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Collective Creation, Collaboration and Devising

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Introduction: Devising the Creative Body

by Bruce Barton

I. Dramaturgy of Agency

> You cannot expect other people to create meaning for you. You cannot wait for someone else to define your life. You make meaning by forging it with your hands. (Bogart, *And Then, You Act* 2)

Much like its title, Anne Bogart's little book *And Then, You Act: Making Art In An Unpredictable World* is filled with brief statements that encapsulate uncontainable matter(s) in a few words. The selected quotation, above, gestures towards many of the issues explored in the pages that follow in this volume in its multi-hewed (and hued) exploration. Yet what connects it most directly to much of what is written here is its call, both direct and implicit, for an understanding and approach to performance predicated on *consequential action*.

Bogart has ample, and top notch, company in this call to arms (or, precisely, to "hands") {Wells}[1]. In his meditation "On Risk and Investment," Tim Etchells of Britain's (and, subsequently, the world's) Forced Entertainment, asserts, "I ask of each performance: will I carry this event with me tomorrow? Will it haunt me? Will it change you, will it change me, will it change things? If not, it was a waste of time" (Etchells 49). Repeatedly, here and in the related literature, this image of theatre as not merely a force but, literally, a "forge" for "change"—personal *and* social change—where the *work* of the performer-creator produces not merely affect but *effect* {Brookes; Knowles; Salverson; Scott; Little; O'Donnell}, emerges as the grail to be pursued and, hypothetically, achieved within what might be deemed a "dramaturgy of agency."

Admittedly, Bogart's quoted insistence on self-determination may well appear an unlikely introductory reference for a collection of essays that focuses on collective creation, collaboration and devising. Its explicit emphasis on individual motivation and activity would seem to run counter to the agenda of a volume addressing group creativity. Yet in this, too, it is exemplary in its identification of a recurring paradox that operates on multiple levels throughout these pages. For what seems to beat emphatically at the heart of most of the collective and collaborative theatrical models explored here is an insistent, animated individuality.

Edward Albee is on record as asserting, "I dislike the term 'collaboration' ... Let us call it 'having my play done properly' rather than

presumptions about collaboration as a, if not *the*, central tenet of theatrical activity. Yet the individuality that emerges as a persistent preoccupation within the following essays is in many ways a quite distant relative to Albee's declaration of creative authority. And it is, perhaps, the opening up of this self-consciously "alternative" understanding of theatrical collaboration that stands as this collection's most significant contribution to the study of Canadian theatrical performance.

Bringing together a fully satisfying collection of essays on such a broad and diverse combination of subject matter as collective creation, collaboration and devising is, of course, an impossibility – albeit a highly seductive one. The first obstacle—the all-too-common conflation of collective creation, on the one hand, and devising, on the other—only momentarily distracts from the insurmountable challenge of effectively representing collaboration in relation to what is ostensibly the most collaborative of all cultural activities. Perhaps, however, the saving grace resides in the full constellation of topics under consideration. Certainly, stable and distinct definitions and categorizations of these terms could only be employed as anxious and illusory distinctions – tentative, strenuous instruments for temporary and fraught analysis. Yet the insertion (and assertion) of the potentially vast expanse of "collaboration" literally *between* the magnetic poles of "collective creation" and "devising" in the volume's title provides a welcome and effective *caesura*, a practical and theoretical pause (for inquiry, for reflection, for breath) in assessing the relationship between these latter two concepts so often understood as interchangeable. Conversely, the strong common association (within the popular imagination of practitioners, audiences, critics, and no small number of scholars) between collective and devised activity equally provides a productive level of alienation to the theatrical "given" of collaboration, urging inquiry beyond or outside (or simply other than) the dominant conventions of hierarchal, vertically organized theatrical cooperation in the service of doing a playwright's play "properly."

Such self-conscious *caesurae* often emerge as resisted (even resented) yet essential moments of analytical stillness in theatrical territory so thoroughly predicated on movement. In terms of both practice and the efforts to explain practice, this tension between animation and reflection produces theoretical languages and gestures that are, simultaneously, both vigorous and precise *and* abstract and metaphorical. Even (in particular) in verbal expression, collective, devised and physically-based work is often described with a deceivingly dense brevity, resulting in conceptual collisions and conflations. In her 2007 revision of twenty-first century theatricality, *Reframing the Theatrical: Interdisciplinary Landscapes for Performance*, Allison Oddey quotes her own (much quoted) 1994 volume on theatrical devising, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, as follows: "A devised theatre product is work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration" (24). Even in the original context the concentration of terminology was critical; offered as a stand-alone self-quotation in the subsequent volume, the words take on an even more direct, pithy significance that seems to intentionally and irrevocably

"product is work" (as opposed to *a* work) that "emerge(s) from and [is] generated by" (as opposed to *written* or *composed*) through "group" (not *individual*) authorship operating "in (as opposed to *through*) collaboration." If we push on this: collective = shared purpose and motivation, *ideology*; collaboration = self-imposed framework and structure, *context*; devising = adopted strategies and rules, *process*.

The conceptual contact improv at work (and at play) here is tangible and instructive. For Oddey, arguably, and for many others attempting to articulate collective/collaborative/devising dynamics, it is the perpetual negotiation between and navigation of these distinct yet related terms that is, in effect, *definitive*, rather than any fixed understanding of each term in isolation. Collective creation, collaboration and devising thus, potentially, become a strategic organization of concepts intentionally juxtaposed to capitalize on only apparent accessibility and familiarity – and to, in actuality, facilitate a revisiting and troubling of these impressions and the responses they evoke. In this context, "definitions" become open sites for multiplicity, for (even, enjoyably) contestation, and (following Jon McKenzie's proposal for the study of performance, in general), for *creation*. "Philosophically speaking," McKenzie suggests, "to pose the question 'What is?' presupposes a unified form while promising a single, correct answer, while the question 'Which one?' assumes a multiplicity of forces that must be actively interpreted and evaluated" (26). But asking questions is only the first stage; "[W]e must," McKenzie continues, "not only use different concepts, nor only contest and critique them; we must also *create* concepts, *initiate* models, *launch* movements of generalization." It is, then, in this spirit that the following essays have been collected between these covers and introduced in the following lines.

II. Collective Creation: *ideology*

> The group, rather than the individual, is the typical focus of the alternative society, and this is reflected in the structure of the new theatre organizations, their manner of working, and their theatre pieces … Society has become increasingly specialized and competitive. This is reflected in an established theatre based on competition and a theatrical method that focuses on individual specialists … In reaction to the fragmentation of the established society, which for many has become disorienting, the alternative society has sought wholeness. This is evident in many ways, including its focus on group living and group activities, and in its theatre, which is based on the cooperation of a creative collective. (Shank 3–4)

Written over three and half decades ago, Theodore Shank's description of the inspiration and organization of American collaborative theatre practice feels remarkably familiar today north of the 49th parallel {Bessai; Usmiani}. Although terms such as "wholeness" are currently approached more critically, by practitioners and scholars alike, the pronounced (in all senses of that term) emphasis on "alternative" self-

positioning for most present-day theatrical collective/collaborative groups in Canada remains a central preoccupation {Wasserman}.

Of course, not all Collective Creations are generated by "creative collectives" (no matter which of the numerous available definitions of this designation one settles on). But, in one sense, they might be. What I mean by this is that it is, arguably, more instructive to consider the issues of motivation and self-identification that serve as the grounds and impetus for collectively and collaboratively created theatrical works than it is to seek to fix and delimit their formal or thematic characteristics or their precise location on the continuum between "director-lead" and "fully democratic." The essays that follow in this collection present widely divergent preoccupations and processes, often more effectively experienced and analyzed through lenses of culture, orientation, gender, and/or class than through procedural or aesthetic commonalities. Yet virtually all the entries resonate with the preceding quotation in relation to its explicit and implicit *ideological* underpinnings. For the purposes of this discussion, then, I would like to consider collective creations primarily as the variable and mutable but unfailingly recognizable products of "alternative" collective ideology.

Alternative is, of course, a tricky term, an exemplar of the perpetual *différence* of "other"ness. And, as Alan Filewod asserts, alternative is a particularly elusive concept in a culture that has never truly produced nor experienced a fixed theatrical "mainstream." Arguing that the "construction of the mainstream [in Canada] was in effect an ideological fiction that rationalized larger grants to certain theatres on the basis of box office sales (or community penetration) and physical assets," Filewod contends, "[b]eyond that, the stream became a confusing delta" (204). Yet despite its "fiction[al]" status, "it is this category that underlies the whole concept of the alternative theatre, which is commonly represented as the radical challenge to a bourgeois model of theatre" (204). Of particular significance in this context, Filewod's comments address the question of the *practical* potential to distinguish between "ideological fiction" and ideological reality. Clearly, his persuasive case for the lack of an *aesthetic* model of "mainstream" theatre is not meant to preclude that mainstream's operation as an ideologically driven set of *material* conditions.

Nor does the persistently amorphous nature of the theatrical mainstream today decrease the pull (as opposed to attraction) of marginal cultural territory for many contemporary companies organized around collective and/or collaborative artistic/administrative structures. Rather, a key insight offered by Filewod's assessment emerges in the alternative (and, thus, for our purposes, collective) determination to discover one's own position on the cultural map through opposition to an ideologically, rather than aesthetically, defined "opponent." For what strategy better affords one's own aesthetic mobility? The productive ambivalence of alternative positioning—in regards to process, product, market, popular acceptance, *success*—often seems the primary constant in an otherwise constantly evolving cultural economy. Like the term itself, however, this alternative stance is very tricky to navigate.

In 1996, Winnipeg's Primus Theatre, one of the most significant theatrical col-

organized the "Survivors of the Ice Age" conference. The event gathered many of this country's most established and accomplished alternative theatre companies to talk, strategize, share and perform. In a conference presentation subsequently published in *Canadian Theatre Review* (CTR), Richard Paul (Ric) Knowles addressed the paradox of alternative positioning, specifically in terms of the relationship(s) to *space* thus generated:

> Many—most?—of the companies represented at "Survivors of the Ice Age" are dislocated, nomadic, or engaged in a kind of guerrilla theatre that I think is healthy, though it is also risky, and more than a little debilitating. The upsides of dislocation have to do, first, with the guerrilla practice of shifting ground, continually and purposefully refusing to settle in to entrenched positions and taken-for-granted places or starting points; and secondly, with the need, always, to ask questions about how *this* (new) cultural, social, organizational, or physical space can be made to work *this* time. (33)

However, Knowles continues, "[T]here is a down-side[:] ... the problem for nomadic theatre companies is that you can't always find the spaces that you want, and when you do find them (or more often some compromise resembling them) you can't always control those spaces, and your work gets pulled around by them in unanticipated ways" (33). And certainly, this particular manifestation of what Knowles calls the "politics, not of *dislocation*, but of *displacement*" represents only the most explicit of a broad range of more subtle but equally significant repercussions of the alternative posture of "guerrilla practice," which include funding opportunities, categories and jury responses; marketing; reviewing; and audience expectations.

Knowles's immediate focus, in the passages noted above, on physical generation and performance space[2] (or lack thereof) reflects the primary significance of this factor in terms of collective identity – echoing Filewod's emphasis on "physical assets" as a primary point of distinction between ideological perceptions of "mainstream" and "alternative" theatre activity. Similarly, in her reassessment of the "Seminal Teachings" of Jerzy Grotowski on late twentieth century theatre practice, also published in the same issue of CTR, Lisa Wolford references Richard Fowler, the Canadian-born practitioner most directly responsible for the importation of Grotowski's lessons to Canada (via Fowler's extended first-hand training and collaboration with Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret in Denmark). Beyond a broad range of dramaturgical influences, Wolford suggests, the aspect of Fowler's practice as the director and co-founder of Primus Theatre[3] {Barton; Brask; Wells} that most profoundly reflected Grotowski's theatrical philosophy was Primus's thoroughly *collective* organization and operation. Apparently key to this conception of collectivity was the company's markedly social and "organi[c]" constitution, as opposed to a reliance upon material architecture for definition. As Fowler asserts, "The members of Primus Theatre are precisely that, *members*, the articulating limbs of a living organism; the theatre of which they are members is not a building ... but the social unit which is the

As Knowles notes, however, the benefits of organic mutability come at a significant cost, as the physical continuity—for training, rehearsal, design and administration, as well as performance—is perpetually elusive in a state of "homelessness" (33). Conversely, however, the purchase and maintenance of material space is inevitably a defining (and, almost always, problematic) process of transition for a collectively organized company, as made explicit in the evolution of Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille (TPM). As Michael McKinnie has observed, "Passe Muraille was the first of these companies[4] to own its performance space, and, f[a]r more than any other mid-sized company in Toronto, its building can be read as an index of the ways in which theatres have been forced to incorporate the urban political economy of a late capitalist city into the heart of their work" ("Space Administration" 21). Thus, while it is easier to identify contrasts than commonalities when considering the working processes and performance products of, for instance, TPM {Filewod; Nunn; Usmiani; Bessai} and Primus, the direct and unavoidable relationship between creative strategies and material conditions in general, and between "mainstream" and "alternative" ideological positionings in particular, provides a graspable point of access into their shared "collectivity."

Not surprisingly, then, Mark Weinberg's study of collective theatre in the U.S. through to the early 1990s is titled *Challenging the Hierarchy*. Subsequent reflection on the historical collective movement has weathered the sentiment behind this confident assertion somewhat (see part IV. Devising, below), but the resulting ambivalence has merely thickened the complexity, rather than undermined the conviction, of the contemporary "alternative" ideological stance among most collaboratively organized theatre practitioners. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in relation to the most enduringly and overtly "collective" of collaborative creation processes, participatory Popular Theatre {Little; Salverson; Gallagher}. In *Popular Theatre in Political Culture: Britain and Canada in Focus*, Tim Prentki and Jan Selman describe Popular Theatre practice in terms that in fact intensify the ideological orientation of early theatrical collectives.

> Popular Theatre works to facilitate independence, to assist communities in a process of building a capacity for autonomous self-development. Participatory and democratic, its principles are at odds with those of globalization. It provides a means by which those whose indigenous culture is threatened by outside intervention can, through the agency of fiction, create a space in which to articulate that culture and to examine the social bases of communities on terms of their own devising. (200)

As the related essays in this collection attest, this confidence is not purchased at the cost of naïveté. In particular, increased multicultural exposure and its resultant anxieties have similarly increased the opportunities for unintentional intrusion, miscommunication and misunderstanding in Popular Theatre contexts {Salverson; Freeman}. Yet, John Somers contends, despite the ample difficulties—which "are mainly of an ethical and political, rather than an aesthetic, nature"—Popular Theatre

practitioners remain "convinced that, notwithstanding the failures … effective drama and theatre work 'does good'" (xi).

Thus, while perhaps more selectively pronounced and self-consciously employed, Weinberg's historical list of the organizational objectives of theatrical collectives retains significant allure and regular application today:

> The principles of collective organization: nonexploitative structures, nonrestrictive norms, pluralistic leadership, equal access to information and power, equal respect and rewards, equal responsibility, and democratic decision making (i.e., the principles of *worker control*) lead to a process by which each group can create a particular working methodology that is likely to be responsive to the needs of its members and to the task and that maximizes both freedom and responsibility. (16)

True, most contemporary collaboratively structured companies enact a distinctly integrated and savvy engagement with the forces of government, business, and the media; but most also self-consciously enact Baz Kershaw's definition of performance as "an *ideological transaction* between a company of performers and the community of their audience" (78), with the intention of meeting, engaging, examining, challenging, sharing and entertaining {Wasserman}. Foremost among the attractions of "collective organization," then, would seem to be structural and procedural *mobility*—the ability to "create a particular working methodology that is likely to be responsive to the needs of its members"—coupled with a commitment to the hands-on "task" of actually, however modestly, changing the world.

III. Collaboration: *context*

> Is collaboration this: the 12 years' endless proximity to other people, physical, vocal, all day and into the night, watching people fade in and out of coherence and concentration – an intimacy that approaches that of lovers who now no longer bother to close the bathroom door whilst shitting? (Etchells 54)

The conventional (as opposed to mainstream) theatre industry threatens to show its wrinkles (or, at least, its stretch marks) most conspicuously in terms of its understanding of collaboration ("No one collaborates with me on a play" [Albee 20]). Both the hierarchal model of authority in most professional theatrical contexts in Canada and the particular mode of commercial co-operation it engenders are familiar to most practitioners and students (including researchers and instructors) of the discipline. A separate volume—indeed, several volumes—could easily be dedicated to these topics (both in terms of practices that respect traditional procedures and those that experiment within their fixed parameters) and merely scratch the surface. This collection of essays does not attempt to explore these dynamics.

theatrical exchanges in question are conspicuously *not* conventional nor habitual – in which the context of creation is intentionally reconfigured, consciously self-imposed and, frequently, volatile territory (with Etchell's reference to "lovers" effectively suggesting the level of the stakes involved). It is an experience of collaboration that, within these essays, claims a degree of open interpretative space for specific dynamics related to culture, class, sexuality and gender through a willed distancing from or valiant disregard for dominant and homogenizing material and disciplinary constraints. It is, ultimately, an understanding of collaboration that provides a practical bridge and a conceptual separation between the ideological presumptions of collective creation and the processual strategies of theatrical devising.

> Is collaboration this: four people in the room drunk and tired, treading again through an argument about the structure of the show, an argument which we've already had 100 times in the last week and for which all of us, by now, know all the parts and yet are always coming back in circuits to the same stalemate stand-off conclusions about how and why the show does not work and will not work? There is a word for these too familiar arguments – we call them the loop, arguments that soon are shorthand and can be indicated simply with a gesture: the circling of a hand … Maybe collaboration is simply the process of developing new words for the strange situations in which a group can find itself. (Etchells 62)

The first essay that I intended to include in this volume is one that does not feature in these pages, having already made its appearance in the previous entry in this series dedicated to Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre practice (see Houston, *Environmental*). Originally published in CTR #126 and entitled "Please Dress Warmly and Wear Sensible Shoes," the piece is a thoroughly and *explicitly* collaborative project by the four-member company bluemouth inc. presents.[5] Each individual in the intermedia troupe took on a particular aspect of site-specific work to consider within the article; once the original sections had been completed, these were circulated among the other members, all of whom were free to write into and through the original author's contribution. Each member adopted a characteristic font, and these different typefaces were carried through to the publication of the article. The result approaches a sort of conceptual hypertext, with each shift in font (there are *many*) potentially drawing the reader to make connections across and throughout the remainder of the article, as the individual voices of the company members emerge as somehow both separate yet irresolvably intertwined.[6]

My limited experience working as dramaturge for bluemouth inc.[7] has revealed them to be, as far as I know, the most defiantly "collective" company working in Canada. Determined to generate and perform without a designated director, the troupe instead occupies a creative space of constant internal persuasion, coercion, argument, and absolute generosity, one in which they must perpetually explore, negotiate, revise and reinvent their collaborative framework. This ability and more

component of the creative process reflects the company's overtly interdisciplinary composition. Anticipating divisions ranging in nature from practical and aesthetic through political and philosophical, the company members resort to an approach to agreement that offers striking contrasts to the "consensus" models described by Shank and Weinberg. In this, they perhaps reflect collaborative frameworks more familiar within exchanges in the visual and graphic arts, such as those recently proposed by Maria Lind in her discussion of "The Collaborative Turn" in north-west European visual arts culture:

> Perhaps the problem is rather that there is too much forced commonality and prescribed collaboration today in the sense of social unanimity and political consensus … More difference and disagreement, in other words, in order to avoid the risk of "consensus of the centre," which gives scope to, for instance, right-wing extremists as the only real alternative in the political area. [Political philosopher Chantal] Mouffe's "antagonistic pluralism" can be of use here since it is not based on final resolutions but on an ongoing exchange marked by conflict. "Agonistic" relationships involve struggles with an adversary rather than with an enemy, as in antagonistic relationships. An adversary is someone with whom you share a common ground but with whom you disagree on meanings and implementation of basic principles – disagreements which simply cannot be resolved through the deliberation and rational discussion celebrated by "third-way-politicians" and defenders of the "post-political" alike. (19)

The demands of constant reassessment—not to mention attrition—prioritize individual attention, engagement, enthusiasm and consideration, thus locating bluemouth's collaborative agenda squarely within the collective objectives outlined by Weinberg. However, their collaborative *structure* requires a democracy predicated on the ability to sustain and thrive in the tension of passionate and volatile exchange (including conflict and difference), in addition to (and, at times, rather than) the equilibrium of consensus {Barton; Plowman & McLean; O'Donnell; Nolan}.

These observations highlight the important, if commonsensical, observations of Keith R. Sawyer in relation to the study of creative collaboration. In an attempt to consolidate theories of collaboration drawn from the fields of anthropology, musicology, conversation analysis, organizational behaviour, and creativity research, Sawyer argues that "[t]o 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 34)." Drawing on G.H. Mead's 1930s work on "the *emergent*"[8] in group behaviour, Sawyer contends that the primary 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). These hypotheses lead Sawyer to propose what he terms "*collaborative emergence*" as the focal point of group creativity *in performance* – the quality

which makes collaborative performance fundamentally unpredictable (and, thus, engrossing) (12).

Intriguingly, if we continue on the trail of Etchell's aforementioned "loop," we find Sawyer's equation in reverse, with performance presented as the "solution" to collaboration, rather than the other way around:

> The loop is the heart of the show, a wall you hit your heads against until you are senseless, gibbering and tired of it, tired of it, tired of it. And strangely it seems sometimes that the worst thing of all is that the loop must be tackled in public, with the group, through speech, discussion. So many times in the process I begin to envy the solitude of writers and painters – who surely have their loops but at least aren't condemned to sit up forever and talk about them. (63)

As the product of a shared motivation of collectivity (*ideology*) and a common structural framework of collaboration (*context*), the momentary, transient, unpredictable "*emergent*" of performance is understood here as the product of drudgery, repetition and persistence. Collaboration, in this instance, is thus the intake of breath—the ironically volatile and passionate semantic stillness—waiting to be animated by the strategies and rules, the devising *process*, called forth by such hard and contentious labour.

IV. DEVISING: *process*

> [C]onstraints are necessary as rules of the game for acting ... They are born of the demands of poetry. (Lecoq 76)

Two new books on theatrical devising have recently been published, providing welcome contributions on an aspect of performance creation surprisingly underexposed to both academic and practitioner examination. In a field where a few widely read and referenced studies have basically set the agenda—in some cases for over a decade—these new resources have effectively deepened and broadened the discussion. What is intriguing, however, is the degree to which, in both new studies, the same territory is explored through relatively similar optics. This is, no doubt, in part attributable to the fact that both emerge from England, the birthplace and enduring home of devising discourse; but this provides only a partial explanation.

Unsurprisingly, both of the new texts initially (and repeatedly) wrestle with issues of nomenclature. The result is regularly, though not always intentionally, a conflation of issues relating to ideological context and questions of processual strategies. In *Devising Performance: A Critical History* (2006), Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling note that

> British and Australian companies tend to use "devising" to describe their practice, whereas in the USA the synonymous activity is referred to most often as "collaborative creation" ... We shall use the terms interchangeably in this text, although the terminology itself offers a slight variation in emphasis. While the word "devising" does not insist on more than one participant, "collaborative creation" clearly does. (2)

Even more explicitly, in *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (2007), Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington observe that

> Devising is widely regarded as a process of generating a performative or theatrical event, often but not always in collaboration with others. It is interesting that, in the USA, this aspect of theatre-making is often described as "collaborative creation" or, in the European tradition, as the product of "creative collectives," both terms that emphasise group interactivity in the process of making a performance. (4)

The superimposition of context and process is neither surprising nor without historical basis. Oddey's influential *Devising Theatre* effectively established this precedent by interweaving its description of ideological motivation and organizational structure with considerations of practical strategies. Whereas, for Oddey, "In the 1970s devising companies chose artistic democracy in favour of the hierarchical structures of power linked to text-based theatre ... within the last twenty years or so there has been a move from this standpoint to more hierarchical structures within many companies in response to an ever-changing economic and artistic climate" (9). Thus, by the time of Oddey's writing, "the term 'devising' ha[d] less radical implications, balancing greater emphasis on skill sharing, specialization, specific roles, increasing division of responsibilities, such as the role of the director/deviser or administrator, and more hierarchical company structures." While these parallel developments are no doubt present, an alternative interpretation of this dynamic is to identify a gradual distinction between collective and collaborative philosophies and frameworks, on the one hand, and devising techniques, on the other {Freeman}. Certainly, no absolute separation of these two aspects is possible or desirable, but an equal potential for error lies in the unquestioned folding of one factor entirely into the other.

This latter gesture seems to inform Hedding and Milling's survey of ideological connotations historically associated with devising practices (the list is instructive and worth recounting at some length):

> [I]t is possible to construct something of a "soundbite" of those qualities frequently assumed to be implicit in devising which serve to give it an almost mythical status. Devising is variously: a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between art and life; the erasure of the gap between

> death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge for spectators; an expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental; non-literary.... (4–5)

The authors round out this inventory with the following challenge: "As processes of devising are now so firmly embedded in our training and educational institutions, can we really continue to claim for devising any 'marginal' or 'alternative' status? And why should we wish to do so?" (6). This final question is an important one – as much for its problematic conflation of closely aligned yet separate issues as for its accurate capture of much popular and scholarly perception.

Ultimately, however, both texts wisely retreat to the idea of devising as, in Heddon and Milling's terms, "best understood as a set of strategies" (2). Extending this observation in a manner reminiscent of McKenzie's portrayal of "performance," Govan et al. propose, "If devising is most accurately described in the plural—as *processes* of experimentation and sets of creative *strategies*—rather than a single methodology, it defies neat definition or categorization" (7) {Plowman & McLean}. In the next sentence, however, the seemingly inescapable hitching of process to motivation reemerges in the authors' contention that "[n]ew practices have arisen from a combination of creative conversations and dissatisfaction with how current modes of practice address contemporary climates."

In her *Devising Theatre* text, Oddey usefully identifies a series of junctures at which theatrical devising is seen to depart from (or, depending on the perspective adopted, challenge) more traditional, horizontally organized theatrical approaches. Her umbrella categorization of these junctures is "Methodology" (11), most productively understood as a set of practical principles intended to guide the creation, selection, and application of concrete process {Bettis; Mojica; Oloagun}. No doubt foremost among its characteristics is devising's refusal to accord primary or "sacred" status to the dramatic *text* (5) {Wallace; Plowman & McLean}. Indeed, text may be secondary in terms of both its "authority" within the developmental process and of the order in which the performance elements may be selected and incorporated into the final production. Theatrical devising is also seen to adopt an altered relationship to both *time* and material *resources*, shifting the priorities associated with both from preoccupations with product to a focus on the developmental process(es) involved (12–16). Devising strategies are said to involve heightened sensitivity to and engagement with the *physical spaces* [and, by extension, *places*] of development and performance (17–18) (resulting in a theoretical intersection with environmental and site-specific practices). Similarly, devising is described as inherently accommodating to the exploration of advanced and emerging *technologies* (18) (opening up a related theoretical exchange with intermedia activity). Finally, Oddey argues for a fundamental *interdisciplinarity* within devising processes (19). Each of these principles can be understood as orientations towards dramaturgical tools and their application; issues

of ideological positioning (collectivity) and structural framework (collaboration) may be implicit in each, but are prerequisite to none.

What this still relevant "Methodology" directly addresses is an altered approach to and understanding of composition. Many of the essays in this collection attempt to articulate examples and formulate theories to describe the particular qualities of devised composition. The regular reliance, in theatrical devising, on improvisation, multiple authors, and found and adapted text readily prompts metaphors such as "montage" {Barton; Brask} "*con-fusion*" {Barton; Freeman} and – in what strikes me as one of the most fertile and complex of analogies, "*mola*" {Mojica}. These references effectively suggest the culturally rich and phenomenologically multiplanal nature of an approach to expression that is as deeply engaged with issues of physical gesture (tempo, rhythm, scale, direction, relation to gravity) as with spoken text (Bogart refers to composition as "writing on your feet, with others, in space and time, using the language of theater" [*Viewpoints* 12]). By extension, these methodological principles also evoke an approach to and understanding of performance—more specifically, of the *actor-creator*—just as radically altered as the relation to textual composition and communication.

Some of the hundreds of texts committed to exploring issues related to actor-creator training and performance are listed in the Works Cited pages of the following articles and in the Suggested Further Reading section of this collection. Any attempt here to briefly catalogue or summarize the diversity of perspectives on this topic would be foolhardy. Widely recognized figures such as Eugenio Barba, Augusto Boal, Anne Bogart, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Jacques Lecoq, Philippe Gaulier, and Tadashi Suzuki, to name only some of the most conspicuous, have all been thoroughly studied; many have produced multiple volumes, most of which are available in English. All have offered ample opportunities for first-hand experience and training in their respective systems, effectively disseminating their teachings over geographical, national, cultural and generational borders. Significantly, however, very few, if any, would call (or would have called, while alive) their approach to performance creation "devising" (just as many of the practitioners included in this volume initially stumbled over this categorization of their activities). But, as noted, devising is not a *system* – it is not uniform or unified, logically organized or reliably repeatable. Rather, it consists of "*processes* of experimentation and sets of creative *strategies*." The connection to the above mentioned systems of training lies not in stable and predictable application; rather, finally, it primarily relates to an altered conception of the role of the *body* in performance {Barton; Brask; Hurley; Wells; Nolan}.

> In fact, the performer's life is based on an alteration of balance. (Barba 18)

V. Collective Creation / Collaboration / Devising: *the creative body*

If any one term encapsulates Lecoq's overall goal for his students during

> "training," preparation seems to imply a process of getting ready, of open-endedness and an unwillingness to close down on possible options and choices. (Murray 64)

It is with the arrival, finally, at the creative body that we return, full circle, to a "dramaturgy of agency." Simon Murray's shifting of emphasis and interpretation, above, from "training" to "preparing the creative actor" in reference to the teachings of Jacques Lecoq both distinguishes the late acting teacher from many of his more conventional counterparts and firmly aligns him with a number of otherwise diverse figures associated with "preparation" for the types of theatre and performance that I have been orbiting in this introduction. Murray's semantic transition is profound. The trained body—the disciplined, contained, regimented body—is opposed to the prepared body: alert, attentive, capable, creative ... prepared, one might speculate, for ... the future? The Revolution?

Lecoq's aforementioned reliance on "constraints" is a clear point of connection across distinct cultures and complex approaches {Hurley}: "A high jumper would not jump so high if there was no obstacle to clear ... Constraints favour style; too much constraint leads to virtuosoism, to feats. Not enough constraint dilutes the intentions and the gestures in the soup of natural gestures..." (Lecoq 76). Correspondingly, Barba contends, "Extra-daily techniques ... lead to information. They literally *put* the body *into form*, rendering it artificial but *believable*. Herein lies the essential difference which separates extra-daily techniques from those which merely transform the body into the 'incredible' body of the acrobat and the virtuoso" (16, emphasis in original) {Barton; Brask; Wells}. Locating the actor's body (and, thus, the actor) at once separate from life but utterly "of life" emerges as a key objective within multiple "systems of preparation." And, as with the motivational quotations that opened this introduction, this paradox is repeatedly expressed through philosophical mysteries presented as resolvable, ultimately and thoroughly, only through phenomenological scrutiny and practical application.

However, whereas engagement with well-established and rigorous systems of preparation historically took the form of long-term master/pupil, mentor/protégé, or guru/disciple relationships, with the accompanying demands of commitment and fidelity regularly associated with such arrangements, contemporary North American performers tend to be a more eclectic cohort.[9] As Ian Watson has observed,

> The geographical underpinnings of a national identity have little to do with the contemporary actor. He or she can study any number of different techniques from a range of countries and performance genres. Professional identity is formed by those with whom one studies, not by the country in which one lives or by the ethnic group to which one belongs. (8)

Similarly, it is not the many distinguishing particulars of these systems that are of immediate relevance to this discussion, but rather the global ideological and/or

structural frameworks that contemporary actors perceive in them, identify with, and invest in.

For the purpose of this specific argument, then, and at the risk of gross generalization, it is possible to recognize in a spectrum of related teachings[10] two general avenues to "preparation." The first involves a gesture of *emptying* – an extraction of the body (the complete body, which includes the mind) from the world and the world from the body.

> The technique of the "holy actor" is an inductive technique (i.e., a technique of elimination), whereas that of the "courtesan actor" is a deductive technique (i.e., and accumulation of skills). (Grotowski, *Towards* 35)
>
> The beauty of omission, in fact, is the suggestiveness of indirect action, of the life which is revealed with a maximum of intensity in a minimum of activity. (Barba 29)
>
> When I look around the first thing that seems to be missing is the imaginative space that art can engender. Our society, chock full of real trauma, manufactured paranoia and war, needs silence and space. (Bogart 117)
>
> In the darkness, the eyes lose their dominance and other senses control the activity. The body is warmed, muscles loosened, and the mind prepared, almost cleansed of distracting thoughts. (Allain 205 [discussing the training approach of Staniewski Gardzienice])

The second gesture takes the form of reengagement with the world, a bodily reconstitution through the establishment of a new, altered *balance*.

> I – I does not mean to be cut in two but to be double. The question is to be passive in action and active in seeing (reversing the habit). Passive: to be receptive. Active: to be present. (Grotowski, "Performer" 378)
>
> The performer, through long practice and continuous training, fixes this "inconsistency" by a process of innervation, develops new neuro-muscular reflexes which result in a renewed body culture, a "second nature," a new consistency, artificial but marked with *bios*. (Barba 26)
>
> Our fate as artists is to live with and accept the paradox "keep moving and slow down, simultaneously," or *festina lente*. Learn how to live in this contradiction and enjoy its inherent irritation. (Bogart and Landau 125)
>
> What do I teach in my School? The pleasure of the game. A child who plays forgets his sadness. Why not an actor? Where is the pleasure of a character who is about to die? It is in the actor who plays, who surprises, who turns everything upside down while being magnificently drenched in light. (Gaulier)

In isolation, these quotations can, of course, yield no specific insights or distinguishing characteristics. Yet, upon reflection, the gestures they describe—the pattern of movement in relation to society, culture, politics, ideology—emerge as familiar and evocative within the current discussion. The group sentiment identified as underpinning collective creation similarly endorses a self-conscious disengagement from dominant culture in order to effect a profound reconstitution of beliefs and values, resulting in a distinctly new and altered ideological balance. Similarly, the structural context of this transformation takes the form of a passionate and generous but also volatile preparedness: a collaborative tension predicated on the animating potential of difference and contradiction. As advocates for a "dramaturgy of agency," each of the systems of preparation touched upon here involves extensive periods of individual development, training, and material generation.[11] Yet as preparation for engagement with the hands-on forging of personal *and* collective meaning, all also reconverge in the concrete and generative strategies and rules of theatrical devising.

The creative body is the collective body is the collaborative body is the devising body.

The readiness is all.

• • •

The creative body must, of course, forever resist becoming a timeless body, a universal body. By the same token, however, it must also resist the equal but opposite erasure of quotidian invisibility. It must, instead, be both apart from the world and a part of the world, separate from life but utterly of it, simultaneously. New orientations, incorporating and bridging cognitive psychology (see Blair), neurobiology (see Hansen, "Introducing," "Dance"), material semiotics (see Knowles, *Reading*), media studies (see Barton, "Subjectivity"), and phenomenology (see Zarrilli), are bringing a prismatic lense to collective, collaborative and devising contexts, continually complicating the relationship between "the body," on the one hand, and "bodies," on the other.

As the essays in this collection illustrate, the proximate positioning of concepts can be as illuminating as that of living bodies in performance. Inserting a fresh consideration of collaboration between the easily conflated terms collective creation and devising calls for a reconsideration of all three concepts, in isolation and in conversation, in abstract idealization and in concrete historical applications. Such moments of reflection—of passionate, analytical calm in the rushing current of history—are what André Lepecki, following anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis, refers to as "still-acts."

> The still-act shows how the dust of history, in modernity, may be agitated in order to blur artificial divisions between the sensorial and the social, the somatic and the mnemonic, the linguistic and the corporeal, the mobile and the immobile. Historical dust is not simple metaphor. When taken literally, it reveals how historical [illegible] rigidify the smooth rotation of joints and articulations, fixing the subject within overly prescribed pathways and steps, fixating movement within a certain politics of time and place. (15)

The theatrical connotations of "still-act"—"the moment of exit from historical dust" (Seremetakis 12)—reverberate conspicuously through this collection of articles. It is difficult to conceive of a more fitting stage for the creative body in performance, in ideology, in context, in process.

Notes

[1] Author names in {braces} refer to essays of particular relevance included in this collection.

[2] His article also names a) the performing body; b) organizational spaces; c) training spaces; d) discursive spaces; and e) the cultural landscape as additional sites of consequence worthy of study (31–32).

[3] Fowler was Primus Theatre's director throughout the company's nine years of operation (from 1989 to 1998).

[4] Specifically, Factory Theatre Lab, Tarragon and Canadian Stage Company. McKinnie's observation that Passe Muraille was particularly influenced by its move to ownership is in part related to TPM's overtly collective model of administration and creation, as compared to these other institutions. For an extensive study of the relationships of each of these and additional Canadian theatres with property purchase and maintenance, see McKinnie, *City Stages*.

[5] bluemouth inc. presents is Lucy Simic, Stephen O'Connell, Sabrina Reeves and Richard Windeyer.

[6] This description of "Please Dress Warmly and Wear Sensible Shoes" is taken from the introduction of a forthcoming article by the author, "Subjectivity< >Culture<>Communications<>*Intermedia*: A Meditation on the 'Impure Interactions' of Performance and the 'In-between' Space of Intimacy in a Wired World," to be published in *Theatre Research in Canada/Recherches théâtrales au Canada* in 2008.

[7] I am presently working as the company's dramaturge on a project based on American dance marathons to be presented through the Harbourfront Performing Arts (Toronto) "Fresh Ground" program in 2008/09.

[8] "The emergent when it appears is always found to follow from the past, but before it appears, it does not, by definition, follow from the past" (Mead 2, qtd. in Sawyer

[9] I discuss Number Eleven Theatre's "postmodern" relationship with their "modernist" systems of preparation in my contribution to this volume.

[10] My selected "teachings" here are, admittedly, Eurocentric in nature, owing primarily to the facts that 1) the majority of collective and collaborative devising practitioners in Canada draw their primary influence from this region and 2) significantly more has been published in relation to European models. The regularly (and occasionally problematic) intercultural nature of many of these systems notwithstanding, therefore, the relevance of these observations for systems of preparation emerging thoroughly out of other cultures and regions will no doubt complicate these observations.

[11] "The actors work on their improvisations alone, as Barba believes that their focus should be on their particular response to the material that has been presented and not on how they might work with the other actor(s) in the space. Barba comments that when improvising with a partner you have to work in real time and the work can often be merely illustrative. When working alone, time and reactions often appear to work differently; the actor can go much further alone as he or she inhabits what Barba calls the realm of 'dreaming awake'." (Turner 32–33)

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