Of the theoretical work of Richard Foreman, Harries (2004:85) writes:

Rare among contemporary American theatre artists, Foreman regularly writes theoretical essays and manifestoes about the aims of his theatrical undertaking – idiosyncratic pieces informed by his reading in philosophical, theoretical, and literary work. These texts are at once a critical companion to his work, and, like many such essays, occasionally misleading documents marked as much by desire as description or analysis.

Theorising one’s own practice is problematic. As Harries indicates, subjective “desire” – in my case, to mend a troubled process through the wisdom of hindsight – can create “misleading” records of a process existent only in the practitioner’s memory. Needless to say, recovering the devising process through memory is an unreliable task. Heddon and Milling (2006:23) suggest that the devising process is “continually forgotten” in practice. Rehearsal notes are inadequate as “narrative does not accumulate an explanation of how work was made”. Further confusion comes from the “constant folding and faulting of influence and inspiration that is practice and production and documentation” (Pearson in Heddon and Milling, 2006:24). My research into devising histories and methodologies was an attempt to achieve an informed standpoint from which to develop critical awareness of our process. However, when devising, it is difficult to concentrate on the tools of method without neglecting the creativity they are meant to be fashioning. Hence, my reflections on our devising process are distanced from practice. Problematically, I am critically examining notes and memories of devising practice rather than practice itself.
Our devising process was to follow Oddey's (1994) *Devising Theatre: A practical and theoretical guide*. Despite Oddey's warnings that her handbook is "neither definitive nor prescriptive" (xii) and that there's "no one accepted way of devising a performance" (11), I nevertheless studied her Model of Process carefully before our first rehearsal. Two things emerged from this initial work with Oddey's text. First, I decided to aim for an artistic democracy. Second, I developed a map for introductory activities that might assist the group's first-time devisers. While this map was initially useful, I did not consult it or Oddey's Model once devising was underway. Rather than continuing to explore the viability of generic methodologies for first-time devisers, I was convinced that "every project generates its own working process" (25). As Joan Littlewood once said, "if you get a few people with a sense of humour and brains together, you'll get theatre" (Littlewood in Goorney, 1981:127). Rather than any discursive system, "intuition, instinct, and aesthetic choice are vital elements in any devising process, which can never be directly taught or learnt" (Oddey, 1994:151). I was too preoccupied with dealing with the outcomes of each rehearsal to maintain use of a process model. To have done so would have been impractical and inhibiting as the material produced suggested its own paths of development. Devising is an organic process - ideas grow from ideas, pathways of imagination end in new journeys. Creative blocks were overcome through discussion, or by returning to our generated store of characters, narratives, and situations. This constant self-referencing makes it difficult to articulate a "method", particularly as it involved decision-making based on the theoretically-troubling phenomena of "intuition." The apex of our process - the public performances of our production *This Is Not An Exit* - were as ephemeral, and thus as imperfectly recorded, as the devising process itself. Yet even more than my rehearsal notes, the composition of the production records the devising process, and continues it through the embodied practices of performance.
When uncovering the structure of a devised production, Kerrigan (2001:40) advises “highlight the important moments.” Evidence of our methodology can similarly be uncovered in the defining characteristics of the final production. Acknowledging this may be highly problematic, a crude theoretical comparison between the operation of a dramatic text and the devising process in performance may be illustrative of this point. During the production of a pre-scripted text, where it comprises one of many elements – performic, scenic, technical – “the text is the only element that no longer exists in its original from … it transforms, metamorphoses and virtually dispels itself through it very manifestation” (Sarrazac, 2002:68). The text becomes invisible within the physicality of performance. In contrast, the devising process remains visible within the devised production by contributing so directly to form. As Oddey (1994:11) constantly reiterates, “the significance of the process is that it determines the product”. However, I wish to take this one step further by including the eventual theatrical product as a component of the devising process, rather than as a stable result of a cumulative course of development. Process is the cytoskeleton of a devised work. I describe our devised production *This Is Not An Exit* as comprising a character-based “postmodern aesthetic”. That this aesthetic was deliberately chosen then achieved suggests strategies tacitly understood and followed by the group. By identifying the important features of our rehearsal methods through the characteristics of our final production, I believe a clear understanding of our process will emerge. Arguably, this process continues through performance, in both the experiences of the performers and audience. The performance of a devised work, like its creation, is a process difficult to articulate, and in its complexity arguably offers a rich site for future research.

3.1 Artistic Democracy and Aesthetic Direction in *This Is Not An Exit*

Approaching devising with an admiration for the pioneers of the 1960/70s, I was intrigued by the concept of an “artistic democracy.” Although this term may encompass a
variety of working structures, my vision of artistic democracy was one of total performer
control. Sans writer, director, or designers, a group of performers would discuss, improvise
and rehearse a production into existence using whatever theatrical techniques or methods at
their disposal. Theoretically, a production might build up and out from the performers to
inhabit the stage. Although fanciful, I imagined that performers working collectively could
produce an organic work – all the elements of set, lighting, or sound conceptually folding
over and around the performances as they arose from the immediate challenges of
rehearsal. Re-centring performers both within the devising process and the theatrical space
(without resorting to a realist style), I hoped to later examine the critical problematics of
such a re-centring in relation to contemporary thought: for example, the postmodern
“suspicion of presence” (Auslander, 1997:63), or its “crisis of community” (Kershaw,
1999:193) that distrusts “anything that smacks of collectivism” (192). However this project
was usurped by a question dogging me throughout the devising of This Is Not An Exit:
can/do artistic democracies even exist? Are they an ideal of theory rather than practice?
My experience suggests group-led devising hinges on a number of contingencies including
time, resources, and group composition. Disrupt one or the other, and the veneer of
collective directing/authoring/designing crumbles to reveal hidden hierarchies. Performers
used to traditional production structures cry for leadership, experienced devisers clamour
to provide it. These disruptions within group structure have an inevitable flow-on to the
creative work – so much so that I would argue This Is Not An Exit is probably truer to the
vision of two devisers rather than the collective four. While our experience is not
representative of all artistic democracies, it illustrates how even gritty determination to
maintain a theoretically collective model is not enough to sustain one in practice. In
recounting and analysing our experience, I will concentrate on the areas of style and design
– arguably the area of aesthetic decision-making with the most influence on the overall
production. First, it is necessary to examine what an “artistic democracy” might be and why this concept has a troubled reputation within contemporary devising.

*Artistic Democracies: A Nostalgic Myth?*

Oddey (1994) relegates artistic democracies to the idealistic 1970s, identifying more hierarchical structures over the past twenty years as the result of economic and artistic change. She observes the structures of devising companies in the 1990s emphasising specialisation and specific production roles. Accordingly, Oddey outlines how directors, writers, designers, performers, musicians, and administrators may negotiate their traditional responsibilities within a disruptive devising paradigm. A similar approach is found in *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide* (Bicât and Baldwin [eds.], 2002). Assembling essays by a number of practitioners, the devising process is segmented into methodologies particular to individual roles, from director through to production, in an arguably hierarchical order. Throughout is an awareness of achieving and managing a traditionally-modelled, efficacious team of interdependent, though discretely defined, theatre specialists. Arguably, this more recent manual suggests the various 1960s/70s artistic democracy models and the conventional hierarchies they resisted have been supplanted by a middle ground of production – the devising oligarchy.

However, did a true model of artistic democracy ever exist within devising practice? Recent re-readings of “historical” devising suggest companies frequently cited as artistic collectives either maintained hierarchical power structures or altered traditional sites of theatrical power (such as re-visioning “director” as “author”) in what is effectively a masking of these power operations. Heddon and Milling (2006:61) persuasively cut through the rhetoric of pioneers such as The Living Theatre, The Open Theatre, Schechner’s The Performance Group and other companies to reveal collectives
paradoxically cited for their well-known leaders. They quote Aronson: “most groups functioned more on the model of the totalitarian phase of communism: there was a collective of actors, but the groups tended to have autocratic, even dictatorial, leaders in the form of visionary directors, who, in essence, replaced the playwright as the creative fount for texts” (Aronson in Heddon and Milling, 2006:61). This is perhaps explainable by the well-documented influence of Artaud on these groups. Rabkin (1985:319) notes that one of the “guiding principles” of 1960s/70s alternative theatre was Artaud’s proclamation: “No one has the right to call himself author, that is to say creator, except the person who controls the direct handling of the stage.” With the overthrow of the authoritative text, the playwright function “was spread among members of the ensemble or subsumed by the director-auteur” (320). While the former situation dwindled in popularity, the latter persisted and increased. To quote Rabkin: “… collective playwriting waned in the face of the dissipation of the ideals of communality and the difficulties of the craft. Herbert Blau has noted that the polymorphous thinking body which had for a while in the theatre displaced the text … [came] to discover that along with the unreliable duration of group consciousness, it had a limited repertoire of ideas” (320). As recorded in Heddon and Milling (2006), many collectives who commenced in the 1960s/70s with a policy of democratic practice later reverted to working with scripts often credited to a single author. Simply, “the writer/director nexus reasserted itself” (62) to the extent that, nowadays, it is difficult to locate a professional devising company without a director or associated writer.

Practitioners often cite two particular problems with artistic democracies - the often questionable quality of collectively written pieces, and the subtle, yet powerful, hierarchies that emerge in the perceived lack of organisational structure. Oddey (1994) summarises the first problem. While championing “virtue in eclectism” (2), she also warns of “get-it-all-in-ism” (50) when a group tries to incorporate all its collective views and
ideas into one script. The result is a loose, rambling show that “suffer[s] from a lack of cohesive style and clear single vision” (51). Although Oddey appears to warn off potential collective writers with a rather negative conclusion,13 this does not mean that examples of positive collective writing experiences do not exist. Kerrigan (2001), for instance, contains a selection of advice from contemporary professional devising companies who devise and write their shows collectively. However, collective writing has generally fallen out of favour with devising companies (Heddon and Milling, 2006). Another contributing factor to this demise are “the struggles experienced in attempting both to determine and then to practise a collective model” (105). Richard Seyd, referring to the practices of the collective Red Ladder, makes a number of pertinent points. One is the “anarchic tyranny of structurelessness” resulting from the collective structure, and another, that their model of unanimous agreement may have lead to the more dominant group members getting their way (Seyd in Heddon and Milling, 2006:106). Company member Lizbeth Goodman’s recollections, as summarised by Heddon and Milling, pick up this last point: “the very structure of collective organisation often ironically prompted a non-agreed hierarchy to be imposed. In order for a play to progress, it was often necessary for someone to step in and take control; in the 1970s, that someone ... would typically be a man” (106-7). Despite the political intentions of collectives to disrupt the patriarchal hierarchies of traditional theatre and wider society by working democratically, the resultant lack of organisational structure was experienced as a void in which hegemonic power imbalances could reassert themselves. Artistic democracies cannot escape the encroachment – and sometimes invasion – of wider political and social formations which threaten to silence weakened or less assertive voices.

13 "A group devising and writing collectively needs to allow substantial time for this process, which I suspect is harder and longer than for the playwright employed by a company to come in and write a play from and with the group" (Oddey, 1994:51).
This does not mean that devising has been abandoned as a potential site of disruptive politics, although many published devising methodologies tend to promote more traditional production structures – a director as “leader” and specialised production roles in a hierarchy that, although not vertical, tends to apportion unequal creative authority. It is troubling that such encroachment of hierarchical production on a conceptually egalitarian process may threaten to mask the subversive necessity for non-conventional processes of theatrical creation which marked the inception of recent devising practice. As was explored in Chapter One, devising emerged to confront dominant cultural norms perpetuated in established institutions such as illusionistic theatre. Contemporary devising companies “still choose to place themselves rhetorically outside the mainstream, which they cast as restricted, tradition-bound, or conservative” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:225). For those companies with overt political motivations, devising is used as a political tool very differently to in the 1960s/70s. Direct confrontation, as Auslander argues (1997:61), has since shifted to alternative theatre offering postmodernistic “strategies of counterhegemonic resistance by exposing processes of cultural control and emphasizing the traces of nonhegemonic discourses within the dominant”. Magnat (2005) clarifies the contrast proposed by Auslander – while 1960s devising stood in opposition, postmodernistic devising does not claim an external position to dominant cultural formations. Magnat maintains, however, that devising remains a “danger” to canonical conceptions of theatre precisely by offering process-oriented, non-hierarchical structures which may empower practitioners to further disrupt understandings of artistic creation and authoritative learning procedures in academic practice (74). For Magnat, devising potentialises embodied consciousness, cognition and creativity, offering an alternative to conventional approaches in performance study. The creative possibilities open to each deviser in non-hierarchical processes promotes “the development of consciousness, responsibility, courage, and independence” (83).
However, Magnat (2005:74) refers to devising within (North American) academic institutions, thereby raising the question of whether the “nonhierarchical nature of devising” in such situations is, in fact illusory. Schmor’s (2004) argument for devising opportunities in college theatre programmes suggests, despite his positive spin, “the constraints of pedagogical and institutional conditions” (260). Foremost is his model of students and faculty devising together, with an academic as director – despite consciously striving for egalitarian working conditions, the imbalance of status inherent within the team from its inception suggests some people’s opinions will carry more weight than others. Arguably, one area where this weight might be felt is aesthetic direction. I will focus on this area to explore the failure of our artistic democracy when devising *This Is Not An Exit* for two reasons. First, as I will explain, aesthetic direction encompasses production areas that are usually controlled by members outside the performance team. Second, aesthetic direction in the theatre is where macro (socio-cultural, political) and micro (theatrical, artistic) influences intersect, revealing every production to be a potential site of dialoguing, juxtaposed, or conflicting concepts. Arguably, where a group is responsible for aesthetic direction, the workings of these various macro and micro influences are made visible in its working process. The impact of social (i.e. group composition) and economic (i.e. budget, resources) factors can be traced along with more immediate theatrical influences. Further, the dominant aesthetic concepts of a democratically-devised production may reveal the “hidden hierarchies” of its process. In this way, aesthetic direction in a group-devised production is more than an issue of creativity but an area where wider social, cultural, and political discourses may be revealed as implicit within the devising process.
Before considering the model of artistic democracy underpinning the devising of *This Is Not An Exit* it is necessary to acknowledge the inherent threats to its success. The most obvious was my status within the group. Of all group members, I had the most responsibility after instigating the project for research purposes. Problematically, due to the interests of this research, I imposed a democratic working structure on the group before any other decisions were made, effectively preventing any consensus for democracy in the first place. As initiator, I was already placed in a leadership position and, perhaps more pertinently, one of ownership. Both factors were inescapable throughout the process, and despite the group claiming ownership of the performance material, I was considered leader/owner of the project at large. Not only did I facilitate games and warm-ups, I was responsible for production management and administration including acquiring and controlling the finances. A certain aura of authority or ownership would inevitably spill over from my organisational/facilitating functions to the rehearsal room – Adam once commented that I was only person who knew exactly what was going on. Sadly for the prospect of democracy, I controlled the production’s knowledge store and its capital. Despite anticipating this, I hoped that in the rehearsal room proper, it would not be naïve to attempt a more equal balance of power. It is important to bear in mind these other roles I fulfilled within the group and how they may have consciously or unconsciously affected the perception of my status.

Broadly, collaborative creation can mean “all members of the group contributing equally to the creation of the performance or performance script” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:4). In many contemporary companies, this creation is facilitated, mediated, or even completely controlled by a director. After considering examples from contemporary and past companies, I decided to focus on aspects from a range of models rather than
attempting to imitate the strategies of any one company. Prior to forming my group, I interpreted artistic democracy to mean that all group members have an equal share/say in the creation of the performance; no one group member carries more authority than another; disagreements will be resolved through consensus; group members will be required to contribute skills in a number of theatrical areas, where necessary. And finally, the success or failure of the production will be the responsibility of the whole group. Closer consideration of Oddey (1994), Schmor (2004), and Bicât and Baldwin [eds.] (2002) later inspired a more specific interpretation. These sources describe devising as the renegotiation of traditional theatre roles in a collaborative rather than hierarchical structure. However, after the group’s first rehearsal this model threatened my concept of an artistic democracy for two reasons. First, I had too few group members to fill all the specific functions. Second, the designation of titles is arguably problematic. For performers used to working in a traditional theatrical model, the title “director” is inseparable from “boss”. Similarly, any other title will carry the symbolic weight of its position in the traditional model. While considering this dilemma, I recalled devising experiences in high school and at university, where specifying roles or titles wasn’t even entertained – everyone mucked in and built a performance through enthusiastic co-operation. Influenced by these considerations, “artistic democracy” became the theoretical problem of removing traditional production roles to create a production where every design element (set, costume, and lighting) is derived from the performers. The performers would be responsible for all ideas and decisions. Aside from the group as a whole, there would be no director and no designers.

There is an important distinction here between my model and that of the pioneering collectives. While their concepts of total group creation were politically inspired by ideals of more co-operative social practices, mine were motivated by possible aesthetic outcomes.
A second motivation was pedagogic. Like Magnat (2005), I believe the potential benefits of a devising experience reverberate beyond simply learning to devise theatre. One benefit is learning how to extend one’s creative capabilities in a group. Thomson (2003:118) explains: “I teach that true collaboration is a verb not a noun, a process of engagement, a map more than a destination. The process fosters a community of makers, who engender a shared vision, which in turn fuels individual creation.” As Thomson indicates, successful collaboration potentialises the creativity of the individual, strengthening that of the group and the product. Arguably, however, what is most important here is Thomson’s thinking of “collaboration” – as a verb, not a noun. Collaboration is a process as important as the product, if not more so, since the quality of the process may impact upon the quality of the product. Devisers may extend such knowledge to other areas of group creativity, such as conventional play production, where focus tends to settle on the end product. Ideally, devisers will come away with the “skill [of] being able to include what another person is doing while not losing one’s own momentum of thought” (Tufnell and Crickmay, 1993:73) – that is, the ability to nurture both the group’s and their own individual creativity to the full benefit of the resultant work.

The period covered in this analysis reflects the early phase of devising, approximately spanning August, 2004 until July, 2005, well before Larry departed the group. While this “early” may seem a long time, it reflects how long it took before our first attempt at structuring our scenes into an overall context. By then, the fractured, non-linear postmodern style favoured by Suzy and me had become so entrenched in the group’s vision of the production that this first structuring session reified that vision in practice. Further, by the time Carl joined it was necessary for him to accept this vision without challenge if we were to finalise the production before the set performance dates. To explore our collective process, I will focus on style and design as components of aesthetic
direction, both of which were decided in this early phase. The former is revealed as a site of considerable socio-cultural power that can be potentially hijacked by more dominant devisers for aesthetic or political purposes. Design, meanwhile, becomes a redeeming site in the corrupted artistic democracy of *This Is Not An Exit*, since true collaboration responds to an imposed style in a creative and organic way. Taken together, these examples suggest that artistic democracies are complex, sometimes contradictory processes capable of drawing inspiration from both the positive and negative potentials in group dynamics.

**Aesthetic Direction and “This Is Not An Exit”**

By “aesthetic direction” I mean the process of formulating parameters of style, form, and content when creating a theatrical performance. In traditional play production, this is popularly known as the “director’s concept.” Simply, this concept refers to “the director [having] a fairly strong idea of what he or she is going to do with a play and the kind of themes the production will emphasize and what the director wants to communicate about the play to the audience” (Griffiths, 1982:11). If, as Taylor (1996:25) indicates, directors “make artistic judgements every time they make a decision”, then the term “aesthetic direction” seeks to suggest the responsibilities of the (absent) director in a devising collective without identifying any one person in the role. It is a sequence of decision-making and, subsequently, a palpable formula that continues developing in depth and complexity. Arguably, in a collective devising situation, aesthetic direction is an endless refining process, not the creative matrix of a single mind dominating from the start. There is, however, room for usurpation of this process in the collective. How such usurpation may occur features in the example of devising *This Is Not An Exit*.

Style was the area of devising *This Is Not An Exit* where the preferences of two group members – Suzy and I – asserted themselves over the others. Style is, as Brockett
(1988:52) argues, difficult to define as "it has been used to designate many things. Basically, however, style is a characteristic that results from a distinctive mode of expression or method of presentation." Lamden (2000:121) suggests that style and genre "are often used interchangeably" and gives Epic Theatre, Naturalism, and physical theatre as examples. In her thesis on group devising, Taffel (1990:14) highlights style as an important consideration during any devising process. She refers to Peter Brook who argues the "problem" of style. Style is transient, ever-changing; contingent upon socio-cultural forces. This is especially true for theatre: "Life is moving, influences are playing on actor and audience, and other plays, other arts, the cinema, television, current events, join in the constant rewriting of history and the amending of the daily truth" (Brook, 1968:19). Choosing a style is one of the first challenges for a devising group. However, as Brook hints, there is more at stake than simply selecting Naturalism or Epic. Styles can consciously or unconsciously reference or reproduce the dominant socio-cultural discourses in operation. For example, illusionistic forms of theatre tend "to perpetuate the status quo in [their] aesthetics, politics, working methods and techniques" (Shank, 1982:1). How a particular style is used, of course, may potentially disrupt the reproduction and reification of these discourses. However, throughout the diverse works of devising companies who "engage with systems of knowing" – i.e., who are aware of and engage with contemporary critical theories – an identifiable postmodern style can be detected (Heddon and Milling, 2006:216). In other words, there are recognisable stylistic elements employed by devisers seeking to disrupt or expose hegemonic discourses and their systems of representation.

14 Counsell’s (1992) definitions of “discourse” and “ideology” are helpful here to clarify these terms. “Discourse” refers to “a type of language” that “does not describe the world but manufactures it, encodes a view of reality in the very concepts out of which it is made … Discourse is … the medium in which ideology operates, and the means by which individuals in society, social subjects, are created” (7-8, original emphases). He defines “ideology” as “the systems of ideas [even unconscious] by which elite groups maintain their positions of power” (7).
While Heddon and Milling (2006:216) stress that postmodernism is not reducible to an aesthetic, and that companies "are not simply repeating a certain style for the sake of it", they do worry that "contemporary devised performance, in terms of both form and content, is also now, often, ‘predictable’". Berghaus (2005:72) lists the typical features of the postmodern style: "self-consciousness; ambiguity of meaning; statements in inverted commas; irony; parodic appropriation of non-systemic material; quoting of elements from different cultures and periods; mixing of high art and mass culture; incongruity of composition; use of pastiche and collage; crossing of genre boundaries; mixing of media". Despite the proliferation of these techniques in contemporary devised performance, Berghaus argues that "postmodernism never became a monolithic ideology or cultural practice" (74). Arguably, its stylistic aspects have been reified through repetition and familiarity within alternative theatre, thereby acquiring a position of aesthetic dominance, or at least high visibility. This leads to the second major determinant of a production's style – its immediate theatrical influences.

"Theatre is a cultural space, and the existing blueprints for theatrical production that circulate within it provide the ideas and parameters within which practitioners knowingly or unknowingly think and work" (Counsell, 1996:2). While overt quotation and borrowing characterise the postmodern paradigm – thereby accounting for the emergence of a familiar postmodern style – no production can ever be free of intertextuality or convention (Harris in Heddon and Milling, 2006). To explain how "a more conspicuous set of conventions ... emerge" within theatrical usage, Jestrovic (2002:48) employs the term "trans-theatrical inscription." This is "a stamp that resurrects another production, theatrical style or another work art" (47) and links a performance to not only other performances but to history. Jestrovic's usage implies a conscious selection of past or trans-theatrical conventions which are implemented, and often modified, for a specific purpose:
The process of combination and association governs the nature of these inscriptions, yet it is not an arbitrary interplay of different performance conventions ... The trans-theatrical inscriptions need to be precise, as Meyerhold puts it: “from the old theater one must select those architectural features, which best convey the spirit of the work” (98-99). (Jestrovic, 2002:48)

However, I believe such inscriptions can also occur unconsciously, as past theatrical experiences become embodied, later re-emerging refigured by fresh artistic challenges. In this way, techniques may arguably evolve or transform within the flux of social, cultural and artistic demand whilst still retaining the traces of earlier usage. Further, their availability and re-use arguably reify them as conventions.

In my use of “convention” I am referring to theatrical techniques or devices which may supply the vocabulary in the theatrical language (style) constructed by every production. For Raymond Williams (1968:178), “convention” implies more than technical choice, embodying “those emphases, omissions, valuations, interests, indifferences, which compose a way of seeing life, and drama as part of life.” As suggested above, a production’s style is not exempt from the influence of wider socio-cultural discourses. To reiterate:

... on the stage discourses and ideologies ... become aesthetics: styles and genre, techniques and practices, designs for sets, costumes and the hypothetical ‘individuals’ that are the characters. All these constitute ways of representing the world, and so, like discourse proper, offer positions from which reality is construed. (Counsell, 1992:9)

Williams (1968), however, pinpoints how conventions construct their own discourses – specifically, through “emphases” and “omissions”. The aesthetic direction of a production is therefore about more than artistic choice but how reality is to be constructed and understood. Whoever controls it is in a position of considerable power.
They implicate all those working on the production in this construction of reality, even utilising some (i.e. performers) in its immediate embodiment. Ideally, where a group collectively determines aesthetic direction, the reality constructed is a "multi-vision (integrating various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes to changing world events)" (Oddey, 1994:3). That is, a variety of perspectives may find themselves on stage competing, dialoguing, or in contrast.

However, this theory does not always translate into practice, as my experience devising This Is Not An Exit attests. Authority lies in understanding how various conventions operate to construct meaning. That is, the ability to interpret and appropriately reconfigure "trans-theatrical inscriptions" for any given theatrical challenge. Presumably, the wider the theatrical experiences one has had as both practitioner and audience member, the wider one's exposure to potential "trans-theatrical inscriptions." Within my group, Suzy and I had had more diverse theatrical experiences than Adam or Larry, and were more fluent in potentially postmodern conventions. Early in the process, Suzy and I both thought these conventions appropriate or best for our generated material, imposed them on the individual work of Adam, Larry, and later Carl. How this imposition worked arguably involved a number of factors. The most obvious would be that Suzy and I frequently made critical suggestions to guide the development of scenes from a realist to more non-illusionistic style. Why others conformed to these suggestions makes visible the workings of group dynamics, highlighting how the "artistic" component of "artistic democracy" is subject to the socio-cultural power discrepancies hidden in the "democracy".
Kerrigan (2001:107) lists “articulateness”, “a track record” and “knowledge” as some of the means by which people gain power in groups. In particular “knowledge is power” (108). In any group, there are two types of available knowledge: “unique information is information held by one member before group discussion; common information is information known by all members prior to discussion” (Stasser and Birchmeier, 2003:88). Arguably, someone who can speak with authority on a subject, thereby revealing the potential for unique information, is likely to be viewed as an authority. In a devising group, inexperienced devisers may possess valuable information regarding conventional production, but are unable to articulate how to begin devising. This was the situation in my group, where Suzy and I, both experienced devisers, very early acquired an aura of authority by suggesting pathways of initial exploration. Do differing levels of devising knowledge/experience within a group's composition doom artistic democracy? Does "undeliberate" authority garnered at the commencement of the process carry throughout until the end production? Arguably, that depends on how the authority is wielded. In the case of aesthetic direction, claiming an artistic democracy only serves to mask a very pervasive operation of power.

Although Adam and Larry were aware of the principles of an artistic democracy as I had explained them, there was no significant challenge to Suzy’s and my “leadership”. Can this solely be explained by their confidence in our “unique information”? Possibly, but there were other potential factors. First, Adam and Larry wanted a designated leader. Larry announced that artistic democracies “didn’t work” and, with Adam’s agreement, requested I take charge. This was towards the middle of the devising process which was somewhat of a creative slump. I resisted their request, as I didn’t want to upset the group process. “The creative process includes frustrating times, when you work hard and get nowhere ... When

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Kerrigan's (2001:107) full statement reads, “People gain power in group though various means: articulateness, a track record, emotionally, charisma, knowledge, action, elections, promotions, appointments, and the ability to reward or punish.”
you get stuck, you are on the verge of discovery, but you won’t find it by beating a dead horse” (Kerrigan, 2001:76). I believed the creative process we were using (improvising the same difficult scenes over and over and getting nowhere) was the “dead horse”, rather than the group organisation. This proved correct as once inspiration struck and we explored a different creative direction, the cries for leadership died down. I interpreted this panic to be a hangover from Adam’s and Larry’s experience in traditionally-organised theatre. Arguably, in times of creative hardship less experienced devisers seek security in a director figure, while during fertile periods they accept that “chaos is necessary aspect of devising” (Callery, 2001:164). Collectives comprising a mix of experienced and inexperienced devisers thus may have an in-built space for the more confident to jostle for aesthetic control.

Another important factor to consider is the process of group decision-making. “Group decisions are largely a reflection of the dominant sentiments of members at the onset of discussion” (Stasser and Birchmeier, 2003:87). Or, as was the case with This Is Not An Exit, the aesthetic sentiments with the most weight – mine and Suzy’s. Stasser and Birchmeier further argue that “the generation of decision options and the choice among these options are distinct processes” (86). Privileging a potentially “postmodern aesthetic” \(^{16}\) meant Suzy and I were affecting leadership by generating options. Theoretically, Adam and Larry did not have to make choices that conformed to the aesthetic direction imposed by myself and Suzy. They could have re-directed the style a different way through subversive decision-making. However, they responded by making decisions regarding their performance material so as to conform to this style. Sawyer (2003:8) defines one feature of group creativity as the impossibility “to determine the meaning of an action until other performers have responded to it.” He applies this to the

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\(^{16}\) This “postmodern aesthetic” is fully explored in Chapter 3.3 (see below).
specific example of improvisation, but it is arguably true for general collaborative creativity. An incomplete thought or suggestion from one person is built upon by another until it is substantial, workable. Sawyer refers to this process as “intersubjectivity”:

In group creativity, the dependence of each action on the subsequent flow of the performance results in a situation in which it is impossible for the performers to have identical mental representations of what is going on. However, although each performer may have a rather different interpretation of what is going on and where the performance might be going, they are nonetheless able to collectively create a coherent performance. To properly understand group creativity, we need to think of intersubjectivity as “a process of coordination of individual contributions to joint activity rather than as a state of agreement” (Matusov, 1996, p. 34). The key question about intersubjectivity in group creativity is not how performers come to share identical representations, but rather, how a coherent interaction can proceed even when they do not. (9)

Sawyer goes on to discuss improvisation which should be “open ended, extendable, and multiply interpretable” in order for collaboration to occur. However, what is most interesting is the quote he uses from Matusov (above). It suggests that instead of individuals offering contributions that conform to the group direction their contributions are subsumed into the whole to create that direction. An opposite reading suggests that the individual coordinates their contribution to fit the group by adapting their original ideas instead of framing new ones. I believe both these readings can be applied to Adam’s and Larry’s response to Suzy’s and my imposed style. Throughout devising (and until Larry’s departure), both evolved their original material towards a more non-illusionistic style while retaining the scene’s original purpose. Instead of interpreting their shift from a naturalist to a non-illusionistic style as accepting direction, it may be read as their creative response to our contribution. They were simply intersubjectively coordinating an appropriate response to the provided stimulus. This is a much more positive reading of the situation, and lessens the charge against Suzy and me of exerting authority within an agreed collective working
structure. However, the general challenges facing creative groups cannot be discounted, as research suggests that much of what we experienced in the first months of devising *This Is Not An Exit* is typical of small creative groups. Briefly outlining these issues further illustrates the complexity of establishing an artistic democracy.

If Adam’s and Larry’s adaptation to our preferred style is an example of “intersubjectivity”, or true collaboration, then it is clear Suzy and I weren’t collaborating in return. While collaboration suggests the movement of ideas in all directions throughout a group, the situation I have thus far described has me and Suzy imposing them. This situation conforms to typical group decision-making situations. “Initial majorities often determine a group’s choice, particularly when decisions cannot be readily evaluated using objective criteria (Davis, 1973; Laughlin & Ellis, 1986; Stasser, Kerr, & Davis, (1989)” (Stasser and Birchmeier, 2003:90). While this may be common, it is not healthy for creative groups where the quality of collaboration influences the quality of the product. Although it was two against two, as mentioned above, my and Suzy’s position was strengthened by an aura of authority. Further conditions typically found in group situations may have also played a role. Hennessey (2003:186-7) summarises:

Researchers tell us that, when asked to be part of an idea-generating group, the majority of persons will not work to reap the benefits of working with colleagues who bring a diversity of experience, backgrounds, and skills. Instead, group members tend to focus much of their attention and concern on how they themselves are being perceived by others. Intrinsic task motivation in other words, is often supplanted by the extrinsic need to appear competent. One especially thorny problem is that most individuals show a marked tendency toward conformity. Fearing criticism or rejection, group members have frequently been shown to avoid disagreement or self-censor thoughts they believe might be met with negative reactions (Nemeth & Nemeth-Brown, this volume; Paulus, 1999).
All of these factors were detectable in my group, particularly in the first weeks of rehearsal when self-consciousness was high. That Suzy and I were clear on stylistic direction very early suggests we took advantage of the “forming” stage of group development, “characterised by tentativeness, politeness and anxiety” (Gibbs, 1995:34). We did not draw upon the potential skills of Adam and Larry, instead privileging our own. In my case, this probably stemmed from “the extrinsic need to appear competent” (Hennessey, 2003:186). Adam’s and Larry’s lack of disagreement was possibly fear of criticism in the face of Suzy’s and my “unique information.” Simplistically, two differing states of “needing to appear competent” therefore came into conflict. One state was characterised by the urge to demonstrate ability by making directive suggestions, the other was marked by the inability to speak out against those suggestions for fear of being labelled less knowledgeable. Collaboration was further inhibited by the adoption of those directive suggestions. Once our aesthetic direction was determined, it was not flexible to the flux of our creative discoveries. Instead, those discoveries had to conform to the style. This lack of collaboration on the part of Suzy and me should have been a cause of concern to Adam and Larry if they had been motivated to uphold the artistic democracy. However, both are fairly easy-going individuals, and both were especially conscious (as they said) that the devising process was my project and they didn’t want to step on anyone’s toes. While well-intentioned, their failure to challenge the hijacking of aesthetic direction meant they were equally implicated in the democracy’s undoing. This suggests that everybody in a collective is responsible for upholding democratic strategies. To assign an individual the task of ensuring democracy is another stumble towards “leader”. Thus, an artistic democracy is arguably only feasible when everybody is committed to its ideals and believes in its benefits. Otherwise, energy ideally reserved for creative work is diverted into anxieties of who is in charge, who may be trying to take charge, and how to avoid any responsibility altogether.
The "postmodern" style Suzy and I favoured was preferred for its potential to critically disrupt hegemonic discourses. At this early stage of devising, I imagined exploring media representations of women and their impact on real women's lives, while Suzy thought to confront anti-euthanasia views. We both felt that the postmodern aesthetic was the best medium for exploring our issues theatrically, with more ideological impact than naturalism or realism. Thus, Suzy and I weren't just imposing style we were imposing a position of opposition to hegemonic discourses which may not have accommodated the views of Adam or Larry. Further, introducing a postmodern style in performance may set up the expectation of resistant politics – an expectation Adam's and Larry's work might not have wanted to satisfy. Broadly, Suzy and I were establishing how we wished our work to be read, and implicating Adam's and Larry's work in this reading. This not only flies in the face of artistic democracy, but makes visible exactly what is at stake in the choice and usurpation of style. Like the Naturalist director who utilises performers consciously or unconsciously to "perpetuate the status quo" (Shank, 1982:1), we were utilising our group members to effect our own personal resistant politics. The point is, that like any cultural situation, when devising, it is important to keep asking: "By what 'system of power' are certain representations authorized while others are blocked, prohibited, invalidated, or ignored?" (Miles in Stiles, 2000:250). In order for an artistic democracy to function, its participants must ask themselves of every decision adopted: "What is there to be gained, and for whom?" (Stiles, 2000:273). Otherwise, inaction creates a space for authority to take hold, and the group's collective intentions may be hijacked by individual personal agendas.

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17 Further, I was critically interested in the similarities and contrasts between postmodern and early twentieth-century avant-garde performance, and wished to work with some of their common aspects – e.g. mixed media, non-linear structures, minimal dialogue. Part of this interest included the issue of modernist opposition vs. postmodern resistance to dominant discourses (see Auslander, 1997).

18 I am quoting Stiles (2000) out of context. This is her follow-up question to, "Why is artistic originality and vision treated with such fear in a cultural context?" (273). However, I found her phrasing succinct and compelling for my purposes.
I do not wish to doom all attempts at artistic democracy to failure as, with the right group, there is arguably the potential for real collaborative engagement. Although aesthetic direction was set, the process by which the actual design developed (albeit within the confines of the style) is more akin to my vision of an artistic democracy. Of course, it is vital to keep in mind that factors such as our minimal budget influenced design decisions as well. Despite what I perceive as the failure of our artistic democracy, there were areas that developed and evolved through ostensibly collaborative effort. I would like to examine our set design as it suggests that even though a group aesthetic may be dominated by the vision of one or two, how that aesthetic is responded to by others provides space for fulfilling collaborative creation. This also illustrates how the contemporary configuration of devising under a directorial figure (as witnessed in Oddey, 1994; Bicât and Baldwin, 2002; and Heddon and Milling, 2006) may retain the potential for being “one of the most creative experiences” performers can have (Netherclift in Bicât and Baldwin, 2002:46).

Collective Designing: Performing the Space

Grotowski’s (1968:919) “Poor Theatre” challenged “the notion of theatre as a synthesis of disparate creative disciplines – literature, sculpture, painting, architecture, lighting, acting.” Instead, the “personal and scenic technique of the actor” becomes “the core of theatre art” (15). While never proposing to emulate Grotowski, I did intend to position the performers as central in the creation of all design aspects of This Is Not An Exit. Early in my research I was intrigued by the glimpses Schmor (2004) provides into the possibility that production design could arise from the work of performer-devisers. Illustrating the fluctuation of boundaries between responsibilities in a devising company, Schmor cites the example of the costume designer for If We Go Out and Call who requested the programme credit “Costume Manager” after “having felt the process was so dependant on individual performers’ ideas and functional requests that she had no room for
a cohesive design she would call her own” (263). For *This Ship of Fools*, Schmor explains that the performers wanted “swings and bubbles” on stage, “both of which became problems of design and tech” and halted the process “until the swings were rigged and the bubble-making clarified” (268). The set designer’s response then “set the limits for how the swings would work and where they could hang on stage” which naturally influenced performance possibilities. It was the performer’s task to be “open and inventive with the effects they had been given” in a more traditional rendering of the designer/performer relationship. What stands out here, however, is that the initial idea came from the performers and was their response to the devising stimulus – they created images which defined the potential of the space in which they were to perform. Only by retaining a designated designer to realise the physical actuality of this image were the performers thrown back into the traditional formula. Johnstone (1981:183-4) provides an interesting example of costume design that takes performer-led designing one creative step further. He describes “Mask” work where “my designers work with the actors and assemble the costume to the Mask’s tastes” and, if necessary, scenes are rewritten “to fit in with the Mask’s requirements”. Here, characters, or in this case “Masks”, personally influence areas of production usually reserved for those designated to these roles. Naturally, the physical realities of any design – whether arrived at by an individual or a collective – influence performance possibilities. However, perhaps allowing performer-devisers to solve design problems such as “swings and bubbles” might lead to a conceptual fluidity of performance where the aesthetic environment flows from and around the performers in a truly integrated devising process. Of course, the practical realities are enormous, comparable to the criticism levelled at collective writing for “producing poorly crafted plays that suffer from a lack of cohesive style and clear single vision” (Oddey, 1994:51). Further, performers may not have the expertise to solve complex design problems with the economy of a skilled designer.
In answer to the above two dilemmas, my group originally conceived of a set in the
vein of “poor theatre” where only what is necessary appears on stage. Faced with a lack of
resources and tight budget, the group turned to “found” objects from which an overall
design concept emerged; this technique has a long history through Futurism, Dada,
Surrealism, Happenings, early devised visual performance, and recent postmodern
performance (Heddon and Milling, 2006). With the image of “staircases” central to the
development of characters (as discussed below), we decided early on to physicalise this
image on stage. Without the resources to construct or acquire a staircase, readily available
ladders were substituted. Milk crates found in the school hall where we rehearsed were
commandeered and put to work as chairs, or anything else required of them. From the look
and feel of these objects, we collectively defined our design concept as a “building site.”
Additional objects would have to conform to this concept. For example, when the character
of Lars Olafsson was introduced towards the end of the process, the need arose to depict
the flower shop in which he worked. Cut-up lengths of pipe were suggested to represent
vases whilst maintaining the “building site”. Originally, we intended to complement the in-
progress, under-construction feel of the design by operating our own lighting – not rigged
stage lights, but four flood lights hooked up to standard power boards. This somewhat
“Brechtian pointing to the means of production” (Dolan, 1992:57) was purely aesthetically
contrived to add to our “building site” concept as the imprecise spills from the flood lights
lent the design a definite “unfinished” look. Despite the physical switching on and off of
lights providing a convenient transition between scenes, this idea was eventually
abandoned due to the difficulties in choreographing the light changes.

The significance of our set design in the devising process was complex. Apart from
the projection screen specifically requested by Suzy, the component objects of our design

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19 Despite my group’s pleasure at the originality of using ladders on stage, ladders have a rather distinguished
career in the history of twentieth-century performance.
were agreed upon, acquired, and arranged by the group through their necessity to the performances and demands of the space. It is, in fact, difficult to articulate how this “designing” worked as there was very little in-depth discussion during the process. The ladders were positioned onstage very early in the rehearsal period, and roughly maintained their positions through to the eventual public performances. Milk crates were scattered randomly until their preset positions were determined through necessity. In regards to sound and lighting, I suggested group members consider themselves the “architects of their own scenes” in that they determine technical aspects when devising scenes for their characters. Lighting and sound were only seriously considered towards the end of devising, and by that time the group shared a clear vision of the overall production, so worked out technical effects together. Here, discussion and experiment were the primary “design” methods. By this stage, group agreement was usually reached quickly due to the harmonising effect of working towards a shared vision. This shared vision is perhaps best described as an amalgamation of style, theme and group aesthetic direction. Although that aesthetic direction was originally suggested by Suzy and me, this did not lessen the sense that, by the end of devising, This Is Not An Exit was a group effort. Evidence for this can be located in Adam’s sense of ownership towards This Is Not An Exit overtly displayed in the final stages of devising. When Carl joined, Adam was very keen for him to conform to our established processes. He actively worked to “direct” Carl’s performance material towards our image-based style, and to ensure that Carl’s character fitted within our themes. Adam’s language and attitude also suggested he was very protective of the production, and enthusiastically worked to refine our material within the overall vision. In his own words, This Is Not An Exit was “ours”, not just mine and Suzy’s. In foregrounding the style imposed by Suzy and me, there is a danger in neglecting the substantial contribution made

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20 Originally there were four ladders onstage – one for each character. When Larry left the group, it was decided to remove his ladder as we came to realize it would have interfered with the positioning of the screen. The arrangement of the ladders was pragmatic, with the tallest ladders upstage, and the lowest downstage. Adjustments to the positions of the ladders were made in regards to sightlines rather than any overt aesthetic considerations.
by Adam throughout devising. Many of our most striking images or movement sequences were his ideas. Like everyone else’s, they were arrived at through interaction in rehearsal with the rest of the group, the established ideas, and the props and set.

Although my memory and rehearsal notes suggest we spent minimal time considering the set in comparison to other production aspects, it had a considerable impact on those other aspects. For instance, the visual concept of “building site” influenced the creation of new scenes and contributed to the articulation of our theme of “choice.” We discussed phrases and images relating to building sites and located the wider context for our action as an exploration of how today’s choices build the future. Tying together “choice”, “the future”, and “building site” may seem obvious in retrospect, but this consolidation of our concepts and themes was reached through an analytic process. In comparison, the design felt spontaneous, even organic. In reality, the set design “happened” through the practical considerations of the space, budget restrictions, and performance requirements. Originally, these requirements were the need to depict the many social environments of our characters. Developing in tandem with the set design, our characters were the first thread of This Is Not An Exit, and their development remained the foremost creative process throughout the devising period. Examining this process of character creation, and by extension the creation of their life-narratives, reveals the influence of established methods of character-based devising. Next to “artistic democracy”, “character-based devising” is thus an identifiable, albeit as equally problematic, method used in the development of This Is Not An Exit.

3.2 Re-Devising Naturalism: Process, Character and Resistance

Devising This Is Not An Exit drew upon two outwardly conflicting aesthetic paradigms: naturalism and postmodernism. Their equal influence arguably divides our
process: the construction, development and performance of naturalistic characters; and the
configuration of the final postmodernistic production. Here, I will consider methods of
colorature creation and how focus shifted to the foregrounding of the topical issues
emerging from their life-narratives. However, while the issues emerged from naturalistic
colorature construction, their presentation and exploration was stylistically postmodern.
How these approaches reconcile themselves in *This Is Not An Exit* suggests that divergent
aesthetic strategies comprise the uniqueness of each devising process. They also provide a
fertile site for creativity. Although a diachronic opposition between naturalism and a
postmodern aesthetic is arguably facile as postmodernism supports a confluence of styles, I
am examining the relationship between these within *This Is Not An Exit* as each required a
different devising method. It is important to stress that naturalism dominated the devising
*process* and was only later subsumed by the “postmodern” structure of the final
production. Briefly, the naturalistic characters and scenes developed through conventional
acting exercises and improvisations. The postmodernist structure resulted from discussion
and continual critical evaluation as we sought to replace dialogue with a visual or
movement-based theatrical language which I shall examine fully later.

*The First Breath: Mike Leigh, Trestle Theatre, and Character Building*

According to playwright Maria Irene Fornes: “The question of what ends up being
a realistic play has to do with the fact that one can feel the characters breathe, rather than in
a more abstract play, where it is the play that breathes, not the characters” (Fornes in
Marranca, 1978:289). The stylistic dualism set up here by Fornes between “realistic” and
“abstract” hinges on one theatrical element – characters. The characters who “breathe” in a
“realistic” play dominate a stage reality that supposedly mirrors the spectator’s own. In the
“abstract” play, characters are often visibly elemental, comprising one facet of a stage
reality rejecting the illusions of naturalistic representation. In some examples of
postmodern performance, "character" is no longer a valid term, sometimes replaced by "figure" which "hints at something deliberately artificial' and 'evokes the impression of functionality rather than individual autonomy’” (Pfister in Shepherd and Wallis, 2004:184). However, in dominant theatre discourse, a “character” remains something that breathes – that is, “character’ is tied up with notions of roundedness, depth and interiority” (Shepherd and Wallis, 2004:179) or the illusion of a “real” person brought to life by the actor. This Is Not An Exit contains these two types of character, i.e. the nameless, impersonal White Suits which conform to Pfister’s definition of “figure”, and the four naturalistic characters who formed the basis of the production. The first breath of This Is Not An Exit came from the characters Michael Flinders (Adam), Lesley Johns (Suzy), Alan Fraser (Larry) and Melanie Johnstone (me). As this breath strengthened, the full body of the production took shape, until a neat dualism like Fornes’ became difficult to distinguish – the breath and the body were one.

When Larry left the group, it meant recommencing the process with a newcomer. We asked: “should the new group member adopt Larry’s character or create a new one? Should we guide the new member to provide a neat structuring device, or should he have full creative control of his character? Should he simply stand-in for Larry in scenes requiring a male performer?” Without much deliberation we agreed Carl would be responsible for an entirely new character. Although doubting the success of creating a thought-out character to order, particularly as rehearsal time was urgently needed for structuring the overall show, I was hesitant to push Carl in any apparently easy or convenient direction. Such directing would not only have disrupted the (albeit problematic) aesthetic democracy, but foregone the fresh ideas potentially arising from the new performer when given the opportunity to explore creative tangents. Introducing a new performer to our devising therefore required unpicking the tangled methods thus far
employed. When Carl joined we had three (discounting Larry’s) characters with individual narratives fragmented into scenes depicting crucial moments in their lives.  

These characters were not substantially interconnected and lacked an overall context. Their independent existence thus betrayed our primary method – devising through techniques of character construction.

Although Bray (1991:8) discourages first-time devisers from attempting a “character play”, I had hoped to develop material through characters rather than through any particular issue or theme. This felt like a comfortable strategy for my first-time devisers whose previous performance experience was only interpreting and representing characters. Further, as Bray indicates, devised characters often require “naturalistic performances” (9). Conceiving characters through Stanislavskian exercises would be a creatively-accessible point of departure. Although the “psychologically whole ‘character’ is no longer central to many types of contemporary theater since the 1960s” (Zarrilli, 2002:22), there are useful examples of character-based devising. In particular, I found the strategies of prominent director Mike Leigh and UK group Trestle Theatre to be highly informative.

Leigh’s “actors invent characters, the characters are put together in improvised situations and out of the material thus created comes, after two and a half months or so, a finished piece of drama” (Clements, 1983:5). Characteristics of Leigh’s method include developing characters from real people known to the actors before intense research into

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21 For a performance at Gosford City Council’s “Cultural Laboratory” November 2005, Suzy and I had edited and structured Lesley John’s scenes into a ten minute performance. As an exercise in editing, we later did the same for my character. The result was two independent linear narratives that we hoped would aid in developing a wider dramatic context for structuring This Is Not An Exit.

22 Like many practitioners who routinely work without a pre-scripted text, Leigh does not work formulaically as “the time is spent differently on every project” (Leigh in Clements, 1983:22). However, the many productions he has developed share similar features of process. Clements describes his chapter on Leigh’s method as “about the principles which underpin his work”. The term “method” is here used to indicate techniques or principles of a practitioner’s creative process which frequently recur, and are descriptive enough to be emulated by an outsider.
their "social, educational, economic, cultural environment" (Leigh in Clements, 1983:22). More than a director, Leigh considers himself a dramatist, sharing in the process of character creation "instead of abdicating it to the actor" (17). After working with his actors individually to generate characters, Leigh provides scenarios for improvising interactions (Heddon and Milling, 2006), maintaining creative control from the first rehearsal to the last performance. Leigh's Stanislavski-inspired techniques are complemented by his set designs which have been compared to film sets in their attention to detail. For example, the set of Greek Tragedy (1988), a production Leigh wholly devised in Australia, "was an exact reproduction of a living room in Marrickville" (Taffel, 1990:10). Unsurprisingly, Leigh's style has been described as "heightened naturalism" (33), with a conscious focus on the dynamics of social class expressed in human relationships. His work consistently explores how people behave within the limitations of their "physical and emotional circumstances" (Clements, 1983:43). While Leigh refutes this naturalism tag, his methods and productions provide a model familiar to conventional theatre: a self-confessed "dramatist" whose directorial functions replace the playwright; Stanislavskian exercises in character development and improvisation; dialogue-based performances and detailed set designs creating true-to-life productions. Indeed, "his work was not ... experimental at all in any self-conscious sense", although there was some disagreement in the 1960s as to how to classify it (see Clements, 1983:21). Today, Leigh's methods seem arguably less than innovative with the absorption of similar character work and improvisation techniques into conventional play rehearsals. Indeed, his most recent production, Two Thousand Years (2005), devised through "his usual methods", was commissioned by the National Theatre, indicating his work is considered somewhat mainstream (Two Thousand Years (Cottesloe), 2006, National Theatre website).
Trestle Theatre exemplifies character-based devising towards productions where "meaning is communicated through gesture, physical relationships and the rhythms of the characters" (Lamden, 2000:19). Its methodology, described in Oddey (1994) and Lamden (2000), exerted a strong influence on my ideas when I first began working with my group. It is important to note, however, that Trestle Theatre's devising techniques are inseparable from their unique style of mask theatre intending "to popularise mask, mime, and visual theatre" (Oddey, 1994:65). What primarily interested me were the company's structure, character development and use of linear narratives. I anticipated that my first-time devisers might expect to produce narratives in a conservative concept of "drama" where "dialogue is its primary element" (Brooks and Heilman in Shepherd and Wallis, 2004). This expectation would increase with the introduction of character work. Thus, anticipating a future need for techniques of converting narrative into scenes, Trestle Theatre's methodology stood out as an example of visually-focused narrative work which I could draw upon.

Oddey (1994:65) describes Trestle Theatre as "a theatre cooperative": "The company determines decisions about the developing shape of the product, which are further defined as the work progresses by particular members with specific responsibilities for performing, dramaturgy, visual realisation of ideas, or direction." Although retaining company roles (artistic directors, dramaturge, technical team, administration), creative material is devised by performers through improvisations "we all set up" (Wilsher in Lamden, 2000:20). During rehearsals, the two artistic directors clarify ideas, determine objectives, collate material, and fulfil traditional directorial functions such as work on focus, timing, and give notes. The creation of shows Plastered, Fool House and Top Storey

While I could not be certain, I suspected Larry and Adam had not seen any productions that may be classified as "devised" although I knew they both had attended many text-based shows. A later survey of their theatre experiences confirmed this suspicion. Through prior discussions and familiarity, I knew their concepts of theatre to be generally conservative - text-based, produced in a traditional creative hierarchy, structured by linear plots and naturalistic dialogue.
each provide examples that contributed to my initial collection of potential techniques. For 
*Plastered*, a thread of action was established through improvisations with the mask 
characters, later clarified through choreography (Oddey, 1994). As with *Top Storey*, 
structure developed after breaking a page of narrative into scenes:

> Each scene was a couple of lines that moved the story on. The kernel of each scene was a visual 
> image, so the whole story could be told visually. We staged the scenes as a moving, visual image 
> like a film. We called that our 'coathanger' – the action that led to the end point of the play ... We 
> improvised around the visual kernel to put the clothes on the hanger so each scene was fleshed out 
> from the middle. That's how we ended with *Top Storey* ... We came up with three versions from the 
> initial coathanger. We used the same structure on the following four or five shows. (Wilsher in 
> Lamden, 2000:20-21)

The extended account of devising *Fool House* in Lamden reveals how 
performances grew through exercises, improvisations, and discussion, with objectives and 
activities to achieve them planned through the rehearsal period.

These methods seemed instructive enough to be adopted by first-time devisers as 
the inspiration for discovering their own techniques. However, methods require someone 
to organise and initiate them – a directorial figure seemingly incompatible with my vision 
of artistic democracy. I compromised by compiling hand-outs detailing the methodologies 
of several devising companies sourced from Oddey (1994) and Lamden (2000).24 Hand- 
outs seemed a non-authoritative way of sharing the methods I was using and created a 
potential knowledge store. The group could consider alternative methods, deciding whether

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24 This hand-out was distributed at the second rehearsal (30/08/04) and not only summarised the devising 
methodologies of Trestle Theatre, Gloria, Forced Entertainment, Improbable Theatre and The Northern Stage 
Ensemble, included preliminary devising questions posed by Oddey (1994:41) and the five objectives Barker 
(1977) posits for games sessions.
or not to adopt or adapt them. Even though I consciously steered them towards character creation, there was a predisposition within the group to think of theatre in terms of characters. For example, at the first two rehearsals, warm-up brainstorming led to character sketches. One discussion about RSL clubs moved from atmospheric recollections of shiny banisters and patterned carpets to the people that might inhabit them – the raw data for character building. Images were related back to personal experience or known people, never explored for their visual or thematic qualities but potential for creating characters. Thus, the group’s comfort with and expectation for character work suggests that despite my steering this was their preferred direction anyway.

Throughout our devising, the development of characters and their life-narratives had resemblances with the Stanislavskian exercises of Mike Leigh and the narrative-building techniques of Trestle Theatre. Simply, we arguably created naturalistic characters like Leigh, then constructed the events of their lives into scenes using practical techniques derived from Trestle Theatre. Although our initial departure point was abstract (the image of stairs), the exercises and strategies used to flesh out the characters were conventionally naturalistic. To fully explore how the characters in This Is Not An Exit originated, I will focus on two aspects: external stimulus (brainstormed images, acting exercises), and the contribution of personal experience. The first aspect is the least theoretically complex. Whilst discussing improvisatory performance at our first rehearsal, Suzy mentioned “playback theatre”. Her description mirrored “Keith Johnstone and Improbable Theatre’s Lifegame (2003), where actors improvised personal stories just recounted by a member of the public interviewed on stage” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:9). A practical exploration

25 Of course, by selecting extracts I was still imposing my opinion of what was beneficial advice (and therefore imitable) amongst the many examples in devising literature. I attempted to include a variety of quotes from a number of sources, and in the case of general advice, to repeat what seem fairly universal devising maxims: “Don’t tell me, show me” (Gibbons in Lamden, 2000:9); “The more there is to cut … in the structuring phase, the better” (Schmor, 2004); “The final comb makes the difference between a polished and unpolished performance” (Lamden, 2000:19). Larry and Adam frequently quoted from the hand-outs any time I dared contradict them.
revealed “stairs” to be a recurring motif. To introduce the process of developing an image theatrically, I later initiated a brainstorm around “stairs” asking: what are stairs used for? What can they represent? From the answers we each constructed a preliminary character.26 Even this early (third rehearsal), Larry was not comfortable developing characters without a unifying theme. To accommodate him, I suggested “crime” after Oddey’s (1994:170) “Group Beginnings 2” where crime is presented as “a preliminary idea for content” with accompanying exercises.27 Our resultant characters incorporated “stairs” and “crime” into their experiences which later formed the basis of scenes. Fleshing the characters involved “working-out” (Clark, 1971:80) from those experiences.

Although designed for analysing pre-written characters, Stanislavskian exercises from Catron (1989) and Benedetti (1986) provide an excellent foundation for character creation. Hand-outs detailing Catron’s (1989:57) checklist of “concrete qualities” plus Benedetti’s (1986:239-248) series of questions probing self-image, social and psychological traits, behaviour and factors influencing choice were completed by Larry and Adam as they constructed the framework of their characters. Before improvisation commenced we had sketched our characters’ backgrounds and current life circumstances. Once these were settled, we began with the “hot-seating” technique where the actor answers “questions about his life strictly ‘in character’, using the first person only” (Unwin, 2004:155). Compared to conventional dramatic characters, hot-seating an original character was more challenging – the interviewers have only the character’s answers without a common script for reference. During our hot-seating, this led to disagreements when the interviewers thought a character’s answers too vague or fanciful. To avoid this or “omniscient” replies, Unwin recommends specifying precisely what moment in the

26 Suzy was absent from many early rehearsals. The third through to the ninth rehearsal consisted of Larry, Adam and me. Suzy was informed of developments and contributed her own suggestions via email.

27 My attraction to this particular mini-project in Oddey arose from a personal experience recalled when brainstorming “stairs” – once I had descended a staircase in a shopping centre car park that was red with pools of lead, leading me to imagine all sorts of criminal activities that might have taken place.
character's life is under investigation. However, this is problematic when the character is an obstinate teenager unco-operative with authority (Adam’s Michael Flinders), or a timid and fearful sufferer of Parkinson’s disease (Suzy’s Lesley Johns). From these early interviews we learnt that developing such characters requires setting improvisations in familiar environments – i.e. Michael playing Playstation in his room, or Lesley receiving visits from family in a nursing home. As these improvisations extended to other situations, the external particulars of our characters, or what Brockett (1988:44) identifies as the first two levels of characterisation – “physical” (sex, age, size) and “social” (economic status, relationships, profession etc) – were firmly established. Brockett’s other two levels – “psychological” and “moral” – were continually enriched throughout devising. The “psychological” level, or the “character’s habitual responses, desires, motivations, likes, and dislikes” (44), was particularly strengthened during analytical discussions of particular life events. The “moral” level, which “reveals what characters are willing to do to get what they want” and what they “actually do when faced with making a difficult choice” (44), was explored in improvisations placing the characters in new circumstances to test their reactions (or more specifically, our ability as performers to react as the characters and identify areas for further development).

Theories of Subjectivity and Character Building

As we adapted documented techniques to explore our characters’ internal and external experiences, it was often acknowledged that we drew not only upon imagination but upon details of our own lives. The extent to which the personal influenced each character is knowable only to the individual performer however we often referred to our own selves as a source of material. Exploring declarations such as “I’m basing this on myself” requires recognising which rhetorical concept of “the self” was being employed. The early twentieth-century practitioners whose work remains influential (in particular,
Stanislavski) assumed that the self was a fixed site from which to build a performance. Auslander explains:

Theorists as diverse as Stanislavski, Brecht, and Grotowski all implicitly designate the actor's self as the *logos* of performance; all assume that the actor's self precedes and grounds her performance and that it is the presence of this self in performance that provides the audience with access to human truths. Their theories are aptly summarized by a sentence of Joseph Chaikin: "Acting is a demonstration of self with or without a disguise" (1972:2). (Auslander, 1997:30)

Throughout the twentieth-century, concepts of "playing oneself" were manifested in numerous approaches, including The Living Theatre's extreme "form of 'ritual' performance in which the actors themselves were the dramatic protagonists" (Counsell, 1996:4), supposedly performing their "own personality and [political] interest" without any mediating character or persona (Heddon and Milling, 2006:39). This situation is akin to Happenings and performance art. Others sought to aestheticise the self and its experiences through the processes of performing. That is, rather than simply being one's self, inspiration drawn from personal experience is structured into the aesthetic form of acting. For example, Grotowski argued:

... if during creation we hide the things that function in our personal lives, you may be sure that our creativity will fail. We present an unreal image of ourselves; we do not express ourselves and we begin a kind of intellectual or philosophical flirtation - use tricks and creativity is impossible.

The creative process consists, however, in *not only revealing ourselves, but in structuring what is revealed.* (Grotowski in Schechner et. al, 1968:236, my emphasis)

The concept of the inherent self has also been, by extension, applied to the fictional character. Describing the process of altering a character's life history during rehearsal, Clements (1983:16) records Mike Leigh discovered that "a character may be built upon a
specific foundation but will embody two qualitatively different strands: his material circumstances and his inherent self. The inherent self is not necessarily compromised by changes in material circumstances.” In this configuration, the character appears to acquire the status of a “real” person through this “inherent self” – the locus of the character’s identity is internal and intangible yet immutable, supposedly like the performer’s own. In conventional acting terms, characters risk becoming “cardboard cut-outs” (Bray, 1991:8) when this innate self remains undefined or underdeveloped.

Practitioners who cite the self as a concrete basis for performance imply the possibility of stable concepts of reality. “The use of ‘believe’ or its commonplace synonym ‘be honest’ by many acting teachers and directors stems from the predominant viewpoint implicit in realist acting that a character when enacted must conform to ordinary social reality as constructed from the spectator’s point of view” (Zarrilli, 2002:9). In contrast, a postmodern reading of the audience would suggest the potential for multiple views and experiences of “ordinary social reality”. Postmodernism posits “performability over truth, plurality over unity, exchange over legitimation (Lyotard, 1984): people act out and exchange many different ways of understanding rather than relying on one overarching truth” (Fortier, 2002:176). Thus, the “reality” presented on stage in “Naturalism [or] ‘realism’ – the apparent fidelity of the representation to the thing or concept represented – is the result, the effect, of a certain specific articulation of language on the ‘real’. It is the result of a discursive practice” (Hall, 1980:95). The enacted characters embody the construction of this stage reality through actions and dialogue, “loaded with social and theatrical habitus” (Shepherd and Wallis, 2004:193). Consequently, the relation of the self to the character becomes problematised within this paradigm, particularly as the self is no longer considered essential but “something that has to be worked on, invented and reinvented in accord with the changing rhythms, demands, opportunities, and closures of a
complex world” (Weeks, 1995:164). As Garret (2001:51) observes, approximately “thirty years after the arrival of poststructuralism, the ‘self’ is still a mere construction of language and convenience – a suspect text nostalgic for presence.”

What concepts of the “self” operated when devising This Is Not An Exit? Although striving for an ostensible postmodern aesthetic, our characters were understood within a naturalist paradigm. Consequently, we were discussing the identity of our characters (and ourselves) without any disruption from postmodern or poststructuralist ideas. Without questioning it, the self was formulated as a steady trustworthy base in our uncritical adoption of the tenets of a naturalistic acting tradition. Real events from our own lives were fictionalised, stylised and structured into the experiences of the characters, and thus considered “true to life”. Where experiences were invented, they were understood as being informed by our own selves – again, supplying their claim to “truth”. As Suzy often observed, the performer can never escape the “self” – in naturalism, it is the basis for improvising known and unknown experiences, thus permeating the creation of characters and influencing all aesthetic decisions. In this view, the self in a devised performance reifies States’ (1985:125) observation that “the actor is always slightly quoting his character ... there is always the ghost of a self in his performance”. Arguably, it is the many “selves” contributing their experiences and views when group devising that supposedly potentialise a postmodern multivocality in the work. However, in my group, the “self” was seen as raw material to be conventionally structured, and therefore arguably homogenised, into a naturalistic character complete with a life-narrative.\footnote{Another way the “self” was arguably homogenized in our devising was through conforming to a group vision for the production. Throughout the devising process, we arguably homogenized our perspectives on and material for the production until there emerged what was recognisable as a group vision – a recognisable goal for the end production that we all aimed towards.} While these life-narratives differed in their particulars, the methods and qualitative judgements used by the group to refine the characters confirmed Zarrilli’s (2002:9) identification of the
predominant viewpoint in realistic acting – the enacted character must conform to "ordinary social reality". Thus, the "selves" offered when developing and agreeing on the depiction of "ordinary social reality" were those that conform to our everyday society and culture's standards of behaviour. In other words, the "selves" judging the naturalism of the characters were not particularly unique or individual – they were the "selves" that everyday reproduce or enact the hegemonic discourses of society. This becomes problematic when considering one of the main objectives later clarified for our characters – to raise awareness of, or present resistant positions to, controversial social issues.

**Naturalism and Resistance**

As mentioned in Chapter One, naturalism was revolutionary at its inception. Further, "the discourse of naturalist drama ... is progressive, encouraging social change and rebellion" (Murphy, 1998:70). However, as the avant-garde originally realised, naturalism is theoretically problematic as a resistant strategy. Naturalism significantly failed to "balance its political tendency ... with its technique ... to urge change at the level of content, while as a formal system of representation uncritically reproducing (and so substantiating) both the appearance of the status quo and the rationalist conceptions which underpin it" (203). In fact, naturalism's "dramatic form, even down to the very props it employs on stage, are so solid, and its verisimilitude so precise and uncompromising, that against its own intentions it overwhelms us with an impression of the unchangeable fixity and immovable determinacy of the world and its appearance" (70). Similar to realism, naturalism pretends to offer "a comprehensive survey and rational explanation of the world ... which is ideologically sanctioned by the dominant social discourses" (44). Through "narrative structures and conventional rationalist constructions", these discourses are made to appear "self-evident or 'natural'". For example, one such "self-evident" discourse remains "one of the essential epistemological premises of the bourgeois world-view: the
implicit belief in an unshakeable and 'organic' relationship between a clearly delineated Cartesian ego and a distinct and rationally constructed world” (46). The avant-garde sought to reveal that “mimetic representation ... [is] actually merely a set of culturally-privileged codes which have simply attained a special institutional status” (10). Naturalism therefore does not offer reality but one view of reality in accord with or upholding those hegemonic discourses the avant-garde sought to challenge or dismantle.

Thus, a critical dualism was established between naturalism and the avant-garde, even though stylistically both “were abstracting from ... experience and projecting that abstraction into a set of conventions” (Hornby, 1977:154). This dualism has led to debates, particularly in feminist criticism, as to whether attempting realistic depictions is a useful strategy when protesting against dominant socio-cultural formations. For example, Felski (1988:59-60) summarises:

Recent discussions in feminist theory on the question of a feminist aesthetic have tended to polarise around a typology of realist versus avant-garde art: advocates of realism argue the importance of texts which can authentically communicate the quality of female experience, while critics insist upon the inherently conservative and ideological nature of a realist style, and argue for an experimental feminist aesthetic which will subvert existing codes of representation ... Irrespective of actual content, the realist [text] is perceived to be irredeemably compromised. It generates the illusion of transparency, of showing things as they really are, rather than drawing attention to its own signifying practice and the workings of ideology in the construction of meaning and the unified subject.

Although Felski is referring to novels, the conundrum she describes may arguably be applied to theatre as well. Focusing on feminism(s) – seeking effective change(s) within society – this summary highlights why those seeking to resist dominant socio-cultural formations may find it problematic, even contradictory, to use naturalistic methods of
representation. However, does this mean abandoning naturalism altogether? Utilising naturalistic acting methods within the devising and performance of *This Is Not An Exit* was, in contrast, considered by the group an effective strategy for presenting a resistant position.

Constructing naturalistic characters meant developing for them a personal history like any "real" person. I've termed this a "life-narrative". Although not all details would feature in the end production their exploration through improvisation or writing exercises would ensure "a totally realistic background of experience for each character" (Leigh in Clements, 1983:18). This contribution "to the living bulk of the character's memory" creates a tension "between the character's previous experience and his perceptions and behaviour in the present tense" thereby adding to the reality of the characterisation (Clements, 1983:16). Specifying experience uncovers what past events influence the character's present and future, thereby aiding in the construction of a linear narrative appearing "part of a long flow of continuous history" (Hornby, 1977:155). We pulled out these events -- defined as moments of choice -- to form the kernel of scenes. Like Trestle Theatre, "we improvised around ... the kernel ... so each scene was fleshed out from the middle" (Wilsher in Lamden, 2000:21). Each character thus acquired a distinct sequence of scenes. Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment argues that "when there's a smaller group you get very wrapped up on the psychology of the interactions, or in the narrative reasons why all these people are together" ("Bloody Mess Contextualising Pack", Forced Entertainment website, p. 6). With *This Is Not An Exit*, however, the characters remained separate as we were reluctant to force neat interrelationships for the convenience of structure. Further, we expected the audience to make "narrative jumps" (ibid) about the characters' possible interrelationships without any deliberate inference from us. Thus, we

29 Private writing exercises were an important method of mapping our characters' lives. For example, I wrote detailed autobiographical sketches from the point of view of Melanie Johnstone, and Adam wrote letters and sketches from the point of view of Michael Flinders.
devised four linear narratives, concentrating on the naturalism of the characters within the parameters of their own experiences.

Emerging from those narratives were specific issues that, once recognised, we sought to highlight within the production. These were societal issues prevalent in the media – euthanasia (Lesley Johns), abortion (Melanie Johnstone), drug use, domestic violence (Michael Flinders), war (Lars Olafsson), sexuality (all four) – and focused not only which aspects of our characters’ lives to portray, but potential material for structuring the production. Discussions led to more issues we sought to make visible – for example, advertising as a means of constructing reality, and the treatment of human beings as commodities. As the performance dates loomed, focus moved from considerations of character to strengthening the visibility of these issues within the wider production. Here, the complex (and often contradictory) influence of the self when devising again became apparent. We were attempting to enact our own personal resistance to the dominant discourses (capitalist, materialist, heterosexist, pro-life) surrounding our chosen issues. Our characters and their life narratives became a vehicle for the exploration and promotion of our own positions. Following Auslander’s (1997) argument that in postmodern culture it is impossible to take a position outside dominant discourses, our characters were not conceived and portrayed as transgressing these discourses but struggling very much within them. Although my group would not have been able to articulate this as a postmodernist strategy, each member seemed to intuitively work their character to emphasise “traces of nonhegemonic discourses within the dominant without claiming to transcend its terms” (61). For example, Michael Flinders’ long-term homosexual relationship is portrayed as (deliberately) conforming to heterosexist, middle-class conceptions of marriage. However, despite conforming to the dominant expectations for legitimate partnerships, such as monogamy and mutual financial support, Michael struggles to achieve the same rights
granted heterosexual couples. It is easy to argue that Adam, a heterosexual, was imposing his hegemonic conception of a legitimate relationship (i.e. marriage) onto his homosexual character. However, Adam was seeking to make visible how homosexual couples remain socially disadvantaged compared to heterosexuals and to him the clearest strategy was pinpointing the dominant formations perpetuating that disadvantage – specifically, the definition of marriage (and its associated rights) as a legal contract between a man and a woman. By further portraying Michael as a gay rights activist, Adam was seeking to confront that disadvantage and make plain his advocacy of equal rights for heterosexual and homosexual couples.

How does naturalism contribute to, or detract from, this resistant function of our characters? Although we turned to an absurd kind of humour for emphasis, we retained a naturalistic performance style for our main characters. As they were entirely configured within a naturalistic paradigm, it would have been difficult to attempt another performance style once socio-political concerns became our focus. Simply, these concerns arose towards the end of devising when our mode of performing our characters was already entrenched. Thus, despite our desire to draw critical awareness to certain issues, a Brechtian distance, where “the actor must be present as herself as well as in character, and her own persona must carry greater authority than the role” (Auslander, 1997:32) in order to promote an intellectual rather than empathetic performance was not a viable option. In fact, the group utilised the exact opposite strategy. The empathetic portrayal of naturalistic characters was seen as effective for promoting a point of view to the audience, particularly in the case of Lesley Johns. Suzy sought to create an emotionally engaging character in order to convey her argument for the legalisation of euthanasia. While some may argue the naivété of such a strategy, Dolan (2001b:9) suggests:
Art, perhaps, can make the body politic feel others' suffering more acutely, moving us closer to real democracy, if people can be persuaded toward radical change through empathy and unexpected identifications with those once considered other or alien to them. Maybe political change does happen through empathy as well as through Brechtian alienation. Perhaps this emotional awareness is what our culture needs to even begin to see the limitations of our democratic ideals.

Suzy wanted her character to create an “emotional awareness” in the audience of the suffering of the terminally ill. By stressing an embodiment of suffering, Suzy sought a sympathetic, emotionally active audience response to the human degradation under current laws criminalizing euthanasia. To convey this degradation as authentically as possible, Suzy’s performance of Lesley Johns remained within the paradigm of naturalism. However, when re-structured within This Is Not An Exit, Lesley’s life narrative was fragmented, abstracted and, in some scenes, parodic in order to over-state the suffering and degradation, leaving the audience in no doubt of Suzy’s position. This structure led Suzy to fear that the naturalism would be lost, and before the final structure was complete, she requested that we reconsider our order of scenes so the four narratives were presented in linear sequence. Although still fragmented amidst the other narratives, Suzy thought it important that Lesley’s story be told sequentially so the audience could become more fully emotionally involved with her plight.

This leads to the second reason naturalism was retained as a resistant strategy within This Is Not An Exit. Naturalism’s position as the dominant mode of representation means it is “readable” to most, if not all, of any audience. Susan Bennett’s (1997) analysis of Wolff indicates audiences have socially formed ideas and values which are mediated by “literary and cultural conventions of style, language, genre and aesthetic vocabulary” (Wolff in Bennett, 1997:99). Just as the scope of aesthetic convention and available
technical means contain the artist’s work, Bennett suggests that how audiences read a work is determined by “the scope and means of culturally and aesthetically constituted interpretive processes” (99). Developing and refining these interpretive processes is thus a question of accessibility. The mainstream cultural positioning of the naturalistic play (or film) as conventional means most people are familiar with its conventions – that is, they can “read” a naturalist production. In contrast, Kershaw (1999:59) describes “tactics of marginalisation” such as negative labels like “fringe” or “small scale”, which have been used by a mainstream critical tradition against alternative practitioners (including feminist, environmental or physical theatre), arguably positioning oppositional, non-conventional practices at a greater distance from potential audiences. Therefore, with the higher visibility of institutionally-produced theatre which, as Bennett (1997:117) notes, if it is reliant on box-office returns will tend towards conservative (naturalistic) choices, and what Kershaw (1999:62) sees as the positioning of alternative practice as the “ideological other” to the mainstream, the accessibility of non-illusionistic theatre as a meaningful theatrical experience has been reduced. Audiences highly adept at accessing the conventions of the illusionistic stage may find themselves at a loss with non-naturalistic techniques due to the lack of opportunity to develop fluency in this equally strong theatrical language which, as argued in Chapter One, has been utilised, reworked and reprised for over a century. Thus, it was felt within the group that the surest way of conveying a resistant message to the majority of the audience was through an “understandable” method of representation. Ideally, the audience would receive the message through their receptivity to naturalistic characters. Arguably, this suggests a (albeit risky) technique of working with hegemonic discourses to present alternative positions within them. In other words, returning to naturalism the socio-political function with which it was conceived.
Whether our use of naturalism as a resistant strategy succeeded or not is impossible to determine from within the group. However, it was not the only one utilised in *This Is Not An Exit*. The naturalistic characters were embedded within an overall structure which drew upon a "postmodern aesthetic". Arguably, within this context, the credibility of naturalism was enhanced as it was being deployed with an awareness of its theoretical problems. On the other hand, the prime position of naturalism within our devising process was masked by the final postmodernistic performance. Thus naturalism was more a defining feature of process than the product. How and why our naturalistic characters and their life-narratives were subsumed into a fragmented, parodic, conceptual rather than naturalistic rendering of contemporary societal issues requires examining the second paradigm influencing our aesthetic direction. Less familiar to the first-time devisers than naturalism, adopting a postmodern aesthetic furthered not just the politically-resistant strategy we commenced through naturalism but our own understanding of how theatre communicates. Evolving from the dialogue of naturalism, we explored presenting the experiences of naturalistic characters through non-naturalistic means such as imagery (including sounds) and movement sequences. Thus, naturalism provided a creatively rich, and surprisingly elastic, base from which to commence our devising process, lending itself to both aesthetic and political experimentation.

### 3.3 The Postmodern Aesthetic

Attempting to classify the aesthetic of a theatrical production is fraught with danger. Barthes' (1975:412) suggestion that the word "aesthetic ... has ... become too depreciated" arguably also applies to "postmodern" today. Exploring the varieties of performance or style in one production is theoretically challenging when "postmodern" has become a popular catch-all for the ostensibly contemporary or experimental. As Bertens (1986:42) argues, "in the 1970s Postmodernism became more and more an inclusive term
that gathered itself to all literary and cultural phenomena that could not be classified as either Realist or Modernist”. The other popular designation for non-mainstream theatre – “avant-garde” – is similarly contestable. Savran (2005:35-6) observes that, in the US, “there remains a remarkable resistance to giving up the word ‘avantgarde’”, although this “does not mean … that its value is what it was 30 years ago”. In Savran’s argument, contemporary use of “avant-garde” is a way of commodifying “the remnants of a highbrow experimental theatre” into “a set of clearly recognizable and marketable theatrical styles” (35) in “a complete reversal of [avant-garde’s] original meaning” (36). Further, even though the “avant-garde” is a historically modernist concept, “card-carrying postmodernists often use the term … despite their scorn of progress narratives and their contention that modernist hierarchies have been superseded by a new cultural dispensation” (11). Harding (2000:7) suggests that “the gains, rhetorically at least” of continuing to use the term “avant-garde” “have more to do with constructing a critical opposition to the cultural mainstream than with the production of the uniquely new”. This situation is further complicated by the term “neo-avant-garde.” Is it therefore possible to discuss the aesthetic of contemporary non-illusionistic theatre without resorting to theoretically slippery terms arguably diluted through overuse? Moreover, is it possible to avoid a “taste-versus-concept-oriented form of critical consideration” (Sell, 2000:169) that arguably shadows popularist rhetoric? Problematically, taste, as an aspect of perception, informs how an audience receives and responds to the aesthetic of any artwork.31

Arguably, in the case of a non-specialist theatre audience, personal taste is the primary critical faculty used to appraise a production. Here, in order to define the “postmodern aesthetic” of This Is Not An Exit, I will consider which perspectives were brought to this definition – my own, my devising group’s, and feedback received from our audiences.

31 I use the word “taste” here not in a Kantian sense but in its more general usage – e.g. “that’s not to my taste.”
Postmodernism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde

As mentioned above, reducing postmodernism to an aesthetic is problematic. However “whilst the definition of ‘postmodernism’ remains appropriately contested, it is nevertheless apparent that a certain postmodern aesthetic code has become citable and, through repetition, is assumed to be synonymous with a postmodern practice” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:203). This aesthetic is typically “nonlinear, non-literate, non-realistic, nondiscursive, and non-closure oriented” (Whitmore in Heddon and Milling, 2006:203). “The postmodern performance style ... heralds the death of unified characters, decentres the subject, and foregrounds conventions of perception” (Dolan in Carlson, 1996:62). Even so, Heddon and Milling emphasise that postmodern performance should be classified by purpose rather than form. They argue postmodern performance often bears “evidence of a political commitment towards challenging dominant ideologies or narratives, and is often rooted in contemporary concerns”. Further, there is an “overriding concern in contemporary devised performances with both the status of theatre, and the status of ‘reality’ ... Many performances explore the mechanisms of theatre as a representational medium and, simultaneously, the representations that serve to construct our social worlds” (204).

Definitions of postmodernism often rely on its contested relation to modernism. Many “commentaries are grounded in the [the] fundamental contrast between ‘high’ modernism’s striving to impose a scheme of meaning on the world ... and postmodernism’s ironic questioning of the very possibility of meaning” (Maltby, 1991:521). Similarly, theatre/performance scholarship frequently compares and contrasts postmodern with avant-garde performance. This is understandable as many features of the “postmodern style” were pioneered and disseminated by the historical avant-garde. Clarifying the avant-garde’s relation to modernism is thus important when comparatively
determining a postmodern style. It is arguably critical when addressing the aesthetic of a contemporary performance influenced by both past and recent performance devices, such as *This Is Not An Exit*. Without careful consideration, ostensibly "postmodern" performances may be misidentified, and the value of "postmodern" as a specific performance strategy further eroded. The result may then arguably be the further marginalisation of actively postmodern, resistant work by stylish, semi-mainstream theatre employing "form for form’s sake" (Heddon and Milling, 2006:203).

Berghaus (2005) and Murphy (1998) suggest that the avant-garde arose within modernism. "The avant-garde was the 'cutting edge' of Modernism and produced genuinely novel and original works of art" (Berghaus, 2005:17). Problematically, the difficulties in defining the avant-garde resemble those plaguing postmodernism: "Definitions of the avant-garde are legion. They are tendentious, combative, and contested, and they are elusive, which ironically may be the one thing that all definitions of the avant-garde share" (Harding, 2000:5). It is important to note that the "twentieth-century avant-garde was never a homogeneous phenomenon, but encompassed a wide range of artists who were opposed to the aesthetic and social conventions of their day" (Berghaus, 2005:17). As the Modernists also "struggled against entrenched rules and conventions" (16), the avant-garde require disentangling from their modernist context of artistic innovation. Murphy (1998:258-60) argues:

... what distinguishes the avant-garde from modernism in general is its institutional awareness: firstly, unlike modernism the avant-garde not only renovates the means but also deconstructs the ideology of art, while reflecting upon those social demarcations of culture for which modernism seems to show a complete lack of awareness or interest. The avant-garde sets out to expose and alter art's status as a socially differentiated and segregated mode of discourse, and to make it clear that its position is always mediated by the social mechanisms responsible for the institutionalization of
culture ... The historical avant-garde's critical (or ideology-critical) impact lies then in revealing that ... organized and ordered images of reality are in fact the product of an arbitrary discursive organization whose function is to create a smooth and efficient social imaginary capable of imposing a continuum of time, space and causality upon the fundamentally contingent and chaotic world of experience.

Murphy's argument that the avant-garde sought to reveal the discursive construction of reality gestures towards the advent of postmodernism. He later makes this clear: “With the progressive works of the historical avant-garde a series of significant steps is taken which paves the way for the emergence of the postmodernist mode” (262). In contrast, the Modernists “never challenged the guardians of established cultural institutions ... [operating] in close cooperation with the mediating agencies of museums, theatres, newspapers, etc.” (Berghaus, 2005:16-7). Operating within these institutions, modernism risked reproducing and reifying their dominant ideologies, particularly concerning the status of art and the artist within society. Thus, two of modernism’s “central assumptions” stand in stark contradistinction to both the avant-garde and postmodernism:

Firstly in separating itself off as an autonomous cultural discourse modernism operates from the belief that it possesses a perspective which is external to, and independent of, the realities to which it purports to respond. Secondly, modernism frequently takes for granted, in a similarly unreflected manner, that its systems of language, thought and representation are ‘neutral’ mimetic implements. (Murphy, 1998:256)

Given that both the avant-garde and postmodernism seek to reveal “the discursive construction of the real” (263) it is not surprising that similar strategies are locatable in the performances of the historical avant-garde and contemporary postmodernists. Some of the key features Berghaus (2005:20) lists as characteristic of avant-garde art – “fragmentation, collage and montage; multi-focal perspective, simultaneity, discontinuity; juxtaposition of
material; disjointed discourses rather than linear renderings”; “self-reflexivity”; “disintegration of the organic, coherent integrated subject” – could describe postmodern performance. However, there exist important differences between the historical avant-garde and postmodernism, not least their distinct positions on the relationship between art and life.

The concept of artistic autonomy was hotly contested in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Where Modernists sought to “protect the independence of works of art from non-aesthetic functionality” (Berghaus, 2005:18), the historical avant-garde worked to collapse the distinction between art and life. They believed that “instead of being restricted to operating within the established cultural institutions, art should engage with a new life praxis and organize everyday existence according to creative principles” (20). This was an important aspect of the avant-garde’s politically radical attack on bourgeois culture and ideology, believing art capable of real social change. The postmodern, however, “distinguishes itself by no longer attempting to overcome the separation of art and life” (Murphy, 1998:270). The autonomy of art is no longer problematic for the postmodernists: “either the postmodernists accept aesthetic autonomy as a fact of artistic life, or conversely, in the era characterized by simulation and by the aestheticization of politics they see the realms of art and life as already absolutely and irreversibly intertwined” (285). Murphy argues that whichever the case, “postmodernism’s unproblematic acceptance of art’s status (very different in this respect from the lingering doubts characterizing the historical avant-garde) becomes the central principle and condition from which it begins to operate” (285). How the avant-garde and postmodern positions on the autonomy of art impact on performance is best illustrated in a crucial difference between their theatrical practices. Fischer-Lichte (1997:57) explains:
The development of stratagems which postmodern theatre not only furthers but also greatly radicalizes was carried out by the avant-gardists with an ultimate goal in mind. Such stratagems functioned solely as the instrument by which this goal could be reached: to bring art closer to life, which is to say, to shock the spectators, or to liberate their creative potential and transform them, thus, into the longer for, yearned after – even if differently defined – “new” beings.

There can be no question of a similar objective in postmodern theatre. Here the spectators are not cultivated into ‘material’ for specific purposes from which, with all the means available to theatre, “actants” should be produced. Far more, the spectators are given back their right to spectate.

This does not mean that spectators are to remain passive. Instead, they are assigned an active role that postmodernism posits as performative: “reception is production, looking on is acting” (58). Fischer-Lichte argues “spectators are free to associate everything with anything and to extract their own semioses without restriction and at will, or even to refuse to attribute any meaning at all and simply experience the objects presented to them in their concrete being. Here it is understood and taken for granted that looking on is a creative act” (58). This quality of postmodern performance – combining once avant-garde theatrical techniques with a concept of the audience as co-producer of meaning – helps to distinguish a postmodern aesthetic from an avant-garde objective of transformation. “Spectators are now in a position to keep an aesthetic distance from the objects and sequences put before them as well as to receive them purely from an aesthetic point of view” (58) whether or not a postmodern work contains politically resistant content. The plurality of subjectivities comprising a theatre audience will thus result in a plurality of interpretations. For devisers, this can be both a creative spur and constant source of self-righteous agony particularly as conceptualising a potential audience is a common strategy to focus performance material. Bowles (2005:18), for example, describes how when devising a tour show “to address anti-LGBT bias in schools”, the devisers made each dramaturgical decision with “John Q. Tough-but-Moveable-Middle” in mind (19). Representing the majority of the audience, the group identified the characteristics of potential “John Qs” and sought the best theatrical
strategies to reach them with their message. When devising This Is Not An Exit, we referred to an imagined “Woy Woy audience” whose criticisms we sought to pre-empt. Research on the genealogy of avant-garde conventions could not supplant the group’s personal perceptions and experiences which stood in for those of the imagined audience – a construct of our own suppositions. \(^{32}\) How we fashioned our version of postmodern performance reflected our primary assumption that the majority of this audience would be at a loss with non-linear structures and minimal dialogue. We were brazenly classifying our regional audience as what Bourdieu and Darbel (1990:40-1) call “the most deprived” for whom “a work of art from which they expect an unequivocal meaning ... is all the more disconcerting the more completely it abolishes ... the narrative and representational functions”. This classification – together with the haphazard use of “postmodern” in the rehearsal room – reflected our somewhat negative perception of the dissemination and accessibility of non-naturalistic aesthetics in regional areas such as the Central Coast. Even so, it was decided that a non-illusionistic style would better serve our performance material, and provide more scope for adopting resistant positions. Thus, we sought to create a “user-friendly, Woy Woy audience” version of a postmodern aesthetic, at the same time raising questions about how such an aesthetic might be “activated” by the spectator.

Towards A Definition of “Postmodern Aesthetic”: This Is Not An Exit

Applying the term “postmodern aesthetic” to This Is Not An Exit is intended to reflect its status as an already “depreciated” term. When devising This Is Not An Exit, typically “postmodern” aesthetic devices were adopted and adapted without an informed, academic understanding of postmodernism. Thus, the “postmodern” of “postmodern

\(^{32}\) As we were performing This Is Not An Exit at the Peninsula Theatre, Woy Woy, our assumptions were based on what we knew of local audiences. One of our sponsors, amateur drama group Woy Woy Little Theatre Inc, perform mostly English farces, comedies and some drama in the Peninsula Theatre to good houses. Written and verbal feedback from the WWLT audiences indicates that they enjoy ensemble comedy and realistic sets, but especially do not like coarse language.
"aesthetic" retains a non-specialist imprecision. However, despite not fully understanding "postmodernism", the group when devising This Is Not An Exit utilised typically postmodern concepts – in particular, positing reality as fragmented and incompletely known for each spectator to interpret individually. To maintain ambiguity we sought to create our own version of a visual theatre with multimedia (film, sound, projections) and stylised movement that is neither mime nor dance. Originally, replacing dialogue with expressive visual images had a pragmatic purpose. Generating performance material via improvisation resulted in wordy scenes lacking in action or movement. It was decided that such scenes were incredibly boring and even after numerous edits too heavy in dialogue. Perhaps rejection of the verbal – the "boringness" of too many words – was an unwitting acknowledgement of how verbal language "stumbles", to quote Richard Foreman, the necessary failure of language to articulate the Real (Foreman in Harries, 2004:89). Long, verbose improvisations stumble and swerve, capturing or reflecting nothing but the "defective" quality of language. Rather than utilising rambling, stumbling language to "gesture toward the Real" and make manifest its "inarticulable existence", the practical attitude of my group members was that situations can be more effectively conveyed via immediate, simple images. Of course, this does not mean a visual image comes any closer to articulating the real, and in most cases arguably widens the gap between possible interpretations. However, the group considered a visual emphasis more theatrically engaging for the audience. As The People Show co-founder Mike Long explains:

33 For example, Adam once admitted that although he would describe This Is Not An Exit as "postmodern" he did not know what it meant and that it was a word he used to "sound intelligent".

34 The thought underpinning some of the themes of This Is Not An Exit is arguably postmodern, particularly the concept of a company that manufactures babies and harvests the body parts of cadavers for re-sale. “For Jameson, postmodernism is the cultural predicament brought on by late capitalism’s extension of commodification into virtually all aspects of social and cultural life. There’s nothing that isn’t bought and sold anymore: babies, body parts” (Fortier, 2002:177).
I believe very strongly that theatre is definitely a very visual form and I think this has been denied for a long, long time. I don’t think it was always the case, but it has generally become a verbal art form. I don’t reject this but I also don’t believe that it is the only thing that the theatre is about. It is not necessarily a carrier of ideas, it is very much a thing people look at. (Long in Heddon and Milling, 2006:63)

It was in this emphasis on visuality that This Is Not An Exit echoed the “traditions” of alternative theatre. Many of the visual devices we used can be traced through the development of non-mainstream, non-illusionistic performance. The most obvious would be our use of multimedia; however avant-garde techniques permeated every aspect of the production, from set design to performed actions. Originally avant-garde innovations in design inspired us to create what Fischer-Lichte (1997:52) terms a “spatial stage”. She argues “this space did not represent one defined space – a room or a forest – but served varying functions. It should ... create specific preconditions and possibilities as well as serve the various requirements of the movements and actions of the players”. Our use of ladders follows in the tradition of transforming objects through performance. Avant-garde designers such as Adolphe Appia and constructivist Lyubov Popova were amongst the pioneers of this technique:

Neither Appia’s steps nor Popova’s scaffolding represented anything to which one could accord a specific meaning. They were, uniquely, stairs and scaffolding that remained, as such, dumb objects to the spectator. Only through the movements and actions of the players were they brought to life and meaning communicated to the spectators, according to the changing meanings of the processes and actions. (Fischer-Lichte, 1997:52)

This type of functional, multipurpose, non-realist set design now frequently features in mainstream productions (particularly Shakespeare) and is arguably no longer particularly “avant-garde”. The same could be said about our “white suit” costumes that
were intended to complement the ideas upon which the production was built rather than expressing "to the audience aspects of the character, highlights of the personality, and [giving] a clear idea of the time, place and style of the period in which the play is set" (Griffiths, 1982:109). Stylistically, the "white suits" were meant to function in a way similar to how the "surrealists and Bauhaus artists ... regarded the individual performer essentially as one element in a larger picture – the abstract performance as a whole" (Carlson, 2004:101). Positioning costumes (and, by extension, performers) as merely stylistic elements of the mise-en-scène, not privileged above the other elements, is another characteristically avant-garde technique that was explored throughout the twentieth-century. As well as general borrowings from the theatrical avant-garde, specific moments of performance within This Is Not An Exit were direct quotations of past performances. The foremost example is the pouring of water from one vessel to another. This action has been utilized widely in avant-garde performance: Picabia’s Rélâche (1924) (see Goldberg, 2001); John Cage’s Untitled Event (1952) (see Counsell, 2003); Thomas Schmit’s Cycle for Water Buckets (1962) (see Fischer-Lichte, 1997); The Theatre of Mistakes’ A Waterfall (1977) (see Tufnell and Crickmay, 2001). Further, Lars Olaffson’s consultation with the telephone psychic Madame Fortuna, comprising arbitrary "readings" from cards chosen at random, was an intentional quotation of Dada chance techniques.

I have chosen the most obvious examples of avant-garde borrowings and quotations in This Is Not An Exit, although there would be others made both consciously and unconsciously. The same could be said of many contemporary theatrical productions given that, early in the twentieth-century, “the concepts of the avant-garde had become absorbed by the wider community of artists and popularized amongst the modern public ... and eventually became part of the establishment” (Berghaus, 2005:19). These aspects of the production were embedded in a fragmentary structure that was intended to be more

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recognisably “postmodern”. Not just the structure, but some of the devices used in *This Is Not An Exit* have been identified as characteristic of a “postmodern style”: “autobiographical material drawn from the performers’ lives”; “music used as a ‘soundtrack’” (Harris in Heddon and Milling, 2006:206); “use of technology”; “recycle[s] other cultural material” (Fortier, 2002:192). The overall aesthetic intention was to create a production whose fractured narratives reached no definite conclusions, with each scene retaining some ambiguity. Group discussions on how the audience were to make sense of *This Is Not An Exit* are comparable to the theories of Robert Wilson:

> Human beings, he maintains, always register the world in two ways, on two separate ‘screens’. The ‘exterior screen’ is the place of conscious, public meanings, where we ascribe to objects and events the same significance as our fellows. But at the same time we each register those same images on our ‘interior screen’, where they are perceived subjectively, our imaginations granting them meanings personal to ourselves. Both screens operate throughout our waking lives, so that we continually perceive reality in both a cultural and an individual, acultural way. (Counsell, 1996:180)

While I would question the possibility of ever perceiving anything “aculturally”, the idea that an audience discovers meaning in a work through the dual lens of shared and individual experiences is one that resonates with the group devising process. As devising relies upon the input of individuals who often experience similar socio-cultural situations, personal experiences aestheticised through the devising process are arguably made intelligible by the wider socio-cultural factors surrounding them. Added to this are the personal meanings and associations audience members may ascribe to even the most familiar of images depicted onstage, ensuring a plurality of potential meanings within a theatrical production. Thus, in productions with a fragmented, ambiguous “postmodern aesthetic” the room for personal engagement by an audience is arguably increased. Indeed, one might expect the meanings audiences ascribe to such a production to tend more towards the highly personal rather than collective agreement. “The spectators … are driven
to make their own choices, and to be cognisant of that activity, or the politics and ethics of the choices they actually make, the meanings they attribute” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:206). Underpinning this process is the expectation of meaning that spectators bring to a work. When devising This Is Not An Exit, we were aware that our audience would most likely expect a discernible meaning to be offered to them through each onstage occurrence. As Counsell (1996:196) argues:

> Even when we are offered no story as such, as spectators we still assume that stage events comprise some kind of purposeful sequence. We thus try to link one image with the next, and ascribe significance to changes and continuities, seeking to make of the unfolding action a temporal chain whose links are meaningful; that is, we seek to narrativise it by other means, find a conceptual rationale in the absence of any obvious plot.

Thus, adopting a “postmodern aesthetic” was not only an exciting challenge for us as devisers, but would hopefully engage our expected audience – supplied with a local diet of farces and musicals – in a stimulating process of thinking both critically and creatively. Even if they missed what we each sought to depict with our individual characters the spectators would nevertheless find something in the production to which they could ascribe meaning, thus satisfying their expectation. However, from the feedback we received, this was not always the case. While admittedly being only a small sample, the responses we received raise general questions regarding how spectators engage with a postmodern aesthetic.

*Receiving the Postmodern Aesthetic*

If, “at the close of the twentieth century ... avant-garde performance has indeed established a language, an aesthetic tradition built from a hundred years of piecing together performance fragments and shards of performing techniques” (Bell, 1995:188), then
theatrical audiences have theoretically had an equal amount of time to become acquainted with that language. The absorption of avant-garde devices into the mainstream and their rhizome-like diffusion throughout various performance types ostensibly suggests that most theatre-goers should be familiar with alternatives to mimetic representation. However, my experience suggests that many avant-garde devices remain unfamiliar to some theatre-goers. While some spectators of *This Is Not An Exit* perceptively likened it to theatrical experiments of the 1960/70s, many others admitted to being confused by the disjointed structure. One in particular was perplexed, amongst other things, by the costumes, the Madame Fortuna scene, and scenes involving the White Suit characters watching film projections. Yet, she seems to have grasped the concept of the production: “Everyone sees things differently & the objective, I gather, was to use our minds & interpret it our own way” (J. Morris, 2006, pers. comm., 24 April). However, instead of doing so, this spectator demanded concrete explanations of what the show “meant”, asking “do I need a university degree in drama to understand it?” This reaction suggests that some audience members continue to find avant-garde inspired devices inaccessible. “In the theatre, positive results depend as much on ... the willingness and preparedness of the spectator to participate in the reality of [the performer’s] actions” (Daniel, 2000:65). Coming up against unfamiliar devices, this spectator was at first unprepared then unwilling to participate as a co-producer of meaning – the role of the spectator crucial to the postmodern aesthetic. Her other telling comment – “Give me ‘good ole’ speaking characters any day” – hints at her preference for naturalistic drama. Barker’s (2000:18) observation that “the strength and resolution of actors to hold on to the words should not be underestimated” still arguably holds true for audiences as well. In Daniel’s (2000:67) investigation of the dance critic John Martin’s responses to the work of Merce Cunningham and John Cage, he suggests “the difficulty that Martin had in accepting the approach of the postmodern was directly related to his own reliance on the emotive-narrative link as a means of individual recognition”. Further,
styles that rely on “strong emotional power”, like naturalism, arguably “can encourage an audience to become lazy participants” (67). This suggests that viewing work with a postmodern aesthetic requires a mode of spectatorship distinct from dialogue-driven, illusionistic plays. The complex diversity of devised theatre as a genre thus opens up new possibilities of understanding how spectators receive such multi-faceted, unpredictable productions.

Although I do not have the space to go into detail, I would like to briefly sketch two approaches to understanding how spectators may make sense of contemporary devised work. One approach acknowledges how the mass media and technology has infiltrated our consciousness and permanently altered our methods of perception. For Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment, “one result of media saturation is that our own experiences become combined with, and therefore to some extent inseparable from, mediated experiences” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:210). Goldberg (2001:221) quotes a Forced Entertainment publicity statement: “Our work is understandable to anybody brought up in a house with the television on.” Engaging with technology such as “digital film and television, DVDS, mobile phones, camera phones, video phones, the world wide web, video conferencing, and emails” (Heddon and Milling, 2006:210) emphasises that reality is “read” – experienced second- and third-hand – while our capacity to take in superfluous amounts of information is increased:

Never before has the human brain been compelled to take in so much at once and in so many different modes; our minds move in sweeps and scans of words, pictures, noise, emotions and sensations with a flickering speed foreign even to our childhoods let alone the mental life of those who saw the plays of Shakespeare or Molière or even Strindberg. (Hoban in Heddon and Milling, 2006:92).
Arguably, a disjointed postmodern aesthetic is ideally suited to our experience of everyday life in the contemporary world. For example, advertising has conditioned us to quickly discover multiple meanings in brief images and scant text. "The very existence of so much competing information means that our attention span is shortened and that the potential for a continuous narrative is undermined. Instead we mix and match styles and genres creating an eclectic mix of short-lived experience" (Watson, N., 1998:62). Thus, one way of approaching how spectators may engage with a postmodern aesthetic is to examine what expectations and multi-focal abilities the media and technology has endowed us with, particularly amongst the younger generations who have grown up with televisions, computers and CD players as staples of life. In other words, emphasising the "postmodern" of "postmodern aesthetic": "Postmodernism ... as the social and cultural patterns of response to being in the postmodern world, to postmodernity" (Fortier, 2002:175).

A second approach points towards what Heartney (2001:77) calls "the return of the real" or the "post-postmodern era". She argues that contemporary art "is full of celebrations of the body, nature, tradition, religion, beauty and the self". Although it "is no longer possible to imagine ... that our sense of self is not deeply implicated in relationships of power and authority", the self – or, more specifically, the embodied self – has increasingly become a legitimate, acknowledged site of experience, perception and knowledge. Theatre/Performance Studies is, unsurprisingly, one arena where embodied perception has become of academic interest. The non-linear, often highly visual style of devised theatre lends itself to these investigations. Interestingly, a devised work may rely on emotive responses from its spectators even more than naturalism, although in a more complex process where the audience must take "personal risk and responsibility" (Daniel, 2000:67). "One can be aware of, witness, and even accept the results of performance
without fully being able to logically and coherently explain why. [Daniel] claims that this level of understanding can occur only after the individual has re-cognized important aspects of their own experiences as these resonate with the immediate performance” (65). Rather than relying on discursive reason, Magnat (2005:74-75) suggests spectators “sensuously make sense of devised theatre”. She quotes Dolan, who “evokes this experience as one of ‘feelings of pleasure and hope that often come before the security of articulation … Something inexpressible fleets before my eyes, resonates in my soul, a feeling of pleasure’” (Dolan in Magnat, 2005:75). This almost mystic description emphasises how subjective experiences necessarily inform the creation and reception of theatre. Processes difficult to articulate plague discussions of devised theatre, and are often problematically described as “intuitive” or even “magical”. It is not just the spectators who “sensuously make sense of devised theatre” – for the devisers themselves the process is often characterised by apparently spontaneous discoveries, relying on “feelings” rather than discursive logic, and the embodied knowledges of performance.

3.4 The “Hidden” Process: Structure and the Embodied Knowledge of Devising

While the final script of This Is Not An Exit was arrived at through sustained group decision-making, this process was not entirely conscious. Identifying our devising strategies, such as character-building or striving for a postmodern aesthetic, reveal the deliberately implemented aspects of process. At the same time, however, This Is Not An Exit was acquiring its form through the many incidental decisions made in rehearsal necessary to continue the creative process. Without considering it, our production was gaining shape from the material discarded as much from the material retained. This hidden process, made invisible by our focus on the decisions requiring prolonged discussion, is arguably an important characteristic of devising where theatre is made through a “combination of instinct and learning” (Oddey, 1994:26). By exploring how “instinct”
influenced the making of *This Is Not An Exit*, I hope to identify a fertile site for future devising research.

Although the group often commented that we worked without a structured methodology, we critically engaged with our material in an informed process of reflection, reviewing, and editing. Oddey (1994:26) argues:

> The devising process needs to be searching, the work constantly sifted, re-examined, and criticised. Group analysis is required, which ultimately leads back to self-examination and self-criticism. The pertinent point must be that the strength of devised work is in its method of working, and of giving significance to the process itself. The group defines and controls its own conditions of progress, thus offering opportunities of working that no other theatre can provide.

To me, what Oddey describes is the conscious level of decision-making where critical discussions draw awareness to those concerns which often dominate during devising – for example, questions of theme and content. Progress is made by deciding what to keep, what to discard, and what to alter. While sometimes these decisions constitute formal revisions, when devising *This Is Not An Exit*, most “editing” work was incidental – abandoning dead-ends in improvisation, cutting dialogue for movement ideas, scrapping scenes because we had tired of them. Many potential outcomes were left unexplored as improvisations were interrupted or discussions took new turns. The outcomes which did eventuate – constituting *This Is Not An Exit* – were later felt by the group to have suggested themselves. Taylor (2003) provides a model for how such a self-fulfilling process might work. Taylor draws upon Schôn (1983) whose research into the daily problem-solving of professionals produced the concept of “reflection-in-action”. Taylor summarises that when “dealing with the immediate challenges professionals encounter, they not only draw on an intuitive knowledge base as a way for dealing with this challenge
what Schön refers to as knowing-in-action – but on their ability to reflect-in-action … This immediate process of reflection is characterised by a complex internal dialogue, which requires prompt decisions about what the practitioner is observing and how these observations should influence behaviour” (111). Taylor quotes Schön:

When someone reflects-in-action, he [sic] becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His inquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. He does not separate thinking from doing, ratiocinating his way to a decision which he must later convert to action. Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry. This reflection-in-action can proceed, even in situations of uncertainty or uniqueness, because it is not bound by the dichotomies of Technical Rationality. (111-112)

Taylor considers reflection-in-action useful for evaluating applied theatre “because it honors intuitive and emergent processes that inform the aesthetic event” (113), likening it to other modern performance practices that emphasise lived experience. For example, Taylor describes the dances of Martha Graham as reflection-in-action because they achieved the features of Schön’s on-line exploration – a willingness to draw on and submit to one’s breadth of worldly experiences when bringing form to an idea … For Graham and many other artists, reflection not only happens before and after the performed event, but informs the very event itself. Applied theatre too is powered by a reflection-in-action – ideas are rethought in process and techniques are refined or dropped based on how participants engage with them. (114)

I believe reflection-in-action may similarly power devising practice as “the devising process needs to be searching, the work constantly sifted, re-examined, and criticised” (Oddey, 1994:26). Without any formal organisation of our material, progress
depended on immediately analysing improvisations to decide what to build on or discard. By allowing discoveries in improvisation to guide the production's development, most of our fundamental decisions were made in "the try-fail cycle" (Kerrigan, 2001:5). For example, after enduring many long-winded verbal improvisations, we decided to aim for stylised movement to convey key ideas. Developing such movement then became a key method for evaluating and editing improvised material. An unstructured approach to rehearsals allowed such discoveries to occur organically and develop our confidence as they were grounded in experience. These decisions occurred in action – reflecting on work as it was produced, and developing new strategies to accommodate fresh discoveries. Manuals such as Devised and Collaborative Theatre (2002) and Devising: A Handbook for Drama and Theatre Students (2000) offer day-to-day timetables for structuring a devised project which I believe is helpful when devising within a limited timeframe. However, creativity in devising is often aided by a time-consuming, free-wheeling process. As Thomson (2003:120) says:

Studies document that creativity is earmarked by a persistent relish for the unknown, what Keith Johnstone describes as a "journey without maps" (Storytellers 75). As a creative process, collaboration requires a high tolerance for open spaces, advanced skills in uncertainty, a hunger for the question, and a commitment to surpass what is routine.

One group fear was that we were taking too long without producing anything concrete or of quality. However, while some of our best ideas may have felt spontaneous or discovered by chance they usually came after hours of cumulative, unstructured work seeking to thoroughly explore a concept. Importantly, the opportunity to take the wrong devising path then examine the mistake allowed us to build a stronger group vision for the production by questioning our understandings of theatre. Marrying Callery's (2001:164) assertion that chaos is necessary in devising "not least because truly creative work makes
use of chance" with the critical thought characterising reflection-in-action thus approximates my experience of the devising process.

**Structuring “This Is Not An Exit”**

Reflection-in-action occurs at every level of the devising process. It happens when improvising, watching, discussing and when performing. I believe it is both a conscious and unconscious process that occurs throughout the performer’s faculties – cognitive, emotional, intuitive, and physical. Of all the aspects of a devised work, I believe the one best illustrative of this process is structure. “The structure of a performance piece consists of the main events and the bridges between them, without which the piece would fall apart” (Kerrigan, 2001:51). In my usage, it refers primarily to the order of scenes, but also carries more subtle connotations: an internal rhythm “or inner consistency, easier to perceive than to describe or plan” (Tufnell and Crickmay, 1993:198). For example, “through lines” or the “characters, themes, motifs, repeated phrases, symbols, and other elements that weave through a piece” (Kerrigan, 2001:43). The structure of a devised work is like a treasure map with invisible trails leading to myriad alternative scenes, characters or content discarded since the first rehearsal. Questioning why *This Is Not An Exit* eventuated one way when, at every step along the process, it could have taken a different turn raises the issue of group decision-making. I have already examined the intricacies of conscious aesthetic decision-making within a group democracy. Here, I will focus on the type of decision-making often called “intuition”. Arguably, intuition is a manifestation of reflection-in-action that frequently occurs in theatre making. It often arises in the exclamation of “that works!” Dolan (2001a:458) explains:

> Anyone who considers herself a theatre person knows when something “works” – it’s when the magic of theatre appears, when the pace, the expression, the gesture, the emotion, the light, the sound, the relationship between actor and actor, and actors and spectators, all meld into something
alchemical, something nearly perfect in how it communicates in that instance. We all rehearse for moments that work ... Some critics debate this premise ... I must admit that I believe in all [these] things ... mostly because as a one-time actor, and as a director, writer, spectator, critic, and performance theorist, I’ve experienced them all. I’ve felt the magic of theatre; I’ve been moved by the palpable energy that performances that “work” generate ...

Articulating how a theatrical moment “works” is, as Dolan indicates, difficult. Her use of “alchemical” and “magic” further mystify such moments, suggesting that to identify when something “works” is to be involved in a somewhat esoteric process. Suggesting it to be a combination of experience and intuition does nothing to demystify it. However I feel that this is the closest I can come to articulating how scenes were marked for inclusion in This Is Not An Exit. A scene was considered ready when it “worked”. Interestingly, this group decision rarely required further discussion, arriving at that point involved reworking the scene from “that doesn’t work” to “that works better” until “it works”. That is, all the “it works” moments were the culmination of an extended, intuitive, reflection-in-action process. While the group often attempted to rationalise why something didn’t work, there was no investigation into why it did. Here, Heddon and Milling’s (2006) observation on the difficulties of documenting a devising process become particularly pertinent. Besides the unreliability of memory as cited by the authors, the specifics of process are lost within highly subjective and difficult to define concepts such as intuition. Further, to make the claim that the structure of This Is Not An Exit suggested itself – which is how it seems in memory – belies the many hours consciously spent developing it. Why, then, does the memory of arriving at the final structure seem like another “it works” moment?

Bottoms (1998:435), examining the devising methods of Goat Island, refers to “Deleuze’s insistence ... on the importance of pursuing ‘intuition as method’”. According to Bottoms, Deleuze argues that “the systematic pursuit of intuition opens up to the
possibility of making leaps across conceptual boundaries". In Bottoms' analysis, Goat Island achieve this through "a process of lateral free association" triggered by found images, phrases or "an abstract question". Without attempting to deduce significance, the group explore each others' responses to the materials by allowing "the imagination to play freely". A piece is structured with "a 'constructive principle' akin to John Cage's precept that 'each and every thing in all of time and space is related to each and every other thing in all of time and space'". Bottoms concludes: "From the outside, this might appear a dauntingly amorphous working process, but the group insist that experience has taught them to trust that any line of enquiry, pursued far enough, will render provocative connections between it and whatever other questions are being asked simultaneously, however unrelated they might appear." This comment from Bottoms identifies two issues emerging from the structure of This Is Not An Exit. First, after public performance, the group felt that the material had not been "pursued far enough". Second, despite fearing our content underdeveloped, we did feel that the structure suggested "provocative connections" within the material that were not deliberate.

"The structuring task is one of recognising an emergent form rather than imposing one" (Tufnell and Crickmay, 1993:196). The three times we formally attempted to order our scenes involved both consideration of practicalities and allowing "significance discovered rather than chosen" (193) to guide us. The practicalities of where performers or props were positioned from one scene to another became less a priority as the scenes seemed to develop their own flow. In my rehearsal notes I recorded that each structuring attempt was completed without argument, and that "things wanted to go in certain places" even after agreeing on a basic principle to guide our choices. Our first principle was complete randomness purposely defying chronology or any deliberate significance between scenes. This structure was abandoned when the group composition changed. On
the second attempt Adam and I sought to pattern scenes around whether they were set in the past, present or future and whether they were dialogue or movement based. Following these patterns produced interesting juxtapositions revealing potential meanings not previously apparent. Of course, our identification of unexpected meaning within our material was entirely subjective although we likened it to how an audience might experience the work for the first time. This increased our confidence to draw out and build upon the meanings we had found. However, while this structure employed its own logic, Suzy feared we would never remember it, so *This Is Not An Exit* was formally structured for a third and final time. Here, the discovered meanings were elaborated on and transitions developed to aid movement from scene to scene. Walking through this structure, we would often stop to comment how even practical considerations seemed to neatly take care of themselves. Our experiences structuring *This Is Not An Exit* seemed to support Tufnell and Crickmay (1993:196):

> As the work progresses connections begin to become evident between the various ingredients. A number of independent trails coalesce as a larger territory. The effect of this clarification is to distinguish essentials from details and to indicate what can be discarded and what needs further development. The moment of clarification will often come suddenly, in a flash of recognition. Sometimes this will only occur at a late stage, when material has been worked on for some time ... The material will seem, as it were, to form itself, form arriving via a process of evolution rather than from any preconceived shape.

Arguably, if a group is truly collaborating, the work the members produce individually subtly resonates with everyone else's, as the intense environment of rehearsal promotes mutual ideas and influences. The sense that material "forms itself" might simply be an intangible aspect of collaboration that resists articulation. Familiarity with the group and the material paradoxically masks the heavy influence one has on the other – even though such unforced collaboration is arguably one goal of group devising. The ease with
which scenes come together is a pleasant surprise as the task of collaboration ceases to become a conscious process. However, while this suggests group cohesiveness, this situation may be fraught with aesthetic dangers. When a group works extensively in isolation, they risk losing a sense of audience and creating a show with little meaning outside the group itself. Schmor (2004:272) warns: "There can be a real danger in devising that the same careful attention to process and collective communication skills can be misapplied to justify every choice and insulate from any criticism." The excess of agreement that blunts critical appraisals of each others' work also may result in a production that is "esoteric – a private language" (Tufnell and Crickmay, 1993:201). To avoid this, Tufnell and Crickmay advise remaining aware of

the interlocking realms of personal and public experience. Part of us is what is around us – our thoughts/perceptions exist within images, associations and assumptions that constitute contemporary culture. We think and 'are thought' by them. They carry dominate attitudes to nature, to the body, to gender, etc, which we may either passively use or actively counter. All work exists in dialogue with other cultural processes and products ... The making of a work is not just structuring it internally but is also to do with locating it in terms of place and occasion and in its particular historical moment. (201)

This accords with the postmodern contention “that one is always already enmeshed in the constant circulation of signs, images and discourses, and that in this realm there can be no ‘outside’ or neutral point of view since one’s perspective is always already informed and contained by this restricted discursive economy” (Murphy, 1998:262). When devising, just how enmeshed one’s perspective is in wider socio-cultural constructs becomes visible. With This Is Not An Exit, we frequently exchanged media clippings that resonated with the issues we were exploring. These were not only to deep our knowledge but to generate an understanding of what our work may potentially represent to an audience. What startled us was the proliferation of media images, political or popular culture events that could have
provided the inspiration for *This Is Not An Exit*. Of course, the issues addressed in the production are prevalent, and we became more attuned to noticing these issues elsewhere. However, we believed that our characters embodied "the interlocking realms of personal and public experience" (Tufnell and Crickmay, 1993:201), and that what we had seen, heard, read and done had been unknowingly absorbed, then reconstituted, into our characters. Thus, our embodiment of those characters was our "dialogue with other cultural processes and products". We were not using *This Is Not An Exit* to talk amongst ourselves but to express how first-hand and mediatised experiences are both simultaneously located in our own bodies and the wider socio-cultural moment. An example can be found in Thompson (2004:155) who explores how "in situations of violent conflict stories are not disembodied discourses adopted or discarded with ease" but part of "the very body of the teller". He argues "stories cannot be separated from how they constitute and reconstitute the tellers and the listeners. Playing with stories becomes a play with the bodies of participants" (156). Although our daily occurrences are not as extreme as those in a war-torn country, our bodies are similarly the site where experiences become narratives to be re-told. When devising, the embodiment and re-performance of experience can take two forms – the everyday experience fuelling creativity, and the experience of devising itself.

*Devising as Embodied Knowledge*

Raymond J. Barry, recalling his work with the Open Theatre, writes: "After a full two years of workshops, when the plays finally were presented to audiences the words had become an integral part of the actors’ beings, so connected were we with the political and poetic sense each one of us had introduced in the workshops" (Barry in Rugoff, G. et al, 2004:104). Barry’s observation articulates our experience devising *This Is Not An Exit*. As most of our material developed through improvisation, it was only later we scripted the dialogue before rehearsing it in a traditional sense. It was the same with the movement
sequences. Developed on the floor, there was no urgency to write them down in order to remember them. For Adam and me especially, material devised on our feet remained easy to recall. Difficulties arose when using less physical methods to construct or order material, such as with our structuring attempts. These were done at the computer and were received as printed scripts, not as verbal or physical demonstrations. This created a sense of separation from the material which had previously existed wholly within us. Interestingly, once we began rehearsing with scripts, it was difficult to put them down again.

"Most mainstream scientists today seem to favour a brain-centred model in the general debate on consciousness. Such an approach tends to marginalize the importance of the corporeal, something that is of such crucial importance to the performing artist" (Daniel, 2000:64). Further, a great deal of performance rhetoric tends to reinscribe a Cartesian mind/body dualism despite the "radical rediscovery of the body" in the early 1960s (Zarrilli, 2002:13). Zarrilli argues:

... this "resurrection of the body" has not been unproblematic ... In some improvisational, bodily and/or experientially saturated approaches to acting when "being in the moment" is emphasized, a Cartesian dualism is simply reinscribed in the form of an overly simplistic and monolithic subjectivity often described as the actor's "presence," or as an "organic" or "natural" state of being. A reified subjectivist notion of "presence" is as complicit in a dualist metaphysics as is the Cartesian "mind." Neither provides an adequate account of the "body" in the mind, the "mind" in the body, or of the process by which the signs read as "presence" are a discursive construct. (15)

Attempting to articulate the embodied processes of performance is as difficult as attempting to understand them in the first place. This is doubly so with devising where the process is actively performative. The use of improvisation foregrounds the performer's embodied creativity, raising questions about how material is developed and where it is
stored, if not in a written script. In my experience, relegating the creation and storage of performance knowledge to the “mind”, in the traditional Western sense, is inadequate. When devising, much of the process is somatic, or what Lockford and Pelias (2004) term “bodily poeticizing”. “Bodily poeticizing relies upon the affective, physical, and vocal capabilities of the performer. It is a process of aesthetic engagement and judgement located in a corporeal presence” (432). Lockford and Pelias explore what “embodied knowledges – be they cognitive, physical, somatic, affective, or a combination” (431) – a performer utilises when improvising. Effectively, bodily poeticizing is the process of creating in performance that emphasizes the performer’s “embodiedness” over a traditional “embrained” (Riley, 2004) model of aesthetic decision-making. In other words, it may arguably be considered a body-based form of reflection-in-action “with the aim of achieving an aesthetic end” (Lockford and Pelias, 2004:432). Lockford and Pelias argue bodily poeticizing in improvisation draws upon five sites of embodied knowledge – communication, playfulness, sedimentation, sensuality and vulnerability – although they stress that it “isn’t just about the body as an epistemic site” but “how the actor’s body functions in an aesthetic way” (432). Here, I will focus on Lockford and Pelias’ concept of sedimentation and how it can be applied to the devising of This Is Not An Exit. This is not to suggest that the other four sites of embodied knowledge identified by Lockford and Pelias are less crucial to devising or the concept of bodily poeticizing. For my purpose, I find that “sedimentation” supplies two important understandings: first, of the role experience plays in “intuitive” response; second, how the devised material emerges from and remains situated within a performer’s corporeality.

Lockford and Pelias (2004:436) suggest that the “it just felt right” moments when improvising come from “intuitive sedimentation”. This is particularly the case with groups who have worked together for a long time. “Their knowledge is habituated and embedded
in the body ... It is a knowledge that draws upon a place of artistic grounding, a place where performers can call upon past endeavours to inform their choices” (436). Lockford and Pelias provide a tangible theory of the performer’s corporeality as a reservoir of past performance experience to unlock the mysteries of intuitive response. They further draw upon Michael Polanyi’s concept of “tacit knowledge”: “Tacit knowledge operates from an implicit system of logic, a learned and imprinted grammar of practice, but it is also a grammar whose rules actors may not be able to call forward ... it is much like linguistic competence, a structure that supports each performance but typically remains hidden” (436). Sedimentation is useful to explain not only how spontaneous choices are made when improvising, but also how the experience of performance material accumulates within the performer. Thus, when devisers choose to continue with or abandon scenes after one attempt, “their assessments are felt deeply in the body and are based upon a richly layered sediment of artistic practices constituting a particular way of knowing” (437). When devising, process “sediment” arguably accumulates within the group members until they unconsciously work from “an implicit system of logic” particular to that group. When Carl joined after Larry’s departure, he wasn’t quite clear about our working methods and we found it difficult to articulate them. Although he quickly grasped our ideas, we had settled into a way of shaping and directing scenes that was mostly intuitive. Once Carl began sharing material he had independently devised, Suzy, Adam and I would try to run it through our process of assessment, improvisation, assessment, editing, assessment – a process graded by “that works!” moments. It was clear Carl wasn’t sure why we thought a scene worked or didn’t, although he recognised it had something to do with an overall “feel” for This Is Not An Exit which, at that point, only existed within us.

“The ‘remembrance’ of physical actions which are embodied in the body as bio-evolutionary is never lost, even though the duration and strength of its ‘recall’ may vary.
These innate processes can be set in motion through physical, mental, emotional and psychic processes" (Daniel, 2000:63-4). During the performances of *This Is Not An Exit*, Adam, Suzy and I discussed how, even if we couldn’t name which scene came next, we knew where to move. Offstage, we often referred to a running sheet. Onstage, we followed the impetus to take certain positions from which the scene would then unfold. Arguably, weeks of rehearsal had created an embodied “‘remembrance’ of physical actions” accessed by the process of performing: it is important to stress that offstage we all had difficulty recalling the correct moves. This type of “sedimentation” (Lockford and Pelias, 2004) through practice has been discussed by many performers and performance researchers. For example, Ruth Way (2000:57), in her interview with choreographer Yolande Snaith, observes: “... repeating ... evolves into a process of defining the material because the more familiar the dancers become with it, the physical body will remember how it arrived there.” More than memorising it, the material itself is continually evolved through repetition, much as training conditions the body. Way writes: “As a director and choreographer, Snaith values her artists as creative thinkers and technique is embedded into the creative processes which facilitate the phenomenal experience. In this way, the physical preparation the performers execute can be perceived as an essential and vital part of the creative process where the physiological body and the senses are awakened and tuned” (60). Other practitioners have developed techniques that seize upon the dual benefits of memorising and enriching performance material through psychophysical processes. These are deliberate ways of harnessing the performer’s potentiality for embodied creativity, rather than the incidental physical memories made when devising *This Is Not An Exit*. Riley (2004), for example, advocates “embodied perceptual practices” where the performer “focuses on layering recalled imagery of a fully sensual nature (aural, textual, visual, etc) with perceptual imagery as it unfolds in the moment” (453). This is designed to aid the performer in achieving “a state of what might be called perceptual polyphony, the ability to
work simultaneously with text, perceptual and recalled imagery, and associated imagery” (467). Importantly, this technique advocates a concept of imagery and perception “without unnecessarily reinscribing the mind/body split” (466). Recounting a rehearsal process utilising “embodied perceptual practices”, Riley notes that they “turned out to be an excellent mnemonic device – the material was memorized experientially and was not easily forgotten” (467). Zarrilli (2004) argues for “an aesthetic ‘inner’ bodymind discovered and shaped through long-term extra daily modes of practice” such as yoga or acting (655). In operation with the “aesthetic ‘outer’ body ... that body offered for the abstractive gaze of the spectator”, the inner bodymind is a “mode of awareness and experience” (661). The “score” enacted by the performer – “that set of actions/tasks ... often read and experienced as character in a conventional drama” (664) – is “corporeally engaged with and through one’s bodymind” (666). Zarrilli is attempting to articulate a phenomenological model of the embodied experience of performing. While not outlining a particular method like Riley’s (2004) “embodied perceptual practices”, he does indicate like Riley that embodied aesthetic creation requires a regime of training or rehearsal to heighten perception and awareness. Arguably, the process of devising has the potential to develop within the performer a similar level of embodied aesthetic sensibility. Even without structured exercises like games purposely designed to cultivate “intuitive” response, the physicality of improvisation combined with on-the-floor aesthetic decision-making suggest devising a potential site for further investigation into how performers “think” and “remember” with their bodies. Furthermore the application of techniques such as Riley’s (2004) when devising offers a wide area for research into, for example, the potential for devising to develop performers or even new methods of devising itself.

Exploring the embodied knowledges of devising arguably privileges an interest in process over any notion of a devised “product”. It similarly raises questions about
academic separations of theory from practice mirroring the mind/body split. Ryan (1997:206) makes the point that the "shared root of 'theatre' and 'theory' – 'to look' or 'to contemplate' – belies the doing integral to both sites of knowledge". Theorising devising especially foregrounds how integral practice is to theatre theory – if not a form of theory itself. The process of devising is a journey that continues well into any public performance where the accumulation of performance knowledge continues to develop material. As with any theatre, discoveries are continually made and built upon in performance. With devising, however, the implications are potentially wider-reaching. Magnat (2005:74), for example, sees the "embodied creativity fostered by devising" as empowering beyond a performance context. She argues the "utopian" potentiality of devising where transformation is possible. Importantly for Magnat, this "utopian dimension of devised theatre is anchored in the materiality of a body transformed by the power of its own actions" (74). For theatre students, undertaking a devising process may lead them to "experience the infinite resources of collaborative work, and learn to expect the unexpected ... They might ... come to question canonical definitions of theatre and form new expectations about the function of artistic practice" (84). These expectations are a "danger" to traditional theatrical approaches and even "our privileging of discursive reason over embodied knowledge" (74). Devising is thus a way of knowing that involves reconsiderations of the self, the group, theatrical processes, and even the wider socio-cultural environment. To further understand devising, I believe it is important to examine how devisers undertake these considerations, and what impact the process may continue to have on devisers afterwards. If devising is a total embodied experience, then it does not end with the final performance. It remains within the devisers, informing future aesthetic and group-based activities. In this way, devising is arguably more than a theatrical process. As collectives of the 1960s discovered, it can be a way of life. In (post)-postmodern times, devising is arguably a site for exploring how modernist distinctions between art and
everyday existence have collapsed, as focus shifts to the embodied experience of both
deviser and spectator. Theatrical process has truly become the theatrical product.