

Interview with Richard Clews at his home in London, 4 April 2001

Interview with Ruth Finn at her home in London, 2 April 2001

Interview with David Glass at the David Glass Ensemble office, the Leathermarket, London, 23 April 2001

Interview with Amit Lahav at his home in London, 27 March 2001

Interview with Athena Mandis at Café Breva, London, 17 April 2001

Interview with Sophie Partridge at her home in London, 6 April 2001

The David Glass Ensemble induction document for Unheimlich Spine participants, produced by the David Glass Ensemble, January 2001. Available from the David Glass Ensemble, 59 Brewer Street, London W1F 9UN.

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### *Forced Entertainment*

Interview with Tim Etchells by Katja Hilevaara at the Showroom Gallery, Sheffield, 9 July 2002

Correspondence from Tim Etchells (e-mail to Alex Mermikides), 4 February 2003

*Gary Stevens*

Interview with Gary Stevens at his home in London, 3 July 2003

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