1. RE-DEVISING THEATRE: Towards a Genealogy of Devising Practice

Devised theatre may be defined as “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” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:3). The ambiguity of “devising” means it has been used to describe many different performance processes, from applied theatre to performance art. The fields of practice vying for a position in any devising study are thus huge, and such studies will always be highly selective. Thus, it is necessary to define “devising” as it applies in a study to establish a baseline of reference. Drawing upon Oddey (1994) and Bray (1991), I would like to offer my understanding of “devising”: “Devised theatre refers to the process of creative collaboration by a group of performers to generate and assemble a performance through improvisation, discussion and rehearsal, inclusive of the resultant production.” This is a very specific definition describing the process of the practical devising project I undertook as part of this research. It may also be applied to other examples of democratic performer-led devising, although these have become less frequent since the 1990s when devising re- emphasised “specialisation, specific roles, increasing division of responsibilities ... and more hierarchical company structures” (Oddey, 1994:9). My practical devising project was inspired by the countercultural collectives of the 1960s whose albeit problematic models of aesthetic democracy seemed an exciting creative challenge to recreate. Pioneers of group collaboration such as the Becks of The Living Theatre and Joan Littlewood of Theatre Workshop prepared for themselves a thorough study of early twentieth-century theatre, and adopted and adapted this knowledge when developing their own creative strategies. Thus, I sought to approach my research through a literature of practice. That is, an examination of past devised/experimental practice. Arguably, published devising manuals do not adequately consider influences on devising prior to the 1960s, although close examinations of
theatrical experimentation at this time point towards a much earlier period of influence — specifically, the “historical avant-garde”. While there are well-known “genealogies” of the avant-garde “canon”,¹ I wish to focus on the aspects of avant-garde practice that engendered a complexity of performance types including devising. As will be examined closer, an understanding of past practice can inform critical approaches to current practice, particularly when attempting to explore slippery terms like postmodernism. As Hilton Kramer suggested, postmodernism is a challenge to the rhetoric, not the aesthetic of modernism (Marranca in Marranca and Dasgupta [eds.], 1999). Devising is arguably a fertile site in which to explore these concepts as it is here that many originally avant-garde techniques now proliferate. Further, from a practitioner’s point of view, examining past practice may assist in deepening our understanding of why certain avant-garde techniques remain current. Of The Wooster Group’s production Poor Theatre, director Elizabeth LeCompte remarked:

Last night during the break I listened to some students talking about the Grotowski section and they were arguing back and forth about whether or not it was good to go back to the old masters, whether it was good to elevate these works to masterpieces and copy them or whether that was foolish. It was wonderful to hear, because it was a very lively discussion about how to continue work, which is what I think I was trying to do by going back [to Grotowski]. I was searching for some way to continue. (LeCompte in Savran, 2005:19)

LeCompte points to the risks of looking back to the past (most problematically, elevating past works to “masterpieces”), but she also suggests it can refresh our view forward. Attempting to understand the rhizome-like genealogy of devising may enrich one’s own theatrical vocabulary of techniques, devices and strategies. Importantly for my

research, the precedents within past theatrical practice that privilege process over product may help in establishing a critical approach to contemporary devising – a practice that in its very name emphasises process as product.

1.1 The Problems of Linearity

Berthold’s (1972) assertion that The Living Theatre developed the concept of collaboratively devised theatre belies the tangled web of influences informing experimental theatre throughout the twentieth-century. Their first collaborative creation, “Mysteries and Smaller Pieces”, was heavily indebted to The Theatre and Its Double, with the Becks amongst the first American practitioners to fathom Artaud’s importance (Tytell, 1995). Unpicking The Living Theatre’s influences – including Piscator, Genet, Cocteau, and John Cage – requires deeper investigation into historical avant-garde performance. Although Clark (1971) traces theatrical collaboration to Ancient Greece, the origins of contemporary devising are located in modern times. Precisely, the diffusion of certain experimental practices which remain recognisable in contemporary devised work may arguably be traced to the innovations of the “isms” including individual avant-garde practitioners and theorists.

Any attempt to establish a linear genealogy of influence from the historical avant-garde to recent performance practice is highly problematised. Aside from the enormous scope, an important question is how much of an influence the avant-garde actually had on alternative theatre since the 1960s. Bell (1995:186) considers “avant-garde technique as a repository of tradition and continuity”, citing how such techniques have penetrated “normative culture”. He uses Reza Abdoh’s work to establish a “developing avant-garde aesthetic” which he labels a possible avant-garde tradition (187). Querying whether a definite tradition actually exists should underscore any comparative analysis of theatrical
experimentation. Some recent criticism, however, offers positive evidence. Carlson (2004:108) identifies a “direct line” through the experimentation of early twentieth-century movements to 1970s performance art. Despite Carlson’s emphasis on the work of visual/performance artists over “theatre”, he does consider examples of what Kostelanetz (1970) would term “stage performances” – The Living Theatre, the Wooster Group, and the productions of Robert Wilson, for instance. The methods of these practitioners are closely related to contemporary devising practice. In Carlson’s “direct line”, these examples provide a neat confluence of the artistic explorations of the “isms” and more recent theatrical experimentation. Fischer-Lichte (1997), referring to postmodern theatre as the “neo-avant-garde” (39), claims, albeit cautiously, that the experiments begun by the historical avant-garde have been resumed and furthered by “Western theatre of the last twenty-five to thirty years” (56). She identifies certain works of the Futurists and Dadaists as “forerunners” to Cage (261) and, in summarising the ongoing debate around postmodernism and modernism, claims that early twentieth-century works (particularly Dada) have distinctively postmodern characteristics. Schneider (2002) supports a lineage from the early avant-garde to 1960s performative practices, such as Happenings, while Counsell (1996) moves effortlessly from Futurism to Dada to John Cage and Merce Cunningham. Such confidence is seemingly qualified by Kostelanetz’s (1970) contemporary account of 1960s experimentation. Examining the development of the “Theatre of Mixed Means”, Kostelanetz cites Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism as early prototypes of such activities as Happenings and “kinetic environments”, believing “the influence of the mixed-means precedents, along with the dialogues one art persistently holds with another, is why the Theatre of Mixed Means should have emerged at this time” (10). These “dialogues” between the arts may be equated with what Schneider and Cody (2002:1-2) call the resilient “liveness” of theatrical productions that potentially continues through reproduction, quotation, citation, parody, or “overt resistance to precedent”. The
dispersal or "ongoing interaction" of avant-garde practices through often subtle references or allusions – intentional or not – arguably provides a safe entry into any attempt to conflate historical avant-garde performance with the relatively recent phenomena of group devising.

However, this confidence is (perhaps valuably) threatened by Brockett and Findlay's (1973:311) warning that while movements like Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism "contain the seeds of subsequent experiments down to the present day ... it is tempting to see in it evidence of more direct influence than can be clearly established". Such caution is further exercised by Kershaw (1999). Brockett and Findlay (1973) suggest that post-World War II theatrical experimentation is perhaps comparable to that of the World War I era due to a shared experience of war's traumatic social and political upheavals. What they infer is a second coming of innovation not evolving from previous practice but inspired by a situation so like the earlier time that "from similar questioning came similar experiments and conclusions" (311). Whilst acknowledging some direct influences, such as Dada and Surrealism engendering Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, Brockett and Findlay's caution is useful when evaluating seemingly comparable innovations. Likewise, Heddon and Milling (2006) remain cautious after briefly acknowledging the possible influence of the historical avant-garde on devising:

The companies and the work that we explore were undoubtedly influenced by earlier performance traditions and experiments ... However, the devised work we look at ... 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. (Heddon and Milling, 2006:12)
Arguably, an informed balance between the enthusiasm of Carlson (2004), and others, and the scepticism of Brockett and Findlay (1973), Kershaw (1999), and Heddon and Milling (2006) is thus necessary when attempting to locate the development of devising within the fertile artistic climate of the twentieth-century.

It is also vital when establishing a genealogy to remain aware of the differing theoretical positions underpinning the historical avant-garde’s use of influential theatrical techniques. Certainly there were significant shared concerns which allowed for a “cross-fertilization” of ideas or practices (Carlson, 1984:346). For example, Innes (1993:3) argues “primitivism” provides a coherent stream of theoretical investigation through the avant-garde movements. He believes the widespread “experiments with ritual and the ritual patterning of performance” amongst avant-garde practitioners arose from a shared interest in “the exploration of dream states or the instinctive and subconscious levels of the psyche; and the quasi-religious focus on myth and magic” (3). Nevertheless, it is important to remain aware of individual aims. Take for example the co-existent and interrelated movements of Futurism and Dada. While both were characterised by immediacy and an emphasis on process in performance, Futurism’s valorisation of modern technology and an “ideal man” who was an “aggressive, masculine fighter” (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:290) contrasts greatly with Dada which was “grounded in a thoroughgoing scepticism engendered by disgust and horror for a world that could produce a global war” (296). Further, Futurism emphasised external dynamics such as speed, light, or physicality, while the Expressionists and later Surrealists focused on the mysterious “inner life” of humankind (Carlson, 1984:346). What is pertinent here, however, is not why but how certain production innovations were developed and used. It is these, not the avant-garde artistic philosophies, which have arguably continued into current practice.
Arguably, there are several identifiable avant-garde concerns that are particularly relevant to the development of devising. At the forefront, and the focus of this analysis, is the shift in interest from product to process. Two major instances of this shift – first in the early 1900s then later in the 1960s – are potentially of most significance. Before exploring these shifts in detail, it is important to mention the other major theatrical developments occurring in conjunction, and often connate with, this new emphasis. One was a determination to democratise the theatre, giving rise to the often confluent ideas of aesthetic and social reformers (Bradby and McCormick, 1978). Inherent within this democratization was a critical repositioning of the relationship between stage and spectator above that of the internal activity between the onstage characters which had been dominant since the eighteenth century (Fischer-Lichte, 1997). This turn to the spectator occurred across the spectrum of avant-garde activities with a view to reclaiming the perceived “social and cultural functions of theatre – something that the bourgeois theatre had lost. It was for this reason that the spectator was at the core of their reflection and activities” (43). Making visible the function of the spectator remained an experimental concern throughout the twentieth-century. Its more extreme manifestations came with the audience-participational work of The Performance Group’s Commune (1972) where spectators were Vietnamese villagers “guarded” by performers as US military (Schechner, 2002), or The Living Theatre’s Paradise Now (1968) which included direct confrontation between performer and spectator, ending with a communal procession into the streets (Tytell, 1995). Contemporary devising practice which positions the spectator as collaborator includes applied theatre, TIE programmes, community theatre, theatre of the oppressed, and theatre for change. Like earlier audience-focused work, these practices often have the political imperative of raising awareness and inspiring change (Taylor, 2003). Another influential development in theatre at the turn of the century was the role of director. The emergence of a figure responsible for the realization of a unified production was fostered
by several factors (Schneider and Cody, 2002). The conflux and contest of Naturalist and Symbolist styles, and "an increasing emphasis on visuality in modernity" (5), required a stylistic coherence that generated the director's function. Schneider and Cody are clear that the modern concept of the director arose "via contested practices of production" (6). This suggests that the general assumption of a director's presence within theatrical production is a relatively recent phenomenon. Further, it was from the evolution of the director that the theatrical auteur became possible, often eschewing pre-written texts for visual performances of their own devising. However, the later formation of group devising raised questions about the role of director in an artistically democratic situation, and even whether a director was necessary at all.

While bearing in mind these two principal theoretical and practical revisionings in early twentieth-century theatre – the turn to the spectator and the emergence of the director – what is arguably of most interest to contemporary devising are the innovative production elements resulting from the avant-garde emphasis on process. Many of these resonate in contemporary work, including my own, and are even detectable in more mainstream theatre. Arguably spearheaded by an increase of visual artists entering theatre, these developments included a radical rethinking of dramatic structure and language, supplemented by increased technical experimentation towards the development and refinement of multimedia productions. As these elements evolved, new methods of production birthed new methods of creation. Reconsiderations of the actor's role reduced emphasis on the playwright and led to increased improvisation in the development and presentation of performances. Despite the often fascinating theoretical debates in the literature of the time,² it is necessary to focus on the most prominent examples of avant-garde practice. This is due to the huge scope of the subject. Also challenging is the near

² For example, Carlson (1984) provides a detailed introduction to critical debate on theatricality and the function of the actor during the period 1914-1930.
impossibility of separating these production innovations into a discrete configuration for analysis as one is often, necessarily, related to the other in terms of development. The emergence of visual artists as performers or performance makers, for example, corresponds to a developing emphasis on the visual dimension of performance, requiring new technical effects that resulted in recognisably “multimedia” productions. The interrelatedness of these developments emphasises that aesthetic process was an important consideration for the historical avant-garde, in some cases more so than the artistic product. As questions of process continue to preoccupy theatre makers and theorists, it is useful to revisit how the historical avant-garde addressed the phenomena of performance. The avant-garde’s reconsideration of dramatic structure and technical effects completely disrupted conventional understandings of the relationship between the stage and the spectator. Arguably, the avant-garde began raising questions about how performance “works” that continue to be explored within the practice of devising.

1.2 Product to Process: Production Innovations from Symbolism to Surrealism

It was “between 1910 and 1925 such techniques as juxtaposition of disparate elements, discontinuity, multiple focus, and unity through theme or motif came into the widespread use for the first time” (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:269). This is this period during which the Expressionists, Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists were simultaneously experimenting throughout much of Europe. Rejecting the traditional categories of time and space in the organization of experience (Innes, 1994), these movements sought to challenge the dominance of Realism and Naturalism. This is not to discount the significant influence of Naturalism – first introduced by Antoine at the opening of the Théâtre Libre in 1887 (Knapp, 1968) – on experimental theatre. Naturalism effectively launched the period of modern drama (Baxandall, 1968). Termed for its adherents’ belief in a scientifically objective description of human social behaviour comparable to the field work of
naturalists, Naturalism was instrumental in elevating the concerns of the people to the forefront of the avant-garde (Bradby and McCormick, 1978). It sought to make theatre relevant to everyday concerns and have a tangible impact towards improving society through “observation and deduction” (Schneider and Cody, 2002:16). The rupture between Symbolism and Naturalism in the late nineteenth-century was to be the “crucible” for “the genesis of the theatrical avant-garde” (Schneider and Cody, 2002:5). More precisely, the “split in focus between the material detail of naturalists and the abstract dreamscape of the symbolists … would fracture into the thousands ‘isms’ that would compose twentieth-century modernism” (15). Where Naturalism fixed reality as discoverable through a systematic application of pseudo-scientific method, the growing influence of new perceptive modes – such as those of Jung and Einstein – saw a disruption to the unifying dramatic principle of cause-and-effect (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). With the emergence of Symbolism in the late nineteenth-century, the world had become “merely mysterious” (269), shadowed by a threatening primitivism of myth and ritual lurking in the subconscious. As a result, artists strove to utilise these new modes of perception. Rejecting confining labels such as “painter” or “poet”, they found expression through a variety of media that reflected their energetic, multifarious view of reality. Fischer-Lichte (1997:72) calls this time the “retheatricalization of the theatre” where “only a rigorous stance against language, a turn to noncoded theatrical signs, and a liberation of these signs from the chains of linearity, causality, logic and action were able to bring about a radical shift of the focus from any given reality and the problem of how to represent it to the subjective conditions underlying perception and cognition and, consequently, to the problem of how to construct reality.” An imperative was bridging the “chasm between art and life” as strategies for rethinking traditional concepts of theatrical space sought to augment “basic changes in the existing patterns and habits of reception” (45), emphasising the function of perception in performance. Arguably, this automatically becomes a question of process,
extending performance production from the actions of performers to their reception and resonance amongst spectators. The interest in theatre as a process of *making* – art, meaning, reality, – superseded the *made*, or finished, product. The exact point of conclusion to the theatrical process gradually emerged as a site of contestation.

Although deriding it as “better known for its manifestos than for its actual artistic achievement”, Carlson (2004:98) credits Futurism, launched in 1909, with providing an impetus for the shift from product to process that would witness visual artists abandoning the canvas for the stage. He argues Futurist interest in “movement and change” led to the rejection of the “static work of art” in search of a more dynamic medium. However, the turn to performance by visual artists was not unique to Futurism. In 1907 the Expressionist Kokoshaka, “justly celebrated more as a graphic artist than a dramatist” (Wellwarth, 1969:258), was conceptualising a performance composed primarily of visual elements. Further, most of the Dadaists and Surrealists were writers “before they made Surrealist objects and paintings” (Goldberg, 2001:8), and were already known for collage-style performances. These avant-garde movements, capitalising on a permeability of the arts, renegotiated the dynamics of performance as boundaries shifted and eventually collapsed “between the plastic and performing arts, between the high arts of theatre, ballet, music and painting, and popular forms such as circus, vaudeville, and variety, even between art and life itself, as in the concept of bruitism” (Carlson, 2004:101). Consequently, the characteristics of Naturalistic productions – “quiet conversational style” dialogue, restrained gestures, and detailed settings with “furniture and properties suitable to the place and period of the play” (Hartnoll, 1968:240) – were discarded. Structure, one of the first dramatic elements to be radicalised, experimented with direct, multifaceted forms of sensory communication. The technical elements used in such expression – scenery,
lighting, sound – piled upon each other in a resemblance to the multimedia performances of contemporary devising groups.

The Disruption of Linear Structure

The reconsideration of structure by the historical avant-garde can be divided into two major types whose modern origins are locatable in the late nineteenth-century. The first type – replacing rational sequence with the structuring devices of symbol or motif – was initially explored by Symbolism. Illogical sequence and the abandonment of connectives reduced Symbolist plays, such as Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas and Mélisande* (1892) and Strindberg’s *A Dream Play* (1902), to discontinuous fragments, juxtaposing “elements whose relationships are left unexplored” (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:269). The second type – constructing a performance from entirely heterogeneous components, often without any attempt to integrate meaning or purpose – characterised the emerging cabaret, a more popular and far-reaching form of entertainment “than the various rather specialized and esoteric avant-gardes” (Carlson, 2004:95). Both of these new structures prepared for the usurpation of realistic dialogue as diverse techniques including mime, pantomime, acrobatics, music, and technical effects replaced mimesis and the primacy of verbal language on stage.

Cody (2002:126) suggests that a recent “orientation toward a theatre of images can be traced back to early symbolism’s distrust of rationalism.” Recurring symbols and motifs, in dialogue, visual images, or woven throughout various production elements, allowed for a complex structure suited to a fragmented conception of being. Symbolism, with its “multi-level synaesthetic productions” in search of “a language, at once sensual and subliminal”, employed devices such as colours, sounds, and mime “to portray psychological states … instead of describing these in dialogue” (Innes, 1994:19-20).
Identifiably modernist, it sought to provide concrete symbols of archetypal man's deeper reality. For example, Maeterlinck's *Pelléas and Méliande* contains several scenes only symbolically connected to the main action, adopting an almost allegorical position in their "symbolization of the human condition" but contributing nothing to plot development (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:126). Dialogue and characterization are minimal and used to emphasise recurring motifs. The audience, therefore, must provide connections through their perception of the fragmented scenes and synthesise the whole – a "characteristic feature of modern art" (269). Maeterlinck's rethinking of structure extended to the composition of individual elements within the wider performance. He maintained an ideal of gesture and movement "musically structured" to intuitively express the "nuances of internal states in plastic form" (Innes, 1994:21). Maeterlinck later went so far as to aim towards a "theatre of silence" in a complete dismissal of words that substitute "habitual reactions for existential awareness" (20). Another influential Symbolist work, Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, attempted to "reproduce the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream", abandoning conventional conceptions of time and space as the "imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations" (Strindberg in Carlson, 1984:346). The focus is entirely subjective as the dreamer's "freeflowing consciousness" structures the action (Carlson, 1984:347). This play repositions the interior composition of the dreaming character's individual psyche as the primary action of the stage space, and thus paves the way for the emergence of Expressionism.

Similarly arranged "primarily through idea, theme, or motif" (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:272), Expressionist drama continued stripping away language and reducing dramatic elements to essentials. Like other modernist movements, Expressionism sought to embody "the inner nature of archetypal man ... in contrast to the naturalistic depiction of socially
defined individuals" (Innes, 1994:19-20). It thus presented deliberately quintessential concepts of humanity: death, dreams, good and evil, plus angry, anarchistic visions of patricide, matricide, and sexual conflict. Structure seemed to disintegrate beneath the weight of these grandiose themes as Expressionist language – lyrical, intense, often “eminently untheatrical” – claimed precedence over any interest in stage technique (Wellwarth, 1969:256). Two examples, Kokoshka’s Murderer the Women’s Hope (1909) and Hasenclever’s Humanity (1918), separated by a decade, epitomise non-sequential structure and Expressionist language where connectives are removed from both scenes and dialogue. The “proto-typical Expressionist production”, Murderer the Women’s Hope was first presented in Vienna with a cast of Kokoshka’s friends and acting students (Goldberg, 2001:52). Claiming the script was improvised in a single night – although the play was actually written between 1907 and 1908 – Kokoshka wrote “little more than a framework for gesture and visual effects” (Innes, 1994:53). In this production, “choreography and patterns of visual images and colour are used to communicate instead of a fully articulated text” (53). The actors were “drilled extensively in movement and vocal rhythms. The speeches still contained … evocative and poetic verbal images … but they were chanted or intoned, or broken down into sounds … Colours recurred as motifs in the words and were repeated in the costumes, scenery and lighting” (53-54). Like Strindberg, Hasenclever’s Humanity – a Stationdrama, patterned on the Stations of the Cross – comprised freely-associated images to reproduce a dream’s internal logic. Cause-and-effect is replaced by a series of “almost independent moments – a montage of single images, each making a specific impression, out of which a composite picture emerges” (40). Innes likens this autonomous structure to the paintings of the fauves. Action is supplied largely through pantomime (Brockett and Findlay, 1973) as language is reduced to single word dialogues of almost explosive emotional urgency – a style known as the Expressionist “Schrei”, or scream. Eliminating the “intellectual, denotative quality of language” through the
evacuation of "practically all grammatical structures and connectives" (Innes, 1994:40), each word theoretically becomes a space for pure emotional expression rather than description or exposition. This, Innes argues, reinforces the archetypal nature of the characters as assertion replaces discursive argument, precluding displays of personality or motivation. Plot and action also succumb to this "primacy of language", taking with them "psychological verisimilitude" and delineated characterization, leaving room for "intense subjectivism" and "symbolic abstractions" (Wellwarth, 1969:257).

Hence, in Expressionism the dismemberment of structure echoed the vivisection of dialogue into expressive bursts. Language remains a primary Expressionist concern, more so than Symbolism where "the negative value placed on rational structures of thought" (Innes, 1994:20) included words. Maeterlinck, for instance, argued verbalization eradicated the authenticity of emotion. Perhaps because all Expressionist dramatists were also poets (Wellwarth, 1969), the disconnectedness of structure is near harmonised with the similar reduction of language to singular instances of subjective expression. Despite these opposing attitudes towards language, Symbolism and Expressionism provide the earliest modernist examples of something other than logical narrative sequence structuring a drama within an otherwise traditional theatrical context. Visual elements, movement, or sparse dialogue, charged with motif, symbol or theme, repositioned primal emotion over realistic setting, dialogue, and characterization. What emerges from this type of structure is the potential for methods of creation that work not from but towards a performance text as the visual attains privilege over the spoken, and written, word.

Simultaneous with Expressionist experiments were more far-reaching forms of performance that descended from a cluster of popular spectacles such as fairs, music-booths, and circus (Carlson, 2004). Through music hall to cabaret, performances consisted
of a sequence of unrelated physical or visual elements usually linked only by their inclusion in the one show. This form of freewheeling structure, coupled with highly engaging elements like songs, buffoonery, and tumbling, was to be radically influential as experimenters abandoned pre-scripted text to source more direct, spontaneous modes of expression. The physical and visual spectacle of the cabaret – developing from the music hall towards the end of the nineteenth century – was presenting disparate instances of often political or satirical performance to much more popular audiences than those receiving the Symbolist or Expressionist works. With its variety format “the earliest podium for ... the DADAists, the futurists” and “a congenial forum for experiments in shadowgraphy, puppetry, free-form skits, jazz rhythms”, the cabaret was to have a major influence on later avant-garde practitioners (Senelick in Carlson, 2004:93-94). The movements which support a direct heritage from cabaret – Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism – capitalised on the quick, disjointed form to accommodate their particular aesthetic philosophies. Correspondingly, individual political innovators, such as Meyerhold, Eisenstein, and Piscator, had a relatively physical and visual emphasis. Perhaps because of the larger audiences attracted to the cabaret, its use of popular performance types such as acrobatics, music, and satire became of interest to those who sought as wide an audience as possible for their political messages.

The informal collage structure of cabaret performance suited the Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists who valued spontaneity and a sense of free-form for their likeness to intuitive, imaginative, and creative processes. While each movement manoeuvred the form towards displays of their aesthetic ideals, all embraced variety’s colour, confusion, and surprise as an idealised likeness to life itself. For the Futurists, the epitome of human creativity and achievement was the machine whose speed and energy they sought to embody in artistic forms (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). In performance, the model for
mechanically-inspired pace and dynamism was variety. The instigating Futurist manifesto, Marinetti's "The Variety Theatre" (1913), praised eclecticism over traditional theatre for its "dynamism of form and colour", replacing conventional psychology with the \textit{fisicofollia}, or "body-madness", of jugglers, gymnasts, ballerinas and clowns (Carlson, 2004:98). Marinetti did not seek direct imitation of the variety tradition, rather a harnessing of the spirit of popular entertainments through the adaptation of certain characteristics, "especially the carefree and unselfconscious atmosphere, the rapid succession of disparate attractions, the interaction of performers and actors, the mingling of elements drawn from many media, and the overall dynamism of the performances" (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:291). Fundamentally, Marinetti advocated variety structure where, without a "gratuitous" storyline, "authors, actors and technicians of variety theatre had only one reason for existing ... 'incessantly to invent new elements of astonishment'" (Goldberg, 2001:17). As the template for Futurist performances, their philosophy of "speed, surprise and novelty" found its expression in physical displays as well as various lighting, sound, and mechanical effects occurring either sequentially or in tandem (Carlson, 2004:98). A later Futurist manifesto, "The Futurist Synthetic Theatre" (1915), authored by Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra, brought the Futurist ideal into focus with its subtitle: "atechnical - dynamic - simultaneous - autonomous - alogical - unreal" (Carlson, 1984:342). It called for the abolition of climax building, foreshadowing, and the making of logical connections, intending the Futurist theatre to reshape reality rather than simply attempt to reproduce it (342). In 1916 came the publication of seventy-six short scenes, the "\textit{sintesi}" or Synthesis, which attempted the theatrical embodiment of the manifesto's concerns (340). In the \textit{sintesi}, "the place of action is the stage itself; time is usually indefinite or severely telescoped; nonverbal sound and symbolic lighting are common" while "clear-cut story, logical progression, and psychological characterization are minimized or ignored" (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:293). Futurist experiments with the
variety structure continued until its decline after 1930, and though never "a major theatrical movement" (295), the flexibility and immediacy Futurists found in this form had a profound influence on the contemporaneous Dadaists and Surrealists.

Arising from Geneva's Cabaret Voltaire, Dadaists presented "manifestations" comprising "lectures, readings, 'sound poems', dances, concerts, visual art works, or plays" (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:296). In "Le dadaisme et le théâtre" (1922), Tristan Tzara celebrated the passing of Realism and illusionist theatre. No longer responsible for imitating life, theatre could "preserve its artistic autonomy, that is to say, live by its own scenic means", and spectators could become part of its world through the visible arrangement of technical effects (Tzara in Carlson, 1984:343). Making visible the machinations of theatrical production also included releasing performers from the "cage" of the proscenium. As process became a fundamental concern, the Dadaists experimented with "bruitism or 'noise music', an exploration of the expressive qualities of non-musical sound", as well as creating collages "by allowing scraps of paper to fall randomly to the floor" and composing poems by "pulling words from a hat" (Carlson, 2004:99) – activities echoed in later performance art. However, in Dada's direct descendent Surrealism, the utilisation of variety-inspired structural and performance types took a more recognisably theatrical form. "Surrealism, in its original purpose, is markedly different from Futurism and Dada, for where its predecessors wanted to incorporate the realities of modern life into art, Surrealists attempted to expose subterranean forces in the individual – to represent a personal reality beyond appearances – in order to create a new consciousness" (Kostelanetz, 1970:14). While "the surrealist principle of rejecting any connection between art and the material world is inconsistent with the physical nature of theatrical presentation" (Innes, 1994:70), in Surrealist performance the Dadaist and Futurist visual, physical and technical eclecticism began assuming a structure comparable with
contemporary visual theatre. Apollinaire, who may have coined the term *surrealism* around 1917, called for a theatre where “sounds, gestures, colours, cries, tumults, music, dancing, acrobatics, poetry, painting, choruses, actions, and multiple sets” could join as in the amalgamated diversity of life (Apollinaire in Brockett and Findlay, 1973:301). The manifestation of this vision occurred with *Parade* (1917), which Apollinaire described as Surrealist despite the official launch of the movement still to come in 1924. *Parade* is an example of performance comprising separate events co-ordinated into a unified whole. Scripted by Cocteau and designed by Picasso, *Parade* was more sideshow than traditional ballet with performers consisting of Chinese conjurers, acrobats, and fair barkers (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). As Conrad (1998:314) explains, the “parade is a sampling of music-hall or circus acts performed in the street to drum up custom.” For Apollinaire, *Parade* was a work of total theatre that “translated reality” into a coherent ensemble of various arts (Apollinaire in Carlson, 1984:343). Carlson elucidates: “Instead of seeking to imitate reality, it suggested it ‘by a kind of synthesis-analysis’ embracing all the visible elements and something more ... an integral schematization which seeks to harmonise contradictions while at times deliberately renouncing the immediate aspect of the object” (343-344). *Parade* has been “credited with setting the tone for all postwar experimentation in France” (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:302). Cocteau himself believed that the “new generation will continue its experiments in which the fantastic, the dance, acrobatics, mime, drama, satire, music, and the word combine to produce a new form” (Cocteau in Brockett and Findlay, 1973:303). What he advocated was a “poetry of the theatre” replacing verse drama with the elements of performance (Cocteau in Carlson, 1984:344). Rejecting Realism for a more insightful realism available through the disrupting mechanisms of the bizarre or fantastic – what he calls an “absurd” theatre – Cocteau formulates a position comparable to Apollinaire’s (Carlson, 1984). This new form was to be realised in Picabia’s *Rélâche* (1924). “Rélâche is a theatre’s cancellation sign, and when
customers arrived for the opening ... they found it had been postponed: they were offered ‘türkisch’ instead of Türkisch” (Conrad, 1998:316). Conrad suggests Picabia created his ballet “perhaps with a certain disdainful curiosity about what might happen when some human figurines (thirty men in tights, and a woman who strolled onstage from the audience and removed her evening dress) were granted free will”, resulting in what Conrad terms “creativity automated” (316-317). Carlson (2004:99-100) describes the ballet: “various ‘performances’ interspersed with the main action (such as a chain-smoking fireman pouring water from one bucket to another and a stagehand chugging across the stage in a small automobile trailing balloons, a tableau vivant of Cranach’s Adam and Eve, film clips, and blinding lights in the eyes of the audience”. This description sounds like something UK group Forced Entertainment might envisage. Significantly, Carlson quotes reviewer Fernand Léger who believed Türkisch overcame distinctions between ballet and music hall: “author, dancer, acrobat, screen, stage, all the means of ‘presenting a performance’ are integrated and organized to achieve a total effect” (100).

The aesthetic ideologies of the avant-garde cannot be separated from their socio-political origins. Thus, one appeal of the variety structure was its adaptability to political causes. Marinetti praised variety’s ability to “quickly and incisively” explain to audiences “the most abstruse problems and most complicated political events” (Marinetti in Goldberg, 2001:17). Dada, looking to undermine the ruling rationalism of society, sought the “abolition of logic, which is the dance of those impotent to create” and an “absolute unquestionable faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity” (Tzara in Innes, 1994:72). This found its expression in the cabaret-inspired juxtaposition of assorted performance elements, and is comparable to “the surrealist belief that the free flow of imagination and release of the subconscious could liberate the individual from repression” (Innes, 1994:71). It is not incongruous, therefore, that variety, with its appealing clutter of
lively entertainment open to the repetitious dissemination of political messages, became a
favoured format of the Russians Vsevolod Meyerhold and Sergei Eisenstein, and the
German Erwin Piscator. All three strived towards a theatre of commitment appealing to the
common people.

Meyerhold and Eisenstein were prominent in a “generation of Soviet artists [who]
had turned toward minor genres, the kind of popular art which the aristocracy and
bourgeoisie had scorned ... the music hall, the circus, and the cinema” (Yutkevitch in
Gerould, 1974:296-7). Meyerhold’s career spanned the “isms” including Surrealism and
Constructivism (Schneider, 2002). As a director, he “privileged visible theatricality” (16).
This manifested itself in his concept of an ideal acting approach and functional sets which
“the actor no longer played in front of, or on ... he played with it” (Bradby and
McCormick, 1978:53). Prior to the Revolution, Meyerhold, one of Russia’s foremost
avant-garde directors, found inspiration in the commedia dell’arte. By clearing away the
effects of the illusionist stage and peopling his constructivist sets with actors ideally
possessing “the skills of the mime, the dancer, the acrobat and the juggler” (51),
Meyerhold sought a direct theatricality that, in his post-Revolution political work, became
a site where “meanings could be jointly created by actors and audience through means
which acknowledged the creative powers of each” (Worrall, 1973:71). His approach is
exemplified in Mystery-Bouffe (1918). Aside from a physically demanding set, this
production included the use of film projections, “jazz and concertina” as well as “the noise
of machines and engines” (Berthold, 1972:622). Now concerned with “propagandistic
agitation”, Meyerhold continued after “effects of pure pantomime, acrobatics and
clowning” as his self-termed “biomechanical” theatre sought to discard “the last vestiges of
bourgeois theatre” and spread a Party message to the people. Influenced by Meyerhold and
Marinetti, Eisenstein had a similar regard for techniques of music hall and circus. In his
association with the Moscow Proletkult theatre, Eisenstein sought “emotional saturation” through acrobatics: “Gesture is intensified into gymnastics, fury is expressed by a somersault, excitement by a salto mortale” (Eisenstein in Berthold, 1972:626). Eisenstein took a more extreme approach to dramatic text than Meyerhold by dismantling it completely then reconstructing it by a series of images, film projections, acrobatic displays, and satirical scenes (Bradby and McCormick, 1978). These physical and visual feats weren’t simply entertaining disruptions, but visual metaphors expressing the play’s central themes and ideas (Gerould, 1974). Montage was therefore a structuring principal. Eisenstein’s own description: “A new method … – free montage of arbitrarily selected independent … effects (attractions) but with a view to establishing a certain final thematic effect – montage of attractions” (Eisenstein, 1923:304). Such work stood in opposition to the “academic” institutions – the Bolshoi Opera, the Maly Theatre, the Moscow Art Theatre – and sought, in an era of mass rallies and Party-sponsored events, to “present the spirit of the people” (Vakhtangov in Berthold, 1972:621).

In 1919, Germany felt the influence of these experiments as news concerning cultural developments in the new Russia spread across Europe (Bradby and McCormick, 1978). Although Piscator had never seen any production by Meyerhold (Ley-Piscator, 1967), he called for the creation of a “Proletarian Theatre” addressed to Berlin’s workers with the similar aim of agitation propaganda. He was not concerned with creating art but winning “over the politically still wavering and indifferent masses”, so he sought the halls of Berlin’s working-class district for his stages (Berthold, 1972:627). For Piscator, theatre could happen “anywhere, in a marketplace, in a subway station, as long as there is an audience” (Ley-Piscator, 1967:262). To engage this non-specialist audience, he employed the same popularised techniques as the Russians. A first attempt of his Proletarian Theatre was a production of Russia’s Day which was to be “one of the first collectively scripted
agit-prop plays ... in Germany” (Bradby and McCormick, 1978:65). This collaborative working method was a feature of Piscator’s theatre, a process of invention sharing “the values of the dramaturgical, technological and even programmatical innovations” (Ley-Piscator, 1967:26). In 1924, three years after the Proletarian Theatre closed, the Party-produced *Revue Roter Rommel* clearly demonstrated Piscator’s technique, later known as “direct action”: “... we indiscriminately used every possible means: music, songs, acrobatics, quickly sketched cartoons, sport, projected images, film, statistics, acted scenes, speeches” (Piscator in Berthold, 1972:628). Piscator replaced structure with “repeated political leitmotiv” in brief, appealing forms to ensure the attention of his working-class audiences (Berthold, 1972:628-627). A later work, the documentary mass drama *Trotz alladem* (1925), censored after its second performance, utilised a “scenic montage of printed speeches, newspaper clippings, manifestos, leaflets, photographs and films, printed dialogues between historical personages, and arranged scenery” (628). Here, variety extended to the richly textual visual elements. Primarily interested in content over form, Piscator sought the “utmost intensification of effect” through “the use of extra-theatrical means” (623). Berthold indicates “extra-theatrical means” remained the favoured components of 1970s political theatre, with “collages of film, billposters, newspaper reports, signals, or transparencies” replacing text (633). While stressing again the tenuousness of establishing a linear trajectory from avant-garde to contemporary theatre, juxtaposition, collage, and multimedia remains a popular structural device amongst postmodern theatre makers. While not suggesting a sequential evolution, what can be detected is a refinement from Futurist-style alogical collation, to a Piscator-like progression of tendentious political sloganeering, to the integration of multi-layered media and performance styles in a sophisticated theatrical language. For example, the UK’s Forced Entertainment works to construct a theatrical language “out of fragments from television, film, music, literature, advertisements and the company’s own experiences”
(Oddey, 1994:86). Juxtaposing “meanings generated from different sources”, Forced Entertainment generates pieces containing “contradiction and a multiplicity of meanings or interpretations” (86). An important aspect of their method is that disparate elements are structurally integrated, creating the primary consideration of how to combine material from such a variety of sources. Carlson (2004:130) argues this creative process “could apply to a number of Europe and America’s leading young performance ensembles organized near the end of the twentieth century.”

**Technical Experimentation**

These two major structural upheavals – the Symbolist/Expressionist use of symbol or motif as structuring device and the cabaret-inspired integration of disparate elements into a single performance – relied on increasingly radical technical experimentation. In 1907, Craig (1956:41) claimed “production’, as it is understood nowadays, is but a more modern development of the Theatre.” He believed the “most effective scenes, productions, costumes and the rest, will of course be the most theatrical ones”, asserting that “here tradition is not so strong”. Craig envisaged the integration of production elements like light, sound, and costume as more than a fusion of separate forms, but a new art form in itself – the “Art of Theatre”. This concept of total theatricality first appeared in the late nineteenth-century with Wagner whose “conception of unity was to inspire almost every subsequent theatrical reformer” (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:27). Kostelanetz (1970:18) describes Wagner as “probably the first important composer to favour an integrally mixed-means work”, wanting “to assault the senses with a variety of stimuli.” Demanding total synchronization of lighting, music, acting and scenery – the Gesamtkunstwerk – Wagner’s theories of production were to be assimilated “by practically all movements without regard for his own stylistic preferences” (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:32). With the avant-garde came a rethinking of the potentialities inherent in technical devices, inspiring new
conceptions of the mise-en-scène. Lighting was to become an integral component of setting, while set design and costume eschewed realistic detail for an abstraction which was to begin the "retheatricalization of the theatre" (Copeau in Berthold, 1972:602).

Early theatre visionaries experimented with light to create space after stripping the stage of excess decoration. As Symbolists sought to construct onstage "zones of feeling" rather than illusionistic settings (Berthold, 1972:589) and discover "correspondences" between colours and sounds (Innes, 1994:19), lighting became an important element in the construction of meaning. Adolphe Appia, conceiving his designs in terms of volume, space and mass, used light to "[unify] and [blend] all the other visual elements into a harmonious whole" (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:202). He was the first to cast shade with lighting, thereby "creating space by producing depth and distance" (Berthold, 1972:591). Appia's highly stylised sets, designed to give the actor physical dominance, consisted of "architectural shapes of heavy blocks, cubes, and wedges" (591). His principal scenic elements were ramps, steps, platforms, or drapes, pillars and walls (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). Appia's contemporary, Edward Gordon Craig was similarly fascinated by light and sought to translate a play's inherent "mystical and tragic lines about human destiny" into "light and space" (Berthold, 1972:594). His production of Hofmannsthal's Das geretete Venedig (1903) featured pools "and intersecting beams of light" that later became "a distinguishing feature of the expressionist theatre" (594). Craig was also concerned with volume, space and strong architectural lines onstage. However, where Appia maintained a hierarchy of production elements, Craig considered each aspect vital to the whole. The "Art of the Theatre ... is divided up into so many crafts: acting, scene, costume, lighting, carpenting, singing, dancing" (Craig, 1956:177), which were to be unified in a singular theatrical language. Replacing realism, Craig advocated "color, line, mass, light, movement, gesture and sound" (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:208). Similar theories could be
found at the Munich Art Theatre where Georg Fuchs adopted the slogan “retheatricalize the theatre” (211). Believing that stage settings ought to be stylized since theatre is convention-based, Fuchs’s ideas were influenced by principal designer Fritz Erler who achieved effects “primarily with simple forms, painted drops, and the play of colored light” (212). However, Appia’s and Craig’s full influence was to be felt between the end of WWI until the emergence of Artaud and Brecht, when their ideas “dominate[d] both theory and practice” (211).

Subsequent avant-garde experimentation capitalising on the stage renovations of the Symbolists was individual to the aesthetic aims of each movement. Expressionism fully exploited “the potential of lighting as a means of visual expression” (Berthold, 1972:602). In Expressionist design, light was integral when limiting scenic elements to essentials (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). Not only instilling a sense of mood, light isolated characters “in a void” or contributed colour (272). Kokoshka’s Murderer the Women’s Hope, for example, used colours as recurring “motifs in the words and were repeated in the costumes, scenery and lighting” (Innes, 1994:54). Brockett and Findlay (1973:285) suggest no other movement did as much as Expressionism to “develop the expressive powers of stage lighting.” Technical devices became increasingly dominant as Expressionists continued clearing the stage. Director Fehling, for example, used practically no scenery in his version of Toller’s Man and the Masses in 1921 (286).

Futurists utilised technical effects for their “speed, surprise, and novelty” value (Carlson, 2004:98). Besides “mechanical, lighting and sound effects”, they replaced bodies with machines and “even colored clouds of gas”. In the Futurist aesthetic, the mise-en-scène should be “dynamic” to “become part of the rhythm of movement” (Berthold, 1973:291). The visions of Futurist designers Enrico Prampolini and Fortunato Depero
illustrate this emphasis on dynamism. Prampolini sought to arouse spectators' emotions through the interplay of space and light over the actor's words and gestures (Carlson, 1984). He advocated "dynamic stage architecture that will move" to replace the painted scene (Prampolini in Brockett and Findlay, 1973:294), integrating motion into the very spatial environment of Futurist performance. This mobile space was not to rely on meta-scenic illumination, but to contain its own light sources "coordinated analogically with the psyche of each scenic action". Of interest here is the absorption of technical elements into the performance itself. Where setting and lighting were once considered static properties enhancing the actors' performances, they are now as vitalized as the performers themselves. Depero sought two notable aspects in his designs: transformability and unity. He worked towards settings and costumes capable of numerous alterations during a performance, and sought total unity "between performer and background", using the same colours, shapes, and materials for both scenery and costumes (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:293). He was fascinated by the struggle and apparent merging of animate and inanimate forms (Carlson, 1984) creating a "liveness" of setting foregrounding the process of theatricalization.

Dadaist and Surrealist technical effects emerged from structures privileging multimedia performances. Dada's most influential experiment was arguably bruitism, extending the sound work of Futurist Marinetti. Best described "as 'noise with imitative effects' as heard for example in a 'chorus of typewriters, kettledrums, rattles and saucepan lids'" (Goldberg, 2001:67), bruitism sought to extend beyond art into a situation of authentic experience. "As dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck explained: 'Music of whatever nature is harmonious, artistic, and activity of reason – but bruitism is life itself'" (Carlson, 2004:99). An illustrative example is Kurt Schwitters' "Merz composite work of art", conceived in 1920 but never performed. This speculative score contained "all tones and
noises capable of being produced by violin, drum, trombone, sewing machine, grandfather
this an “extraordinary prophecy” of 1960s performance. Dada’s “interest in non-musical
sound of course prepares the way for the pivotal experiments of John Cage, himself a
major influence on subsequent experimental theatre and performance” (Carlson, 2004:99).
Equally interesting is Schwitters’ conceived stage setting for his “composite work of art.”
“The Merz stage knows only the fusing of all factors into a composite work. Materials for
the stage-set are all solid, liquid and gaseous bodies, such as white wall, man, barbed wire
entanglements, blue distance, light cone” (Schwitters in Kostelanetz, 1970:12). Total
integration created a space comprising animate and non-animate elements bound in the
generation of a complete performance moment. Not only were novel objects sourced to
create setting, performance concepts themselves were redeveloping as Dadaists sought
“equality in principle of materials, equality between complete human beings, idiots,
whistling wire netting and thought pumps” (Schwitters in Goldberg, 2001:71). With
Surrealism, the “stage became the vehicle for avant-garde pictorial compositions on the
grand scale” (Berthold, 1972:605), continuing the tradition of juxtaposing unexpected
images or ideas in a series of “seemingly nonsensical performances” (Goldberg, 2001:89).
While Goldberg (2001:96) argues that “Surrealist performance was to affect most strongly
the world of the theatre with its concentration on language”, at least one Surrealist
performance – Picabia’s Rélâche – introduced multimedia effects current today. Brockett
and Findlay (1973) argue Rélâche’s integration of film into live performance was its most
historically important aspect. The backdrop “comprising metal discs, each reflecting a
powerful light bulb” (Goldberg, 2001:90), shone a powerful light into the spectator’s eyes,
creating a physical discomfort emphasising the reception of performance as experience. In
both Dada and Surrealism, the use of technical effects was a precursor to later
phenomenological approaches to performance process and reception.
The avant-garde’s structural and technical innovations were arguably of considerable influence, revealing new possibilities in understanding performance processes. Whether direct lineages can be ascertained or not, these experimental production elements remain detectable in devised works. Synthesising “theatrical storytelling, puppetry, improvisation and song and live music” (Lamden, 2000:35), Improbable Theatre’s 70 Hill Lane employs the multi-layering of performance elements pioneered by the variety-inspired movements. Similarly, Suspect Culture’s Lament (2003) is structured around themes of grief and loss, using visual images amidst performance to explore a number of responses within these themes (Bye, 2003) – an echo of the Symbolist or Expressionist use of motifs and symbols to structure their works. The use of arresting technical devices by devising groups is extensive, although those given specific mention by Schmor (2004) are New York’s Builders Association, Bread and Puppet Theatre, and Redmoon Theatre. While these groups are “mining the history and theories of Dada cabaret [and] Surrealist derive” (264), the development of enterprising production methods did not singularly influence the emergence of devising. When Oddey (1994:19) describes devised theatre as a “kind of performance theatre [that] enables a performer to engage in the creation of a visual or physical language”, the two crucial shifts in avant-garde theatre and their contribution to devising are revealed. The first: a “visual” emphasis which may be considered in relation to the above structural and technical innovations. The second: an emphasis on the performer within “a form of theatre that often veers away from written text”. This repositioning of the performer within processes of creation comprises the other major component of devising’s unique character within the modern theatrical tradition.

1.3 From Author to Actor: Disrupted Modes of Creation

Within the period examined above (from the start of the twentieth-century until around 1930), the shifting boundaries of performance genres contested not only ownership
of theatrical forms, but processes of creation. A "physical and visual theatricality" (Carlson, 2004:93) replaced naturalistic dialogue as movement, music, and visual effects became the avant-garde mode of theatrical expression. Consequently, the emphasis on the playwright as creator of a performance text shifted to the director and, occasionally, performers themselves. Throughout this period of technical experimentation, the performer’s position within a production was re-evaluated. New theories of the interrelationships between theatrical elements granted the performer either more or less autonomy. Where performers were allowed greater freedom of individual artistic development, improvisation became an important component in the creative process.

Denys Amiel declared in 1923: “We have progressed beyond the explanatory drama ... Let the characters speak for themselves, their inconsistencies and illogicalities express their essential humanity. We [authors] have no better claim than anyone else to be able to explain them” (Amiel in Innes, 1994:21). During this time of theatrical upheaval, realising the potential of theatrical elements (performers, lights, sounds, set) to fulfil an artistic concept required a co-ordinated approach. As mentioned above, the need for conceptual consistency, influenced by Wagner’s theories, saw the director take precedence in the production process during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This paralleled Appia and Craig who challenged existing production hierarchies, repositioning the “theatrical” as pre-eminent where theatre had previously been considered a literary form. Craig (1956:148) describes the “master craftsman” director, who interprets plays “by means of his actors, his scene-painters, and his other craftsmen”, becoming an artist once he has “mastered the uses of actions, words, line, colour and rhythm”. Meyerhold, in particular, advocated that the text of a play was completely at the director’s disposal to alter or adapt. Brockett and Findlay (1973:222) describe this as a “director’s theatre” where

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3 Fortier (2002:4) notes how recently this conflation of drama and theatre has continued with the domination of literary theory in the study of theatre. He questions the proliferation of language-centered approaches to the theatrical, asking: “Is theatre fully understandable when dominated by a linguistic model?”
the script is merely material in the director's creative act, "just as a painter might take his inspiration from a biblical story." In "The New Theatre Foreshadowed in Literature" (1908), Meyerhold believed the director's pre-eminence over the performance text included actors, arguing that "the theatre must employ every means to assist the actor to blend his soul with that of the playwright and reveal it through the soul of the director" (Meyerhold in Carlson, 1984:320). This view attracted criticism from those who felt it crushed the actor's creativity and hence the whole theatrical art (Carlson, 1984:320). In contrast, Copeau saw the director as translating the script into a kind of pure theatrical language that was to faithfully recreate "every nuance" onstage. For Copeau, acting was the primary voice of this language, so reduced the set to barest essentials to avoid detracting from the actor. Komissarzhevsky, believing the director served the author, criticised Meyerhold for what he perceived to be "fitting actors into scenery instead of fitting scenery to the actors" (259), and rejected Stanislavski for forging actors who merely imitated psychological states (Carlson, 1984). To Komissarzhevsky, the actor was to be granted as much freedom as possible with the director there to "assist him in finding the proper line of action", even working around "inadequate or incalcitrant actors" if necessary (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:259). The actor's function was "synthetic", unifying the other theatrical elements by first mastering "all the means of expression - music, poetry, dance, song, mime" (Carlson, 1984:325). Komissarzhevsky privileged the actor to a remarkable degree, but still maintained like Meyerhold and Copeau the necessity for differentiating between theatrical and dramatic text. "Theatricality" was a much-discussed controversy at the time, often focusing critical attention on the actor's function - "whether acting should be regarded essentially as a creative act or merely as a medium ... for the creative work of the dramatist" (368).
Russian theorist Bryusov, often credited with establishing a trend against Naturalism in Russian theatre, positioned the actor as the theatre's foremost creative artist in his article "The Unnecessary Truth" (1902). According to Bryusov, the script and the stage setting existed to provide the actor full creative freedom. Thus, the stage should only contain "that which is needed to help the spectator to picture as easily as possible in his imagination the scene demanded by the plot of the play" (Bryusov in Carlson, 1984:314). This is echoed in Appia's hierarchy of production means, where the physical presence of the actor is followed by "spatial arrangement, lighting, and painted flats" (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:202). He considered the body to be "the expression of space in time and time in space" where "movement brings about the meeting of space and time" (Appia in Brockett and Findlay, 1973:205). This extends the actor's corporeality to a level of meaning far beyond imitating everyday life, although Appia maintained the conventional notion of performer as intercessor between playwright and audience. In comparison, Georg Fuchs, director of the Munich Art Theatre, felt literature's domination of the theatre restricted the actor and provided space for a controlling director. Bemoaning the actor's reduction to "a walking illustration of a literary text", Fuchs thought the text should be constructed with "a delicate understanding of the possibilities of form which are inherent in the personalities of the performers" (Fuchs in Carlson, 1984:320).

In Craig, the performer was reduced to a component of the "graphic whole" (Berthold, 1972:596). Craig (1956:56-7) cited egotism and a refusal of the actor's limbs "to obey his mind" causing "accident upon accident" rather than a deliberately constructed artistic moment when denouncing the actor's potential for creating art. This criticism extended to Realism wherein the actor is reduced to "an imitator, not an artist" (63). Envisioning a performer who "[conveys] the spirit and essence of an idea to an audience", Craig theorised the Übermarionette – what Brockett and Findlay (1973:210) reduce to "a
superpuppet without any ego but capable of carrying out all demands.” Superficially, what Craig advocates are actors able to create “art” but within the limitations of the director’s vision. Craig’s conception, however, was more complex and tinged with mysticism. The state of the actor as Übermarionette may be likened to a trance-state, aiming “to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit” (Craig, 1956:85). It extends beyond the corporeal to the spiritual later clarified as “the actor plus fire, minus egoism: the fire of the gods and demons, without the smoke and steam of mortality” (ix-x).

Coupled with Craig’s interest in the “ancient joy in ceremonies” (94), the Übermarionette may arguably be interpreted as an early, albeit unconscious, analogy between the actor and the shaman. Claiming the Übermarionette “will not compete with life – rather will it go beyond it” suggests a transcendental state analogous to the later work of Grotowski. These radical ideas were mediated by a “less controversial alternative” – that actors be trained in an Oriental-style “so that conventionalized movement and gesture might express ideas, attitudes, and emotions” (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:210). Besides obvious comparisons with Artaud, the Symbolist Craig’s foregrounding of a spiritual dimension in performance was echoed in Expressionism.

As Expressionist figures were not naturalistic individuals located within “the context of a specific social environment, the mimetic approach to acting was inappropriate”, leading instead to a style characterised by “artificial, exaggerated and rhetorical” effects (Innes, 1994:43). Wellwarth (1969:257) traces the development of this “unrealistic ... puppet-like style of acting” to Wederkind, a forerunner of Expressionism. This style complemented the declamatory speech he developed to counter “the lackluster reproduction of everyday speech that the naturalists advocated.” Heavily influential, this larger-than-life style suited the grandiose themes distinguishing Expressionist drama. The Expressionists sought an experience of “lived truth” for performer and spectator, where the
“artist’s subjective vision” is transferred to spectators’ minds bypassing intellectual or socially-conditioned filters (Innes, 1994:41). Expressionism, declaring “an inability to hold the balance between the psychological interior and the social exterior” (Conrad, 1998:187), was to result in a performer’s complete embodiment of subjective emotion. The actor was to reveal “his innermost being directly in movement, gesture and facial expression” in searching “for absolute emotional truth ... which any element of pretence or illusion discredits” (Innes, 1994:43). Spontaneous experience is emphasised over the “prior selection of feelings to be exhibited, since these would have distorted the process of intellectual reflection” (43). This equates to a quasi-mystical “emotional transcendence”, accessed through trance-states, and later compared to shamanism (44). Fuelling this mysticism was a familiar avant-garde belief in a “collective soul”, requiring the actor to “divest himself of personality”, resulting in the development of techniques to “project archetypal emotions directly in physical terms through rhythms of movement, posture and symbolic gesture” (43). With the body becoming “the organ of the soul” (Kaiser in Innes, 1994:44), the actor is the conductor through which intense emotion is experienced with the spectator. Problematically, a situation is created where the actor “always plays himself, though trying to reach beneath the merely personal” while at the same time conforming to a “highly rhetorical style” (Innes, 1994:44-5). Significant, however, is the performer’s elevation from enactor to embodier, not merely representing but becoming the archetype through connection with the “collective soul”. Experience and emotional truth arise from within, demanding the performer give of the self situated beneath the socially-constructed personality. Each performer makes a considerable investment in each performance, and, in return, arguably engenders the possibility for a shift within the dynamics of theatrical production towards performer-oriented theatre.
This performer-oriented theatre was not to be found in Futurism, Dada, or Surrealism which placed “little emphasis on the individual performer” (Carlson, 2004:101). The avant-garde often conceived of the performer’s body as “raw material” to be reshaped within the framework of each movement’s aesthetic intentions (Fischer-Lichte, 1997:37). Marinetti, celebrating the machine, in turn reduced the performer to an automaton who delivered “a staccato of acoustically conditioned verbal montages, marionettelike movements intensified into acrobatics, and reduction of his own person to a smoothly working cogwheel of the ‘teatro sintetico’” (Berthold, 1972:605). The variety formats of Futurism and Dada emphasised experimentation with the boundaries of performance genres rather than drawing particular attention to the individual performer, especially as performances were often simultaneous. The Surrealists and the Bauhaus artists considered the individual performer as merely one performance element (Carlson, 2004). Even so, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, an influential Bauhaus figure, believed the individual performer dominated in Dada and Surrealism performance when they should be “on an equal footing with the other formative media” to focus on common human activities rather than individualistic concerns (Moholy-Nagy in Carlson, 1984:353). However, as Carlson records, performance was first seriously considered as an art form at the Bauhaus, resulting in a necessary examination of the performer’s role. Despite reducing them to elements in a “total theatre” work, Moholy-Nagy counted performers as above mere translator or director’s puppet. He proposed that, in opposition to the performer’s traditional function as “interpreter of a literarily conceived individual or type, in the new THEATRE OF TOTALITY he will use the spiritual and physical means at his disposal PRODUCTIVELY and from his own INITIATIVE submit to the over-all action process” (Moholy-Nagy in Carlson, 2004:100). Carlson notes Moholy-Nagy regarded this elevation of the performer from interpreter to creator as a key contribution to the experimental tradition. Inherent within this re-evaluation of the relationship between performer and
performance is the shift from product to process visible throughout avant-garde experimentation. For this change in emphasis to recognisably become devising, performers were to be given a much more substantial responsibility in performance construction. The incorporation of improvisation into the creation and performance of a production is arguably one of the most significant steps towards disrupting the traditional theatrical model and realising the avant-garde positioning of process over product.

Kokoshka, claiming that the script of *Murderer the Women’s Hope* was improvised in one evening, was “clearly deriving from the value put on emotional immediacy and the direct externalization of subconscious states by the expressionists” (Innes, 1994:53). With the avant-garde valuing spontaneity and immediacy, improvisation acquired currency in the development of productions and as performance training with resonances in recent devising. For example, Meyerhold and Copeau taught methods of improvisation famously derived from *commedia dell’arte*. Whilst including *commedia* techniques in his training as early as 1912 (Berthold, 1972), Meyerhold, heading a teaching studio from 1913-17, became increasingly more experimental in his geometry-inspired explorations of movement and the incorporation of devices from various folk traditions (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). Students improvised pantomimes to musical rhythms in what could be interpreted as an early example of devising, comparable to Oddey’s (1994) suggestion of using stimulus such as paintings, photographs, music, and film as inspiration for a devised work. Vakhtangov, head of Moscow Art Theatre’s First Studio from 1916, worked along similar lines to Meyerhold in seeking to reintroduce the concepts of *commedia dell’arte* so “actors have a creative function and are to ‘shape the plays’ as they go along” (Berthold, 1972:624). Berthold’s analysis of Vakhtangov’s work provides an early concept of performer as creator. This creative function is explicit in the training methods of Copeau. In his early teaching, Copeau concentrated on understanding the text and the techniques
actors could use to transfer what was found in that text to the stage (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). Later his focus shifted to the expressive qualities of movement, an emphasis "then new" (364). Before Copeau abandoned his school in 1929, he relocated it to the country and concentrated on improvisation. Using a method clearly influenced by commedia,

Much of the work centered upon a group of about ten type-characters that Copeau considered to epitomize the basic aspects of human behaviour. Students learned to make masks which captured the essence of these types and, wearing them, to eliminate all actions, gestures, and motivations foreign to them. In this way, they were able to purge extraneous elements from a characterization and to rely entirely on the most essential and expressive means. They also improvised scenes based on such archetypal situations as war, famine, and lust. As the culmination of their work, they evolved scenarios, which they performed at the village festivals of Burgundy. In this way, the students, known as Les Copiaux, learned discipline, effective techniques, integrity, and selfless devotion to ensemble playing. (Brockett and Findlay, 1973:365)

Heddon and Milling (2006) suggest Copeau's commedia experiments influenced later devising companies, and practitioners like Barrault, Lecoq and Mnouchkine. The methods of Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Copeau are not noteworthy merely as examples of improvisation but for their revival of commedia dell'arte and other folk theatre traditions. Coinciding with the incorporation of "popular" styles into theatre, the focus on appealing to a proletarian audience arguably obscures how such productions augured the potential of performers as primary performance creators. Not to diminish the control maintained by directors like Meyerhold, it is interesting to note the more egalitarian method of improvisation in the production of performance material which, in the case of Copeau, was performed in communal centres. Not only had the linear progression of production, from author to director to actor, been disrupted, theatre was returning to a commedia-like situation of direct contact with the people. While it would be four decades before the final disturbance to the production hierarchy was completed by democratic methods of creation,
the work of early experimental directors indicates that process was becoming a more visible element in performance production and presentation. As the mainstream theatre continued to stage plays within traditional modes of production, the avant-garde were stepping out from beyond the proscenium in a rethink of major theatrical relationships - text and production, director and text, director and performer, performer and production, performer and spectator. These same questionings were to arise with the emergence of modern "devised theatre" during the 1960s/70s. The historical avant-garde practices were, however, arguably filtered through the work of established devising influences, like Artaud, Barrault, and Cage. What makes the innovations of the historical avant-garde interesting to devisers, however, is that the techniques they pioneered - non-linear structural devices, multimedia etc. - have arguably become characteristic of group-devised productions. Devised theatre is thus positioned at the latter end of an experimental "tradition" rethinking theatre throughout the twentieth-century rather than as a phenomena arising merely from circumstances particular to the 1960s and 70s. As Oddey (1994:4) stresses, this does not mean devising is in contradistinction to text-based theatre, as we have seen some major experimentation occurred in Symbolist and Expressionist productions of pre-scripted work. What it does indicate is that when in "the late 1960s and early 1970s, numerous companies were evolving with the common desire of considering different ways of creating a theatrical performance", they were reviving a rich tradition of experimentation to address their perceptions of a mutinous socio-political climate. As Brockett and Findlay (1973) suggest that the turmoil of World War I and advances in scientific thought influenced artistic innovations, so Oddey (1994:5) contends that with "changes in attitudes towards sexuality, the existing political and social climate in Britain, and censorship of the stage abolished, it is hardly surprising that theatrical expression found new ways of reflecting political upheaval and discontent." This also occurred in America and Australia (Heddon and Milling, 2006). When retracing the development of
contemporary devising, commentators such as Shank (1982), Oddey (1994) and Lamden (2000) commence with the numerous social movements arising in the 1960s who turned to performer-orientated creation as a method of having their voices heard, and to increase their creative responsibility. My research suggests, however, that early groups who devised as an experiment with theatrical processes drew upon the avant-garde innovators through both research and a complex filtration of practical experimental ideas through heterogeneous sources. If so, the contemporary devisor has a wide range of practice as literature on which to draw, as well as a conceptual position for their work in a field of theatrical experimentation now over a century old. To me, this suggests that devising is an ideal critical tool for a twentieth-first century analysis of theatricality and the processes of theatrical creation. Indeed, such analyses are similar to the aesthetic and technical experiments of the historical avant-garde. Contemporary practice, however, also has the benefit of the past four decades as creative collaboration moved towards the current concept of devising. It is important to remain aware of the vast upheavals in politics, society, critical theory, and the arts which have penetrated contemporary thought and exert influence on any individual undertaking any theatrical production today. Companies who pioneered devising throughout the formation and rapid change of the past forty years are the direct predecessors of contemporary practice. It is in the development of these companies that a potential understanding of devising's position in contemporary theatrical practice may be grounded.

1.4 Artaud and Beyond: Devised Theatre to the Present Day

If The Living Theatre pioneered group devising, as Berthold (1972) suggests, then one of their primary influences in abandoning the playwright for group collaboration, The

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4 This, however, does not take into account early practitioners such as Moreno, the Living Newspaper groups, and Theatre Workshop whose methods contain traces of the development towards devised production, as well as theories of practice still beneficial to novice devisers today. For a fuller account, please see Appendix II.
Theater and Its Double, may arguably be read as an instigating text for devised theatre. Many other performers have drawn inspiration from Artaud. The immediate inheritor of his ideas was French director Barrault (Carlson, 1984). An important experimenter with his model of “pure theatre”, Barrault’s production of As I Lay Dying (1935) was based on the work of his actors and not a text. With minimal sets, costumes and props, suggestions of scene environments were through the performers’ vocal sounds and gestures (Innes, 1994). Artaud’s work has also influenced the diverse theories and practices of John Cage and the Black Mountain Group (Tytell, 1995), the Open Theatre, Squat Theatre (Shank, 1982), Genet, Robert Wilson, Peter Brook (Innes, 1994), Richard Foreman, and Carolee Schneeman (Goldberg, 2001), to name a few. Arguably, towards the end of the 1960s, “Artaud’s intensely physical and psychically-strenuous methodology prevailed” (Dasgupta, 1997:2). More recently, Oddey (1994:188) describes examining the work of Artaud with her “A” Level Theatre Studies students through “devising a piece of theatre that started with an exploration of objects.” The ideas and theories of Artaud have therefore had a significant impact on the development of performance-based theatre.

In 1907, Craig (1956:53) predicted that “we shall be able to create works of art in the Theatre without the use of the written play”, envisioning a director so masterful that “we shall no longer need the assistance of the playwright” (148). Like Craig, Artaud was a visionary who sought “a play made directly in terms of the stage” (Artaud, 1958:41). Unlike Craig, this was not in the pursuit of art but salvation (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). An active member of Surrealism from 1924 until Breton expelled him in 1926, and a great admirer of the theatrical achievements of the Weimar Republic (Innes, 1994), Artaud developed his theories as barriers between art and life were collapsing, and concepts of process superseded formulations of art as finished product. Carlson (1984:393) locates Artaud at the latter end of the historical avant-garde, arguing that in his work “we see the
metaphysical concerns of the symbolist and surrealist theorists taken to their most radical
extension.” Constructed as a series of manifestos first published in 1938, *The Theater and
Its Double* contributes to the significance of process in experimental theatrical thought by
declaring theatre a cure for “the ills of the time” (Fischer-Lichte, 1997:44). It is a purgation
or scourge, like the plague, that disrupts “important collectivities ... something both
victorious and vengeful” (Artaud, 1958:27). The main tenet of Artaud’s theories, and
inherent in his concept of “cruelty”, was the vision “of a theatre that would change man not
socially but psychologically, by setting free the dark, latent forces festering in the
individual soul” (Carlson, 1984:392). Asserting that human “unconscious is the same
everywhere” (Artaud, 1935:131-2), these “forces” could be reached through a direct, active
“theatrical language”, both visual and auditory, relying on the communicative potentialities
of objects, movement, gestures, sounds, lights and other components of the mise-en-scène
(Artaud, 1958). To become meaningful “signs” in “a kind of alphabet” comprising this
language, “the theatre must organize ... into veritable hieroglyphs” its various components
to make use of “their symbolism and interconnections” (90). This was to be the end of the
imitative on stage – or what Derrida (1978) calls the “closure of representation” – by
expelling written text, “whose nature is itself necessarily representative (235), from the
theatrical process and replacing it with “the language of life itself” (240). Artaud’s ideas
were influenced by a performance of Balinese theatre wherein he “believed he had
discovered essential archetypes” (Fischer-Lichte, 1997:136), and this became a model for
his theory of gestural hieroglyphs. Artaud subsequently denied the relevance of a
performer’s individuality as the “systematic depersonalization” of the Balinese performers
was key to a performance where “everything produces significance” (Artaud, 1958:58).
The performer’s body was to be remade as material for “movements and gestures ... so
structured ... that the immediate perception of them was able to influence the subconscious
directly” (Fischer-Lichte, 1997:54). The penetrative power of this theatrical language, in
conjunction with technical effects, was to negate the barrier of discursive thought against the inner spirit’s restoration (Carlson, 1984). In the Theatre of Cruelty, performances weren’t simply to be read or decoded, but experienced directly. The spectator would not “leave the theatre intact, but exhausted, involved, perhaps transformed” (Artaud in Brockett and Findlay, 1973). In Artaud’s conception, theatre was akin to spiritual or mystical practice where the individual is “put in a state of deepened and keener perception, and this is the very object of the magic and rites of which the theater is only a reflection” (Artaud, 1958:91).

“The theatre of cruelty is not a representation. It is life itself” (Derrida, 1978:234). In this distinction lies the importance for later admirers of Artaud. In destabilising boundaries between life and representation, the stage is no longer the repetition or representation of “a present that would exist elsewhere and prior to it” (237), but a “closed space … a space produced from within itself and no longer organized from the vantage of an other absent site” (238). Derrida terms this type of representation on the Artaudian stage as “autopresentation”. Theatrical performance, then, is not a reconstruction but a construction incompatible with repetition. It is a process whereby “theater must make itself the equal of life – not an individual life … but the sort of liberated life which sweeps away human individuality and in which man is only a reflection” (Artaud, 1958:116). This concept is central to “Artaud’s followers” who claim “true art can only exist as ‘process’ (inseparable from the continually changing experience of life), and [reject] the notion of art as ‘product’ (an independent artifact)” (Innes, 1994:62). However, it was not until the 1960s that Artaud’s ideas were to have their biggest impact. In the 1930s and 1940s, France was dominated by “the text-oriented critical tradition of Copeau and Jouvet” (Carlson, 1984:396), and by the time his popularity grew there in the 1960s, Artaud was known in America. Carlson (2004:141) identifies early 1970s performance, such as body
art, as coming closest to addressing Artaud’s concerns, although it tended to dispense with “Artaud’s interest in non-verbal spectacle, seeking the ‘essence’ of performance in the operations of the body in space.” There was a shift to a phenomenological orientation in performance, as seen in the work of Richard Foreman, or Marranca’s Theatre of Image. Earlier, however, The Living Theatre adopted Artaud as one influence in their reconsideration of theatrical creation, and the restoration of viscerality to theatre in a deliberate confusion between art and life.

Julian Beck and Judith Malina first read *The Theatre and Its Double* in 1958 (Shank, 1982). They thought Artaud “the ultimate revolutionary” (Carlson, 1984:420) who “sought to activate the latent anarchy in all people, to move them to demonstrate with extreme gestures” (Tytell, 1995:149). Artaud’s claim that the literary theatre, or theatre of “masterpieces”, is “fixed in forms that no longer respond to the needs of the time” (Artaud, 1958:75) was to have a tangible impact on The Living Theatre’s working methods. In “The Theater of Cruelty (First Manifesto)”, Artaud declared that, to circumvent all the imitative, closed and subjective qualities of pre-authored text, “We shall not act a written play, but we shall make attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts or known works” (98). With *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces* (1964), “an experiment in what Judith called nonfictional acting ... actors play[ing] themselves, not characters in roles” (Tytell, 1995:200), The Living Theatre abandoned pre-written text and created a performance through group collaboration. This “production did not attempt to project a place other than the actual theatre or performance space nor a time other than the actual time of the performance” (Shank, 1982:14), but sought a direct experience for the audience inspired by the mysteries at Eleusis. *Mysteries* was to be followed by other collaboratively-devised productions, including *Frankenstein* (1965) and *Paradise Now* (1968) “which would become the defining experience of the Living Theatre” (Tytell, 1995:225). Described as “primarily a
series of provocations to revolution and anarchy” (Brocket and Findlay, 1973:743), Paradise Now reunited performers and spectators through confrontation, simulated sexual activity, and a concluding street procession. In its “published introduction Paradise Now is described as a spiritual and political voyage for the actors and spectators” (Shank, 1982:20), emphasising theatre as lived experience. Importantly, the Becks stressed that their collaborative methods were “inseparable from their anarchist and pacifist orientation, and that it was the direct result of the group’s community style of living” (Berthold, 1972:656). Lifestyle and theatre were one in The Living Theatre with each embodying ideals of revolution and raising awareness of the need for social and political change.

Political hyperawareness is a defining feature of the 1960s. Both Shank (1982) and Oddey (1994) relate the emergence of collaboratively-devised theatre at this time to the wider political, social, and cultural upheavals occurring in America and Britain. American groups in particular were at the forefront of this development. Bradby and McCormick (1978:28) observe that while Russia once influenced experimental theatre, “the relationship has been reversed and developments in America, especially in political and community theatre, have had a strong influence on European groups.” Shank (1982) equates alternative theatre with the counterculture movement as both sought to disrupt the cultural norms of middle class society. A similar situation occurred in Britain where “alternative theatre ultimately hoped, in concert with other oppositional institutions and formations, to re-fashion society” (Kershaw, 1992:136). Kershaw argues any consideration of 1960s/70s alternative theatre practices must acknowledge their position within a wider project of cultural disruption. Thus, Kershaw takes a widespread cultural and social imperative as “the leading edge of the [alternative theatre] movement” before any production innovations, although he describes this movement as “extensive because it aimed to alter radically the whole structure of British theatre.” Heddon and Milling (2006)
detail extensively the rise of contemporary devised theatre as beginning with groups and productions with a social or political focus. Theatre created collaboratively satisfied many ideologies of the anti-Establishment, including a desire for more communal, democratic working methods; a distrust of words and conventional modes of representation; and crossovers within the arts, similar to the early twentieth-century, where freedom was sought from specialization and categorization. Like examinations of the historical avant-garde, an overview of the culturally fertile 1960s to the present day is necessarily selective and superficial given the vast amount of experimental activity. Also important to bear in mind are the wide range of critical approaches influencing this activity, most notably semiotic theory, phenomenological theory, theories of subjectivity, feminist and gender theory, plus the "isms" including post-structuralism, deconstructivism, postmodernism and post-colonialism. All of these have been used to examine and evaluate contemporary devised theatre. However, what I wish to establish here is that remote or disparate performance practices inform and influence productions across time and space, whether through wider dissemination or direct inspiration. This awareness then makes it possible to discern a heritage for contemporary devised theatre still alive in its methods and processes.

In the 1960s/70s counterculture, focus shifted to the group over the individual (Shank, 1972). Institutional theatre had long maintained a competitive and specialised environment which reflected the "fragmentation of established society" and the hierarchical structures of authority dominating an individual's social and political experiences. In opposition to normative practices, the alternative movements and their theatre sought a unity emphasising communal living and the development of collective artistic working methods. Alternative theatre companies often provided members with "family, work, education, and recreation" (2). The destruction of production hierarchies in artistic creation became the theatrical correlation to the new communal lifestyle.
Challenging “the prevailing ideology of one person’s text under another person’s direction” (Oddey, 1994:4), collective creation often dispensed with the authority of the director and playwright altogether. Oddey describes how British theatre after World War II was predominantly text-led so “the dominant tradition of theatre and criticism has always been about the relationship of writing and performance.” Groups devising their own performances rejected the pre-eminence of the text, challenging the stability of the written word as authoritative, representational and authentic.

Shank (1982) gives three reasons for this distrust of text. First was an awareness of how politicians and advertisers manipulate words for their own ends. Second was the inadequacy of words to express certain experiential concepts. Finally, the national languages of different countries were seen as perpetuating nationalism which the alternative culture sought to subvert. Words were perceived simultaneously as barriers, dangerously malleable and ambiguous. While this distrust of words may appear comparable to the postmodern “recognition that ‘reality’ is itself a construction, a representation” (Counsell, 1996:207), these early devisers believed they could incite real social change, whereas postmodernism harbours “a generalised pessimism about the possibility of social change and revolution” (Fortier, 2002:178). Shank (1982:1) lists the many social movements striving for social revolution in the 1960s/70s: “civil rights, free speech, hippie, anti-nuclear, anti-Vietnam War, ecology, feminist, and gay.” Added to these were the influential reformist views of theorists such as Marcuse, Laing and Brown who questioned societal structures and the perception of reality whilst opposing, particularly in the case of Brown, the value of tradition and rationality (Brockett and Findlay, 1973). Given the similarity of these concerns with those of the historical avant-garde, it is not surprising that ostensibly avant-garde theatrical practices re-emerged. The heightened visuality of the early twentieth-century experimental theatre reappeared as
focus shifted from written and spoken text to the body of the performer, physical setting, and visual effects.

Another influence for this shift also invites comparisons with the historical avant-garde as visual artists in the 1960s turned to performance. This is well documented in Heddon and Milling (2006), as well as in Kostelanetz (1970) whose interviews with such artists details the attraction of performance over the more static media of painting or sculpture, and the influence of dance, music and film. Goldberg (2001:152) suggests that this switch to performance in the late 1960s by visual artists was a reaction against art’s accepted meanings and functions, the commercialization of the art object, plus a “rejection of traditional materials of canvas, brush or chisel, with performers turning to their own bodies as art material.” With the advent of conceptual art privileging experience over representation, the artist’s body became a site of direct expression and performance “an ideal means to materialize art concepts” (153). Resulting from this cross-fertilization of artistic ideas were several performance types: Happenings, body art, persona and autobiographical performance (Carlson, 2004). Kostelanetz termed these “The Theatre of Mixed Means” in 1968, while in 1977 Marranca coined “Theatre of Images” for the same. Appearing around 1970 was the term “performance art” to describe “the ephemeral, time-based, and process-oriented work of conceptual ... and feminist artists”, and which has retrospectively been applied to the diverse examples of performance falling outside conventional definitions of theatre (Brentano in Schechner, 2002:137). Of particular interest is the emphasis on process as evidenced in the term “Happening”, first introduced by artist Kaprow, describing works dispensing “with the idea of theatre as a finished product in actions and performances which were not intended to be interpreted but only experienced” (Fischer-Lichte, 1997:92). Kostelanetz (1970:34-6) identifies this with the “contemporary notion which holds that art and life ... are continuous ... so the new theatre,
among its more radical implications, would remove art from its perch above experience – where it is held to be greater than experience – because it distinctly enhances it.” Common elements in Happenings included the performance of actions or tasks and the use of non-musical sound from real objects, all with “an apparent lack of meaning” (Goldberg, 2001:130). Attention was drawn to the processes of artistic construction by emphasising “the purely performative, removed from the referential” of fictional characters or settings (Carlson, 2004:105). Heddon and Milling (2006) chart how such non-dramatic art performances influenced a branch of devised visual theatre including well-known UK companies such as The People Show, Station House Opera, Welfare State International and IOU.

Aside from the diversities of performance art, non-text-based theatre arising from the 1960s can be divided into two broad categories. The first encompasses the work of theatrical auteurs such as Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, or Reza Abdoh. The second covers group devised theatre where the production is collaboratively created either with or without a director. Since the 1960s, group devised theatre has reflected many concerns and positions, all related to the time and context in which they arose, allowing the identification of dominant preoccupations within devised theatre. Shank (1982) identifies activism, environmental theatre, new formalism, and the self as content to be the major trends in American devising in the 1960s/70s. Recently, “there has been a move away from devising issue-based or politically oriented work as in the 1970s, to theatre that is more visually, physically or performance-based” (Oddey, 1994:19). While Heddon and Milling (2006) suggest that politics remains a concern, contemporary devisers employ a subtler and more sophisticated theatrical language than, say, the confrontational Living Theatre. Devising today is often represented by “physical theatre” that “melds dance, mime, visual arts,

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5 For a brief examination of theatrical auteurism and devising processes, please see Appendix II.
circus and drama together to generate what has become stylistically one of the most recognisable forms of contemporary devised work" (157). In Australia, “physical theatre ... has become one of [the] most significant sectors of performance work over the last twenty years” (163).

1.5 Australian Devising Practices

Similar to the US and Britain, the late 1960s in Australia were a time of social and cultural readjustment as major international events such as the Vietnam War and “the emergence of self-identified marginalised ‘groups’” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:17) inspired the search for new ideals in the formation and maintenance of “community”.

During this time Australia achieved a number of important social milestones. For example, “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” (19). Such changes reflected a growing move towards inclusion and acceptance, but also provided the opportunity for those previously denied access to mainstream cultural expression to explore new methods of creating and sharing their art with an audience.

Heddon and Milling argue that 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” (17). In Australia, the “unseen and unspoken” included substantial communities of non-Anglo migrants whose wellspring of stories and
experiences, dramatized and adapted in collaboration with alternative theatre artists, were to have a substantial impact on the development of community theatre.

In addition to the political changes reconfiguring Australian society, the theatre artists who pioneered devising in Australia in the late 1960s/early 1970s were inspired by international and local theatrical influences. For example, the Australian Performing Group (APG), a Melbourne theatre collective originally known as La Mama Café, “rose out of a primordial soup of the student culture of the 60s: US West Coast radicalism, Greenwich Village counterculture and incipient feminism. It was heavily influenced by British socialist and political theatre and the history of European intellectualism and experiments with form (a sort of Artaud in the Antipodes)” (Richards, 1992:33). In their weekly workshops, the actors of the APG would improvise together and try “to dissect ensemble playing and the nature of performance ... [using] a mixture of the second-hand and the makeshift: a variety of ensemble exercises drawn from many sources but adapted to [their] own situation and the beginnings of [their] own performing vocabulary” (Blundell in Heddon and Milling, 2006:46). Influencing these workshops were “the theatresports of Viola Spolin and the gurus of TDR” (Robertson in Heddon and Milling, 2006:46). Fotheringham (1992:18) corroborates that the US journal The Drama Review was read widely amongst Australian alternative theatre artists, offering “insights into new experimental, political and community-based theatre work which was imitated in the general push towards innovation in style, subject matter and performance venues.” The APG’s first production, Marvellous Melbourne, was a collectively-devised piece that blended “melodrama and vaudeville with contemporary political and social satire, together with songs and a simple, physical style of acting born out of the agit-prop street theatre” (Milne, 2004:129). Agit-prop styles similarly influenced The Popular Theatre Troupe (PTT), a Brisbane-based touring company formed in 1974. The PTT “garnered a major
reputation for its socially committed material – more than 30 issue-orientated performance pieces, generally less than an hour in length” (Riley, D. 1996). These pieces were devised by such writer-directors as Richard Fotheringham and the UK devising pioneer Albert Hunt, “often working with the actors in improvisational workshops-rehearsals” (Milne, 2004:225). Although the APG and the PTT eventually disbanded (in 1981 and 1983 respectively), members from both groups moved on to develop new companies, some of which are still in existence today. For example, Soapbox Circus, a sub-group of the APG, was a precursor to the internationally renowned Circus Oz (Milne, 2004: 133). Meanwhile, several members of the PTT went to “work with and have significant influence on” the Street Arts Community Theatre in Brisbane which, like the offshoots of the APG, is “a long way from the agit-prop tradition” (Riley, D. 1996). Arguably, Circus Oz and the Street Arts Community Theatre represent the two most prominent classifications of contemporary Australian devising practice. The first classification is “physical theatre”, an oft-used term usually encompassing works that “in varying measure [meld] dance, mime, visual arts, circus and drama together” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:157). The second classification is “community theatre” which Fotheringham (1992:11) describes as “the successor to the alternative theatre movement of the 1970s.” He outlines the specific usage of the term “community theatre”:

... “the community” is a particular sub-group of people who are assumed to have interests in common. The community is defined by geography ... by work experiences ... by institutionalisation ... or by organisation. This community approaches, or is approached by, a group of professional theatre workers. Together the community and the artists devise a performance project with the intention, not only of entertaining, but of saying something about the community’s life experiences, memories of the past, and hopes and fears for the future. (Fotheringham, 1992:20)

Like any definition of devised work, “community theatre” and “physical theatre” are fluid classifications which can both overlap and expand to encompass sub-genres.
Although it is often problematic to rely on broad definitions when discussing the diversity of theatrical practices that may be called "devising", in an overview of contemporary Australian performance, physical theatre and community theatre represent two strong, highly visible traditions of devising that continue to influence the position of theatre in Australian society.

*Contemporary Australian Devising: Physical Theatre and Community Theatre*

Julian Meyrick (2005:50) argues:

The last twenty years, which have been a period of stupendous underachievement for verbal drama, have been lively and challenging for companies who devise work according to different parameters. The living edge of performance practice has for some time been with cross-art form, physical, visually-based or new circus theatre: Circus Oz, Not Yet Its Difficult, Legs on the Wall, Arena Theatre, Rock and Roll Circus, Back to Back Theatre, Strange Fruit, Urban Theatre Projects, the Snuff Puppets.

He suggests the success of these companies, particularly internationally, relates to the characteristics of producing physical theatre: “no language barrier, low costs, niche-marketing appeal” (50). In their examination of physical theatre in Australia, Heddon and Milling (2006:163) concur with Meyrick, adding “Australia has a long history of spectacular popular theatre, most obviously in traditional touring circus, which celebrated 150 years in 1997.” Heddon and Milling draw from Meyrick to describe how following the rise of the “New Wave” of Australian theatre in the 1970s, “Australian” was no longer a simple marker of origin but “a positive category of order” (Meyrick in Heddon and Milling, 2006: 163). “This valorisation of a distinctively ‘Australian’ culture also drew on the popular and the body-based as part of a resistance to an imperial definition of Australia as a colony” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:163). They suggest that the development of
Australian physical theatre was, to some extent, a combination of this new sense of “Australianness” with “a rejection of the British tradition, particularly that tradition as characterised by classical, language-based performance” (165). In fact, physical theatre has become such a strong form within Australian performance culture that “performers from Australian groups using circus skills … have influenced comparable groups in England” (Tait, 1998:218).

Arguably, one of the reasons why physical theatre has found favour amongst Australian alternative theatre practitioners is due to its potentiality for enacting subversive and transgressive political acts. Tait (1998:216) explains that the “recent expansion of acrobatic display, clowning and aerial routines into imaginative theatrical contexts derives from the adaptation of circus skills to Australian political theatre in the mid-1970s.” This “ad hoc political circus” developed from street theatre performed at political rallies, and from the influence of groups such as the APG who sought a wider, popular audience for political messages. As Tait continues, contemporary physical theatre continues to carry a strong political element. In their principles and performance, Circus Oz retains the egalitarian, politically resistant stance with which the company was founded in late 1977. Those principles are: “collective ownership and creation, gender equity, a uniquely Australian signature and team-work” (Circus Oz website, accessed 04/01/07). On their website, Circus Oz outline their commitment to “Social Justice” through a variety of benefits and programs, including a long-standing association with refugees and asylum seekers, stating “We believe in tolerance, diversity and human kindness.” In Circus Oz performances, their politically resistant intent is made clear. For example, the lyrics of “Big Song” include the verse: “I’ll take the crumbles out of cookies, / put the treats into ticks. / Hell I’ll even go to Cuba and free David Hicks. / I’ll get blood from a stone, / ‘n’ truth out of Bush. / War out of Iraq. / Give Howard the push” (Circus Oz, accessed
04/01/07). Tait suggests that Circus Oz “seem emblematic of a unique Australian brand of comic larrikinism with an eclectic combination of popular entertainment styles” with all performers requiring, besides circus skills, the ability to sing, dance and play an instrument. As Meyrick (2005) indicates, such popular performance styles cross borders as well as appeal to a wider audience than perhaps more staid, traditional styles of verbal theatre. As evidence of their success, “Circus Oz has performed in 26 different countries, across five continents to over two million people” (Circus Oz, accessed 04/01/07).

The empowering nature of developing circus skills and strengthening the body saw physical theatre/circus-fusion styles become popular with feminist performance groups. Tait (1998:217) cites the Melbourne-based Women’s Circus (founded 1991) and the Brisbane-based Vulcana Women’s Circus (founded 1994) as two recent examples of community-based women’s circus which “seek to physically empower women through the mastery of physical skills and acts of strength.” Like Circus Oz, both the Women’s Circus and Vulcana Women’s Circus have a strong community focus deriving from their political intentions. The Women’s Circus provides training in circus and physical theatre open to all women, although priority is given to survivors of sexual assault, women over 40 and women from non-English speaking backgrounds. The goals of the Women’s Circus include to “learn to work co-operatively”, to “challenge gender stereotypes” and to “encourage respect for your body” (Women’s Circus website, accessed 09/01/07). The workshop program “is ... the site for creative developments that inform our annual public performance”, with the class performing in the end-of-year show (Women’s Circus website, accessed 09/01/07). The direction and processes of the Vulcana Women’s Circus evolved “from the recognition that a large number of women and young people have limited access to cultural expression or the means to achieve it” (Vulcana Women’s Circus website, accessed 09/01/07). Like the Women’s Circus, the productions of Vulcana
Women's Circus have included participants from the community working with professional artistic teams. In their mission statement, it is clear that devising and developing performance skills are tools for outcomes wider than theatrical production. For example, they seek to "develop community identity" and create a "non-competitive environment for women and young people to explore their physical potential" (Vulcana Women's Circus website, accessed 09/01/07). These two companies have much in common with community theatre, as discussed below, in that community training and participation is a core feature of their devising process. Their political and social positions are enacted through direct social intervention. Where early political theatre utilised circus performance styles to engage a wider audience, contemporary political theatre groups engage that audience as potential performers. The skills participants acquire through such training programs empower them with a sense of capability and physical strength which may translate into their everyday lives.

The evolution of Australian circus into a sophisticated theatrical medium is arguably best exemplified in the work of Legs on the Wall. "The work that Legs on the Wall does is still clearly linked to circus in its technical feats and its devising process, but the company has evolved a broader range of narrative, emotional, imagistic and elegiac qualities that draw on dance and theatre aesthetics" (Heddon and Milling, 2006:168-9). They describe themselves as producing "startling, sensuous and soul-stirring physical performances – quintessentially Australian theatre" (Legs on the Wall website, accessed 09/01/07), clearly locating themselves within the tradition of physical theatre as a particularly Australian cultural form. Legs on the Wall was founded in 1984 by a group of students "interested in street theatre and circus as a form for dealing with social issues. And they really liked Circus Oz but felt it could go further in terms of theatre, it could do something that really does deal with social issues" (Batton in Heddon and Milling,
Although Heddon and Milling argue that the political activism of Legs on the Wall productions has lessened since its formation in 1984, their work still contains “social and political commentary” (166) but with a deeper complexity enhanced by striking imagery. One early Legs on the Wall production, Bruce cuts off his hand, used popular clowning styles “to explore the politics of workplace accidents, playing in the industrial Newcastle area” (165). In contrast, later work All of Me was built around “relationships which moved from normal to abnormal psychology” (168), researched from personal stories and experiences of the performers, but the tasks explored by the performers were “to think of new and bizarre ways of travelling over the top of one another, we threw and jumped onto each other a lot from very high places” (Keogh in Heddon and Milling, 2006:168). Heddon and Milling describe this show as a turning point for Legs on the Wall, moving from circus to a more complex physical theatre aesthetic that “both is and is not dance, circus or theatre” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:169). Homeland (first performed 1998) and On the Case (2006) are more recent Legs on the Wall productions that further extend aerial acrobatics beyond the realm of circus. This theatricalization of circus skills is similar to the work of director Gail Kelly who specialises in physical theatre. Instead of simply reproducing circus techniques, Kelly “develops a postmodern physical theatre which parodies the actions of circus bodies in its form, while retaining recognisable elements from circus such as its continuous sound track, its clowning intention and the execution of aerial and acrobatic tricks ... If the routines come from circus, the artistic concepts draw on cultural mediums from the visual arts to cinema, and Kelly’s work is informed by feminist and performance theory” (Tait, 1998:220-21).

Like the Women’s Circus and Vulcana Women’s Circus, Legs on the Wall offer training programmes catering for school groups, beginners and physical theatre professionals. Engaging community members through participation has been a strong
feature of Australian alternative theatre practice since the 1980s. While physical theatre performances are notable for their potential to resonate with culturally diverse audiences due to the perceived reduction of language barriers, community theatre often utilises the unique languages or experiences of specific community groups. In outlining the purpose of his volume *Community Theatre in Australia*, Fotheringham (1992:27) echoes one purpose of community theatre itself: "... to challenge the mainstream companies to answer the charge that they have not reflected in their work the diversity of Australian people and their many interests but have instead capitulated to the preferences of an ageing and conservative section of the community; and that they have discouraged originality by applying the working relationships of class society to the creative process." Devising techniques – often integral in the development of community theatre projects – are thus about more than aesthetic experimentation. This does not mean, however, that aesthetic experimentation is unimportant when tracing the development of community theatre over the past twenty years. For example, van Erven (2001:210) notes: "Sidetrack [Performance Group] has come to avant-garde theatre from a more explicitly political popular theatre background in the 1980s (Watt 1992:11-12; Burvill, 1986, 1998)." Although while it "might appear that Sidetrack's trajectory from 'community theatre' through the 1980s to 'performance' in the 1990s exemplifies a paradigm movement from a modernist to a postmodernist aesthetic ... suggesting a total break with the earlier work would sell short the company's history and obscure the continuities which are also crucial" (Burvill, 1998:182). Similarly, the work of Urban Theatre Projects, formerly Death Defying Theatre, has developed into a form of community theatre that combines community participation with sophisticated performance techniques:

[UTP] can ... be seen as an inheritor of the project of Death Defying Theatre and of the community theatre movement of the 1980s. The company's current theoretical and aesthetic strategies, however, differ for the most part from the latter's. The current work of UTP can usefully be construed as
"post-contemporary" community theatre, striving to find ways to work with community "post" the high moment of experimental postmodern performance work usually referred to in Sydney as "contemporary performance." (Burvill, 2000:130)

Such contemporary performance techniques include "strategies to provoke non-passivity in the audience", the "inscription of multiple perspectives in the work", "no central narrative ...or continuing characters ... but multiple and even simultaneous actions [that] can occur in different parts of the performance site" (Burvill, 2000:130). However, one important difference between the working methods Sidetrack and UTP reflects a division within the definition of community theatre as a whole. As Heddon and Milling (2006) indicate, community theatre can take two forms: devising for specific communities and devising with those communities. Heddon and Milling locate Sidetrack in the first category. UTP, on the other hand, regularly utilise members of the diverse communities comprising Western Sydney in the development and performance of their works. As Australian community theatre is such a vast, polymorphous topic, I will briefly examine here the work of two companies: The Murray River Performing Group (known as HotHouse Theatre since 1996) and UTP.

The Murray River Performing Group was established in 1979 "by a group of VCA graduates ... who were looking for a region that would benefit from the establishment of a community theatre company" (HotHouse Theatre website, accessed 16/01/07). In 1985, the "heart" of the MRPG was The Performing Ensemble, comprising "a full-time ensemble of five actors, a director, a production manager, a technical person and a musician/composer" (Paxinos and Thomson, 1992:151). The Group devised shows based on local research and input from the communities of the Albury-Wodonga area and performed them, as professionals, in community venues. Such shows include Roadhouse Blues, "concerning the dilemma of young people in small rural communities", The Galah Bar, "contemporary
revue and comedy in a stand-up comedy venue”, and Luck of the Draw which concerned “the contemporary effects of the Vietnam war on veterans, Vietnamese migrants and the public at large” (151). MRPG members John Paxinos and Phil Thomson remark that “all of these projects have been developed in conjunction with our community and deal with specific issues” (151). The MRPG, and later as the HotHouse Theatre, is an example of a highly successful community theatre company that devised productions for its regional audiences. “From the beginning it was an energetic and creative company that was concerned with the process whereby artists ... could contribute meaningfully towards describing and defining our culture ... Their mission was to serve as many people as possible, finding ways of engaging the diverse communities that comprised Albury Wodonga” (HotHouse Theatre website, accessed 16/01/07). For sixteen years the MRPG succeeded in their mission “with a prodigious output spawning three semi autonomous theatrical units, including the Flying Fruit Fly Circus” (McCowan, 2004:2). By 1996, however, the company recognised that times had changed. The HotHouse Theatre website lists an increased theatrical sophistication amongst the local audiences, an increase in tertiary institutions, a new freeway to Melbourne, accessibility to more professional shows as a result of the touring company Playing Australia, and more TV stations as some of the changes that lead to a restructuring of the company. “The result was HotHouse Theatre – a company driven by the unique artistic leadership of a 12 member Artistic Directorate, that embraced the notion of nurturing new works in a hothouse environment and that was determined to bring the regional voice to the metropolitan stage” (HotHouse Theatre website, accessed 16/01/07). As HotHouse, their mission is “to develop and produce theatre that is valued both here and in the wider community” (HotHouse Theatre website, accessed 16/01/07).
In contrast, the work of Urban Theatre Projects frequently “turns to the youth and communities of Western Sydney to make new works emphasising the performance of subculture, class marginality, and ‘multicultural’ identity” (Burvill, 2000:127). First established as Death Defying Theatre in 1981, the company was, like the MRPG, conceived by tertiary graduates – in this instance, from the University of NSW. Van Erven (2001:211-12) argues that “DDT’s approach was obviously inspired by the popular theatre tradition that had developed in Europe and North America in the 1970s ... Stylistically, it structured its collectively devised performances into small self-contained, energetically performed, and visually striking units that were underscored by live music.” At this early stage, while DDT offered free community theatre workshops, community participation in their productions was limited to informal discussions following each show. By the end of the 1980s however, founding member Paul Brown began to investigate ways of changing from “a performer-oriented company catering to community audiences to a production house for participatory community theatre projects created and performed by amateurs under the guidance of professional artists (Watt 1992:10)” (van Erven, 2001:212). The company was relocated from Bondi to Auburn and has since “been located in various place in Western Sydney since the mid-1980s” (Burvill, 2000:127). In working with the various communities of the western suburbs, UTP have raised questions about the nature of community itself, how an individual identifies with a community and how that identification may be expressed. In other words, UTP is a community theatre company that not only addresses the issues of the communities which it serves, but simultaneously reflects on contemporary notions of “community” and how performance may even “enact” community. For example, Maxwell (2006:4) describes how “Eye of the Law (1994) recognised communities of affiliation – specifically that set of practices and ideas clustered around ‘hip hop’ (graffiti, break-dancing, rapping) – rather than those of ethnicity.” Hip Hopera (1995) further developed this, “tapping into the complex ways in which young
people from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds ... were turning to mediatised resources of transnational cultural flows, rather than monocultural traditions” (4). Burvill (2000:129) argues that “the group's working methods do not assume that there exists a pre-established community to 'be voiced' ... not only do they remain aware that stories, performances, expressive activities will be 'found' in any area: they also recognise that the character of their own activity calls certain modes of voicing into being, that by having certain kinds of questions and performance forms in mind, they summon particular types of stories and self-presentation into being.” In the work of the UTP, contemporary community theatre practice is revealed as potentially utilizing the myriad performance practices comprising the enactment of cultural (or subcultural) identity already present within the community. Not only are new audiences found for these forms of expression, these audiences are enlightened as to the cultural richness of the western suburbs, positively counteracting the “biased way the media resort to western Sydney as the prime example of Australia's immigration-related urban problems” (van Erven, 2001:208).

This is a very select overview of devising practice in Australia and includes many omissions, including: “WEST Theatre Company (Melbourne) ... Doppio Teatro, now Parallelo (Adelaide), Zeal Theatre (Newcastle), Back to Back Theatre (Geelong), Street Arts Theatre (Melbourne), Junction (Torrensville) and Melbourne Workers' Theatre” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:135), The Sydney Front, Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre, and Stalker Theatre. In addition, I have only grazed the surface of the companies discussed above. However, what emerges from this brief examination is the importance of notions of “community” in Australian devising practice, whether it be explicitly indicated in categories such as “community theatre”, or present in the practice of physical theatre companies who offer workshops and the opportunity to participate in productions to non-theatre professionals. Australian devising has also been a form for expressing resistant
political views and counteracting mainstream representations of Australian society. In these regards, devising in Australia has similar aesthetic motivations underpinning its development from 1960s radicalism through to more contemporary, "postmodern" examinations of the interplay between community, society and culture.

Locating one's own devising work within current theatre practice and scholarship requires an understanding of what devising has meant to practitioners over the past fifty years. Heddon and Milling argue the purpose of their critical history of devising is "to enable the makers of devised theatre to locate their own practice but also understand the relationship of this to the history of devising. Our aim has been to contribute towards informed devising practices, entreating practitioners ... to make works for and of their times and places" (231). Here, I have focused on past devising practice as the 1960s ideals of community and artistic democracy influenced my approach to devising. Of particular interest to my research is the concept of "process". To summarise, contemporary devising has been informed and influenced by a number of twentieth-century performance strands privileging process over product. As new methods of perception questioned the nature of representation and the dominance of text in the theatre, innovative technical and production techniques sought to restore the physicality and visuality to theatrical performance. The role of performer has been a shifting element in this transition. From scenic element to contributor then to co-creator in devising, the emphasis shifted from an author- or director-led hierarchy to close collaboration in the formation and maintenance of a more democratically organised group. The processes involved in forming, developing and maintaining the group are thus an important consideration. While a conventional play pre-exists in the template of a script, the devised production is initially located within its devisers. When studying collective devising processes the group should arguably be the initial site of investigation. This knowledge may later inform an examination of the devised
work itself, suggesting devised performances wear their unique processes structurally, genetically, negating the separation of “devising process” from “devised product”.