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1 Introduction

Devising or collaborative creation is a mode of making performance used by many contemporary theatre companies, and widely taught in schools and universities across Europe, America and Australia. Yet little critical attention has been paid to it. In her preface to *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, Alison Oddey admitted that the main reason for writing the book was that she ‘felt there was a lack of information on the subject of devising theatre’ (1994, p.xi). Ten years later, and after what turns out to be a surprisingly quick survey of books or articles that specifically concern themselves with this enduring and prevalent practice, it is apparent that very little has changed.¹ Given the widespread use of the mode of practice that we might call ‘devising’, it is curious that the conversation that Oddey hoped would result from the publication of her book has never really taken place. Perhaps it is precisely because devising *is* so prevalent, so present, that critical enquiry has been so sparse. Devising may appear to be a given, something that simply ‘is’. In response to a survey we circulated in 2004 to teachers of degree programmes in Theatre, Drama, Performance and Dance in the UK, one respondent replied, ‘Why would you not teach [devising]? It isn’t new for goodness sake, or cutting edge, or anything, it’s just how people usually make theatre.’²

This book sets out to demarcate and explore some of the parameters of devising or collaborative creation and to chart a history of this mode of practice in post-war British, Australian and American culture. Developments in Australian theatre, although less often placed alongside Britain and America in theatre histories, were part of a similar cultural trajectory, influenced by many of the same trends and conditions. Devising practice is taught at universities in all three countries, and exchanges of devising practices and devised performances between Australia and the UK and USA are increasingly

significant elements of festivals and collaborative encounters. In studying modes of devising from these three countries we are not aiming to offer a general theory of devising, nor to suggest pragmatic, exemplary or idealised ways of working in collaborative creation. Rather than extrapolate from general principles about devising, we have looked at the companies who used or generated devising processes, and wondered about what they did and why they did it.³ Our aim here is not to provide a single narrative of origins, but to explore the cultural and political resonances of the emergence of devising processes in the work of British, American and Australian companies which stem largely from the late 1950s and 1960s.⁴

Overall, devising is best understood as a set of strategies that emerged within a variety of theatrical and cultural fields, for example in community arts, performance art/live art, or political theatre. Within these fields, a range of devising processes evolved in relation to specific and continually changing cultural contexts, intimately connected to their moment of production. The purpose of this history is to encourage us to look more carefully at different modes of devising and to consider the implications of our use of these practices today. What are the relationships between today's practice and that of the last century? If the process and form of 'devising' was considered, in the 1950s and 1960s, to be both innovative and experimental, how might we engage with the processes and forms of devising in the twenty-first century? Why, where, when, how, in what way – and arguably, for whom – does devising take place today? How might we critically engage with devising as a practice and interrogate our own practice of it?

What is Devising?

To begin with nomenclature, British and Australian companies tend to use 'devising' to describe their practice, whereas in the USA the synonymous activity is referred to most often as 'collaborative creation'. We shall use the phrases interchangeably in this text, although the terminology itself offers a slight variation in emphasis. While the word 'devising' does not insist on more than one participant, 'collaborative creation' clearly does. A second variation in emphasis takes us to the nub of the issue. When used in non-theatrical settings, 'devising' suggests the craft of making within existing circumstances, planning, plotting, contriving and tangentially inventing.

By contrast, the phrase ‘collaborative creation’ more clearly emphasises the origination or bringing into existence, of material *ex nihilo*. Elements of both phrases apply to the practices of companies we study here. At the core of all devising or collaborative creation is a *process* of generating performance, although there is an enormous variety of devising processes used.

The use of the word ‘devising’ to describe this set of practices for making theatre has led some commentators to suggest that there is no distinction to be made between devised work and other modes of theatre production. One respondent to the questionnaire that we circulated argued that ‘devising’ could be used to describe the traditional rehearsal and staging of a play-text: ‘the terminology [of devising] has a tendency to suggest that script work is not devised, when clearly the performance is devised but with a script as a starting point’. This seems to us unhelpfully broad. In this present study, we examine those theatre companies who use ‘devising’ or ‘collaborative creation’ to describe a mode of work in which *no* script – neither written play-text nor performance score – exists prior to the work’s creation by the company. Of course, the creation and the use of text or score often occur at different points within the devising processes, and at different times within a company’s *oeuvre*, according to the purposes to which they intend to put their work. However, for the companies studied here, devising is a process for creating performance from scratch, by the group, without a pre-existing script.

Devised performance does not have to involve collaborators. To this extent the scope of devising practices is much larger than can possibly be encompassed here. We have deliberately limited our focus to collaborative creation and therefore place our emphasis on companies, rather than individuals. This decision inevitably produces omissions, particularly in the field of performance art, where the work is undoubtedly devised, though most often by individual artists.⁵ Though Chapter 3 explores some crossovers between avant-garde art/performance art and devising practices, our decision to exclude performance art results in the simultaneous exclusion of important radical voices, often of queer and feminist subjects. However, our aim is not to provide a critical history of performance art, nor to give an account of the various ways in which performance artists devise; other books already exist which do that more thoroughly than we could possibly hope to achieve here.⁶ This is not to deny that many performance artists, such as Carolee Schneemann, Franko B and Bobby Baker, exert a powerful influence on contemporary devising

companies and that such connections remain in need of exploration; but this text must be regarded as only one of many possible engagements with a vast subject.

Also outside the limits of this study is devising which does not result in performance. For many companies, workshop or studio-based discoveries form the bedrock of the performance material; for others, the exploration in a workshop is an end in itself. When the Open Theatre first considered performing in 1963 there was a split in the company between those who wanted to share the studio discoveries and build them into a performance meaningful for an audience, and those for whom the studio sessions were simply actor-training exercises, sufficient in themselves and ultimately about equipping the actor for other kinds of text-based performances. By contrast, for current participants in workshops run by the Living Stage (Washington) discussed in Chapter 5, participation in the processes of devising brings its own reward. Therapeutic uses of play, improvisation, the creation of scenarios and the building of stories offer creative and empowering insight to workshop members, who form their own audience. While one or two examples of devising without performance are included in the chapter concerned with community theatre, to give an indication of the range of work that occurs under this heading, we are centrally concerned with devising as a process of generating *performance*.

For some of the companies we examine here, and for a great deal of the early rhetoric that surrounded devising, the idea of a devised performance being produced collaboratively meant: with all members of the group contributing equally to the creation of the performance or performance script. Moreover, the ideology of 'collaborative' practice equated it with 'freedom'. For Oddey, for example,

there is a freedom of possibilities for all those involved to discover; an emphasis on a way of working that supports intuition, spontaneity, and an accumulation of ideas. (Oddey, 1994, p. 1)

The rhetoric pertaining to the process of devising is quite transparent here, and it is a rhetoric that is widely shared. In fact, it is possible to construct something of a 'soundbite' of those qualities frequently assumed to be implicit in devising which serve to give it an almost mythical status. Devising is variously: a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of

work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between art and life; the erasure of the gap between spectator and performer; a distrust of words; the embodiment of the death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge for spectators; an expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental; non-literary.⁷

In the twenty-first century, it is more than possible to take to task many of the 'ideals' embodied in the above. For example, is it necessarily the case that devising companies should be non-hierarchical? Were they ever? Judith Malina and Julian Beck, Joseph Chaikin, Richard Schechner, Liz LeCompte, Lin Hixson, Nancy Meckler, John Fox, Naftali Yavin, Hilary Westlake, Tim Etchells, and James Yarker were, or are, leading directors within their ensembles or companies. Does a director, who ultimately has the last word, who accepts final responsibility, complicate the notion of non-hierarchical work or democratic participation? Further, does the fact that many companies now operate as umbrella organisations, often run by one or two key figures, challenge the assumption of ensemble practice? In the pages that follow, it is not our intention definitively to prove or demolish the myths, but instead to ask where these beliefs about devising arise from and whether they are accurate in relation to historical and contemporary practice, and sustainable within contemporary social structures. At the very least, contemporary processes might require us to question what 'collaboration' means.

A shift in the significance of 'collaboration' within contemporary devising practices was articulated by Oddey:

In the cultural climate of the 1990s, the term 'devising' has less radical implications, placing greater emphasis on skill sharing, specialisation, specific roles, increasing division of responsibilities, such as the role of the director/deviser or the administrator, and more hierarchical company structures. (Oddey, 1994, p.8)

Two recent books on devising, aimed primarily at the UK market of 17–18-year-olds studying drama or performing arts to examination in 'A' level or GNVQ National Diploma, exemplify the transformation of rhetoric about devising for contemporary companies and audiences. In *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide* (2002), despite Clive Barker's foreword, which argues that we should

see devising ‘as attempting to supplant oligarchic, or even dictatorial, control by a more democratic way of working’, the content of the volume emphasises the separation of roles and foregrounds that of the director (Bicât and Baldwin, 2002, p. 6).⁸ Gill Lamden’s *Devising: A Handbook for Drama and Theatre Students* does not offer so radical a reworking of a collaborative ‘ideal’, in part because she draws on a wider selection of companies at work. Yet the central chapter studies four artistic directors under the heading ‘Devising as a profession’. In the 1990s, collaborative creation may have come to mean something rather more akin to traditional theatrical production. The idea of ‘devising as a profession’ also seems to mark a shift from categorising ‘devising’ as an innovative, fringe practice, to seeing it within the commercial, mainstream sector. As processes of devising are now so firmly embedded in our training and educational institutions, can we really continue to claim for devising any ‘marginal’ or ‘alternative’ status? And why should we wish to do so?

Devising and Script/Text

In the 1990s, Oddey pitted devised theatre as a marginal alternative to the ‘dominant literary theatre tradition’. We are in no position to argue, a decade later, that devised performances have become the dominant products of theatrical culture. A brief glance at the theatrical landscape of Britain in 2004 shows that the literary play-text remains central stage. However, any simple binary opposition of devising to script work is not supported by the briefest survey of the actual practice of companies who choose to devise. Many companies see no contradiction between working on pre-existing scripts and devising work, and move seamlessly between the two. For example, Theatre de Complicite produced Dürrenmatt’s *The Visit* (1989), Ionesco’s *The Chairs* (1997–8) and Shakespeare’s *A Winter’s Tale* (1992) between and alongside their devised physical theatre work. Judith Malina and Julian Beck of The Living Theatre likewise grew their own devising processes out of work on European Absurdist and American Beat plays. At the height of their period of devising work they also produced a version of Brecht’s *Antigone* (1967), and much of The Living Theatre’s current work grows from scripts.

While some of the rhetoric that has surrounded devising suggests that it emerges from a distrust of words or a rejection of a literary tradition in theatre, very few devising companies perform without

using words. Even groups from a dance or mime tradition have been happy to use text, and the exceptions, such as Trestle Theatre's full-mask shows, or Ralf Ralf's gibberish comedy of political brinkmanship, *The Summit* (1987; revised 2004), still wish to emphasise the story and narrative clarity of their work. Many companies use text as a stimulus for their devising: adapting short stories, poems or novels; using found texts; cutting up existing texts; using historical documents; and quoting, citing or parodying classic play-texts. In some community-theatre contexts devising companies use verbatim performance, reproducing exactly the words of witnesses and interviewees, reassembled and theatricalised in collage.

The role of a writer or writers within a collaboratively created process can be fraught, as the study of the Open Theatre in Chapter 2 illustrates. Most companies we discuss have experimented with crystallising ideas and images into text, or a rehearsal score, at different moments in the devising process, and have explored a variety of relationships between writing and devising modes of work. Some use writers outside the process of devising, some use only the actors driving the devising to generate text, others straddle the difference with a range of involvement for a dramaturg. For a few of the companies here, the collaborative process involves a period of collaborative writing of a script to be performed, as discussed further in Chapter 4. A forthcoming study of the relationship between collaborative creation and writing in recent devised work in the UK will go some way to address this complex area in more detail.⁹ The desire, in some early devising companies, to have the actor as a creative contributor to the making of performance, and not an interpreter of text, has perhaps encouraged the idea that devising is anti-literary by nature, but this is by no means accurate. While many companies making work in the 1960s and 1970s were concerned to give voice to the voiceless, and to make new and different points of view heard and seen, this often involved the use of a writer-figure in the rehearsal room. The fuller repercussions of questions of authorship and authority in relation to text within performance are explored in the studies of companies that follow.

Devising and Improvisation

Improvisation has been a key practice in the devising work of many of the companies we look at here. Often, for companies whose working

practices involve an initial period of the creative development of ideas in the studio, improvisation of some form *is* that part of the devising process. Frost and Yarrow's study of improvisation briefly charted a range of Western precursors, before they identified three main strands to twentieth-century improvisation:

- (a) the *application* of improvisation to the purposes of the traditional play;
- (b) the use of *pure* improvisation in the creation of an 'alternative' kind of theatrical experience; and (c) the extension of improvisatory principles *beyond* the theatre itself. (Frost and Yarrow, 1990, p. 15)

Obviously it is (b), the second strand of work, that primarily concerns us here but, as we discuss more fully in Chapter 2, improvisation developed for actor-training in preparation for work on a text, and creative improvisation for devising, share a heritage, often a form, and are not so clearly demarcated as the distinction between 'applied' and 'pure' above implies.

Moreover, the use of improvisatory techniques in devising re-emerged at a particular moment in social and political culture in America, Australia and Britain. As Daniel Belgrad has argued in his study of *The Culture of Spontaneity* (1998), the appearance of improvisation across art forms in America was indicative of a political moment of resistance to bureaucratisation and established institutions. The uses and styles of improvisation within devising have changed considerably over time as companies' work has been inflected by multiple influences, and by the developing tradition of devising itself. The improvisatory sound-and-movement exercise evolved by Joseph Chaikin and the Open Theatre is no longer so startling that it can be used directly in performance to unsettle the audience, as The Living Theatre did in *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964).¹⁰ That exercise has become a standard part of drama training in improvisation in all sorts of contexts, enshrined in textbooks. It is important to note that in theatre during the twentieth century, improvisation has been primarily taken to imply an 'acting' exercise, an alien idea to many of the companies and artists discussed in Chapters 3 and 7, below. While these practitioners might improvise in the broadest sense of trying out ideas or experimenting with tasks, this has little to do with the 'acting' focus of many of the textbooks on improvisation or even the more radical manifestations of actor-training.

Some companies have taken the impetus of improvisation further and emphasise the element of spontaneity and its possibility for

producing free creative expression. They have evolved performances which are direct displays of improvisation without filtering, as in the TheatreSports work of Keith Johnstone or Second City (Chicago); or within performance structures, as in Keith Johnstone and Improbable Theatre's *Lifegame* (2003), where actors improvised personal stories just recounted by a member of the public interviewed on stage; or in Forced Entertainment's *And on the Thousandth Night ...* (2000), where performers told competing stories for six hours. The metaphor often used about improvisation in performance is that it is 'like jazz'. Cultural critic Henry Gates has emphasised the role of structure, and the limitations of freedom, in jazz improvisation:

Improvisation, of course, so fundamental to the very idea of jazz, is 'nothing more' than repetition and revision. In this sort of revision, again where meaning is fixed, it is the realignment of the signifier that is the signal trait of expressive genius. The more mundane the fixed text ('April in Paris' by Charlie Parker, 'My Favourite Things' by John Coltrane), the more dramatic is the Signifyin(g) revision. It is this principle of repetition and difference, this practice of intertextuality, which has been so crucial to the black vernacular forms of Signifyin(g), jazz – and even its antecedents, the blues, the spirituals, and ragtime. (Gates, 1988, pp.63–4)

This idea of repetition and revision is one that holds good in theatrical, improvisational performance. A structured set of givens, rules or games can limit and contain the 'spontaneous' input of the performer. As the performance is prepared and then repeatedly performed, experience of a successful range of interactions between performers and audience inevitably builds. Even in the most apparently chaotic performance or Happening, there is structural order. In the studio or workshop during the making of performance, different devising practices will use improvisation that might involve the repetition and revision of breathing exercises, or physical, dance-based contact between performers, or everyday tasks, or verbal interrogation, or character-based interaction. It is the specific nature of the task, game, rules or structure within which improvisation occurs that conditions the possible outcomes, and contributes to the style of the resultant performance. Of course, improvisation is only part of the process of making work, which might also include editing, designing, structuring, choreographing, writing and rehearsing.

Within the improvisational process used by theatre companies across the various types of devising practice, there is a remarkable repetition of the idea of intuition as a structuring element of that

process. Again and again, companies report that they ‘just knew’ when an image was appropriate, or when they had hit upon an idea, movement, phrase or sequence that ‘felt right’. Rather than accept the function of this mechanism as an inexplicable element of the practice, we might remember Foucault’s insistence that:

We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history. We believe in the dull constancy of instinctual life and imagine that it continues to exert its force indiscriminately in the present as it did in the past. But a knowledge of history easily disintegrates this unity. (Foucault, 1977, p. 153)

Drawing on Foucault’s insight here, we should note that intuition functions paradoxically within improvisation in the devising process. An element of material generated by improvisation is recognised by company members as a performance solution, and intuition authenticates that moment as original and a creative revelation. Yet, improvisation is always already conditioned by the mannerisms, physical abilities and training, horizons of expectation and knowledge, patterns of learned behaviour of the performers – their *habitus*, to use Bourdieu’s phrase.¹¹ That moment of intuitive recognition in a group, as a group, is a function of the establishment of a shared set of patterns and experience, and thus is a recognition of what is the ‘same’, rather than what is original, and is part of what an audience can then recognise as a style of work.

A Moment of Emergence

An improvisational and creative aspect of performance, something akin to devising, has been a part of the folk arts or popular performance across time and across cultures; Tara Arts (London) found inspiration as much from the improvisatory practice of the medieval Gujarati folk drama *Bhavai*, as from Western physical theatre, for example. Many theatre companies who developed devising processes in the 1960s and 1970s looked to earlier popular forms for inspiration in their work. The paradigm they most often cited, although historically it was not by any means always played for popular audiences, was *commedia dell’arte*. Many of the companies we look at in Chapter 2 viewed *commedia* as a form where actors were able to generate material improvisationally within the parameters of a

scenario, which might then become the set form of a scene.¹² In continuing the reawakening of interest in *commedia dell'arte* in the twentieth century, some devising companies were influenced by Jacques Copeau, who had set out to 'try to give re-birth to a genre: the New Improvised Comedy, with modern characters and modern subjects' with his company Les Copiaux in Burgundy in 1924 (Frost and Yarrow, 1990, p.25). The company experimented with *commedia*-style masks and improvisations around scenarios for specifically popular audiences, although Copeau was to call a halt to the experiment in 1929, feeling the need for a writer in order to take the experiment further. As Thomas Leabhart charts, Copeau's experiment and writing reinvigorated a French mime tradition and attempted in it to link the political and the popular, an attempt which Jean-Louis Barrault, Jacques Lecoq and Ariane Mnouchkine, amongst others, were to follow (Leabhart, 1989).

The very different trajectory of the European avant-garde also employed elements of chance and improvisation in making performance.¹³ While the Futurists, with their production of *sintesi*,¹⁴ had challenged the dominant theatrical convention of realistic verisimilitude introduced to theatre by naturalism, the Dadaists emphasised spontaneity both in their process of working and in their performances, similarly attempting to defy the imposition of conventional 'logic'. Tzara's 'paper-bag' poems were composed by drawing words randomly from a bag, while Hans Arp's 'chance' art allowed scraps of falling paper to form random patterns.¹⁵ Sharing sentiments with the Surrealist movement, Tzara equated spontaneity with creative freedom, arguing 'everything that issues freely from ourselves without the intervention of speculative ideas, represents us' (Melzer, 1980, p. 68). The Surrealists further developed the use of 'chance' procedures, such as automatic writing, to try to express the functioning of thought. Automatic writing, like the technique of chance, was intended to allow the artist to escape from the strictures of self-censorship and bypass the individual ego. One writing technique, called *Cadavre exquis*, the exquisite corpse, a phrase taken directly from one of the first results of the writing game, involved collaborators each writing a sentence consecutively, without knowing what the preceding writers had contributed. The visual equivalent of this technique, using drawing or collage, extended the role of chance and collective action, although here the output was imagistic rather than textual. In 1919, André Breton and Philippe Soupault collaborated on what Breton would retrospectively claim as the first surrealist text, *The Magnetic*

Fields, using the technique of ‘automatic writing’.¹⁶ The use of ‘chance’ and various other related processes of generating work – the mistake and the accident, for example – are frequent in contemporary devising.

Another important link between the historical avant-garde and later performance processes is the incorporation of ‘found’ objects. Bearing some relation to Picasso’s paper collage pieces, where real materials were introduced into the representational image, the use of found art also attempts to equate art with life. Kurt Schwitters, who met the Dadaists in 1918, was the most prolific artist to work with ‘found’ materials, creating ‘Merz’ collages out of the detritus of everyday life. Schwitters’s 1920s concept of the Merz ‘composite’ stage, in which any and all objects ‘are not to be used logically in their objective relationships, but only within the logic of the work of art’, pre-empts many of the performance-art developments of the 1950s and 1960s (Kostelanetz, 1980, p. 12).

Although we aim to point to possible continuities with past traditions, this book is centrally concerned with the emergence of a range of devising practices used by companies in the post-World War II period. The companies and the work that we explore were undoubtedly influenced by earlier performance traditions and experiments and we try to chart these where possible in the detailed studies that follow. However, the devised work we look at here is not merely an inevitable evolution of those forms. Its characteristics, diversity, aesthetics and significance signalled a radical disjunction. The emergence of devised work in the 1950s and 1960s was of a different order of magnitude. For example, we might trace an evolution between the revived, twentieth-century *commedia* tradition into actor-centred theatre or dance performance discussed in Chapter 2, but in the latter work, improvisation was used not just within small sections of the performance, but as a structuring mechanism of the whole. Closer connections exist between the ‘anti-art’, European avant-garde of the early twentieth century and solo European performance artists of the 1950s and 1960s, who evolved devising practices which were pragmatically similar, whilst being politically very different. But in the 1950s and 1960s many *groups* of artists emerged, collaborating to produce performance works. Moreover, as Andreas Huyssen has argued:

neither Dada nor surrealism ever met with much public success in the United States. Precisely this fact made Pop, Happenings, Concept,

experimental music, surfiction, and performance art of the 1960s and 1970s look more novel than they really were. The audience's expectation horizon in the United States was fundamentally different from what it was in Europe. Where Europeans might react with a sense of *déjà vu*, Americans could legitimately sustain a sense of novelty, excitement and breakthrough. (Huysen, 1986, p.187)

The other marker of difference in the post-war period was the fact that devising practices were simultaneously emerging across a very wide range of fields in dance, mime, community arts, performance art, storytelling and political theatre, and in some instances also working across performance disciplines.

It seems evident that many of the common conceptions and/or myths of devising that we have inherited arise from the specific political and cultural conditions of the 1950s and 1960s in the West. It is, for example, during the 1950s and 1960s that the process of devising work was considered to be a material expression of political and ideological commitment, and an ideal embodiment of desired aspects of freedom and authenticity.¹⁷ In this respect, devising performance was a practice that echoed other cultural changes of the 1950s and 1960s, when there was a steady 'revolt' evident across art forms, including the work of the Beat writers, and of Pop Artists who framed the material productions of advanced capitalism as art.¹⁸ It was also during the 1950s that Merce Cunningham and John Cage began considering the everyday – movement and sound – as properties of dance and music, alongside 'chance' as a creative property; that Anna Halprin began developing improvisation, gestalt therapy and task-based work to unlock collective creation in dancers; that the action undertaken in action-painting was extended to include space and time; and that the writing of Antonin Artaud, produced originally in the 1940s but not published in English until 1958, was given serious consideration by many performance makers.

Everything came into question: the place of the performer in the theatre; the place of the audience; the function of the playwright and the usefulness of a written script; the structure of the playhouse, and later, the need for any kind of playhouse; and finally, the continued existence of theatre as a relevant force in a changing culture. (Sainer, 1997, p. 12)

The pervasive political mood of the 1950s must itself be understood within the context of the Cold War and the ever-present threat of global nuclear destruction, as the arms race developed between the Soviet Union and the USA and western Europe. Relations between

America and the UK were strained in 1956 when the US did not back Anthony Eden, then Conservative Prime Minister, in the invasion of Egypt he had ordered to maintain control of the Suez Canal, and he was forced to withdraw. The crisis signalled the waning of British imperial prestige and the rise of American imperial ambition. The moment heralded a further process of decolonisation, notably in Africa, commencing in the late 1950s and gathering pace throughout the 1960s, as the struggle for independence and self-government grew. Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) gained independence in 1957, followed by Nigeria in 1960, the Republic of South Africa in 1961 and Kenya in 1963.

Popular political protest began to become more visible and widespread. The Suez Canal Crisis, set against the backdrop of the enduring Cold War, was a catalyst in the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the UK, an identifiably New Left organisation. In the USA, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s provided an important model (and impetus) for collective political protest. In 1954, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1910 to ensure full equality for black Americans, succeeded in getting the Supreme Court to rule that segregation in education was unconstitutional. In 1963, in response to the daily experiences of black Americans, Martin Luther King led 200,000 protesters on a march to Washington, D.C., where he delivered his famous 'I have a dream' speech. Congress finally passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964. In the autumn of that same year, the Free Speech Movement (FSM) of the University of California at Berkeley was founded, in response to the university's restriction of political activity on campus.

Many of the protesters at political rallies and marches during the 1960s were young people and students, part of the affluent post-war generation privileged by university education. The organisation Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), founded in 1959, is a notable example. In the USA, Britain and Australia, the late 1950s was a period of economic prosperity and ideological optimism, set against a background of fascism defeated. The realities of the 1960s, although it was an affluent era, were tested against the utopian promises of the 1950s and found wanting. One major trigger for widespread, international protest was the Vietnam War, which seemed to underline the bankrupt 'democracy' of the West. As Fink reflected, 'The conduct of the war belied the myth of Western innocence and exposed the structural violence of the Western democracies', leading to

demonstrations in Washington, Amsterdam, Oslo, Paris, Rome and Tokyo (Fink et al., 1998, p. 26). The international scale of the demonstrations was helped in no small measure by the increasing impact of the mass media, which served not only to report the events of the war internationally, but also to relay the extent of the protest, thereby engendering something of a feeling of a global anti-war movement.

The rhetoric employed within the political movements of the 1960s and 1970s was also applied to ideal (and idealised) models of devising and helps us understand why devising became such a desirable mode of practice during this time. A number of key terms or ideas that belong to the political rhetoric of this period, and which subsequently have an impact on concepts and practices of devising, include 'individual and collective rights', 'self-determination', 'community', 'participation' and 'equality'. For example, Tom Hayden, a member of the Students for a Democratic Society, spoke for thousands of fellow members when he insisted that humans had 'unrealized potential for self-cultivation, self-direction, self-understanding and creativity' (Cavallo, 1999, p. 204). Thus, 'the goal of society should be human independence'. What the students were reacting to, partly, was 'the actual structural separation of people from power' (Marwick, 1998, p. 53).

Embracing its own ideologies through practice, the SDS would arrive at decisions through a consensual process rather than majority rule. The political model desired was that of a popular participatory democracy, which would enable 'ordinary' people to have control over their own lives, 'expressing a new force outside of existing institutions, a society apart from the state' (Cavallo, 1999, p. 209). The 'state' was perceived as being bureaucratic, patriarchal, authoritarian, and repressive, and the individual as alienated. As Robert Daniels summarised the situation,

[the] target of rebellion was power – power over people and power over nations, power exercised on the international plane by great imperial states, by governments within nations, or by people in positions of dominance over the powerless under them, from the industrial bureaucracy to the university classroom. The primary aim of the era was equality. (Daniels, 1989, p. 5)

The politics of this time, as expressed through the student movement, did not cohere to traditional notions of class politics. Politics, here, referred to every aspect of social life, to the availability of choices, to lifestyle, to working relationships, to personal relationships. Part of this political ideology came from the New Left.

By invoking early Marx, the insights of psychoanalysis and existentialism, feminism and anticolonialism, the New Left made a broad, sweeping critique of the growing alienation that had developed within the advanced industrial societies. The solution required not only a social, political, and international revolution but also a complete change in the conditions of human existence, from modes of work to forms of private behaviour, from relations between the sexes to the structure of the family. (Fink et al., 1998, p.25)

The range of targets identified by the New Left in some senses served to align it with what has been called the ‘counter-cultural’ movement. Theodore Roszak, who coined that phrase, articulated the connection in an article published in *The Nation* in 1968:

The counter culture is the embryonic cultural base of New Left politics, the effort to discover new types of community, new family patterns, new personal identities on the far side of power politics, the bourgeois home, and the Protestant work ethic. (Marwick, 1998, p.11)

One influential spokesperson for this cross-over of political and cultural life was Herbert Marcuse, author of *One-dimensional Man* (1964). Marcuse argued for a cultural resistance to incorporation by the economic–technical force of established society. His subsequent *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) corresponded with the various international, student-led political demonstrations that had taken place during 1968. What is most notable about *An Essay on Liberation*, and important to locating new theatrical experimentation within a political and cultural context, is Marcuse’s insistence on the necessity of a new sensibility. For Marcuse, any economic ‘revolution’ must involve – in fact be preceded by – a revolution of the senses, which would emerge

in the struggle against violence and exploitation where this struggle is waged for essentially new ways and forms of life: negation of the entire Establishment, its morality, culture; affirmation of the right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the Form of the society itself. (Marcuse, 1969, p.25)

Marcuse read the student movement as symptomatic of the ‘Great Refusal’ – a rejection of ‘the rules of the game that is rigged against them’ (ibid., p.6), and a way of ‘methodically disengaging from

the Establishment' (Alway, 1999, p.93). The Great Refusal is the refusal to accept or participate in the given social reality; the Great Refusal is a 'total' politics.

The 1960s also saw the emergence of self-identified marginalised 'groups', a response in part to the fact that the traditional (and indeed sometimes the New) Left did not take full account of the range of oppressions suffered by different people, nor of their various effects. In 1968 the Second Wave feminist movement was founded, followed in 1969 by the Gay Liberation Front. Participants in both movements realised that certain inequalities would or could not be resolved merely by changes in class structure or by a more equitable distribution of wealth. The glut of stereotypical, sexist or homophobic representations of women, gay men and lesbians on stage made the production of alternative representations an urgent necessity. This, combined with the cultural context of the time, suggested collaborative devising – a means of wresting the mode of production from the grip of dominating institutions and dominant ideologies – as an appropriate model of agency for *self*-representation, and a process by which to make visible that which had been previously unseen and unspoken. The collaborative nature of devising also suggested the potential for complex, multiple representations, even if, in practice, this was not always realised.

The upsurge in collectives and collaborative groups during this period, and not just in performance contexts, was remarkable. That there were as many as 2000 to 3000 thousand communes in the USA in the late 1960s (Marwick, 1998, p. 60) is some sort of testimony to the impact of the political rhetoric of participation, collectivity, and democracy. As the ideology of 'participatory democracy' took international root, it was evident that for theatre to play its role in the formation of any new society, the praxis of participatory democracy should also be implemented within the theatre. Set beside the model of hierarchy, specialisation and increased professionalisation in the mainstream theatre industry, devising as a collaborative process offered a politically acceptable alternative. The critique of professionalisation was further evidenced by artists' moving away from, and out of, traditional gallery and theatre spaces.

All over Europe, America ... artists, creative people, stepped aside into a deliberate sell-it-yourself amateurism. This was the beginning of the underground. (Nuttall, 1968, p.161)

However, devising practices did not just emerge as part of the alternative, fringe or underground movements; the rhetoric of ‘participatory democracy’ also led them to emerge within the community, educational and socially-interventionist programmes of mainstream theatres.

This introduction to the context in which devising became an increasingly popular practice has focused on cultural and political shifts and challenges. What has not been addressed here is the longer-term effect of the 1960s: whether these supposed pressures had any lasting impact on culture. What is immediately evident today, of course, is that the 1960s did not usher in a total revolution (nor even a partial one). The contemporary world of the twenty-first century is marked by global capitalism, by continued exploitation, and by the creation (and in some – more privileged – cases, satisfaction) of what Marcuse would refer to as false or ‘inauthentic’ needs. Arguably, then, in spite of any claims made for the ‘revolutionary’ zeal of the 1960s, much remains unchanged.

The writers of this book were both born in the 1960s. Our knowledge of the decade is necessarily distanced and second-hand. As ‘Thatcher’s children’, witnesses to the introduction of the sweeping privatisation of previously nationalised industries, the total decimation of other industries (mostly heavy – coal, steel manufacturing, ship-building) with the corollary rise in unemployment, and the erosion of free education for all, we probably also view the 1960s with borrowed nostalgia for both its promises and its failures to deliver. Margaret Thatcher contributed to the ‘myth’ of the ‘sixties’ when she declared in March 1982 that ‘we are reaping what was sown in the sixties ... fashionable theories and permissive claptrap set the scene for a society in which old values of discipline and restraint were denigrated’ (Marwick, 1998, p. 4). This is a theme picked up, somewhat surprisingly, by the Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2004. When announcing new measures on law and order, he regretted a society which had ‘spawned a group of young people who were brought up without parental discipline, without proper role models and without any sense of responsibility to or for others. ... Here, now, today, people have had enough of this part of the 1960s consensus.’¹⁹ However, as Richard Cockett has reminded us, though ‘the sixties has generally subsided into popular imagination as a collage of revolting students, permissiveness and personal freedom’, in reality, for ‘most people who lived through the 1960s, the above picture would be scarcely recognisable as an account of their ordinary lives’ (Cockett, 1999, p. 85).

While noting the usefulness of the myth of the permissive, failed ‘1960s’ to current political rhetoric, and also admitting that Cockett undoubtedly has a point about the extent of the experience of the ‘permissive sixties’, it is also important to recognise that throughout the 1950s and 1960s there *were* important international political and cultural events that would have enduring effect and impact (and some of these have already been mentioned – the Cold War, the Suez Canal Crisis, the Vietnam War). The 1960s enacted tangible, long-lasting, material change, alongside the cultural challenges, whose impacts are more difficult to assess. As already noted, in the USA the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, followed by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In Australia, non-European immigration was allowed in 1966, while in 1967 a referendum returned a resounding ‘yes’ to the question of whether Aboriginals were to be granted citizenship rights including the right to vote, and the Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1969. In the UK, a number of new Acts were passed, including the first Race Relations Act (1965), the Sexual Offences Act (1967) which decriminalised sexual acts in private between consenting males over the age of 21, the Abortion Act (1967), and the Divorce Reform Act (1969). In the UK, of prime importance was the Theatres Act of 1968, which finally removed the Lord Chamberlain’s powers of pre-censorship. The legal necessity to submit a written text for approval prior to its performance made devising at worst impossible, and at best hugely restricted.²⁰ It is in this crucible of change, and amidst the rhetoric of change, that devising as a practice emerged.

Devising and Economics

A key condition that needs to be considered when determining the ‘context’ for the historic turn to devising is that of economics. In the 1950s and 1960s, many of the companies who began devising were ideologically opposed to – or temperamentally disinclined to comply with – the economic imperatives of the commercial theatrical marketplace, or the post-war development of government subsidy for the arts. It was precisely to escape the restrictions imposed by economic considerations that many artists turned to solo performance work, or street performance events, or set up their own alternative venues. But artists have to live, and as Joan Littlewood’s and Julian Beck’s memoirs make clear, the life of an unsubsidised or poorly subsidised theatre company, particularly one which places politics

and aesthetics over profit, is one of continual, draining struggle.²¹ However, not all devising practice happened in the ‘alternative’ sphere. Those companies who were centrally concerned with educational theatre or community-centred work were usually conceived of and initiated as part of the programme of subsidised regional theatres or local government arts projects, as we explore more fully in Chapter 5.

Direct subsidy has never been, and does not function today as, the only way in which devised performance is funded, particularly devised work in alternative theatre. Sally Banes, writing about American avant-garde performance, has articulated the significance of

government funding and private funding by individuals, corporations and foundations, but also trust funds from wealthy parents, more modest support by middle-class parents, and even real-estate speculation. ... [I]ntellectual and religious organisations – in particular, colleges, universities, and churches – have played a central role in the development of avant-garde performance, serving as research and development centres, venues, catalysts and patrons. (Banes, 2000, p.217)

The hidden patronage of the university sector is one that we can also trace in the UK and Australia through the provision of spaces, venues, audiences and technical support, the commissioning of residencies and workshops, and the marketing, discussion and dissemination of many devising companies’ performances. The relationship between the emergence of devising companies and training in the university and conservatoire setting is a point that will be picked up in the Conclusion of this book. To evolve a performance through a devising practice usually takes longer than the traditional four-to-five-week rehearsal period of mainstream, text-based theatre in Britain, America and Australia. Without some form of external funding or pre-performance income, such work is, in effect, subsidised by its makers.

In the chapters that follow, where possible we trace the relationship between devising and shifts in the rhetoric and practice of government, business and private funding. For Baz Kershaw, who traced British alternative and community theatre work, the experience became

ideologically, ... a story of incorporation as companies increasingly became dependent on state agencies, and as those agencies gradually took greater control of the movement’s operations in order to dampen its oppositional thrust. Industrially, it is a double-edged success story, as the creation of a

new sector of British theatre with its own infrastructure enabled an increasing number of conservative companies to survive, forcing out more radical groups in an age of reactionary repressions. (Kershaw, 1992, p. 252)

No longer a 'fringe' or 'underground' mode of work, devising is taught at school, university and drama school. Devising companies have been absorbed into mainstream culture and funded by government subsidy. This trajectory is perhaps most exemplified by Theatre de Complicite, who were picked up in 1989 by the National Theatre and offered studio space in which to work, and have been supported by both mainstream theatre industry and government subsidy since then. Until 1968 in the UK no company that devised work received funding; in that year, grants or guarantees were offered to the Brighton Combination and Inter-Action Trust.²² Today, the Arts Council of England revenue-funds 30 companies who devise work, either as the sole working practice or as part of their activity.²³

The Question of Process

It was during the 1950s and 1960s that a concern with the creative 'process' itself became so widespread. With the emergence of interest in improvisation, experimental theatre practice and devising practices, the language of rehearsal was replaced by references to 'labs', 'workshops' and 'sessions', drawn from the discourses of science, craft and the music industry.²⁴ In an attempt to resist the commodification of performance, to enable connections between life and art, artists across cultural fields entertained the possibility of presenting work that was 'unfinished', expecting and ready to integrate or reflect audience response. While this move was for some a demystification of creativity, an attempt to blur the divisions between amateur and professional, ironically, for others it led to an increased professionalisation of the artist, championing and scrutinising the aesthetics of the *labour* of the creative artist, rather than simply the product. Hence this is also the period when performances became 'work-in-progress', which hoped to summon a new kind of viewing from the audience. The extent to which the open-ended nature of devised performance continues to conflict with the traditional production expectations of the theatrical industry is explored by Karen Fricker's study of Robert Lepage and Ex Machina's work (2003), notably *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*. Fricker unpacks the uneasy status of performances

which operate as ‘work-in-progress’, evolving through performance before audiences into a final form, yet sold and marketed as a finished product on the international festival touring circuit.

The Anxiety of Influence

This volume examines the nature and the purposes of devising in a range of theatre fields including political theatre, community arts, physical theatre and postmodern performance. Given the apparent fragmentation of devising practice, is it possible to suggest that a tradition of devising has emerged in British, American or Australian culture? There are two forces at work in this volume: the desire to trace chronology, to follow time forward, to write a history that ‘leads’ us to think about the work we might make in the present; and the need to move backwards, retracing, in order to find the ‘same’ thing, the shared, the copy, the tradition. The paradox is captured by Jean-François Lyotard’s opposition of tradition with history, which he articulated in a discussion about John Cage’s work and about the power of so-called repetitive musics:

[this power] lies in the fact that [repetitive musics] cause the forgetting of what is being repeated and they make for a nonforgetting of time as a beat in place. Tradition is that which concerns time, not content. Whereas what the West wants from autonomy, invention, novelty, self-determination, is the opposite – to forget time and to preserve, acquire and accumulate contents. To turn them into what we call history, and to think that it progresses because it accumulates. On the contrary, in the case of popular traditions ... nothing is accumulated, that is, the narratives must be repeated all the time because they are forgotten all the time. But what does not get forgotten is the temporal beat that does not stop sending the narratives to oblivion. (Lyotard, 1985, p.34)

From our look at devising work we have found the idea of both a tradition and a history. The tradition we explore finds links and coherence in modes of devising work. The devising practitioners examined here saw each other’s work, heard about performances or processes they were not part of, participated in workshops, learnt about work in formal educational contexts, influenced each other. The history we explore finds differences in devising across the diverse fields in which it occurs, and also examines what it is that links devising process and performance to the chronology of the cultural, political or social moment.

What is impossible to ‘recover’ is both the live performance and a definitive history of the making of a piece of devised or collaborative work. Although video documentation now gives some experience of a performance, the different medium renders it a different version from the live event. Further, much of the history of this work predates video-recording technology. Mike Pearson, writing of performances that were staged in Wales throughout the 1970s, captured the problem well:

these performances, variously described as ‘experimental’, ‘devised’, ‘physical’, ‘site-specific’, rarely became part of a published record. They have their document in the endlessly elaborated (and increasingly fictionalised) reminiscences and anecdotes of its practitioners, in a discourse akin to an oral culture. Unfortunately, memory fades. (Pearson, 1997, p.85)²⁵

Memories of process are also unreliable: Who made which suggestion, or initiated a movement that became a moment of performance? Even with video recordings or notation in the studio or workshop, the narrative does not accumulate to an explanation of how work was made, since the process is continually forgotten. A rare example of a remembering of a devised *performance* was offered by Stan’s Cafe, who presented or represented Impact Theatre Cooperative’s devised performance, *The Carrier Frequency*.²⁶ Impact’s ‘original’ work had premiered in 1984, and had been a collaboration with writer Russell Hoban, better known for his dystopian novels such as *Ridley Walker*. With its pounding soundtrack, and exhausting, repetitive task-based action, *The Carrier Frequency* had been hailed as a foundational artwork and post-nuclear fantasy. In 1999, Stan’s Cafe set out to copy, piece together and re-present the performance from a video of one version of the work.²⁷ This remembering was in part developed with the intervention of the academy. Stan’s Cafe’s performance was prefaced by a day conference on ‘Archaeology, Repertory and Theatre Inheritance’. Nikki Cooper, one of the performers with Impact, remembered:

I wasn’t in Impact with my brain. It was purely emotional. We would have laughed that what we were doing would ever be discussed, like this, academically. (Babbage, 2000, p.98)

Both more and less than repetition and revision, this second performance represented what is always at stake with devised performance, not only the forgetting of its performance, but the forgetting of

its making. The second performance was pieced together by quite different means from the first, from a visual and verbal score *without* devising. In this example, then, process had become distinctly divorced from product.

The tradition of devising continually betrays its influences as it repeats, appropriates, copies, and forgets its borrowings, the ‘constant folding and faulting of influence and inspiration that is practice and production and document’ (Pearson, n.p., 2004). Images and motifs reappear in productions – not only from devised performance, but from the broader social and cultural environment. For Simon McBurney of Theatre de Complicite, ‘the pleasure of theatre is impurity, it’s the magpie quality of people stealing from everybody else’ (McBurney, 1994, p. 24). Gerry Harris has warned against the mis-recognition of style as process, and the production of performances that can only recycle cliché. She bewailed the endless round of productions in the late 1980s and early 1990s which used eastern European folk songs or laments as shorthand for dislocation and isolation, or battered suitcases as symbols for journey, after the success of Grotowski’s company and Theatre de Complicite’s European adaptations (Harris, 1999a, pp. 6–21). However, for some companies, such as The Wooster Group or Forced Entertainment, a reiteration of their own performance images and previous processes functions as part of the accumulation of layers, often a starting point within a new devising process. Complex images are also borrowed knowingly as quotation, as, for example, the balloon dance in Forced Entertainment’s *First Night* (2001). Cathy Turner described actress Claire Marshall in a bathing suit with balloons pinned to it:

My memory of it (which may not be accurate) is that Claire did a sort of slow, vague dance on a chair (a cross-reference to her dance in *Pleasure* (1997)?). She was smoking and she used the cigarette to burst the balloons one by one, as if utterly bored of being a showgirl – but that boredom was also a tease.²⁸

This echoed Pina Bausch’s *Masurca Fogo* (1998) where, to draw attention to her possible role as ‘object’, dancer Julie Shanahan wore a bikini adorned with red balloons and popped them one by one with exaggerated enthusiasm. Chapter 7 discusses in more detail the ideology of knowing quotation as a mechanism of postmodern, devised performance.

Other motifs occur and recur across the tradition of devised performance that are not just performance images, but reflexive functions

of devised performance itself. Take, for example, staring wordlessly at the audience. The broader field of experimental performance championed the power of the performer and audience member consciously reflecting on their shared time and space in performance, a recognition of the ‘encounter’ textually realised in the work of Peter Handke in the 1970s. One of the simplest markers of this encounter is a moment when an actor (not as a character, but as a performer) stands before an audience and looks back at them, observing them, in silence, for an extended period of time. This desire to draw attention to the ‘watching’ and the contract of watching that the audience and performers have embarked upon, recurs again and again in devised work. At the beginning of The Living Theatre’s *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964), performed first in Paris, a single actor stood in the centre of the stage, looking at the audience, ‘defiantly silent’ (Aronson, 2000, p. 75), ‘at attention . . . expecting that some audience response would begin the play’ (Tytell, 1995, p. 200). Initially this encounter was designed to run for six minutes; by the time Margaret Croyden saw the performance she described the time period as half an hour (Croyden, 1974, p. 105). Open Theatre’s *Mutation Show* (1971) ended with the actors in silence, looking out at the audience, breathless but at rest. Australian performance group The Sydney Front’s *Don Juan* (1992) began with the actors in a bank of seating in the studio space, behind an iron barrier, as the audience were ushered in. The actors watched them, eventually beginning to whisper to each other, and finally pushed aside the bar to join them. Forced Entertainment’s *Dirty Work* (1998) opened with two actors looking at the audience for what felt an uncomfortably long time, as seduction, as apology or in pity, before they consoled us for what the performance was not, with descriptions of impossible spectacles and improbable theatrical encounters. As part of the marking of tradition, deliberate borrowing or copying, as well as the unconscious work of influence, can be read across the *performances* generated by devised process, and in the chapters that follow we trace some of the ways in which devising *processes* and strategies also cross-fertilise and repeat.

The Plan of the Book

Our intention is to map out an overview, one possible landscape, of the evolution of the mode of devising as a practice. Oddey’s *Devising Theatre* (1994) offered pioneering guidance on ‘how to’ devise, and

other workbooks and practice-based books have been produced since.²⁹ Although we do explore the devising practices and processes of companies here, it is not in order to offer exemplary models to be followed. Rather, by examining the development of different devising processes in their differing moments in history, this study aims to raise questions about the choices and responsibilities that face student and professional practitioners in using devising strategies today.

Recently a number of histories have begun to appear which chart the post-war rise and evolution of alternative theatre companies, political theatre companies, or dance and community groups, although there remains much work to be done here.³⁰ These histories have provided valuable background and advice for us, but we are not attempting to chart a history of every devising company here, or even to trace the complete histories and influences of the groups at which we do look. Reading the back-run of theatre journals such as *Performance*, *Plays and Players*, or *Theatre Australia* reveals a wealth of devising companies whose work is forgotten or performances which are lost to us. A thorough chronology of devising companies and devised performances in even one of the countries considered here would be an enormous undertaking. Readers will perhaps inevitably identify their own lacunae and begin to construct their own landscapes and histories of the theatre companies we neglect. Such responses will be valuable elements in weaving a history of post-war theatre. Rather than attempting a history of all theatre companies who have devised, or even identifying all devising companies, we are attempting here to trace the evolution of the *mode of devising* itself.

In order to do this, in each chapter we have chosen to study companies that exemplify key elements of devising practices and processes. The sheer scale of this landscape makes choices, inclusions and exclusions, inevitable. We are not implying that the detailed studies that follow are necessarily of the only, or on occasion even the most, important devising companies. However, the companies we have chosen to talk about in detail offer clear examples of the distinctions and complexities of different devising modes. Readers might choose to substitute one company for another depending on their own areas of influence, knowledge, or matters of concern. The danger of any book of this sort is that, through the inclusion of particular examples, those companies become, by default, canonical. Several of the companies discussed here have been thoroughly studied already, and we include them precisely because they are already recognised as pioneers in their particular field of theatre practice.

They have inspired, through performances, occasionally through workshops, and often because they have been well-documented, a range of other companies to replicate their style of work. Of course, the citing of work results in further citing of work. This is an unavoidable effect of the materiality and ‘economics’ of writing, as distinct from the ephemerality of live performance, an effect that we do not pretend to escape here. We hope that this book might prompt other writers to make different choices and thereby to write over our constructed landscape.

Devising did not suddenly emerge as a practice without relation to existing theatrical fields such as mainstream narrative theatre, community arts or political theatre, for example, and this history attempts to place devising in that theatrical, political and social context. In each case we look not only at the historical context to the emergence of devising as a mode itself, but also at the particularity of specific types of devising. What becomes evident from this history is that devising is a multifarious mode of work. To help give coherence to the picture, we have grouped devising companies together in the chapters that follow because the central concerns of their work, and the devising practices they use or used, are linked. Broadly speaking we have identified three strands of devising practice: theatre predominantly concerned with the actor, acting and story, in Chapters 2 and 6; theatre closely linked to art practices, which dramaturgically places the image as equal to the spoken text and which therefore pays close attention to the visual potentials inherent in the stage ‘picture’, in Chapters 3 and 7; and theatre predominantly concerned with its impact in a political and/or social context, in Chapters 4 and 5.

It would be disingenuous (not to mention harmful) to suggest that there are clear-cut lines separating any of the types of practices and companies discussed in this book, for the practices, companies, aims, forms, and even personnel blur, and many companies deliberately take an interdisciplinary approach. To take just one example that reveals the extent to which the areas of work discussed below are fluid, we might try to place the company Brith Gof. Founded in 1981, Brith Gof would initially have fitted comfortably into the actor-centred practices explored in Chapter 2, given that their ‘group ethos’ at this time matched that of the ‘encapsulated work group’ practised by the Polish Theatre Laboratory (Savill, 1997, p.100). However, from the outset, the work of this Welsh-based company was culturally political, desiring to create a ‘new kind of theatre in Wales’ (ibid.). Though this concept of ‘new’ did refer to ‘new forms’, their aims

also extended beyond formal experimentation. As Charmian Savill recorded, 'their work was inspired by their need to reinscribe Welsh social, mythic, literary, political and historical representation' (*ibid.*, p. 105). Taking seriously this political commitment, we might wish to locate Brith Gof in Chapter 4. However, Brith Gof's productions also typically involved various communities in their devising, inviting contributions from 'students, dancers, musicians, local communities, special needs groups or theatre companies' (*ibid.*, p. 103). In this respect, the company could quite easily sit within the parameters of Chapter 5. From the mid-1980s, both the composition of the group, and its formal style and concept of the 'political', shifted. Temporary members were now invited to work with the company, and the formal codes adopted by the company, intended to interrogate and challenge 'metanarratives', produced effects that bear resemblance to the work explored in Chapter 7, which we have located within a frame of postmodernism. The placing of companies into separate, defined modes of practice presumes neat categories when in fact categories are often deliberately challenged. Moreover, the various cultural, social, political and theatrical influences inevitably work across the different devising modes we have identified. We encourage readers to similarly read across and through the modes/chapters.

There has been a great deal of cross-fertilisation between Australia, America and the UK through the touring of devised performances, workshops by leading companies, and through the teaching of devising at school and university level. We hope that what follows is a contribution to that debate and exchange. We have begun by attempting to resist already knowing what devising 'is', and have tried to proceed by examining the rhetoric used about devising against the practices and processes actually employed by practitioners. The questions that underpin this investigation have significance for our use of devising practices today. Why did devising emerge as a mode of work? What conditioned the evolution of different devising practices? What are the ideological implications of the decision to devise, and of the choice of different devising processes?

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