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What is devised theatre? Why have theatre-makers chosen to devise performances since the 1950s? How has devised performance changed over the last fifty years? Why, where, when, how, and for whom does devising take place today?

Devising Performance explores these fundamental questions and charts the development of collaboratively created performances from the 1950s to the present day in British, Australian and American culture. Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling discuss companies including The Living Theatre, Open Theatre, Australian Performing Group, People Show, Teatro Campesino, Theatre de Complicite, Legs on the Wall, Forced Entertainment, Goat Island and Graeae. In so doing, they encourage us to look more carefully at different modes of devising and to consider the implications of our use of these practices in the twenty-first century.

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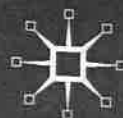
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devising performance
a critical history

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Contents

<i>General Editors' Preface</i>	vi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
1 Introduction	1
2 Devising and Acting	29
3 Devising and Visual Performance	63
4 Devising and Political Theatre	95
5 Devising and Communities	130
6 Contemporary Devising and Physical Performance	157
7 Contemporary Devising and Postmodern Performance	190
8 Conclusions	221
<i>Notes</i>	232
<i>Bibliography</i>	250
<i>Index</i>	266

5 Devising and Communities

Devising emerged as a core feature and methodology within the burgeoning field of community arts in the 1960s. The passions, ideology and contradictions of the emergent community arts movement produced a distinctive set of devising strategies, and the movement itself was informed by the possibilities of devising. This chapter examines the relationship and distinction between community arts and the politically-activist companies discussed in Chapter 4. The evolution of radical pedagogy in the mid-century underpinned the emergence of Theatre-in-Education, which championed participation in the processes of devising. The political, social or personal benefits arising from involvement in devising processes for unskilled participants has remained a central debate within the field of community arts throughout the period we look at here.

Devising and Community Arts

Early on, devising within community arts was closely allied to the more political, alternative theatre discussed in the previous chapter. Many of the British companies considered in Chapter 4 were also part of The Association of Community Theatres (TACT), established in 1973, which envisaged community theatre 'as part of the larger class struggle and as a means of changing dominant concepts of culture' (Itzin, 1980, p. 176). Baz Kershaw has argued for community theatre to be viewed as part of the alternative theatre movement, which saw theatre as more than simply cultural intervention, seeing it as a way to oppose and change mainstream politics (Kershaw, 1992). Certainly, early community arts were part of a movement towards the 'democratization of culture' and a desire to reach different audiences from

those the existing commercial theatre attracted (Giesekam, 2000). Drawing on the principles of the Workers' Theatre Movement of the 1920s and 1930s, and the Federal Theatre Project, the widespread re-politicisation of the arts world in the late 1950s and 1960s produced a new wave of practitioners and educationalists who envisaged a liberation politics and a liberational art (see Chapter 4). Devising appealed as part of this agenda because of its 'democratic' process – an apparent equality of participation in the production of theatre – and because of the need to deal with topics of immediate relevance to community audiences rarely addressed by existing, written plays.

Who the 'communities' of community arts were and how they have been defined and imagined has shifted fundamentally over the last forty years. In the 1950s and 1960s 'community' was most often viewed as a static, utopian ideal of neighbourliness and locality, and its absence was mourned. The mediation of national and global concerns through the increased visibility of television and the overflow of information in the face of which the individual seemed powerless, as McLuhan identified in *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968), prompted a backlash of desire for the local and for 'authentic experience'. Anthropologists such as Victor Turner were happy to oblige with studies of small-scale groups in 'Third World' contexts, and offered romantic views of tribal or village communities who experienced 'spontaneous communitas' (Turner, 1972, p. 1100). In America, Paul Goodman's influential *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) berated schools and social institutions for 'The Missing Community'. However, there was a competing idea of community that had influenced the working-class, socialist theatre movements since the 1930s; a dynamic understanding of the formation of class-consciousness which offered an alternative and dynamic model of community-consciousness. As E. P. Thompson, an historian of the British working class, pointed out, class was not a structure nor a category 'but something which in fact happens in human relationships' (Thompson, 1963, preface). David Watt argued that the same is true of a community:

the interactions within a group of people who choose to see themselves as a community continually alter the nature of that community, so that it is always in a state of 'becoming', and therefore, growing, and thus avoids the stasis of a 'thing' to be serviced. (Watt, 1991, p. 61)

Paulo Freire's notion of 'conscientization', widely circulated in the 1970s, articulated this principle clearly – that communities of interest,

rather than locality, can be forged. During the late 1970s and early 1980s the idea of community as 'a set of shared social meanings which are constantly created and mutated through the actions and interactions of its members, and through their interaction with wider society', implied that the activity of community intervention could be very powerful (Kelly, 1984, p. 50).

This active model of community being forged through action and interaction led to an increased concern with the participation of communities in the making of an artwork. Indeed, for Naseem Khan, the defining characteristic of community theatre was participation (Khan, 1980). And the use of devising strategies might seem a natural mode for achieving community participation and animation. For Eugene van Erven such work first started to evolve in South America, where devising or the collaborative creation of theatre with a community was the essence of the South and Latin American tradition of *creación colectiva* (van Erven, 2001). This mode of working emerged from experimental popular theatre groups all over South and Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s. Liberation politics underpinned the work of groups as diverse as Enrique Buenaventura and Cáliz Experimental Theatre (TEC) from the 1950s, Santiago García's collective La Candelaria (founded in Bogotá, Colombia, 1957), and the Cuban Teatro Escambray (1968).¹ Although diverse modes of working evolved, the component principles of the work were:

music, carefully researched themes that correspond to the interests and cultures of the people they perform for, simple but flexible production techniques that can be adapted to all kinds of indoor and outdoor venues, and lengthy creative development processes ... [and] a new kind of actor, one who is not someone's servile employee but, instead, a self-conscious socially responsible co-owner of the means of creative production. (van Erven, 2001, p. 138)

The better known companies from that period tended to be professional companies touring with collectively devised, popular, political shows. However, they inspired and left behind the principles for community theatre groups in many areas, who 'concocted their own versions of the collective creation process to dramatize their local stories' (van Erven, 2001, p. 139). Such work was a physical expression of a Freirean pedagogy:

As a form of deliberate and systematic action, all cultural action has its theory which determines its ends and thereby defines its methods. Cultural

action either serves domination (consciously or unconsciously) or it serves liberation. (Freire, 1989, p. 180)

Theatre festivals and workshops across the continent were one way of disseminating the modes of performance, and Freirean pedagogy was circulated through journals and workshops in educational circles far beyond South America.

However, while the roots of community-based work lay in politicised and oppositional activity, the rise of community arts in America, Britain and Australia was largely underpinned by government funding, through Arts Councils and other national funding agencies. Indeed, Gay Hawkins, in a survey of the community arts movement in Australia, argued that the term 'community arts':

had no real currency in Australia until it was invoked in Commonwealth cultural policy in the early 1970s. As difficult as it may be for many community artists to accept, community arts are an official invention. (Hawkins, 1991, p. 45)

That the state should support work that was oppositional or politicised might seem surprising. However, the way in which government agencies perceived the role of community arts differed somewhat from the role that the more alternative, or counter-cultural, workers in community-based activity saw for themselves.

The 1974 Baldry Report (UK), which set out to investigate the work of community artists, did not regard them as essentially 'alternative' or 'oppositional':

their primary concern is their impact on a community and their relationship with it: by assisting those with whom they make contact to become more aware of their situation and of their own creative powers, and by providing them with the facilities they need to make use of their abilities, they hope to widen and deepen the sensibilities of the community in which they work and so enrich its existence. To a varying degree they see this as a means of change, whether psychological, social or political, within the community. (Kelly, 1984, p. 16)

This improving, but limited, definition of community arts was to earn the sector government funding, since the idea of any change was firmly to be contained 'within the community' itself and not to impinge on larger political or social realities. In the UK large proportions of predominantly working-class communities had been dispersed

from 'slums' to new estates of tower blocks during the 1950s, and the provision of improving cultural activity for community-building on these housing estates was perceived by some government agencies as a panacea for local unrest. A similar activity accompanied 'urban renewal' in American inner-cities during the 1960s and 1970s. To view the actions of local government most cynically, local communities were also constituencies. However, despite the state's best intentions there was much crossover between the personnel, groups and aesthetics of the 'alternative' groups of the 1960s and 1970s and the community-based practices of early community theatre groups.

In Australia, another kind of collaboration between oppositional principles and the Establishment was evident in the birth of community theatre – in the relationship between theatre companies and the universities. Two universities were crucial in the evolution of community theatre in Australia. First, the School of Drama in the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, established in 1976. Although it was conceived as a drama school to challenge the dominance of the Sydney-based National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA), Peter Oyston, who headed its programme, set out to train a more resourceful performer or theatre worker, and formed the students into small theatre companies. Part of the degree course was designed to train 'animateurs', 'primary creators who could make new theatre works of various kinds in various conditions ... and be in a position to find their own audiences' (Milne, 2004, p. 161). Companies which emerged from this programme included the Murray River Performing Group, WEST Theatre Company and Theatre-Works. A similar style of programme was established in the newly created Deakin University further south in Geelong, Victoria, in 1978. James McCaughey was both head of the drama programme and artistic director of a community-orientated theatre company, the Mill Community Theatre Company. Rose Myers, now director of Arena Theatre, was a graduate of the programme.

It was a very interesting model. The company would be working on a project, whether it was a community-based project that was something to do with Geelong's history (although they also did texts as well), and the students from the three years would be working on that same material with them at the same time. There was a big community workshop programme component of any development of work and a community theatre night-time project (Mill Night for adults, on Thursday nights). ... There was a real surge in the community theatre movement right across the country and there were a lot of regionally-based companies.... That's all died off. (Myers)²

Companies who devised work for communities include WEST Theatre Company (Melbourne), Sidetrack (Sydney), Death Defying Theatre, now Urban Theatre Projects (Brisbane/Sydney), Doppio Teatro, now Parallelo (Adelaide), Zeal Theatre (Newcastle), Back to Back Theatre (Geelong), Street Arts Theatre (Melbourne), Junction (Torrensville) and Melbourne Workers' Theatre. These groups shared practices, collaborated and generated the sense of themselves as part of a coherent movement of community theatre through a series of national conferences held in the 1980s in Adelaide, Geelong and Marrickville, Sydney.

American theatre companies who use devising in making performances for specific communities, or who use devising as a tool for making performance with communities, are numerous. This chapter might consider the work of The ProVisional Theatre (LA), Soul and Latin Theatre (East Harlem), Living Stage (Washington), Cornerstone (LA), Roadside Theatre (Whitesburg), Dakota Theatre Caravan (South Dakota), Teatro de la Realidad (LA), Teatro de la Esperanza (San Francisco), Wagonburner Theatre Troupe (Native America), Carpet-bag Theatre (Knoxville, Tennessee), or the United Mime Workers political mime (Champaign, Illinois). Jan Cohen-Cruz argued that community-based arts in America developed their current form in the mid-1970s when the national protest movements were waning. For her, community arts emerged 'with a heightened consciousness to think globally but act locally, activist art practitioners looked to local contexts in which their work could play a role'.³ A key marker she noted was the founding in 1976 of a coalition of community theatres as Alternate ROOTS (Regional Organisation Of Theatres South). This coalition included the Free Southern Theatre (founded 1963), which had been a leading black theatre of the South during the Civil Rights Movement, but which redefined its commitment to a broader programme of supporting communities of place, tradition and spirit and became Junebug Productions.⁴ In many ways the history of Junebug echoes the history of devising companies more broadly, as politically activist groups from the 1950s and 1960s began to transpose their devising practices into community-based and community-focused work during the late 1970s and 1980s.

Devising Practices and Community Theatre

A very diverse range of devising practices has been used within community arts over the last forty years. In order to map out such

diversity we might consider four spectra along which a company's practice may lie: the level of involvement of theatre professionals; the level of participation of community members; the relative importance of process or product; and the political impetus of the work, from radical to supportive of the status quo.

Many of the earliest companies who devised within community arts, particularly in the UK and US, were professional acting groups, and lay at one end of the spectrum of professional involvement. Professional actors generated a performance from local stories or histories and performed it for a geographically-defined community within a theatre building. Peter Cheeseman's documentary dramas at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent (1962, UK), were early examples of this. Theatre-in-Education, which also evolved in the mid-1960s, was usually sponsored by regional theatres or educational authorities and was driven by the same principles, offering professionally devised performances for specific communities within an educational setting. Ann Jellicoe's significant work with community plays lies at a midpoint on this spectrum of professional involvement. Jellicoe's work was not devised but used plays written by professional playwrights from local history; however, the plays were produced and performed by community members rather than professional actors.⁵ At the other end of the spectrum lies work generated from within the community itself without professional initiation, such as Helen Crummy's leadership of the Craigmillar Festival Society (Edinburgh), which became an inspirational model for many other deprived communities who wanted to produce economic and social change through arts activity.⁶

A counterpoint to the level of professional involvement is the extent to which communities participate in devising processes. This raises complex questions about the kind of devising strategies used within community arts and the value and function of that devising. Participation, in community terms, is different from either actor-centred devising (Chapter 2) or politically activist work (Chapter 4). It is far less prescriptive, and more diverse, than the action-defined audience participation of The Living Theatre's love-heap in *Paradise Now* or Pip Simmons Group's slave auction in *The George Jackson Black and White Minstrel Show*, CAST's Muggins plays or Albert Hunt's Russian Revolution project. Within community arts, devising participants might be offered a range of roles: as source and resource material, hence the popularity of the storytelling-based work of Junebug (US) or Roadside (US); as performers in pre-existing scripts evolved from community research, as in Ann Jellicoe's (UK) or Cornerstone's

work (US); as co-devisors, as in SALT's short-lived experiment (US) or Ley Tea's experience (Inala Community Theatre, Australia); or as participants in a therapeutic process, as in the Living Stage's recent work with teen mothers (US), or Geese Theatre's workshops with offenders (US/UK).

A third axis of community work concerns the relative importance of the performance product and process, and the relationship between the two. At one extreme might lie highly-technical, professionally devised performance for communities, such as Arena Theatre's (Australia) recent Anthropop trilogy and *Eat Your Young*, discussed below, which toured festivals and large-scale community events. At the other end of this spectrum would lie some of the work of the Prof. Dogg Troupe of Inter-Action (UK), which sought only to facilitate creative play and improvisation among participants, without any interest in a resultant production. Over the last forty years the pressures on community workers at both ends of this spectrum have grown. For community theatre companies who devise performances for community audiences, the pressure from funders to provide a professional quality performance sometimes militates against interactive or open performance structures, appropriate to the context. At the other end of the spectrum, lies the idea that the *process* of participation in the making of the work, not the product itself, has a positive impact on participants to bring about change: social, political or, most often these days, personal. Hence a plethora of work with specific client groups which offers participation in devising and improvisation as a form of personal intervention, seeking to change personal behaviour, as in much recent Boalean work based on Moreno's psychodrama. Funders of this kind of interventionist community art increasingly wish to see concrete evidence of ameliorative changes in participants. It can be difficult to assess sometimes whether this change leads the community or individual to resist the status quo or to conform more effectively to mainstream demands.

The fourth spectrum is the level of political input into the devising process. Over the years, many of the explicitly political devising groups considered in Chapter 4 have turned to or incorporated community-based work within their portfolio, one example amongst many being 7:84 (Scotland). Although devising has often been presented as an inherently oppositional activity, because it directly involves untrained participants in artistic endeavours, it does not follow that either the devising process or the devised product in a community context is *always* politically explicit. Many theatre workers,

while seeing themselves as left-wing, do not expound a direct, explicit, party political stance in their work. Rose Myers, director of Arena Theatre, Melbourne, articulated the difference as she saw it:

If you talk to Melbourne Worker's Theatre (a politically left, socialist group) in the end as individuals they probably are [socialists]. But it's the grey areas that are more fascinating to us. Say we've got a fascist premier or rightwing government. Their company take might be 'The government is oppressing us'; our take is, 'What's attracting people at this point in time to vote for that government?' What does it say to us about the human condition?

However, this is not to imply that the content of Arena's shows is apolitical. *Eat Your Young* explored the long-term incarceration of young offenders:

What does it say about our humanity when we decide to segregate young people in this way and our main interest in them is how we can have an economically rational model? The politics of the art makers has to come into the equation because they are engaged in the work so heavily. But for me the starting point among the team has to be what we are interested in exploring, rather than statements we want to make. (Myers)

Arena Theatre tends to devise performance *for* a community of young people, rather than devising *with* young people. Likewise, Sara Brady's critique of Cornerstone Theatre and Touchstone Theatre's collaboration, *Steelbound* (USA), a performance scripted from interviews and performed by former workers of the Bethlehem Steel foundry in the steel plant, argued that personal testimony and documentary theatre may not produce radical theatre – the production did not tackle the steel company's greed or racial discrimination (Brady, 2000). Jan Cohen-Cruz concurred that had Touchstone Theatre's involvement stopped there the project would not have appeared radical, but the group went on to produce 'a collective creation, *Never Done*, focusing on women and people of colour in Bethlehem in the 'forties, and taking on discrimination' (Cohen-Cruz, 2000, p. 378). Though the collectively created work was the more explicitly political in its comment in this instance, it is by no means universally true that devising *with* a community necessarily produces more politically explicit material.

Often community artists feel that collaboration with a community group must accommodate the diversity and internal conflicts of that community, which may militate against a clear political comment.

Alternatively, some community artists have felt that the purpose of working with a community is to celebrate and reaffirm its significance or history, in which case critical counter-narratives or difficult topics may be repressed or ignored. In 1984, WEST Community Theatre, Melbourne, undertook a project with Vietnamese refugees. Work with this community group was in itself a political act, given the right-wing media's scare-mongering attitude to the influx of refugees at the time. However, the facilitators discovered that 'skills training and a substantial amount of group devising' led to the evolution of *The Vietnamese*, a dramatisation of the journey and resettlement of this community, which blamed the exodus of the refugees squarely on the 'communist' invasion. Any analysis of the complexity of the Vietnamese situation, and the American inflammation of the conflict, which had been the source of such protest fifteen years earlier, was absent (Watt, 1992, p. 12).

Having marked out some of the central issues in the use of devising in community contexts, the rest of this chapter develops a close look at the processes of a variety of representative theatre companies. First, we look at the rise of Theatre-in-Education, which identified a very specific community audience and began to experiment with a variety of devising strategies within the formal constraints of educational institutions. We then go on to look at the two leading, but very different, strands of devising work with communities: that done *for* communities by professional groups, and that done *with* communities, by members of the communities themselves.

Devising and the Genesis of Theatre-in-Education

The rise of Theatre-in-Education (TIE) in the 1960s was not surprising as, in part, the rhetoric asserting the positive value of the expressive arts that underpinned the community arts movement was closely linked to changes in pedagogic practice that had developed in the schools of post-war Britain and America. Not only had the 1944 Education Act in the UK introduced compulsory and free education for all, it had sharpened the significance of educational theory. In the pre-war years, drama had fought for a place in the curriculum, suggesting itself either as cultural improvement, or as a mode of 'child-centred' progressive learning through which to teach other subjects. Theories of child development changed over the mid-century and the role of 'play' in the creative development of an individual became a

key concept, as we explored in Chapter 2. There had been an exploration of interest in behaviourism, child development and personality studies, made accessible by writers like Abraham Maslow (*Motivation and Personality*, 1954), Carl Rogers (*On Becoming a Person*, 1961) or Paul Goodman (*Growing Up Absurd*, 1960).⁸ It was out of this concern for 'play' and its value as pedagogy that the Theatre-in-Education (UK and Australia) or educational theatre (US) groups emerged. The echoes of this approach are clear in the aims of the first British Theatre-in-Education group, from the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry (1965), which were:

to explore the values of drama in the development of the child's personality, to experiment in teaching methods using drama and theatre techniques, and to stimulate an interest in theatre in adult life. (Coult, 1980, p. 78)⁹

The relatively conservative nature of this language – a return to the idea of building an audience of the future and an exposure to improving cultural activity – belies the aspirations of many community theatre workers and TIE groups. They actually shared much with alternative theatre, notably a challenge to mainstream conservative values, a concentration on the *process* of production rather than just the product, and a desire to connect with the audience that translated into the language of empowerment and participation. Paradoxically, at their inception in the UK, the Theatre-in-Education groups were established by 'the state education system and the predominantly middle-class repertory theatre' (Coult, 1980, p. 76), everything that was anathema to the claimed ethos of the alternative theatres.

The Belgrade Theatre in Coventry was a first in several ways, not least in that it was the first new theatre built after the Second World War, in 1958. From the start, the theatre had attempted to forge links with the surrounding community, including taking a performance out to schools and running youth theatre clubs. In 1964 Gordon Vallins, appointed to reinvigorate the educational programme, developed a vision of diverse community liaison for the theatre. In the event, the scheme was scaled down to a team of four actor/teachers who dubbed themselves a Theatre-in-Education (TIE) team. Rather than a play, the team produced a programme 'of activities, usually devised and researched by the company ... presented in school by the company and involving the children directly in an experience of the situations and problems that the topic throws up' (Jackson, 1993, p. 4). Since the object of the TIE work was to experiment with teaching methods

and to connect with theories of developmental play, pre-existing play-texts were not suitable. As David Pammenter noted:

the TIE movement during its short history has had to rely almost entirely on its practitioners for its material. Its whole history has been one of self-devised work either with or without writers ... [although] the devising process has differed much from company to company. (Pammenter, 1993, p. 53)

Maggie Steed, an actress with Belgrade TIE, remembered the passionate involvement of the actor/teachers in this devising work:

We had to work out what the aim of the piece was, what sort of narrative the piece would need, and what were the conflicts that would best serve its aim. We'd go off and write our own scenes or improvise. We were completely thrown in the deep end. It was difficult but exciting. ... Our performing style – if there was a style at Coventry – was very full blooded, and we sang and did all sorts of different things. Naturalism was a dirty word. (Chambers and Steed, 2004, pp. 193–4)

One early programme, *Pow Wow* (1973), gives a flavour of the results. One class-group of children had to first

identify and develop a relationship with a racist, acquisitive cowboy who runs his own Wild West show and later with an Indian who tells a different story about the demise of the Indian tribes in the face of the white man and his technology. At one point the children have to decide whether or not to free the Indian from his cage. (Pammenter, 1993, p. 65)

Most of the topics chosen involved moral and social choices and demanded some political and economic education, as in Belgrade TIE's shows *The Car Makers* (1971) or *The Price of Coal* (1977), or Bolton TIE's *Poverty Knocks* (1973).¹⁰

Other TIE groups were quickly established between 1968 and 1970 at regional theatres, often peopled by alumni from the Coventry experiment: in Bolton, Leeds, Glasgow, Greenwich and Ecinburgh; Nottingham and Peterborough followed in 1973, and Lancaster in 1975 (Jackson, 1993, p. 18). Crucially, these companies were funded by the Local Education Authority (indeed the Inner London Education Authority set up its own TIE company, Cockpit, unconnected to a theatre), and also had access to Arts Council funding (particularly after the establishment of a separate, fund-distributing Committee for Young People's Theatre 1966, inspired by the Belgrade example), in

order that schools should not have to pay for the service. The extent to which these companies straddled both mainstream and alternative camps was evidenced by the heated debates that characterised the conferences the groups held. In 1975 there were so many TIE groups that the Stranding Conference of Young People's Theatre (SCYPT) was formed, where:

Marxist analyses of social processes, and the educational philosophies of Ivan Illich, John Holt and Paulo Freire generated not only heated debate about the need for 'alternative' approaches within the state [education] system but also a vital atmosphere of experiment with form, with ways of engaging children actively in their own learning. (Jackson, 1993, p.24)

Maggie Steed, who later went to work with the socialist theatre company Belt and Braces, recalled 'a lot of argument, a lot of blood spilt, a lot about the wrong ways to do things, and the right ways to do things, but it was very lively' (Chambers and Steed, 2004, p.195). Such political arguments extended not only to content and the process of making work through devising, perceived as more egalitarian, but also to the organisation of the companies themselves, many of which were configured as collectives.

In Australia, John O'Toole and Penny Bundy argued that while British imports of Theatre-in-Education arrived in the 1970s and were a part of the officially funded programmes of several States' educational provision, there was an ongoing suspicion of the cultural colonialism that they also implied. Companies such as Derek Nicholson's Pageant Theatre (NSW), and Melbourne Theatre Company, were touring schools with theatre programmes around 1970-2; but, as Barbara Manning of Salamanca Theatre in Tasmania (1976) identified, more participatory work like her own grew out of visits to TIE companies in the UK (Fotheringham, 1992, p.42). Some critics suggested that when funding for participatory Theatre-in-Education was widely cut in the 1980s few in the theatre or education communities mourned its passing. Whereas most early British TIE shows were devised, many Australian TIE shows were written, and small-scale participatory programmes had been very difficult to implement (O'Toole and Bundy, 1993, p.138). Today in America, the UK and Australia the kind of participatory, small-scale Theatre-in-Education work has become something of a rarity, following the demise of subsidy and the resulting economic burden placed on schools. However, for Anthony Haddon of community theatre Blah, Blah, Blah

(1985, Leeds), new possibilities of participatory drama in schools have been made possible by recent, admittedly limited, funding for Education Achievement Zones in the UK.¹¹

Devising for Communities

Emerging in the early 1960s out of the same desire to resist establishment practices that had driven the aesthetic revolutions of alternative theatre, and inspired by a socialist enthusiasm for reformulating opposition from the 'grassroots' up, the search for a 'community' of resistance was powerful. Joan Littlewood's commitment to the locality of Stratford East extended beyond making theatre herself, to the proposal of a Fun Palace as a community resource where the *community* would create beyond the confines of theatre, becoming involved in the 'therapy of theatre' (Littlewood, 1995, p.706). The Fun Palace was never funded, perhaps not surprisingly, and Littlewood continued her work with the disillusioned youth of the area in other ways. However, paradoxically, some of the most significant community theatre initiatives emerged not from the alternative theatre companies of the 1960s' counter-cultures, but from the mainstream regional theatres.¹²

When Peter Cheeseman established the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, in October 1962, not only was it the first 'theatre-in-the-round' but it also initiated a new style of community-centred work. Cheeseman evolved a mode of documentary drama drawn from local stories and history, where the work was entirely controlled, created and performed by the actors and the director. Initially evolved in 1964 when the resident dramatist, Alan Ayckbourn, was unavailable, it was described by Cheeseman thus:

the plays are constructed from primary source material gathered during a preliminary research period and then rehearsed collectively by researchers, consisting of the resident dramatist, [Cheeseman] and the company in committee. They are then created on the floor at rehearsal. (Cheeseman, 1971a, p.79)¹²

Cheeseman described a more radical impetus than the pragmatic absence of a playwright in his search

to begin to bridge the cultural gap which separates the artist from the majority of the community and which I believe to be a gap created by style

not subject matter ... [the company developed] a popular language, a style of our own which would make theatre livelier and more attractive than the current play format. (Cheeseman, 1971b, p. 86)

The documentaries that emerged from this process were episodic, with a diffuse structure usually linked by songs and music. The costumes and set were simple, to accommodate the multiple locations and the many roles each actor needed to play. In *The Jolly Potters* (1964), about working conditions and 1842 Chartist riots, 'the method employed ... involved the whole company in an immense amount of research; the end product was a play in which almost every word spoken was taken directly from historical records' (Bradby and McCormick, 1978, p. 143). Other local historical topics were tackled, notably in *The Knotty* (1966), about the birth and disappearance of local railways and their absorption into the London, Midland and Scottish Railway Company. The historical topic chosen was never without relevance to the contemporary moment for the local community:

when [*The Knotty*] was produced the town of Stoke was being threatened with absorption into a larger administrative area, which would have lessened its independence and destroyed part of its character. This documentary, by establishing a parallel between the history of the railways and the current situation, led to a protest against the government proposals which as a result, were not implemented. (Bradby and McCormick, 1978)

Not dissimilar to the Living Newspaper in style, but not so radical in content, such documentary theatre was addressed to the community, alongside the more traditional offerings of the repertory theatre, and it was a style of working that was to become popular with other regional theatres around the country.

However, Cheeseman's documentaries did not involve audience participation. The only place where the Victoria Theatre did develop audience participation was in the children's work, based on plays by Brian Way. Even here Jim Lagden pointed out that the workshops failed to reach more than middle-class children, who were required to 'acquiesce in the making of what are already scripted decisions'. A more exciting alternative, Lagden noted, was that initiated by a group of local graduates from Keele University who were

attempting to develop entertainment structures from Grotowski exercises. Used with groups of working-class children as a way to launch them into

genuine improvisation with no element of pre-conceived script, this has produced an exciting response in free invention and decision-making. (Lagden, 1971, p. 85)

The participatory performances involving children developed by Theatre-In-Education, which was emerging at about the same time as Cheeseman's documentaries, were far more radical in their view of audience involvement and were to be influential in the development of more participatory modes of devising, discussed below.

Devising performances from local research and issues to be performed by professionals in community venues also characterised the work of the Murray River Performing Group (Australia, 1979). A small group of four performers and three behind-the-scenes workers devised their shows collaboratively, or commissioned a writer to work with them. The first production was *A Big Hand for the Limbs*, which toured extensively in the region to publicly-accessible spaces like parks, community halls and pubs. The group had a changing membership and adopted a variety of styles:

Our community is our inspiration and provides the source of much of our work ... if you're writing a play that draws on the underlying cares and aspirations of people and that involves their kids, there is a tremendous responsibility to get it right and do it well. (Milne, 2004, p. 211)

As an off-shoot of this group, a children's community circus developed, the Flying Fruit Fly Circus, which continued an Australian interest in physically devised performance discussed in Chapter 6. For both the children's circus and the Murray River Performing Group, devising was a means of generating relevant material more freely, and providing social and political commentary for the local community.

This kind of work was also pursued by one of the longest-lasting community theatre/youth theatre companies in Australia, Arena. In 1966, inspired by British Theatre-in-Education groups, an amateur group called the Toorak Players toured Melbourne primary schools with two shows. A commitment to Australian material meant that the company performed specifically written plays alongside devised performance. Arena briefly evolved into two companies in the boom period of the mid-1970s. The current artistic director, Rose Myers, arrived in 1994, with a commitment to using the full multi-media resources of theatre in the company's devising process, to produce 'new contemporary work that is a genuine force in the contemporary

world ... defined by its engagement with interdisciplinary work or in contemporary pop-culture, rather than what age range is aimed for'.¹³ The devising processes that Myers uses at Arena have developed over time, and differ depending on whether the company is producing the small-scale classroom-size project, such as *Oblong*, a recent piece for 3–8-year-olds about collectables, marketing and friendship, or their larger, more spectacular festival work. The process for the large-scale interdisciplinary work remains collaborative and based in devised cooperation:

We do the research phase, probably myself and a writer, and then take the work into a development phase, where we have all the palette of artists that are going to work on the project; be that the filmmaker, the composer, a designer, the writer, myself and the actors. We'll workshop that material and we'll aim to come out of that development process with the structure of the work. It's usually at that point that the text becomes a solid document – this process is supposed to be a springboard, the writer's role isn't just to be a documenter ... but might take the workshop to new places that are a little bit more refined. (Myers)

Eat Your Young was an examination of the privatisation of social services for children, and the way in which young people were treated in custody. The panopticon of contemporary surveillance was signalled by two huge circular screens with which the young people of the story interacted, an effect that added to the futuristic setting of the piece, although its concerns were contemporary. The generation of material for the performance came from research the company undertook, and was then workshopped for two to three weeks to develop the material. While the context of performance-making is different from the 'poor' theatre of the 1960s or the physical theatre troupes of the 1990s, the central work of the actors in devising is similar in many ways:

Our process to have four actors on the floor for an eight-hour day, it's almost too much. ... If you do a week often by the end they're flagging. But some great work comes out of it too, when people are tired. I like to see what happens when people play a scene way beyond its natural end because good things come out of that too – at times. I'd rather break devising into two half weeks, with a good slab of time to process what happened on the floor. (Myers)

The concentrated stretches in the studio, the moments of editing and reflection, the 'recognition' of good moments share much with the

actor-centred companies discussed in Chapter 2. However, in the context of the 2000s, the actors who devise the work are unlikely to perform it, as the production process for the large-scale projects can take up to two years. The company uses a core of skilled devisers, but often casts actors from more traditional backgrounds to tour the work.

Since the late 1980s the company has attempted to integrate young people into the devising in different ways. Arena tests its work against different audiences throughout the process of the project, in ways that resemble some of the projects which devise *with* their communities:

Eat Your Young had a two-day development with some artists throwing ideas around, some possible multimedia, and then a presentation to a drama teachers' conference saying 'This is where we are up to.' We showed them some draft sketches on stage and had a debate. Then we did a three-week workshop with writer, multimedia maker, and actors that culminated in a showing for 600 people in the Olympic Bowl, where we would show 25 minutes of work and then throw it open to the audience saying 'Where could this go?' and we improvised that back. We had a website ongoing from there, where sound, script and image would be put on, with five central questions for people to email responses to. (Myers)

The large-scale work that Arena tours is not easily taken to rural communities without enormous subsidy. Myers is keenly aware of the complexity of making spectacular and engaging theatre that captures the attention of a visually and technologically sophisticated youth audience without excluding the rural communities that lie beyond the remit of festivals or city-based tours:

We are looking at ways we can open up the process to make it more affordable. The regional areas of Australia can be quite depressing and that divide is so problematic. You will hear of how different areas vote, and how the regional areas have been badly affected by drought and they feel like a separate state that has been abandoned. (Myers)

The awareness of a regional divide in part conditions the choices of material for the group. The latest large-scale show, *Play Dirty/Skid 180*, involves rapid image feedback, live music, physical theatre and live freestyle motorcross stunts, in an exploration of the disenchantment and disenfranchisement of young men, and the seductions of extremely risky behaviour. 'We like people who aren't theatre-goers, it's much more adrenalin charged, a much more excited dynamic exchange' (Myers).

Devising with Communities

If devising is not a professional activity by trained actors, leading towards production, what does participation in devising represent? Broadly speaking there are three main strands to the use of devising *with* communities. Some groups use devising primarily as a tool for encouraging community involvement. Here the aim of the exercise is far less the performance product than the desire to forge a sense of community, or to challenge a community through participation. A second strand of devising with communities is more interested in the content of the performance – the desire to empower community participants to speak publicly about those issues or concerns that are not being addressed by existing government agencies or public discourse. Finally, and far more widespread in contemporary practice, are groups who use devising with participants as a primarily therapeutic activity, usually in order to bring about personal change.

To consider the first of these propositions, for some early groups, involvement in devising activity was less about building performance and more about building community. Ed Berman's Inter-Action Theatre was one of the most radical experiments of community arts and action, and it continues to the present time. Founded in 1968 as a cooperative, the group's explicit agenda was 'to involve people in the improvement of their own communities, making them better places to raise their children and join with other adults to provide leisure and recreational facilities', which was in tune with the broad canvas of the growing community arts movement (Itzin, 1979, p. 197).¹⁴ The multiple activities that the group undertook in Kentish Town, London, included a city farm; a community media van, the Fun Art Bus (a double-decker bus with cinema and theatre); an alternative education project working with truants (September 1974); a community resource centre, the Almost Free Theatre venue; Creative Play projects doing three-dimensional art with children in detention, in schools or on estates; and the Prof. Dogg's Troupe, a street and children's theatre ensemble. Underlying all of the group's work was a common principle:

the use of different artists within a community to stimulate the participation of people in that particular art-form: usually – and mainly, in the minds of the practitioners – for some form of social improvement. (Khan, 1980, p. 64)

The Prof. Dogg Troupe used open-ended play or Game-Plays, a combination of scripted elements and participatory improvisation.

The troupe would arrive on a housing estate as moonmen and invite the children to play with them. The performance would evolve through improvisation and play with the children, and the moonmen might come to represent immigrant communities or simply the idea of meeting new people. Likewise in the project led by sculptress Liz Leyh, *Make a Circus*, a few members of the troupe, dressed as clowns or ringmasters, walked through an estate 'beating drums, wheeling cartfuls of old clothes, paper and assorted junk, and armed with megaphones', inviting children to join them. Gathering the children into a circle in a nearby playground, they gave a circus performance. 'Afterwards the children were encouraged to perform their own circus – this could involve such improvised props and menagerie as a distinctly human-looking lion jumping through a hoop comprising two twelve-year olds' (Asquith, 1980, p. 92). Tony Coult saw the Game-Plays that Berman and Inter-Action used as the broader application of techniques pioneered by Theatre-In-Education troupes. There are also clear echoes of the game/exercise underpinnings of actor-based devising from the many alternative theatre troupes of the time, as we saw in Chapter 2.

The importance of presence in a community was key to Inter-Action's work as it developed. Talking in 1980, Berman admitted that 'in the early days there were lots of one-off visits to other sites. There was only about a 20% follow-up. Now the proportion has shifted radically. We have learnt that theatre is just a first step, and not art for art's sake' (Khan, 1980, p. 65). Berman's statement encapsulates much of the principle of the community theatre work emerging from the alternative troupes – a desire not to bring culturally improving experience to a non-theatre audience, but to empower communities themselves to social improvements. Berman articulated this aspiration in relation to the production of community art:

The Old Masters had ateliers. ... What is new is that no prior training is required to be part of a community arts or social arts atelier. Under the guidance of an artist working in a community local people become a community atelier. They are local adults and children; they don't think of themselves as being artists or apprentices. The problem is they probably don't think of themselves as being 'creative' either. The very fact of having helped to make a single worthwhile item in their own environment can ignite the realisation that they too can be creative and constructive. Also some intensely interested but formerly untrained members of a project might carry on from this on-the-job training to lead projects themselves in future. (Berman, 1980, p. viii)

An example of this process was neatly given by the Dogg Troupe's work when, after a performance in the East End, they suggested that the audience initiate local activities themselves, and helped them develop a disused building into a community centre for mothers and a video unit for young people, where summer festivals and playschemes ran. The project took three years.

Likewise, The Combination, based in the Albany Theatre, Deptford, in London's East End, set out to 'build young popular theatre for an audience without higher education and the whole bourgeois cultural heritage ... participation is really in the meeting of minds in the right environment' (Khan, 1980, p. 64). The group had started as small fringe theatre in Brighton, but in 1970 the company had devised *The NAB Show* about social security and claimant advice, which they toured nationally supported by the Claimants' Union, and the company 'stayed behind after each performance to help organize or strengthen local branches of the Union', in the mode of agit-prop (Craig, 1980a, p. 23). Indeed, in content and spirit the work on this performance shared much with the rising tide of politically-active shows about housing benefit and social security from groups discussed in Chapter 4. The show was improvised from research by unemployed people, and playwright Steve Gooch worked the improvisation into a contemporary version of Aristophanes' *The Wasps*. Paul Curno, director of the Albany in Deptford, which was already a community and social centre, though not an arts centre, applied for one of the first community arts project grants from The Gulbenkian Foundation, and The Combination were employed as community arts workers. In 1972 they settled in Deptford and 'became involved with the local community and its grass-roots political and social organizations'.¹⁵ An explicit political agenda underpinned their involvement in generating a range of cultural resources and opportunities for their locality. Jenny Harris has discussed the way in which the Combination's work had to change, as the community they were serving changed. When the group first arrived in Deptford the community was predominantly white, working-class, who had been resident together for many years. 'Within about three years, 80% of that community had changed. Nearly all of the old housing had been knocked down and tower blocks were built', people who had lived there moved out and the incoming group was around 25 per cent from ethnic minorities, 'so there was no community, no real adhesive community, which was very difficult' (Harris, 1985-6, p. 236). Community building included countering the rise of the extreme right-wing National Front Party in

the area in the early 1970s through their Rock Against Racism festival and other multi-cultural activities. Their strategy led to an arson attack on the theatre by right-wing activists. The Combination, under Jenny Harris, still works at the New Albany, Deptford.

A rather different group who have survived to continue their practice of community animation from 1969 until today is Welfare State International. Initially John Fox and a group of his students devised a series of touring shows, emerging from the avant-garde experiments at Bradford College of Art where he taught, but they failed to connect with audiences in the way Fox was seeking: 'we got all the trendies coming out to see how well we performed, not to listen to what we were saying' (Coult and Kershaw, 1983, p. 5). The group turned instead to the rougher, folk stories they had been beginning to evolve, which followed the travails and *Travels of Lancelot Quail* (1972), an everyman figure, who shared something with CAST's Muggins character, but was more of a folk clown. In 1972, Welfare State were invited to a residency in Burnley, which allowed them a closer relationship to a community. Their aim was to undertake

skill-teaching, and research into the arts and the community. As well as consciously regenerating the popular theatre tradition, Fox had always wanted to work on the assumption that the company should teach people the skills necessary to make their own celebrations, skills fast disappearing in a mechanised and de-skilled society. (Coult and Kershaw, 1983, p. 8)

Although Welfare State have toured shows and split their attention between intimate domestic rituals and large-scale community work, the heart of their practice has remained community-based. Since 1976, when a large component of the performers in the group split away to form the collective IOU, Welfare State has continued with John Fox and Boris Howarth (who had worked with Margareta d'Arcy and John Arden on their early community work in Kirbymoorside and elsewhere) as the core, with regular freelance makers and performers who are involved for specific projects. In 1979 the company established its base at Ulverston, Cumbria, and undertook a well documented three-year residency in Barrow-in-Furness.¹⁶ Community members were involved with the making of performances, with tasks ranging from acting in role to the construction of artefacts like lanterns for processions. Welfare State continue this mode of work today, although they have eschewed their large-scale spectacular community projects of the past, to concentrate on the small-scale folk

and popular arts alongside 'nascent ritual (using theatre) as part of a way of living rather than a repeated dramatic production, where theatre is an end in itself' (ibid., p. 29).¹⁷ The activities that groups like Inter-Action or Welfare State International invite their participants to be involved in are at a considerable remove from the work of actor-centred or contemporary physical devising by professional practitioners. Yet, while these companies' work with communities does not always produce recognisable productions with 'acting' at the heart of them, community participants do indeed devise a range of events, using a broad palette of acquired creative skills.

Tuning to the second strand of devising work *with* communities, an Australian company committed to the facilitation of community empowerment through devising were Street Arts Community Theatre Company (1982, Brisbane). This politically activist group set up a long-term project in Inala, an isolated 1950s Housing Commission area on the outskirts of Brisbane, which drew on the Scottish Craigmillar example in designing arts activity as the impetus for regeneration.¹⁸ Pauline Peel, one of the facilitators of the group, saw Street Arts work as different to politically explicit community work, which implied that:

what we should be doing was going to Inala and giving them a Marxist analysis of what their situation was. ... We just argued that you're better to get them talking about their situation and finding ways of directing them so that they make their own conclusions. (Watt, 1995, p. 18)

Street Arts had three principles: never go where you are not invited; never do one project when you can do three; always ensure you leave something behind. Street Arts began work in Inala in 1983 in a distinctively Australian way, with a series of circus workshops in the local primary school and evening workshops for adults. Out of these contacts a devised performance from the community members emerged, *Inala in Cabaret*, which was 'less than a total artistic success, its legitimisation lay in the larger strategy of the venture' (Watt, 1995, p. 24). The company interlaced Theatre-in-Education shows, and small-scale workshops, with regular, large community productions. The following year the company facilitated a big, outdoor show, *Once Upon Inala*, which incorporated 150 local people, some of whom contributed to the more traditional writing of the project with Nick Hughes. After working on this show, Peel became more acutely aware that 'a community is made up of a whole lot of target

groups – and then you start to determine where you need to do affirmative action' (ibid.). One of the target groups the company identified on the estate was the large proportion of single mothers, and in 1985 they worked on 'a smaller project with twenty local women called *Kockroach Kabaret*' (ibid., p. 24).¹⁹ The skills for making performance for *Kockroach Kabaret* were to be used by the participants for their own ends in many projects after Street Arts had stopped working in the area, through the establishment of an independent, community-participant theatre company, Icy Tea (Inala Community Theatre).²⁰

Other groups working with communities used devising as means of giving voice to the voiceless, expressing those concerns not usually aired publicly. An early community-based group in America used the services of an animator, Maryat Lee. Lee had worked with a community in Harlem in 1951 in order to produce a piece of theatre about drugs, *Dope!*, which had a long performance life and, coupled with her course at the New School, was in many ways the beginning of community theatre in the US.²¹ In 1968 a young people's group from a local school wanted to generate a play about drugs for other students, and this led them to contact Maryat Lee. The short-lived Soul and Latin Theatre (SALT) in East Harlem worked on three short plays (*After the Fashion Show*, *Day by Day*, and *The Classroom*), which dramatised their experience and a desire to change attitudes towards homosexuality, drugs and poor schools. The scripts 'worked out in rehearsal from scenarios by Miss Lee, are as true to the vocabulary and rhythms of street talk as a tape recorder'. The reviewer in the *New York Times* gives a very clear sense of the strong connection, shared dialogue and interaction between young black and Puerto Rican performers and the audience of their peers, who 'would have reduced the cast of *Dionysus in '69* to tears' (Sullivan, 1998, p. 101). The reference to Schechner's Performance Group, with its attempt to engage a predominantly college audience in theatrical interaction, is telling. Community-based theatre as exemplified by SALT's production had no separating divide between 'artist/performer' and audience, and it addressed itself to vividly shared concerns with its audience so directly that it opened a space for the audience to respond immediately. The review of the performance reports that an audience member shouted 'I had a teacher like that once!' in recognition and encouragement to the performers.

David Glazebrook ran a similar project in Melbourne. In 1979 Australia was in the grip of recession and youth unemployment rose

dramatically. As an extension of the values of participatory drama in schools, teachers and social workers were employed to run drama workshops to encourage young people on the dole to 'develop some self-esteem, confidence and personal development, if not actually equip themselves for "proper jobs"' (Milne, 2004, p. 229). Glazebrook involved a group of young unemployed people in devising a performance to go into schools, in order to inform younger children about work and unemployment. The group was called the Avenue Players, and the performance was a series of sketches drawn from their experience of 'dole queues and of the hostility they often met when they got to the front of them, endless job-searching and frustration, peer-group and family pressures' (ibid.). The project successfully ran for two years, temporarily employing over sixty people. This is a prime example of ameliorative social services activity, which was funded by the Community Youth Support Scheme rather than receiving any arts funding. The project was designed to be both informative for audiences, but also personally effective for participants. The performance was intended to encourage young people to take up youth scheme places, rather than to question or challenge the economic and political environment that produced the level of unemployment.

Finally, we might look at companies who pursue devising practice as social and personal intervention. Geese Theatre Company, founded in 1980 by John Bergman in the USA and in the UK by Clark Bain in 1987, works with offenders and young people at risk in the Criminal Justice system. They have a two-pronged approach, running workshops and residencies as well as performances given by professional performers. Two of the most popular performances in their repertoire, *The Plague Game* (about maintaining relationships with family while in prison) and *Lifting the Weight* (about making the transition from custody to the outside world), are devised as open structures where characters seek interaction with the audience and play out alternative suggestions and endings as instructed by the audience. Other performances, particularly *Violent Illusion*, which looks at physical and sexual abuse, are followed by or involve workshops, where offenders are led in an exploration of role-play and the devising of short scenes or scenarios. The company acknowledges as influences The Living Theatre, Odin Teatret, Richard Schechner, and the improvisation practices of Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone. This links their work very closely to the actor-based work we explored in Chapter 2, perhaps unsurprisingly, as it is predicated on the psychologically therapeutic nature of performance, with the mask as a physical

metaphor for the public, external shell that can be lifted to reveal inner, 'true' feelings.²²

A comparative group in the US is the Living Stage Theatre, which was founded in 1966 by Robert Alexander as the outreach wing of Arena Stage, Washington D.C., to work with 'underserved' communities. Four to six actors run workshops with groups of participant-actors for over a year.

With the actors they create characters and improvise scenes exploring a wide range of issues that are of particular importance to the participating group. These scenes are never rehearsed and developed into a public performance for an outside audience, but instead are used to understand, analyze, and explore solutions to a specific problem that members of the group face in their daily lives. (Haedicke, 2001, p. 270)

Based on Freirean philosophies of participation and activation of communities, Living Stage undertake long processes of workshops with small groups. Two three-year-long programmes with teen-aged mothers in 1991 and 1994 involved expressive play for the teenagers themselves, as part of a mechanism of passing that play on to their children. The workshops included improvisation, role-play and forum theatre, which they both made and participated in. Susan Haedicke's account gives a flavour of the long workshop processes, which evolve complex scenarios and contexts for improvisation that develop imaginative, empathetic and problem-solving skills in the participants. This is community theatre at its most therapeutic, unconcerned with public performance, working to effect personal change in participants, principally that they might become more successful within existing structures and institutions.

Conclusion

Devising was a central element to the emergence of community arts. The idea that a process of making performance for non-professionals should be a therapeutic or empowering possibility has devising at its core. It was very often through the rhetoric and practice of devising strategies that community arts programmes came into existence. The conflict in rhetorical and ideological stance between community theatre as improving cultural exposure and community theatre as empowering radical action, permeated much of the writing on and

about community theatre in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1980s and early 1990s, it was this claim to radical action that was to spell the end for much of the funding for community arts.

Devising with communities raises many ethical considerations. Games and exercises from actor-training contexts are adapted to new situations with participants who will never wish to pursue professional training. Improvisation games, verbatim interviews, and role-play are utilised not to develop skills in improvisation, performance or character work *per se*, but in order to create feelings and models of collaboration, to build self-esteem by demonstrating respect for opinions and experience, and to experiment with alternative ways of thinking or behaving. The ulterior motive to the process of devising is usually less a concern for aesthetics and more a concern with effect. The idea that devising can produce beneficial effects in these contexts is predicated on a humanism that champions the social over the individual, hence the use of group activity, communal making or discussion, and collaborative endeavour towards performance. Government agencies have sometimes been nonplussed by this concern with the social, and have construed it as a radical political stance. However, such a humanism also usually assumes a trans-cultural understanding of human behaviour, need and desire. Does utilising the same devising tools in radically different contexts always produce a sense of shared community? Does the ideology of this humanism assume that participatory devising processes will empower, train or change individuals for the better, in a vision of social progress, whatever the political content or context of the work? This chapter has been concerned to examine the emergence of devising within the field of community arts. Broader considerations of the ethical and theoretical questions around the use of devising in current contexts are beginning to appear, as in Helen Nicholson's study of *Applied Drama* (2005) for this series.

6 Contemporary Devising and Physical Performance

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s in the UK and Australia there has been a dramatic increase in the number of theatre companies who have termed themselves 'physical theatre'. Their work in varying measure melds dance, mime, visual arts, circus and drama together to generate what has become stylistically one of the most recognisable forms of contemporary devised work. This second wave of physical performance shared something with its earlier progenitor in the collective actor-centred performances of the 1960s and 1970s, but it emerged at a very different moment in time. This chapter examines the way in which the changed circumstances of theatrical and cultural industries have led to differences in the devising practices of contemporary physical theatre, and in particular to the question of the cultural identity of the bodies devising on stage.

Economics and Patronage

In the early 1980s in the UK the Conservative government, ideologically averse to the idea of subsidy, urged the subsidised arts sector to embrace the forces of the market. More than ever before, the Arts Council, under the chairmanship of Sir William Rees-Mogg, a Conservative appointment, was progressively involved in a redistribution of funds across the theatre sector and in a reduction of funding in real terms, in order to encourage companies to look for sponsorship elsewhere, particularly from business. Ironically, in an environment of reduced subsidy very small-scale touring groups were able to survive