2. PRE-DEVISING: 
Group Formation, Development and Games

Kaufman of Tectonic Theater Project believes the copulation of form and content births innovative theatrical works (Brown, 2005). Similarly, I believe the union of theory and practice offers a deeper understanding of devised theatre. Handbooks such as Oddey’s (1994), Lamden’s (2000), Kerrigan’s (2001), Callery’s (2001), and Devised and Collaborative Theatre (Bicât and Baldwin [eds.], 2002) detail potential devising methodologies. However, “devising can only really yield its best lessons in actual practice” (Schmor, 2004:265). Indeed, devising only exists in practice, and the strategies offered by handbooks are only records or theoretical suggestions. Therefore, to best understand devising, it was imperative that I undertake a devising project in order to study each stage of its practical development.

Notably, all “forms of theatre, even under the most favourable conditions, are subject to constraints: time, money, space, and quantity or quality of collaborators. These constraints decide the rules of the game and mark the boundaries of what is possible” (Barba, 2002:13). I’d argue that, when devising, these constraints not only demarcate how a work is created but are core components of the creative process itself – that is, their restrictive qualities actively create. This is most apparent with collaborators. Their abilities don’t just set limits for the work, they are the work itself, developed through the exercise of those abilities. Similarly, the space in or for which a work is devised contributes to the process by suggesting set, technical and movement design. I believe the space becomes an additional member of the group, whispering its own solutions that reveal new insights into how the space may be played. Thus, constraints inspire creative solutions when devising theatre.
Details of Barba's (2002:13) "constraints" in relation to my devising process will follow throughout this analysis. Here, I examine the formation and early dynamics of my group, a period I designate as "pre-devising". During this period, individual performers join to not only collaborate on producing a theatrical work, but to establish a deep level of cohesion known as "complicité" (Callery, 2001). With the development of "complicité", a functioning ensemble is produced, and ideally the group's solidarity resonates throughout the production and performance of the devised work. One customary method of establishing complicité within first-time devising groups is by playing theatre games. Simultaneously, these games may potentially unlock performers' imaginations and strengthen improvisation skills in preparation for the development of performance material. Initiating this pre-devising stage is group formation which may influence the subsequent devising process. Group composition and discipline are two areas of particular interest to those forming a first-time devising group and, arguably, deserve more attention than they have received in published devising methodologies.

2.1 The First-Time Devising Group: Formation, Composition and Discipline

Devised theatre since the 1960s has been described as a multiplicity of voices subverting, challenging or defying the representations of society reproduced on the illusionistic stage. Oddey (1994:3) describes devising as a "multi-vision" integrating "various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes to changing world events" to create an artistic product. While Oddey later questions whether devising must be a group activity, the plurality of perspectives characterising devised theatre usually come from an ensemble. Murray (2000:45) positions "the notion of the group as the singularly most important element of Devised Theatre", and Oddey (1994:24) later claims devising commences with "the interaction between the members of a group and the starting point or stimulus chosen." She elsewhere suggests that the "more creative solutions" produced by devising
over other production models are "fundamentally determined by group dynamics and interaction" (3). Analysis of group devising may therefore be divisible into two interrelated practical processes – that of artistic creation, and the multifaceted process of developing and maintaining a productive group. I found this duality of process particularly apparent in a situation of collective authority where the group dynamics paradoxically both hastened and threatened our evolution from an assembly of four individuals to a self-governing team. Furthermore, I found group formation and composition had a significant impact on the artistic outcomes of the devising process. Thus, I believe it is important devising groups consider their group dynamics to better understand their theatrical creations and decisions.

In *The Performer’s Guide to the Collaborative Process* (2001), Sheila Kerrigan addresses the practical realities of group creation and dynamics, providing a useful platform from which to examine my group’s evolution into an effective team. Unlike Kerrigan, however, who investigates creative strategies before group process, I believe understanding how groups operate should precede the analysis of devising procedures. This reasoning follows the pre-devising activity of my group where, before devising commenced, group dynamics were tacitly influencing behaviour. Arguably, it is even possible to extend group study to the audition process. For example, Zimmerman’s auditions emphasise a performer’s behaviour in group situations, acknowledging the early influence of group dynamics (Zimmerman, 2005). In this investigation, I will maintain Aranda and Aranda’s (1998:54) definition that “[a group] begins its evolution at the point of formation”. This is supported by Murray (2000:44) who states “the Devised Theatre creative process begins when the group meets for the first time and begins to communicate.” Arguably, the process of collaboration commences from the first rehearsal. Kerrigan (2001) implies this by suggesting introductory games and exercises which may
facilitate or reveal the manifold dynamics of group interaction. A cursory understanding of group dynamics is useful for monitoring the developing group’s “culture” — “the ideas, beliefs, norms, and standards which members of groups hold by virtue of their membership” (Olmsted and Hare, 1978:82). This “culture” may subsequently influence the creative process itself, and is thus an aspect of collaboration of which all group devisers should be aware.

While Oddey (1994:9) acknowledges that “group dynamics, relationships, and interaction between people are a distinguishing feature of devising theatre”, she goes on to qualify this statement in relation to traditional theatre production. Comparing and contrasting devising with traditional production methods efficiently establishes what devising is, but does not address the vagaries of group interaction. Presumably group dynamics also impact on the processes of conventionally organised companies, although in a different way to artistic collectives. Group research literature, as researched by Kerrigan (2001), primarily investigates how groups function, and theoretically may be applied to any working group. Understanding the dynamics of a devising group therefore requires analysing their behaviour in the light of group research literature. A general selection of this literature addressing group composition, efficacy and working strategies is useful to such an examination, although the problem of how far such research may be applied to the unique circumstances of devising soon becomes apparent. A question raised by my research asks whether the devising group can be neatly separated from the devising process in order to undergo discrete analysis. Similarly problematic are the contradictory recommendations made by devising literature and group research literature. Analysis of a devising group using both devising and group research literature must supplement the current shortcomings in these with personal experience and that of other devising groups. However, the highly subjective nature of the analysis of one’s own experience further
complicates this already problematised mire of conflicting researches, resulting in an
examination constantly, and painfully, aware of its own biased nature. Whether this
subjectivity diminishes the academic value of the analysis is arguable, but my foremost
concern here is illustrating the gap between selections of devising and group research
literature and how future endeavours to bridge this gap may be of benefit to both.

Group Formation and Composition

Unlike most theatrical productions, my group did not result from an audition
process. While Magnat (2005), Zimmerman (2005), Brian (2005), Schmor (2004),
Netherclift (2002), Naylor-Smith (2002) and Baldwin (2002) indicate auditions as a key
component of devising projects which they have undertaken, auditions were not a practical
option for me. After placing calls for performers in the local newspaper ('Actors wanted',
Peninsula News, September 6, 2004, p. 11), and in the newsletter of a local theatre group
(Woy Woy Little Theatre Inc. Newsletter, August 2004), both established mediums for
locating performers on the NSW Central Coast, I did not anticipate a large response.
Expecting people to commit to a lengthy devising process without remuneration or
guaranteed outcome was "a big ask" of those whose experience in performing generally
was of memorizing lines in a relatively brief rehearsal period. Instead, I first approached
three individuals, Suzy, Larry, and Adam who I knew well both as performers and friends.
They agreed to participate, and I continued approaching others who, despite expressing
interest, were unable to participate due to the lengthy time period involved or prior
commitments. On the evening of the first rehearsal, Morris showed up unexpectedly. I had
worked with him previously, and was pleased to have him involved. However after the
second rehearsal Morris quit, citing the hefty commitment the project required. His
departure made me apprehensive as to the feasibility of asking people to devote so much
time and energy to one non-professional production, although the remaining three assured me they were interested in the process and were not intending to leave.

When commencing my research, Oddey (1994) was my key reference for devising procedure. Her text, however, like most devising handbooks, addresses the reader as though they already have a group. While advising how the group may initially structure itself or its preliminary material, there is no examining how or why the group first formed. The assumption appears to be that some individuals have combined to potentially feel “part of the making of a theatrical experience, not an interpreter of something already written” (27), or maybe because “the perfect play/piece does not already exist to accomplish the specific task at hand” (Bowles, 2005:16). Callery (2001) suggests a prime motive for devising could be to work with a specific group of people rather than to create something in particular, again implying “the group” already exists. My purpose in forming a devising group was to experience and examine devising first-hand, thereby establishing two initial factors – first, I would inevitably be considered “leader” of the group, and second, the primary reason for the group would be devising itself, not any aesthetic or ideological ambition. For these reasons, I felt more comfortable approaching trusted friends, anticipating that after securing three members, only one or two others would suffice. Devising literature often overlooks how group size may affect the devising process, although professional practice suggests the number involved may vary from production to production. Turning to research on group efficacy, Aranda and Aranda (1998) posit four to twelve members as optimal, while Wittenbaum, Vaughan and Stasser’s (1998) literature review suggests up to ten members ensures a productive group environment. In my case, a small group seemed the most realistic given the project’s practical circumstances, and the generally advanced theory that effective groups “need to be small enough to allow people to develop relationships, to provide for participation … and to engender a feeling of mutual
accountability” (Aranda and Aranda, 1998:9). Once rehearsals began, four devisers – Suzy, Larry, Adam and I – proved to be a very comfortable number in such practical terms as arranging mutually convenient rehearsal times, and in less tangible ways such as generating a sense of equal contribution to the production’s development.

When forming a devising group, it is arguably important to ensure some theatre-making skills are present within the skill mix of its members. Four is a small number for a production team, especially considering all members would be onstage. Murray’s (2000:45) argument that “an extensive and flexible dramatic vocabulary is essential for the director of Devised Theatre” becomes the imperative of the performers in an artistic democracy. Arguably, these deviser-performers require some understanding of other theatrical areas including directing, design, and technical production. Primarily involved in amateur theatre, all the members of my devising group have some professional theatrical experience and/or training. Suzy, a trained actor, is primarily interested in performing but her experience includes directing, drama teaching, production management, and publicity. Larry, a trained singer and dancer, mainly performs but has directed. Adam, a trained stage lighting technician, is experienced in performing and technical production. My experience includes performance, design, and stage management, as well as being a trained classical guitarist. Our collected abilities – directing, performing, music, design, technical production, production/stage management – together with a cursory understanding of all other elements of theatrical production, suggests we were well placed to consider how theatre operates at its most practical level. A foundation was thereby created from which to construct a performance in the absence of a pre-written text.

Of equal interest, though arguably less crucial to the success of the project, were our varying levels of devising experience. Although we were devising as a group for the
first time, Suzy and I both had previous experience in group devising, but Larry and Adam had never taken part in a devising process. However, "[a] salient and crucial characteristic of devising ... is that each project invests the unique resources of the particular group devising" (Schmor, 2004:259). By extension, the devising process of one group cannot be transposed onto another as it has been forged from the interaction, adaptation and development of the unique skills, perspectives and interests of each member. Further, undertaking a devising process provides enough learning opportunities for people familiar with conventional theatrical practice to swiftly become adept at generating, building and adapting creative material. This was certainly the case with Larry and Adam who, despite entering the project without prior knowledge or experience of devising, soon became confident and proficient at workshopping ideas and editing scenes. Perhaps the greatest benefit of having previous experience is confidence in devising's unpredictable nature. Suzy and I were less concerned than Larry when, early in the process, our main images and ideas seemed unrelated and under-formed, although he took our attitude as a cue to let the process unfold of itself. Suzy, Larry and Adam all attested to entering the process open-minded, while I certainly did not expect this production to be like any other in my experience. I do not believe, therefore, that a devising group without prior devising experience is disadvantaged. The lack of expectations may assist flexible and organic creative development – a key feature, I believe, of our group's working methods.

If devising theatre combines artistic creation with the development and maintenance of a productive group then general group problem-solving and interpersonal skills would be of value to the process. Kerrigan (2001:106) describes group behaviour as an "intricate dance" where members play roles and jostle for power. She explains that each "group member, while attending to group tasks, is also adjusting levels of inclusion, affection, and control" (106-7). In order to work effectively, members should contribute
skills that overcome the potentially destructive “dance” of unacknowledged group dynamics. Aranda and Aranda (1998:18) list interpersonal skills as:

- **Facilitation**: the ability to keep the discussion focused and moving
- **Influencing**: the ability to rephrase proposals to meet team member needs
- **Listening**: the ability to capture the essence of ideas
- **Support**: the ability to draw out ideas from others
- **Visioning**: the ability to carry team members through the valleys of the decision-making process.

These are mostly communication skills which, if consciously implemented, potentially ensure that the group remains focused on the task at hand. Their implementation, however, requires discipline and focus as group members must actively understand, encourage and utilise each other’s contributions rather than concentrating on relationships. “Improving your communication skills takes conscious practice over time” (Kerrigan, 2001:123). Importantly, both Aranda and Aranda (1998) and Kerrigan (2001) indicate that these skills do not necessarily need to be brought to the group, but may be cultivated as work progresses. All that is required is willingness and an ability to learn (and, presumably, somebody to introduce and facilitate methods of developing the skills). This in itself provides an opportunity for the group to strengthen as “learning together is an excellent way for team members to build cohesion and trust” (Aranda and Aranda, 1998:19). How devisers may develop these skills together is outlined in Kerrigan (2001) who provides a number of games to build listening and reflective skills. Along with the exercises, she recommends making visible the undercurrent of group dynamics including power struggles, role playing and destructive group behaviours. Kerrigan suggests devisers do not need to be fore-armed with consciously-implemented interpersonal skills so long as they are willing to develop and hone them throughout the devising process.
Perhaps equally important when devising is a certain amount of diversity within the
group. Bowles (2005:17) suggests the “group should be as diverse as possible, especially
in terms of age, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic
status, physical ability, talents, and interests.” Heterogeneity is also recommended by
Schmor (2004) and Murray (2000). Schmor affirms personal differences as devising’s
“best resources”. He argues diversity protects against our “worst assumptions”, and against
a debilitating “ease” in homogeneity where group “orientation becomes more important
than the critical challenges of collective creation and self-disciplined commitment to the
project” (267). Similarly:

One of the joys of the group-creative process is that the more varied the backgrounds, abilities and
life experiences of the individual group members, the richer and more interesting the final piece of
performance will be. Individual difference, in this environment, can be regarded as something that
enhances, as opposed to diminishes the group’s creative potential. (Murray, 2000:45)

In contrast to the positive value devising practitioners assign diversity, group
research literature is more cautious. Generally, this literature posits diversity as a double-
edged sword. The multiple viewpoints in diversity which can lead to conflict (Aranda and
Aranda, 1998; Jehn, Chadwick and Thatcher in Milliken, Bartel and Kurtzberg, 2003) may
also generate innovative ideas. Milliken, Bartel and Kurtzberg (2003) cite studies (Austin,
1997; Bantel and Jackson, 1989; McLeod, Lobel and Cox, 1996) supporting the widely
accepted creative potential of diversity. However, accessing those many perspectives can
paradoxically be hindered by the very heterogeneity providing them. This may be
attributed to the influence of “status characteristics” including gender, ethnicity, or
perceived ability (Cohen, 1984:172), lower levels of cohesiveness (Jackson et al. in
Milliken, Bartel and Kurtzberg, 2003; Wagner, Pfeffer and O’Reilly in Wittenbaum,
Vaughan and Stasser, 1998), and a failure to identify with the group (Milliken and Martins

If diversity includes Bowles’ (2005:17) list of characteristics, then how diverse was my group, and did it have any observable impact devising? I was preoccupied with what theatrical skills members could contribute to the group rather than purposely seeking out a socially or culturally diverse mix. On reflection, I was thus limiting the pool of potential group members to those with whom I was familiar, especially considering there would be no auditions. Amongst the Central Coast theatre groups I’ve been involved with, diversity in its broadest categories – ethnic, religious, socioeconomic – is minimal, therefore I was most likely to result in an Anglo, heterosexual, middle class group as these were the types of individuals most readily available. It should be noted that, conversely, I did not seek to form a socially and culturally homogeneous group. Those who I approached based on prior association happened to share a socio-cultural homogeneity. That’s not to say that our backgrounds and current circumstances were identical. Like any

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6 Arguably, the case presented in these articles against diversity is troubling given the negative outcomes attributed to diversity tends to reinforce wider fears of diversity in the community – particularly in indicating low levels of cohesion and a lack of group identity. It is possible to read these articles, positioned as socially authoritative documents, as “agents of the status quo” which “identify with the dominant relations of power and become, consciously or unconsciously, the propagators of its ideologies and values. They provide the ruling classes with rationales for economic, political and ethical formations” (Giroux et al., n.d.). This is arguably so considering these articles are directed at business managers. However, I believe the methodologies of analysis in these researches, which are not used to make visible dominant ideologies but to examine perceived measures of productivity, means that their results may still be of value so long as awareness is maintained. Indeed, if diverse groups re-inscribe the status quo, as the above articles suggest, then purposely forming a diverse group with consciously implemented policies of inclusion and equality (e.g. an artistic democracy) may make the work practices of that group a site of hegemonic resistance. My point here is that I remain aware of the problematic context in which observations on group behaviour (like those above) may be made, analysed, and utilised.

7 It should be noted that there are many types of diversity. Milliken, Bartel and Kurtzberg (2003) add to these “readily detectable attributes” others which may influence a creative group such as “cognitive background variables (e.g., average education received, type of educational background, or type of functional background), cognitive styles (e.g., problem-solving orientations), cultural values (individualism vs. collectivism), personal profiles (e.g., low-anxiety vs. high-anxiety individuals), or myriad other variables.”
group, we possessed homogeneous and heterogeneous factors. Two females and two males, we were all Anglo, heterosexual, middle-class Central Coast residents, originally meeting through Woy Woy Little Theatre. We differed in ages\textsuperscript{8}, countries of birth\textsuperscript{9}, and, to some extent, our political views, but generally the sense within the group was one of similarity. Although our backgrounds and personal experiences were naturally unique, our general perspectives from within contemporary Australian culture were similar. Indeed, the group often discussed how we were more alike than different. Once devising commenced, Suzy often expressed a desire to expand the group in order to establish diversity of opinion. For example, she felt we too often agreed on topics like euthanasia and abortion which would, in wider society, generate more debate than our pro-choice consensus. Since we began by devising a “character play” (Bray, 1991), intending for the complexities and interactions of character to propel the dramatic action, we developed four very different characters to ensure dramatic interest. However, once topical themes emerged from the four narratives, ideological agreement hindered the extension of those themes into more complex dramatic possibilities. Throughout devising I asked: is our agreement on key societal issues in danger of producing “the simplistic content” of agit-prop (Heddon and Milling, 2006:100)? Consequently we rethought some scenes after they began feeling like a “community service announcement”. Without the spice of ideological conflict, a group is in danger of producing a one-dimensional work, lacking the complexity of how people engage with controversial issues in everyday life.

I agree with the devising literature that diversity is needed to provide a rich resource of knowledge and experience amongst group members, although our homogeneity arguably contributed a number of positive factors to the devising process. Early in the process I noted a strong sense of group identification and cohesion which group research

\textsuperscript{8} 50s (Suzy), 40s (Larry), 30s (Adam), 20s (myself).
\textsuperscript{9} Suzy was born in the UK, Larry was born in New Zealand, while Adam and I were born in Australia.
literature suggests are both more often detectable in homogeneous groups (Milliken and Martins in Milliken, Bartel and Kurtzberg, 2003; Jackson in Wittenbaum, Vaughan and Stasser, 1998; Wagner, Pfeffer and O’Reilly in Wittenbaum, Vaughan and Stasser 1998; Olmsted and Hare, 1978). Group identification is “the individual perception of oneness with the ... group and the tendency to experience the group’s successes and failures as one’s own ... Specifically, individuals develop a sense of who they are and what their attitudes, goals, and so forth should be by identifying with characteristics perceived as central to the group” (Riordan and Weatherly, 1999:311-12). I argue that within my group, the pre-existing attitudes and goals of individuals created the “characteristics perceived as central to the group”, and continued to shape group behaviour throughout devising. As difficult as it is to articulate something as intangible as “group identification”, I believe it initially manifested in the alacrity with which the group displayed cohesive behaviours. Importantly, Riordan and Weatherly posit group identification as possible in the absence of interaction, therefore preceding cohesiveness. Referencing Bass (1960) and Stogdill (1972), Riordan and Weatherly define cohesion as “the degree to which an individual believes that the members of his or her ... group are attracted to each other, willing to work together, and committed to the completion of the tasks and goals of the ... group” (312). Johnson and Johnson (1998) include lower drop-out rates and a greater sense of personal responsibility, while Olmsted and Hare (1978:113) measures cohesiveness by “the frequency with which members say ‘we’ as compared to ‘I’, the extent to which they share norms, or the rate of absenteeism”. As with the sense of group identification, I discerned group cohesion by how we worked, and how I felt as a group member. While this is obviously highly subjective, manifestations of group cohesion included the use of “we” from the first rehearsals, and an equal amount of comfort when required to pair off in any combination or remain working as a foursome. There was never any hesitancy to play games or improvise together, with everyone generous with and considerate of their fellow
performers. An equal amount of courtesy was accorded me as I led these initial sessions, convincing me that the group would be able to achieve an artistic democracy. This conviction arose from a verbally inexpressible sense of identification within the group, contributing to the rapid development of cohesive behaviours.

Perhaps the evident factor fuelling this group identification was our common interest in theatre: what Olmsted and Hare (1978:11) term a “significant commonality”. While our socio-cultural similarity arguably mitigated our early interactions, it was most likely our theatrical commonality which focused our approach to devising, both in terms of creative process and group behaviour. For example, there was a tacit group understanding of the importance of attending rehearsals punctually. Also displayed was an understanding of the creative necessity of actively participating in games, brainstorming exercises, discussion and improvisations, as well as of continuing to develop ideas/characters/scenes outside rehearsals. While the need for mutual support or only constructive criticism was never discussed, it manifested in positivity and enthusiasm, as well as a reluctance to pass judgement on the creative efforts of others. These practices contributed to the development of trust and security so that subsequent necessarily ruthless critical appraisals could be made without fear of causing offence. While cohesive group identity is “promoted by cooperative efforts” (Johnson and Johnson, 1998:19), the group did not agree to every idea which arose in the interests of being cooperative. Our artistic ideas frequently differed but this did not prevent us from working cohesively. No one attempted to undermine offerings or block contributions, and when successful ideas were put forward they were absorbed into the piece, consciously used to guide individual creations, or used as springboards to further ideas. Similarly, any conflict was not personally directed but arose with a view to clarifying ideas, or pushing creative exploration forward. Crucially, conflict was not taken personally either, even though some arguments became quite heated. This willingness “to
endure pain and frustration” again suggests high levels of cohesiveness (Johnson and Johnson, 1998:20).

Arguably, the process of developing cohesion was speeded by a pre-established familiarity amongst group members. Whether it was this friendliness or a perceived homogeneity which promoted relaxed, unself-conscious interrelations is difficult to pinpoint. When the group formed, I was more personally acquainted with each group member than they were with each other. Suzy, Larry and Adam knew each other, but were perhaps best described as acquaintances. I had worked on productions with all three, but Suzy and Larry had never worked with Adam.10 The existing friendships within the group were mine, although there was a definite friendliness and closeness of association through activities with Woy Woy Little Theatre. Certainly their approach to each other, from even the earliest rehearsals, was friendly. Analysing this situation reveals another marked discrepancy between devising literature and group research literature. Where devising literature often describes the work of ensembles comprised of close colleagues and friends, group research literature tends to focus on individuals assembled to complete a single task (i.e. Hennessey, 2003; Schullery and Gibson, 2001; Shepperd and Taylor, 1999; Mulvey and Klein, 1998; Cohen, 1984). Wittenbaum, Vaughan and Stasser (1998:197) cite research suggesting qualitative differences between laboratory or simulated groups and “naturally occurring” groups (Jackson, 1992; Worchel, 1994; Worchel, Coutant-Sassic and Grossman, 1992):

Laboratory groups usually are composed of strangers, given problems to work on that have correct answers, and work during a limited amount of time with their dissolution planned. Natural groups generally are composed of acquaintances or coworkers who come together voluntarily, find and

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10 A month before the group formed, Larry and I performed together in a production directed by Suzy. Previously, I attended drama classes run by Suzy. Adam and I knew each other after working backstage on a number of productions.
define their own problems with solutions that cannot be objectively verified, and expect to work together across several meetings for an unspecified time period. (198)

While Wittenbaum, Vaughan and Stasser are concerned with group co-ordination and in-process planning, their observation about the incongruity between researches concerning “laboratory” and “natural groups” illustrates the general difficulties in applying group research literature to the comparatively atypical formation and behaviour of a devising group. This is further problematised by devising literature tending to detail groups composed of people who have worked together previously. Indeed, “professional devised theatre tends to be made in ensembles – communities of artists working in collaboration over long periods of time” (Lewis, 2005:23). Brown (2005:57), describing the collaborative work of Moisés Kaufman, records that although Kaufman engages actors and designers on a per-project basis, he has often worked with them before and “they share a common language and theatrical interest.” Similarly, Elizabeth MacLennan (1990:56) of 7:84 notes that in ensemble creation, directors “usually develop a team of people she or he will ‘use’ again and again, and they will develop a shorthand often which is perfectly understood; often too they will anticipate each others’ wishes”. The importance of this “common language” cannot be underestimated in devising, as this “shared vocabulary is what fuels devised work” (Callery, 2001:163).

With my first-time devising group, familiarity was an asset as there was no uncomfortable strangeness to overcome during initial rehearsals. While it remained necessary to work on developing “ensemble”, this was arguably aided by a sense of comfort in each other’s presence and minimal embarrassment when required to do silly things during games sessions. Members displayed a rapport during initial warm-up improvisation games that I would argue sprang from already present friendly feelings that eliminated pronounced self-consciousness or shyness. Larry and Adam, in particular,
improvised successfully together without, in Theatresports lingo, “bulldozing” or “gagging” (Pierse, 1993:26-28). Their generosity and consideration in performance situations extended to their general interaction (despite what their unspoken thoughts might have been). With Suzy and me they worked with a strong sense of good will and a focus on building the group as a unit. Once devising commenced, and a desire for creative experimentation left us without a clear idea where either the dramatic material or the devising process itself was headed, I was especially glad to be supported by trusted friends I knew to be capable of developing potential solutions. I believe this confidence itself was an important asset during the entire project.

While theatre is arguably a unique process which, often necessarily, thrives on established working relationships, there are some drawbacks to utilising friends that may be of relevance to devisers. Regarding creative potential, group research literature such as Aranda and Aranda (1998:16) would classify using friends as a “proximity error” which results in groups routinely comprised of the same members “using the same perspectives, coming up with the same ideas, and suggesting the same resolutions”. As in the conceptual restraints of a homogeneous group, I tentatively agree that working with the same people on theatrical productions does limit creative potential due to the reasons given by Aranda and Aranda. I noticed that certain theatrical devices or techniques are routinely relied upon to solve dramatic or staging problems, without considering possibilities outside the group member’s experience. For instance, Suzy very early on wanted a screen in order to project images related to the inner life of her character, plus words relating to our wider themes. The rest of us had later to think of ways to make use of the screen so that it would not seem a prop for Suzy’s character only. Suzy herself has noted the frequent incorporation of screens into her sets, although she felt strongly that the use of a projector was warranted by an inability to convey the power and associations of her desired image through any other
While our search for other projections led to experiments with film, something we previously would not have considered, I did wonder whether this very early desire to project images was a general failure to search for theatrical techniques which were personally less familiar. From my prior understanding of the group members, I suspected they were unlikely to suggest dance or the complex movement found in physical theatre. While we made attempts to work outside our usual theatrical terrains, such as writing songs, we were bound by "the same perspectives ... the same ideas, and ... the same resolutions" (Aranda and Aranda, 1998:16). Luckily, the unique challenges of devising forced us to continually rethink those ideas and resolutions, and to stretch our understanding of theatre and how it operates by exploring alternative methods of dramatising our stories. This is incredibly enjoyable when working with friends as you are able to meet challenges together, and observe each other becoming more confident and adept theatrically. However, the lengthy pathways taken in examining unfamiliar theatrical devices may hinder a process which could be hastened by employing more diverse talents from less familiar individuals. This may be of consideration when undertaking a shorter devising project where any potential educational benefit for devisers is less important than a specific product outcome.

Group Discipline and Disruptive Behaviour

The use of friends as group members may also be detrimental to productive group behaviour. Gibbs (1995:8) suggests groups that form themselves are usually comprised of friends, and while "improv[ing] interaction and cooperation" it "may mitigate against rigour, self-discipline or being able to tackle difficult group problems". I found this statement to be correct, and while I could read over my notes to find evidence of progress, rehearsals were plagued by a lack of self-discipline compounded by a reluctance to

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11 The image in question was an atomic bomb blast.
discipline each other. I was hesitant to exert authority as this would have strengthened my initial leadership role, the role I wished to share among the group in an artistic democracy. Before exploring how our group qualified Gibbs’ statement, I would like to differentiate here between to two types of undisciplined behaviour which characterised our way of working.

The first type of undisciplined behaviour may have had unnoticed benefits, while the second type was a definite interruption to working. Concerning the first, Suzy often expressed misgivings about the amount of time it took for us to start rehearsals, “wasting” approximately half an hour in general conversation. While I agree there was a lack of vigour instigating work each rehearsal, I do not believe this social interaction was detrimental, considering that, as friends, our initial impulse upon meeting was to chat. On rare occasions when we leapt straight into rehearsal, the urge to share news would interrupt our work and we would break early to gossip. Considering that we often continued discussing scenes or ideas for the production during our coffee break, it seemed necessary to allow time for chit-chat, ideally before work, including warm-ups, commenced. Kerrigan (2001:91) records a similar experience:

In TOUCH, we started each day with small talk. I thought it was a waste of time until I realized that we were building ensemble while we chatted – we subliminally checked each other out, reforged connections and got comfortable enough to proceed with the hard work of creation.

By sharing our news, we became sensitive to each other’s feelings, making the exchange of personal information during rehearsals a less inhibited process. Thus, our understanding of each other grew, in turn ensuring a sympathetic and responsive group of listeners, both off stage and on. Kerrigan (2001) describes a formal version of this friendly interaction, known as “check-ins”. Utilised by TOUCH Mime Theater, At the Foot of the
Mountain Theatre, and The Five Lesbian Brothers, check-ins allow group members to air feelings about the devising work, as well as circumstances outside the rehearsal room that are currently affecting them. You can, as Kerrigan says, “check in spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and/or physically”, clearing the air of conflicts, and keeping “emotional channels open” (91). However, I believe unstructured discussion works as effectively, although discipline is required to finish up the discussion and move onto rehearsing. This type of undisciplined behaviour therefore had a mostly positive effect, although arguably any benefits would have been perceived by group members sooner if the discussions had had a utilitarian name like “check-ins”. Suzy seemed less anxious about our pre-rehearsal conversations after I’d described the check-in process and suggested we were unwittingly replicating a similar strategy with arguably the same results.

Less positive, and potentially destructive to our creative work, was the second type of undisciplined behaviour ranging from smokers interrupting rehearsal for a cigarette outside the scheduled break, to diverting attention away from work by changing the topic of discussion. A reluctance to discipline each other often resulted in a “laissez-faire group atmosphere” (Olmsted and Hare, 1978:11), characterised by a lack of intervention by authority figures and an unstructured working environment. Arguably, this was caused by a confusion of boundaries. While at the beginning of the process I had stressed that the authority for maintaining group discipline, direction etc lay with the group and not with any individual, Larry and Adam were not comfortable in taking authoritarian stances for fear of being seen as “taking charge”. Meanwhile, I purposely stepped back to allow the group to find its own rhythm of interaction. Suzy occasionally tried to restore discipline, but was hindered by a feeling similar to that of Larry and Adam. Consequently, without a sense of authority emanating from a particular point at any given time, group members adopted a relaxed attitude which, although it increased our comfort, hindered productivity.
These "process disruptions" (Aranda and Aranda, 1998:146) gradually lessened as devising progressed, and we gathered more material to work on during rehearsals. Once the piece was structured, and rehearsals consisted of run throughs and scene polishing, the disruptions ceased almost entirely – perhaps because rehearsals felt more conventional. Despite increases in the quantity of performance material, however, the group rarely had a positive sense of productivity. The actuality was arguably different, as the production continued to build and we never lacked potential scenes or ideas to workshop. It is interesting that even though progress was evident, it was not matched by a feeling of progress. I believe this resulted from two factors. First, as we were all involved in the process, it was impossible for us to step outside it to make any objective judgement on the quality of our working methods or group behaviour. Second, there was a lack of rigour in adhering to pre-planned rehearsal schedules. Group members would resist previously agreed plans of action and complete less scene work than had been anticipated. Some allowance may be made here for the organic nature of devising, which requires a generous amount of flexibility when planning the next stage of development, as well as the evolutionary process we used as a group for creating and refining scenes which always took longer than anticipated. These factors aside, in lacking (or disregarding) an organised structure of devising, no clear line of creative development could be gauged and therefore progress was perceived as haphazard and sporadic. I regard this lack of adherence to schedules another symptom of the poor self- and group-discipline which persisted despite the initial process disruptions lessening. Corroborating Gibbs (1995), interaction and cooperation remained positive, although we found it difficult to tackle discipline problems, commit to short-term goals (such as schedules), or persevere when we did pause to address these issues. Familiarity and affection made us reluctant to chastise disruptive behaviour, so even though we were enjoying ourselves as a group, we weren’t responding objectively to problems as they arose. Perhaps with a group less personally involved, the focus would
Another factor which may have negatively affected discipline and perceptions of productivity was the project’s long timeline. Prior to the commencement of devising, I predicted it would take about twelve months for us to devise and perform the production. This estimate was based on the unfortunate logistics of being able to rehearse only once a week for two to three hours. I was not too concerned that this lengthy time line would negatively affect productivity as many professional groups use long devising periods. The Chicago-based performance group Goat Island, for example, have taken between eighteen months to two years to develop their pieces from the first workshop to final performance, meeting only two to three times a week (Bottoms, 1998). However, research demonstrates the difficulty of setting long-term milestones. Most people are unable to manage the ambiguity of time beyond 90 days while events a year away seem unmanageable (Aranda and Aranda, 1998). Furthermore, group research suggests that groups adjust their working pace to fit the time frame allocated and continue this pace even when the time frame has been altered (Wittenbaum, Vaughan and Stasser 1998). Groups, therefore, with seemingly ample time to complete a task develop a slow pace which continues even when the time frame has decreased. While we set ourselves mid-term goals, such as refining a certain amount of performance material before a set date, the end goal of staging the production seemed forever in the distance. We did not have any sense of urgency to help focus our working strategies. Coupled with our general bonhomie, it is thus understandable that we were easily distracted and made unspoken allowances for disruptive behaviour. Arguably, with a tighter deadline the group would have implemented a definite working structure and, less worried about “taking charge”, would have prioritised the maintenance of discipline in order to achieve that deadline. This is evidenced by the flurry of activity.
preceding the first viewing of our work by my supervisor after only 16 rehearsals. We developed and ordered a considerable amount of material within the two rehearsals prior to this showing which left us with a sense of achievement. Thus, when time was tight, focus remained squarely on making effective use of each rehearsal. When we felt the luxury of ample time discipline was noticeably lax and rehearsal time was spent joking, chatting and gossiping.

While group research literature “does not suggest that members have to like each other or socialize outside of work in order for groups to be successful” (Wheelan, 1999:14), I do believe that devising with friends was an important factor in ensuring the success of the project due to their support and commitment. Still, if we were not friends at the group’s formation, we soon would have become so. Through devising, “participants make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation, and experimentation” (Oddey, 1994:1) This often involves the exchange of very personal information. From past devising experiences, I believe sharing a devising process can create friendships which may work towards the building of ensemble. Theoretically, this suggests that if a devising group is not initially formed of friends, it would lock into an efficient and work-focused rehearsal style that should arguably continue even after friendships were formed. Of course this is a matter of conjecture, but is perhaps of interest to devising groups forming for educational purposes, such as school drama classes.

Devising a theatrical performance not only requires developing artistic material, but developing the interrelationships and productive behaviours of each person to form a secure and effectual ensemble. In the course of my research I found that devising literature and group research literature often provided different models of what constitutes a
productive team. My practical experience suggested that research on the unique dynamics of devising groups would provide the best evidence of the arguably tangible effects of a group’s formation, composition, behaviour and discipline on the artistic process, or even if such a correlation exists. While it seemed to be true for my group, I hesitate to make any generalised judgement about the interrelation of group dynamics and devising processes without further investigation. What is certain, however, is that a devising group must provide a safe environment for its members. Devisers should feel secure enough to facilitate the free expression of “personal stories to create material” and to allow for the “strong feelings [which] will enter your rehearsal space” (Kerrigan, 2001:87). Each member must experience a sense of trust, “knowing that there is sensitivity and support within the group” (Oddey, 1994:24). To establish this trust within my group, I initiated the playing of theatre games.

2.2 Pre-Devising: The Role of Games in the Devising Process

Group devised theatre requires both the generation of performance material and the development of an ensemble to facilitate the production and presentation of that material. For first-time devisers working through improvisation, it is beneficial for each collaborator to exercise and cultivate their imagination and performance abilities. It is also crucial for the group, in the earliest stages of formation, to undertake activities which promote sensitivity, co-operation and a shared performance vocabulary towards the building of ensemble. Through both research and experience, I believe these three important devising tools – imagination, performance ability, and the sense of ensemble or “complicite” – should be practised and sharpened from the first meeting. I believe theatre or performative games to be a useful method of achieving these ends, providing a safe creative space in which the group may “storm” and “norm” (Gibbs, 1995), and a secure foundation from
which to later tackle the creatively and emotionally demanding devising process. I term this early getting-to-know-you stage of group formation “pre-devising”.

*From Group to Ensemble*

A first-time devising group may fit Wheelan’s (1999:3) definition of a “work group” which is “comprised of members who are striving to create a shared view of goals and develop an efficient and effective organisational structure in which to accomplish these goals.” Like the work group, the devisers must establish shared creative goals and fashion effective methods by which these goals may be accomplished. They must become a team. A group’s evolution into a focused and productive team often follows a pattern of four stages – forming, storming, norming, and performing (Gibbs 1995). “Forming” refers to coming together and getting to know each other as a group. “Storming” marks the visibility of group dynamics as individuals jostle for power, and personalities clash when differences of values and opinions come to the surface. When “norming”, the group starts establishing ground rules to work together co-operatively and points of agreement. Finally, when “performing”, the group works productively as a team. Gibbs indicates that “storming” and “norming” are important progressions on the path to “performing”. Without getting significant differences out into the open, groups may never manage to establish agreements on a solid foundation, with the strong potential for storming at a later, and damaging, stage. To successfully evolve into a team, therefore, a group should consider the possibly awkward stages of forming, storming, and norming, and consciously implement strategies to manage these stages. This is particularly relevant if the group has only a short time in which to accomplish their goal.

For performance groups the impetus is to not only become a functioning team, but something implicitly more complex – to become an ensemble. While Unwin (2004:70)
gives a rather colourless definition of "ensemble" as "a group of actors working together on a number of plays, taking it in turns to share the leading roles", this does not capture the intricacies of communal experience within a devising group. Here, the term "ensemble" often implies a situation where "the group [is] communicating at all levels and with all their senses, as well as with their minds" (Clark, 1971:13). Some practitioners, however, would disagree. Schmor (2004:267) suggests that casting an "ensemble" would reflect a congenial, homogeneous group selected for his "own biases and methods". Similarly, The People Show "denies being a group ... They are interested in retaining their identity as individuals because they feel that a group stifles individual creativity and soon everyone is doing the same thing" (Shank, 1972:234). For other practitioners, the ideal of an internally co-ordinated ensemble is at the heart of devised creation. Eugenio Barba positions internal dynamics as the most important aspect of group theatre, where the essential or incommunicable "action" of theatre is organised as "a social organism" – the theatre group itself (Barba, 2002:18). Barba believes that "how the group creates its productions, the members' attitude to the work, to each other, to the collective, and to their professional life" – or the process itself – is what is important about group theatre (Watson, 1993:246). This process forms the basis of the group's survival strategies, professional ethics, and aesthetics – all the aspects which the group communicates to its audiences, and which position that group in its society.

Supposedly, the effectiveness of the group's process is reliant on the quality of the internal dynamics, or what is often termed "ensemble". Brockett & Findlay (1973:738) posit "trust and understanding among performers" as aspects of effective ensemble, however a heightened degree of group sensitivity and awareness are frequently also mentioned in the literature. Clark (1971:32), for instance, believes "the object of the whole exercise of group theatre is to develop group sensitivity so strongly that the whole
resources of the group can be brought to bear on a dramatic problem.” He gives “players’ sensitive response to each other” and “their honesty and openness to each other” as two of the five factors upon which the success of the group depends (38). Similarly, Clark speaks of “the collective mind of the group”, that the group “must have a sense of its own identity” (8), and that a good group is “interfused” (10). These descriptions approximate a sense of “complicite”, which Callery (2001) uses to define the elusive qualities implicitly present within a concept of “ensemble” when applied to a devising group. She explains that “complicite” has deeper resonance than “ensemble”, and entered English theatre parlance through the work of Jacques Lecoq, Phillipe Gaulier, and Theatre de Complicite. The two types of complicite – that between the performers on stage, and the complicite between the performers and the spectators – are of equal importance in a performance situation, but complicite between performers must take place before the performance, during the shared processes of play, exercises, and theatrical creation. Callery states:

Complicite amongst performers is the crux of ensemble practice, a shared belief which depends upon intense awareness and mutual understanding and produces on-stage rapport. Being fully open to other actors is not simply a matter of creating pleasant working relationships. You must be able to work as an ensemble to tell the story moment by moment. (88)

Other ingredients crucial to complicite include “eye contact”, “a heightened sensory awareness to others in the space”, “a collective sense of rhythm and timing,” as well as “an open relationship between players” (Callery, 2001:88). To a first-time devising group, this suggests that work specifically towards developing such intuitive and sensitive response should arguably have a recognised place within devising methodologies.

Concentrating on the development of the devisers and not just on their creative material

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12 The other three factors are: “3. The daring and inventiveness with which they have solved the problems they have set themselves. 4. The relevance and interest of the problems themselves. 5. The players’ skill in presentation” (Clark, 1971:38).
seems an equally important investment to the devising process. While it would be naïve to expect a first-time (and part-time) devising group to recreate the level of complicité famously accomplished by such companies as Theatre de Complicité, Peter Brook’s troupe, Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop and Copeau’s Les Copiaux (to list Callery’s examples), there is arguably benefit to be had in borrowing their methods of building ensemble and performance skills. One such method, and the one of particular relevance to devisers, is the playing of group games. These comprise the basis of Callery’s guide to achieving mutual understanding amongst group members, as well as assisting in the development of democratic working practice. Further, the establishment of a games period prior to the work of devising may allow a safe space for the all the potentially disruptive energies of “forming”, “storming” and “norming” to operate as described by Gibbs (1995). While Callery (2001:88) is emphatic that building complicité requires “more than playing team games”, this is arguably the most direct way to generate a sense of play and a collective body of shared performative experience with a first-time devising group, particularly within a limited amount of time. Importantly, games not only promote the sense of sympathetic unity necessary for collective creation, they may stimulate within the individual deviser a release of imagination and a heightening of performance skill pertinent to the particular creative demands of devising theatre.

*Performative Games: Building Ensemble, Imagination and Skill*

The process of devising theatre, particularly when based on improvisation, requires access to both an uninhibited imagination and some performance ability. At the same time, performers must be aware of their group environment, remaining receptive and sympathetic to the needs and offers of their fellow devisers. Any practice capable of increasing these qualities should be of high importance to first-time devisers and arguably included within the devising process. I believe the sustained playing of theatre games to be
such a practice, and deserving of its own recognised position within devising methodologies.

According to Unwin (2004:122) theatre games have “almost fallen completely out of fashion” within conventional professional practice. He claims few directors use them extensively, and most experienced actors are resistant to them. This is not surprising given Taylor’s (1996:150) description of theatre games as ranging from group vocal exercises, through adult versions of party games, to more structured and complicated games/rituals designed to illuminate the psychology of the characters, or even the actors themselves ... objects are passed round the group, comments are made, scenes are played using a single word only, or sounds, there are sessions of group-chanting or noise-making, and different surrealist techniques are explored which involve actors personating inanimate objects, animals, plants, shouting at each other to the point of mania, or whatever the director will judge to be useful for the particular experiment in perception he is conducting.

This reductionist description, while touching on some characteristics of games and their purposes, hints at why directors such as Unwin (2004:122) claim “improvisation, games, exercises and theory are the stuff of gossip and jokes in the professional theatre”. In traditional theatre practice, games have three primary uses. These are to relax the actors, “to take the pressure off actors having production or interpretation problems and show through analogy how a difficult or ‘wordy’ scene should be played”, and to substitute detailed verbal instructions for a more immediate, physical response (McCaffery, 1993:72). When devising, games retain these functions, but may contribute a great deal more such as the development of physical-based narrative skills, attention to how movement, sound or images can construct meaning for an audience, as well as cooperation within the group. Furthermore, the practise of theatre games may assist in the refinement and extension of performance skills.
Before examining the arguable benefits of theatre games, I would like to consider this term more closely. Firstly, in my understanding, theatre games should be considered separate to exercises in both definition and practice. McCaffery's (1993:72) distinction between games and exercises positions the latter as "more specifically related to performing and interpreting skills and techniques than games", while these are related to "the first skill we develop, our first means of relating and responding to others". While practitioners such as Spolin (1999) and Jesse (1996) argue that games are equally as important to the enrichment of skill as exercises, this definition indicates the direction in which the split between the two might take – exercises are an individual path along a performer's development, while games are a group process. Exercises for breathing, voice, limberness or movement, while often completed in a group and thereby fostering a degree of shared experience, tend to focus the performer on their individual physicality and imaginative experience. Grotowski, while somewhat extreme, indicates the emphasis on individual purpose with which performance exercises are generally completed:

Thinking is not allowed in these exercises ... You must immediately work out the first impulse within yourself, even if the result differs widely from that of your colleagues. Never look at the others, and above all do not copy their results. The people around you don't exist. What you are doing belongs to your intimate self and concerns nobody else. (Grotowski, 1968:171, original emphasis)

Exercises are "pure form ... infused with information", and once embodied by the performer, constitute what Meyerhold called "the essence of scenic movement" (Barba, 2002:23). They contain the cells of performance which require the body of the performer and the needs of each particular performance to evolve them into meaningful moments of thought, movement, and sound. Exercises prepare the performer's body and imagination for the demands of performing, but are not, in themselves, as recognisably performative as
the theatre games available in such seminal sources as Spolin (1999), Johnstone (1981) and Boal (1992). With their basis in improvisation – “the process through which we spontaneously invent stories and characters to create the world of make-believe” (Pierse, 1993:29) – theatre games usually require more than one player to work collectively in the unplanned construction of a delineated performative moment. They utilise the skills developed by exercises while at the same time drawing attention to their function and strengthening them. For this reason, I prefer to use the term “performative games” to refer specifically to the types of theatre games I found to be of most benefit to my first-time devising group, and to indicate the sense of purpose with which these games were played.

“The words ‘performance’ and ‘performative’ are relatively conflated or distinguished in the pursuit of various arguments” (Shepherd and Wallis, 2004:223). For the purpose of this argument, I use “performative” in what Shepherd and Wallis term its “very general metaphoric usage”, that is, “in the sense of ‘like a performance’, or to index the consideration of something in terms of performance” (ibid). This usage highlights the distinction between a performance when playing a game in the rehearsal room and a practised, considered performance before a public audience. Despite the popularity of Theatresports, I agree with Morrison (1984:53) that “improvised acting has no effective theatrical quality”, except when performed by very skilled practitioners. This does not mean, however, that games cannot be approached in the same manner as a performance. Playing games as though for an audience promotes “a greater desire to avoid sloppiness, and so the quality of work improves” (Callery, 2001:19). This is the attitude which I tried to encourage in my group members, with varying degrees of success. We initially adopted Improbable Theatre’s rehearsal principle of “spontaneous improvisation always as if in front of an audience” (Lamden, 2000:31). This principle is helpful to focus the aim of specific games such as increasing the performer’s onstage spatial awareness or to clarify
the concept of blocking/accepting offers. Awareness of an acceptable performative standard in terms of voice projection, positioning and focus prevents the performer from attempting a demonstration of the game's purpose rather than playing creatively within the rules. Jesse (1996) suggests that enthusiasm for games increases amongst performers when they see them as having a practical purpose, and I found this to be true for performers with little improvising experience. Relating the playing of the game to a performance situation was a method I found to be useful when encouraging group members to exercise and develop improvisatory skills in preparation for devising work. For this reason, "performative" best describes the approach to, and types of, games I chose for my group - spontaneous unplanned improvisation, but with focus, energy and an awareness of an imaginary audience.

These performative qualities are required not just of each individual player, but of the group as a collective. Equally as important to the success of performative games is consideration and co-operation from both group members onstage and those watching. Performative games have the potential to build understanding and trust amongst recently formed performance groups. As Paul Sills, the son of Viola Spolin, has said, "Playing is communion ... Play is also mutual. You can't play alone" (Sills in Brockett and Findlay, 1973:758). Spolin (1999:liii) herself stressed "the importance of group response, in which players see themselves as an organic part of the whole, becoming one body through which all are directly involved in the outcome of the playing. Being part of the whole generates trust and frees the player for playing, the many then acting as one." The benefits for devising are clear as "it is from group agreement and group playing that material evolves for scenes and plays" (10). Time spent playing performative games with a devising group can be seen as "working to a common purpose ... and accessing a common physical vocabulary, a route towards collective creative energy" (Callery, 2001:19). I found the
early introduction of performative games engendered a sense of camaraderie amongst group members which translated well when later attempting to improvise close family relationships, and more generally in the acceptance of each other's ideas and a sense of equal participation when building upon them. I also found it useful to choose games which were diverse in the number of players required, so sometimes a group member would play alone before the rest of the group, sometimes in pairs, and other times we played as a whole. Games would be played twice to vary the pairs, ensuring the chance to work closely with each group member and establish an uninhibited working relationship. Similarly, with group members often acting as audience, we could observe others in the game we had just played, increasing "awareness of what we look like to an outside eye" (Callery, 2001:19). Performers can then "learn from others, and the idea of ensemble practice is reinforced since everyone realises that the whole troupe is in the same boat, that the work is a collective endeavour" (19). As the group settled into onstage working rhythms, group members were keen to discuss what they had played, and differences of opinion often emerged when afterwards arguing the outcomes, or even the point, of a game. The potential was here to lay the foundations for free expression of healthy conflict and, importantly, an early sense of what individual group members consider as vital to good theatre – what they think "works", and what doesn’t. After engaging with performative games, first-time devisers learn not only the theatrical theories and tastes of their fellow performers, but “that ‘how to act’, like the game, is inextricably bound up with every other person in the complexity of the art form” (Spolin, 1999:10). Once devising begins, they are then aware that the greatest strength they have to draw upon is confidence in their collective creativity with co-operation and co-ordination already existing between them.

Performative games prepare first-time devisers for the rigours of devising in ways directly associated with the creative demands of performance. Theatre practitioners of the
late twentieth-century have widely documented the benefit of games in increasing skill, unblocking the imagination, and heightening the physical awareness of performers. Barker (1977:65-67) reveals the potential for both group and individual creative development in his five objectives for game sessions. These objectives are: “to reveal something of the actor’s movement problems and possibilities”; “to lead actors to physical experiences and sensations they could not find directly”; “to initiate in the actor a process of self-awareness and discovery”; “to create a shared body of experience which one uses to build up relationships within the group and to develop the ensemble”, and; “to create a common vocabulary, based upon shared experience, with which to discuss the processes of human action and interaction and the work of the actor”. Condensing these five objectives into Jesse’s (1996:5) two – for performers to “be alive in the moment” and to “learn discipline” – provides a clearer focus when examining the practical role of such games within the devising process. Being “alive in the moment” involves a release of the imagination, creativity, and spontaneity, while learning discipline refers to the acquisition of performance skills which constitute the practical creation of theatre. As Spolin (1999:5) asserts, “all the techniques, conventions etc. that the student-actors have come to find are given to them through playing theatre games”, although she does equate these as synonymous with “acting exercises”. By incorporating activities which address development of both the mental and physical aspects of performing into a preliminary stage of the devising period, performers will have laid a groundwork from which to commence devising and have a knowledge of exercises which can be adapted to aid the process itself.

To free imagination and creativity, the process advocated within the literature is similar to what Grotowski (1968:35) termed an “inductive technique (a technique of elimination)” as opposed to a “deductive technique” or “an accumulation of skills”. Instead
of acquiring an “arsenal – i.e. an accumulation of methods, artifices and tricks” from which the performer can “pick out a certain number of combinations for each part and thus attain the expressiveness necessary for him to grip his audience”, the performer must instead strip away inhibitions and psychological blocks in order to release imaginative response (34). Imagination games “open up closed territory in the mind” (de Mille in Schotz, 1998:5). Practitioners of improvisation liken this process to childhood play whilst recognising that childhood is also when “personal, parental and societal pressures” germinate later adult afflictions of self-censorship and self-doubt (Barker, 1977:63). Further, the demand for self-expression in art, fear of obscenity and a fear of seeming original are all detrimental to the spontaneous expression of ideas (Johnstone, 1979). This is due to the play of both children and adults becoming more “result-orientated” and less “process-orientated” as play “becomes a reflection and extension of our daily conflicts, frustrations and need for justification” (Schotz, 1998:3). Such inhibition is particularly disadvantageous to a performer, especially when involved in a process as heavily reliant on spontaneity as devising. Possessing “freedom and flexibility in associative thinking” (4) in order to develop scenes through improvisation is arguably a foremost requirement of the devising process, and this can be centrally positioned through playing theatre games.

When participating in theatre games, performers “play” in two ways – they “play” by the set rules structuring the activity, and they “play” by responding impulsively to stimulus, promoting “curiosity, a child-like openness to experimentation, and a delight in surprises” (Kerrigan, 2001:6). This second type of play – that often associated with the free play of children – is reliant, paradoxically, on the “highly structured, and structuring” nature of games which are capable of overcoming “common psychological barriers such as over-intellectualization, artistic timidity, or fear of failure” (Sarratore, 1999:51). Games create their own space, similar to the performance space developed from a script, where
there is security for performers to release their imagination. Sarratore cites philosopher Roger Caillois who “describes this spatial creation as an integral part of all games, stating that ‘the game’s domain is ... a restricted, closed, protected universe: a pure space’” (52). In this reassuringly structured space “ingenuity and inventiveness appear to meet any crisis the game presents ... As long as we abide by the rules of the game, we may swing, stand on our heads, or fly through the air” (Spolin, 1999:5). It is the “unusual and extraordinary way of playing” which develops creativity, finding new ways to answer the game’s challenges whilst protected by the formulaic structure of a game space. An improvisation developed within the confines of a theatre game may not “work” aesthetically, or even constitute an engaging performance, but by adhering to the rules of the game, the performers have still succeeded in attaining an objective. The confidence to take further risks is nurtured and true creative response is developed.

Such creativity involves interaction with the imagination plus a trust in spontaneous response. Johnstone (1979:87) believes performers “should be aware of the ideas that are occurring to them”, and not censor themselves for fear of unoriginality or obscenity. He holds “that we struggle against our imaginations, especially when we try to be imaginative”, and, importantly, “that we are not responsible for the content of our imaginations” (105). The games Johnstone developed provide the security of guidelines whilst demanding an immediate, almost unself-conscious response to stimulus to bring this imagination to the fore. The expression of the “first idea”, the first impulsive thought to occur, not the considered after-thought usually given in an act of self-censorship, is the aim of Johnstone’s games. At the simplest level, these games include group free-association, usually concurrent with a physical activity, such as catching a ball, in order to “bypass the censor” (118), or improvising a non-associative list which Johnstone likens to “emptying all sorts of garbage from your mind that you didn’t know was there” (120). This could be
followed by games which require improvisational performance, such as “Yes, but ...” or “It’s Tuesday” (102-3). The freedom of imagination permitted in Johnstone’s games is intended to result in more honest performances due to an absence of self-consciousness. Once having escaped “the tyranny of their inner critics”, performers are “prepared to tell the truth in imaginary circumstances. The actor who has mastered these skills is on the path towards creative and dynamic acting” (Jesse, 1996:3).

Rediscovering the imagination is enriched by the ability of theatre games to simultaneously increase fundamental performance skills – what Jesse (1996) refers to as “The Payoff”. She lists “listening, interaction, concentration, spontaneity, use of bodies and voices, and emotional range” (29) as skills performers will develop and later intuitively transfer to scene work. The key term here is “intuitively”. If “The Payoffs” become the conscious focus of the game itself, Jesse warns that this will “promote self-awareness and the very result-orientated kind of work you are trying to discourage” (25). She uses listening as an example, arguing that “although you want actors to enhance their listening skills by playing several of the games, you don’t want them to focus on listening itself. Instead, you want the actors to focus on what they are asked to listen to”. Techniques must emerge “from the total self”, and not become “mechanical devices – a neat little bag of tricks ... to be pulled out by the actor when necessary” (Spolin, 1999:15) resulting in the Grotowskian notion of the “courtesan actor”. Techniques include, in Jesse’s (1996:25) outline, the ability to identify character needs and the operation of dramatic action, as well as physicalisation, use of voice and spatial awareness. They are “techniques of communicating” (Spolin, 1999:14) which should not be separated from direct experience – embodied and “embrained” (Riley, 2004) – otherwise an “artificial barrier” is constructed between that experience and its communication (Spolin, 1999:14). This results in a presentation of “artifices”, another Grotowskian term, rather than a truly creative
performance. For Spolin, (1999:15), theatre games provide the “direct, dynamic awareness of an acting experience” through which “experiencing and techniques are spontaneously wedded, freeing the student for the flowing, endless pattern of stage behavior”. This marriage creates discipline composed, amongst other skills, of focus and awareness, whereby the unleashed imagination is harnessed for an accomplished and engaging performance.

*Performative Games in the Devising Process*

For game sessions to fulfil their purpose within the devising process, their correct positioning within that process is crucial. Little more can be gained from a one-off games session besides releasing energy and perhaps provoking thought (Barker, 1977). Barker suggests that a warm-up games session before each rehearsal is most beneficial as “only a regular and sustained period of work can produce deep or lasting results” (66). The first game should be a release-of-energy game, followed by improvisation. He argues improvisation is not simply a process of intuition but one of discipline which requires strong technique and structure, leaving “the actor free to work, but at the same time focuses his work and directs his attention” (90). Theatre games, Barker continues, can provide this structure for improvisation until confidence and ability builds to create more intricate scenarios. In a devising situation, improvisation would first be structured by the performative games played while later improvisation to develop performance material is structured by performers. If we accept Barker’s arguments, then the most logical position for games within the devising process, particularly for first-time devisers, is prior to the actual devising – a pre-devising period – where skills are honed and relationships strengthened to tighten the ensemble. To maintain their effectiveness, and so long as available time permits, games should ideally be maintained throughout the devising and rehearsal periods both as warm-ups and to polish technique. Magnat (2005), however,
warns of the fine balance between beneficial and routine, or redundant, game playing. Part of a devising ensemble which created *Interruptions*, a U.C. Davis Mainstage production in collaboration with Annabel Arden of Théâtre de Complicité and playwright Stephen Jeffreys, Magnat records how Lecoq-trained Arden continued to devote a large portion of rehearsal time to “basic exercises such as tossing balls around in a circle and playing tag”, even though the pressures of rehearsal were increasing as cast member’s energies were overextended through intensive amounts of work (79-80). While group activities like games “had initially fostered a positive sense of play, dynamism, and confidence among participants … such ensemble-building exercises became redundant as time went on since they lacked direct applicability to the scene work, which consequently progressed at an alarmingly slow pace” (80). Magnat’s experience suggests that if games are to be continued throughout the devising process, they should at least be perceived as relevant. If devisers feel games are not contributing to, or are taking valuable rehearsal time away from, the production, then it is perhaps best that only brief energisers are retained as rehearsal procedure.

As devising becomes more intense, the length of time devoted to games in rehearsal should arguably decrease, but their continued presence — if devisers perceive them as constructive — is arguably of more benefit to the performers than if they were abandoned. At the very least it allows a time for the performers to have creatively-beneficial fun before the pressures of devising work. Lamden (2001:98) advises a split of 75% practical work and 25% discussion during devising rehearsals, allowing time for some theatre games, including initial warming-up, as well as later productive improvisation. Lamden maintains this division between on-the-floor work and discussion until the final rehearsals before performance, where only energisers would be required once the production is devised.
Despite the established benefits of theatre games, a pre-devising game period is not always recommended as an independent and identifiable stage of the devising process in the literature. For example, Bray (1991:14-15) declares, “The majority of drama exercises I have seen are designed for actor training and I cannot see any purpose in using them … for playbuilding.” The only exercises Bray recommends are for voice and movement, maintaining that discipline will arise organically from “the demands of the play”. Likewise, Schmor (2004:267) describes moving directly from an audition to a developmental phase with an interim workshop for “company study, research, and discussion”. He mentions “active exploration” but not games specifically. Other practitioners, however, do positively discuss the games process and provide time for games in their breakdowns of potential rehearsal/devising schedules. Kerrigan (2001) recommends warm-up games to awaken creative thinking, as well as adapting games for use throughout devising to answer specific needs, such as generating a particular atmosphere for a scene. In addition, Kerrigan advocates games to strengthen group cohesion, explore the power roles within a group and build supportive skills. Netherclift (2002:49) suggests that most days during the early weeks of rehearsal would start with a vocal and physical warm-up, followed by a game “for waking people up, establishing the spirit of play essential to improvisation and for getting actors to work quickly as a team.” She also indicates that games are useful throughout the devising process as they “can rescue a day that has run temporarily out of steam” (49). Naylor-Smith (2002:91) lists warm ups, playing a game, exercises, improvisations, discussion then devising work as the “typical” rehearsal structure. Games that “encourage physical spontaneity” are her choice as a movement director (92). However, these examples provided by Netherclift and Naylor-Smith are perhaps best classified as warm-ups and individual exercises rather than performative games.
The two most detailed manuals for devising both movement- and text-based theatre are by Callery (2001) and Oddey (1994). With their thorough attention to the practical and theoretical concerns of devising, it would be reasonable to expect that both would mention games when detailing possible devising processes. Callery (2001:200) fulfils this expectation. She believes it is “absolutely vital that text work does not start without prior training”, and that groups “won’t get very far without establishing a common physical vocabulary ... the notions of play and complicité ... are as essential to working on scripts as they are to devising.” For Callery, “prepatory training” (19) in the form of games and other exercises must be undertaken by the devising group, particularly when together for the first time. This is especially important for movement-based performances when the performers’ collective rhythm is a factor in timing and style. Developing work on-the-floor without relying heavily on discussion requires an embodied sensitivity amongst the group for accepting offers and building on ideas. Callery’s recommended activities for what I would term a pre-devising games period are geared primarily towards the demands of physical theatre, but are of value to any devising group, particularly those exercises which involve the group collectively. Unfortunately, I came across this manual long after my group had commenced devising and was unable to use Callery’s games in the “prepatory” manner she recommends, but found them of use as warm ups.

Oddey’s (1994) generic Model of Process was my primary source for pre-planning and predicting the likely necessities of devising before my group commenced rehearsals. Within her flexible four-stage Model, the emphasis is on the generation, development and refinement of performance material. The user must “select appropriate ways and means” of examining ideas, including practical methods, to develop structure, design and characters (152). While Oddey initially advocates “communication, concentration, trust, sensitivity, movement, voice and improvisation” exercises as “vital” in the early stage as devising
the use of preliminary theatre games are not included in the Model of Process as a specific stage of devising, and is only later addressed as the third in a trio of possible “Group Beginnings” (168-187). Here, games might be used for a variety of fundamental purposes, including group development and the promotion of spontaneity and communication. Oddey says “work to be covered includes movement and vocal training (with an emphasis on physical fitness, suppleness, and competence in various physical skills), games that encourage group creativity, concentration and trust, improvisation, and relaxation, as well as ways of focussing discussion, decision-making, and leadership” (172). The other two possible beginnings for group devising in Oddey’s format are more discussion-orientated, with the first positioning group administration and the brainstorming of initial aims and objectives as primary considerations; the second involves the exploration of a preliminary theme, with some movement and improvisation work, in order to better understand group dynamics as well as individual ideas, beliefs and interests. Ideally, the incorporation of all three “Group Beginnings” into the structure of initial workshops would constitute a comprehensive approach to introductory devising. This is how I approached my own rehearsals, although emphasising the practice of theatre games as the first identifiable stage in our process.

Like the fluid nature of Oddey’s (1994:172) Model of Process, the choice of theatre games is left to the deviser, taking into account “how the group chooses to incorporate initial practical activities into the overall working structure agreed at the start.” As she maintains, there is no standard formula for devising theatre, although I emulated companies such as Trestle Theatre and The Northern Stage Ensemble who devise through a physically-led rehearsal process (Lamden, 2000:5). The relevant theatre games, therefore, are those that have as their “Payoff”, to borrow Jesse’s (1996) term, skills for building effective improvisations. Sourcing games from Johnstone (1979), Barker (1977), Spolin
(1986), Hahlo and Reynolds (2000), Boal (1992) and Pierse (1993), amongst others, and keeping in mind the dual creative purpose of games to release imagination and increase performance technique, I identified five categories of games of particular relevance to my own devising process. These categories are: 1. general warm-up games which help performers direct their energy outward, provide a clear point of focus and “help them deposit the workaday world outside the theatre door” (Jesse, 1996:19); 2. Space and movement games which both increase stage awareness and allow movement to evolve fluidly from exploration rather than “intellectually planning and preparing in the head” (Oddey, 1994:182); 3. General improvisation games, such as those in Johnstone (1979), which make visible the processes of improvisation and performance to aid the development of discipline; 4. Characterisation games, or what Spolin (1986) terms “Who Games”, to increase non-verbal communication of relationships and identities; 5. Play-making games, such as those in Lamden (2001), which combine Spolin’s (1986) “Who, What and Where” principles to lay the foundations for scene construction and the development of narrative through improvisation. By selecting games from each category I sought to ensure that the particular theatrical concerns regarding the generation of performance material were brought to the attention of my devisers. This awareness was hopefully of use when later devising scenes. Also, by sorting games into these categories, it was easier to select the useful ones from the hundreds available. However, the true test for these performative games is in the practical workshop of rehearsal.

Performative Games in Practice: Devising This Is Not An Exit

It is particularly difficult for me to establish the value of performative games in group practice as I introduced the games and advocated their value. Despite this heavy bias, I do believe that the general outcomes of playing performative games with my devising group supported my theoretical research, even if the practical realities did not
achieve the ideal suggested in Johnstone (1981) or Spolin (1999). Similar to the situation in Magnat (2005), the group had a love-hate relationship with games, dependant on each rehearsal's work load.

Parallel to my theoretical investigations into games practice was the inclusion of a pre-devising period in the devising process of This Is Not An Exit. The time spent in performative games chosen from the categories above was primarily to develop awareness amongst the first-time devisers of how to create performance material. Throughout this pre-devising stage, spanning approximately six rehearsals, the group played enthusiastically and seemed to accept games as a legitimate facet of the devising process. At this point, rehearsals were roughly divided into 90% practical work (performative games) and 10% preliminary devising discussion. The perceived benefits transferring from this initial practice included confidence, reduced inhibitions and creative risk-taking once the developmental phase of the devising process commenced.

Once devising had started, I generally introduced games before each rehearsal to focus on a specific performance aspect pertinent to the production to better illustrate my ideas or concerns. For example, my variation on Spolin's (1986:33) "Rhythmic Movement" was an effective method of conveying the idea of how powerful sounds are at altering a performer's rhythm, and their potential for generating an added layer of meaning to a scene. Playing this game created a vibrant discussion concerning how sound can be the driving force behind a scene or an "effect" to aid in conveying place, atmosphere or mood. Using games to practically illustrate theatrical concepts was a very successful way to engage my first-time devisers in a critical, or at least considered, response as to why we continued playing games after the getting-to-know-you stage. Other particularly useful games were "Yes, But" and word association games (Johnstone, 1981:103), Spolin's
(1986) "Eye Contact" (173), "Contact" (188) and "Pitchman" (173), and "Performance Game" (Pierse, 1993:354). Two unnamed activities sourced from Lamden (2000), one deriving from Trestle Theatre’s rehearsal practice of using “tension states” (119) and, the other, an activity for “creating spaces” (118), were also helpful in promoting discussion regarding the creation of atmosphere and tension through the body. However, while the group were happy to continue playing these games, they did not mention their occasional absence from rehearsal. Only Adam requested regular warm-ups as he felt these helped him focus for the evening. However, once we were rehearsing with our set, the act of setting up became a ritual that similarly focused him on the work ahead.

The playing of games became more sporadic as devising intensified. Due to an increase in performance material, games were mostly reserved for when a cast member was absent and a full run-through of scenes was not possible. At such rehearsals, usually comprising Larry, Adam and me, an encouraging depth of discussion concerning the value of games was reached. Adam indicated a sound understanding of, and belief in, why it was beneficial to continue playing them. He admitted that he would continue attending rehearsals even if all progress ceased, just to play games. Larry, on the other hand, appreciated an explanation as to why a game was considered useful, and though he always participated, tended to commence games with a dubious expression. Over all, I believe Adam and Larry, both first-time devisers, received the most benefit from performative games, both in terms of exercising improvisatory ability and developing cohesion. Encouragingly, they would often relate a theatrical idea or concept to a game we had played in order to demonstrate their understanding, suggesting the games had provided a common vocabulary for expressing abstract performative concepts. The benefit of performative games to instill self-confidence when improvising was arguably not inconsiderable and, after the perceived enrichment of Larry’s and Adam’s spontaneous
creativity and improvisatory skills, I regret failing to initiate games every rehearsal. Although I encouraged a democratic working environment, and frequently reminded group members that they were all entitled to decide the direction of the group's work methods, I was looked upon as the facilitator of games. No one else introduced performative games to the group. Suzy, a fellow advocate of games, offered suggestions only after I asked her for them. This can be interpreted in two potentially related ways. The first interpretation echoes the group members who saw the entire devising process as my project and, consequently, considered me as the leader legitimised to make such suggestions. The second interpretation posits me as the only group member who valued games enough to source and offer them. My perceived role as leader, then, meant the group felt obliged to play them. This raises the possibility that group members felt a frustration similar to Magnat's (2005), perceiving games as redundant once there were large amounts of performance material to work on. If this was so, it was never vocalised. Overall, I believe from this experience that performative games are useful for building a common understanding amongst group members regarding performance concepts and cementing working relationships, but as Oddey (1994) stresses, the situation needs to dictate the number or duration of games within rehearsal. Theorising an ideal game plan for the entire devising period produces a template for selecting games most beneficial to first-time devisers, but this plan should be flexible, accommodating the practical demands of the current situation. I maintain, however, that a pre-devising game stage, before devising work intensifies, is an excellent introduction for first-time devisers to the physical and imaginative requirements of creating through improvisation, and for commencing the development of ensemble which underpins both the development and performance of any group devised production.
Given the high priority teachers and practitioners of improvisation give to performative games, and the core developmental role improvisation plays in the generation, refinement and rehearsal of devised material, the inclusion of a pre-devising period devoted to practising these games should be an important consideration for any devising group, particularly one devising for the first time. Should the group be able to afford the time, attention paid to foundational exercises in movement, scene construction and characterisation could result in benefits not tangible until rehearsal or even the production itself. It is important to bear in mind, however, that "pre-devising" and other such designations of devising stages (including "devising" itself) are theoretical constructs configured to aid critical analysis of this highly organic, often intellectually elusive, practice. That is, experiences within the rehearsal room are difficult to articulate and require translation, or even reduction, through terms or concepts which may, in some devising situations, not translate back again into practice. How to theoretically analyse the total experience of devising theatre, therefore, is a complex and often contradictory task which requires striking a balance between the insights of performance theory and performance practice. Through such investigation, I believe notions such as "pre-devising" (including its performative games component), "devising" and the culminating performance of the production meld into one inclusive process which may assist in locating devising practice within a critically, and historically, accessible context.