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Devising Democracy:

An investigation of director-led work in collaborative theatre-making

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the trends of leadership and hierarchy in current collaborative devising ensembles. Coming from a background of studying and actively creating devised and contemporary theatre, I have participated in a range of contrasting structures of hierarchy. My exposure to such a variety of models has led me to the following research questions:

1. In what ways can a director function in a devising ensemble?

2. How can a director exist in a devising ensemble while upholding the ideology of devised theatre?

The first question is born out of simple curiosity and a desire for clarity as a practicing devising artist, but the second question begins to investigate the ethics and integrity of leadership in collaborative work. In order to answer these questions, it is first important to discuss the origins of contemporary and devised theatre. In the first chapter I address the paradigm shift initiated by Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* and Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*, producing a contemporary theatre practice looking to break out of the boundaries of traditional playwright's theatre. This shift sparked an important change in the way artists and audiences alike thought about theatre, producing a more experimental and intimate theatrical experience. From this transformation came devised theatre, a revolutionary new practice that challenged the patriarchal hierarchy of playwright's theatre. In the second part of

this chapter I discuss the motives surrounding the emergence of devising and some key qualifications of devised work, the most essential being a democratic practice and process. In the third section of this chapter I present an overview of fundamental democratic theory and relate it to the idea of a democratic ensemble.

This research utilizes a case study model and seeks to provide an in depth analysis of two director-led devising ensemble processes instead of attempting to generalize the research questions in relation to the contemporary devising community as a whole. In the third chapter I examine Elevator Repair Service and Forced Entertainment. Both are leading devised ensemble theater companies in their home countries, the United States and the United Kingdom respectively, but are also renowned internationally. I chose to focus on these two companies because they are at similar points in their career and both have a wealth of published research and resources on their process and methods. Although a comparison of two differently structured companies may have provided a broader insight, I decided it was important to use two companies of similar size and reputation for a fairer comparison. The case studies use a variety of published resources to analyze both ensemble's use of an artistic director in their devising processes in order to provide examples of how directors function in a devising ensemble.

The aim of this research is not to critique the ensembles' use of hierarchy in opposition to the principles of collaborative theatre making, but to investigate how each ensemble uses leadership and authority in their process. It is important to note that this study does not attempt to find a definitive answer, but to contribute to the ongoing conversation concerning hierarchy in

collaborative work. The goal instead is to add to and validate current research on the topic. My personal artistic experiences have peaked my interest in this question, and I not only seek to learn in order to grow my own artistic ideology and practice, but to encourage and inspire new ideas and arguments to develop from this research.

Ch. 1 Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this review is to frame the conception of devised theatre in relation to postdramatic theatre and the radical change in perspective that it influenced. A second integral goal of this review is to analyze and interpret existing research and publications concerning devised theater in order to define a collective understanding of the practice. Furthermore, this review provides a basic foundation in democratic theory and its relation to collaborative theatre as the following study intends to analyze the different patterns of leadership in devising ensembles, exploring the role of the devising director and the meaning of hierarchy in a democratic, collaborative setting.

The structure of this review begins with an analysis of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* and Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator,* relating the two works to the paradigm shift that followed, creating the opportunity for a wealth of new practices to develop. I then examine Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* in relation to Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling's *Devising Performance: A Critical History,* and Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson, and Katie Normington's *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* in an effort to define and describe the core elements of devised theatre. In the third section, I discuss democratic theory using key texts *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction* by Bernard Crick and Robert A. Dahl and Ian Shapiro's *On Democracy*. I then relate elements of democratic theory to devised theatre, comparing the

practice to a number of political systems with a focus on the devising director. Finally, I interpret Ben Yalom's article *Ensemble Creation: The Director's Roles* to develop the vocabulary of the devising director as 'facilitator.' This review uses a number of theatrical and political resources to provide a comprehensive foundation from which to analyze the working methods and hierarchical structures of the ensembles analyzed in the following case studies.

1.2 The Postdramatic Theatre Paradigm Shift

Theatre is an integral expressive outlet for the artistic community that creates it, as well as a resonant channel of communication for the audience that consumes it. As a living practice, constantly changing and shifting in response to the surrounding environment and climate. Due to its adaptable nature and significance as a vehicle for catharsis, theatre has and will continue to develop in response to the world around it. In the most traditional sense, theatre is text based and focuses on the drama, the events taking place on stage. Hans-Thies Lehmann illustrates this in the prologue of *Postdramatic Theatre*, 'Dramatic theatre is subordinated to the primacy of the text. In the theatre of modern times, the staging largely consisted of the declamation and illustration of written drama.'[1] In playwright's theatre, the playwright writes the text which the director then interprets and conceives a vision for displaying the text on stage which the actors perform. This conventional form of theatre maintains a single vision product and unintentionally restrains the creative potential of the artists involved. In response to this suppression, artists began to reject the limits of playwright's theatre, seeking a non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, collaborative and multi-visionary form instead. 'Devised work is a response and reaction to the

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[1] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006, p. 21

playwright-director relationship, to text-based theatre, and to naturalism, and challenges the prevailing ideology of one person's text under another person's direction,'[2] Alison Oddey confirms using devised theatre as her primary example.

According to Lehmann, the 'new theatre,'[3] most simply meaning anything other than text based theatre, primarily aims to cause a caesura in traditional dramatic practices. Lehmann's postdramatic theatre can be characterized by a desire to seek out broader issues, investigations, and conversations as opposed to being bound to the strictures of character, plot, action, and text. It also prioritizes the relationship between performer and spectator, discarding the necessity of illusion and fourth wall performance; Lehmann states,

> [I]t can be stated that dramatic theatre was the formation of illusion. It wanted to construct a fictive cosmos and let all the stage represent - be - a world abstracted but intended for the imagination and empathy of the spectator to follow and complete the illusion… Wholeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model 'drama'... Dramatic theatre ends when these elements are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art. [4]

Lehmann's analysis scrutinizes the practice of separating theatre from reality by creating a world of smoke and mirrors. The 'magical' aspect of theatre is what divides art from entertainment. The essential goal of postdramatic theatre is to drive the audience to experience and engage with

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[2] Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*, Routledge, 1996, p. 4
[3] Lehmann, 2006, p. 26
[4] Lehmann, 2006, p. 22

theatre differently, striving for a contemplative and introspective perception and interpretation of the work instead of a careless blanket view. Lehmann emphasizes the special partnership of spectator and performer stating that, 'Theatre means the collectively spent and used up lifetime in the collectively breathed air of that space in which the performing *and* the spectating take place.'[5] In Lehmann's world of the postdramatic, the theatre becomes much more than just a house of show business, but a place of community with a need to listen to and respond to each other. Understanding the spectator under this lens is what allows contemporary theatre to practice failure and to abandon the typical tricks and illusions expected from a more commercial branch of theatre like Broadway musicals.

Postdramatic theatre isn't a rejection of playwright's theatre altogether, but a rejection of the limits set by it. In fact postdramatic theatre arose from the practice and acceptance of the dramatic work that came before it. Lehmann describes the theory using Brecht and post-Brechtian theatre to simplify the explanation: although post-Brechtian theatre has nothing to do with Brecht, it is 'a theatre which knows that it is affected by the demands and questions for theatre that are sedimented in Brecht's work but can no longer accept Brecht's answers.'[6] Art as a whole is interdisciplinary and new art cannot be created without being influenced by the art preceding it. Lehmann validates this, stating art 'cannot develop without reference to earlier forms.'[7] This influence becomes clear in the investigation of contemporary and postdramatic work as many artists still use text as a dominant material in performance. The difference is that the text is no longer the priority, but a possibility. Postdramatic theatre has the ability to use text

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[5] Lehmann, 2006, p. 17
[6] Lehmann, 2006, p. 27
[7] Lehmann, 2006, p. 27

as a layer or an element in the piece without forcing the work to focus on and serve the text as priority. Postdramatic theatre also creates the opportunity to use different kinds of text; performances can include anything from prose and poetry to spoken word and verbatim text. The continued use of text proves Lehmann's conclusion. Postdramatic theatre is no longer accepting the rules set by dramatic theatre as law, but questions them, perhaps using them as guidelines instead.

Postdramatic theatre's distinct focus on the performer-spectator relationship is further supported by Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*, which examines the rapport between the audience, 'spectators', and the actors, 'performers'. Rancière suggests that previously performance had been constructed, perhaps unintentionally, to distance the spectator from being actively involved in the work. The failure lies in the hands of the theatre makers as they have underestimated or simply ignored the capabilities of the spectator or assumed them passive. Rancière admonishes this practice and calls for 'a new theatre, or rather a theatre restored to its original virtue, to its true essence.'[8] Rancière acknowledges that 'there is no theatre without a spectator,'[9] which heightens the necessity of a change in perspective on the creative side of the industry. Should artists continue to ignore the needs of the spectators, the art could cease to successfully exist.

Rancière's ideology calls for an acknowledgment of the audience's inherent ability to critically question, investigate, and interpret the performance presented to them, allowing it to

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[8] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, Verso, 2009, p. 4
[9] Rancière, 2009, p. 4

genuinely affect them and even alter their experience of the world. Rancière pushes this further, using the phenomena of community in theatrical performance as evidence, stating, 'Theatre is an assembly in which ordinary people become aware of their situation and discuss their interests.'[10] This poses a desirable proposition, by creating work for the active spectator, they may take that art, respond to it, and then take part in a shared world and work to better it.

Rancière desperately seeks an emancipation from the assumption of passivity. To be emancipated is to realize the potential the spectator already holds, and the action they are already doing:

> Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting...It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action...The spectator also acts...She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place.[11]

Rancière again prods artists to take their audience into account. He encourages the realization that although spectators may be seated and silent during a performance, they're engaged in a more intimate type of action: being intellectually present and engrossed fully in the work presented, constantly making associations and relations to their particular experience and interpreting symbols and subtext to their own understanding. Once art is created for the intelligent and capable spectator, audiences will have the power to use the art presented to them to change their experience and the world around them.

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[10] Rancière, 2009, p. 6
[11] Rancière, 2009, p. 13

In order to achieve emancipation, it's important for the art to distinguish itself from that preceding it which was created without regard for an active audience. The rejection of illusion in postdramatic theatre becomes integral to liberating the spectator from the strictures and assumptions of previous work, creating a more resonant and effective piece. Rancière states,

> The spectator must be removed from the position of observer calmly examining the spectacle offered to her. She must be dispossessed of this illusory mastery, drawn into the magic circle of theatrical action where she will exchange the privilege of rational observer for that of being in possession of all her vital energies.[12]

Rancière plays on Lehmann's observation that dramatic theatre ends with the removal of the magical theatrical nature. If the performance recognizes itself as performance, and removes the illusions of being set in another world, it becomes less about frivolous entertainment and more about reality. Stripping away the superfluous material leaves room for the important things to take place.

Setting the stage for contemporary work, this paradigm shift encouraged a more open minded and inclusive reception of new and experimental theatre. By recognizing the spectator as an active participant in the theatrical exchange in conjunction with a distinct departure from the playwright's theatre, Lehmann and Rancière's theoretical work laid the foundation for a

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[12] Rancière, 2009, p. 4

movement towards a more exploratory and less cohesive, closure based practice. Professor and

dramaturg Peter M. Boenisch indicates that this departure from playwright's theatre and

acknowledgment of the active spectator calls for 'greater attention to the dramaturgic scripting of

the spectators' experience in a performance event.'[13], placing the focus on the relationship

between spectator and performance as opposed to serving the text or story. This newly developed

perspective paved the way for the development of new contemporary performance fields and

practices.

1.3 Defining Devised Theatre

One of the practices born from the divergence from traditional dramatic theatre is devised

theatre. Attempting to define devised theatre in a universally agreed upon sentence is a difficult

task. Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling state, 'Overall, devising is best understood as a set of

strategies that emerged within a variety of theatrical and cultural fields.'[14] Alison Oddey offers,

'A devised theatre product is work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of

people working in collaboration.'[15] Whereas Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson, and Katie

Normington counter with, 'Devising is widely regarded as a process of generating a performative

or theatrical event, often but not always in collaboration with others.'[16] Heddon and Milling

argue that devising doesn't inherently mean collaboration, but rather describes the creation of

work in a way other than playwriting. Collaborative creation, or 'the origination of bringing into

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[13] Peter M. Boenisch, *Towards a Theatre of Encounter and Experience: Reflexive Dramaturgies and Classic Texts*, 2010, p. 164
[14] Deidre Heddon & Jane Milling. *Devising Performance: a Critical History*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 2
[15] Oddey, 1996, p. 1
[16] Emma Govan, et al. *Making a Performance: Devising Histories & Contemporary Practices*. Routledge, 2008, p. 4

existence, of material ex *nihilo*,'[17] on the other hand perhaps means something more similar to the other definitions listed above. Although the last two definitions seem to be of a similar thread, they also bear a discrepancy; Oddey insists that devising is synonymous with collaboration, but Govan, Nicholson, and Normington specify that devising in fact, doesn't always happen with more than one person. The trio join Heddon and Milling by mentioning collaborative creation and clarifying that calling something devised indicates 'an original piece of work developed by a company or sometimes by solo performers.'[18] Based on these three definitions, devising might best be defined as a process of creating original performance in a nontraditional way, i.e. anything but playwriting. For the purposes of the following analysis, devising and collaborative creation will be used as an amalgamated idea. While fully acknowledging that solo devised theatre can and does occur, the analysis is focused on the democracy of collaboration in devised theatre, so the term devising will be used predominantly in the collaborative sense.

What is widely acknowledged is that devising was initially created out of necessity for representation: devised theatre makers sought a multi-visionary and inclusive theatre making process and had a 'strong desire to work in an artistically democratic way.'[19] Rising to popularity in the 1970's, much of the devised theatre practice modeled itself after the current socio-political events. The desire for democratic and intersectional artistic practice echoes the ongoing fight for equality and protests for peace that filled that 70's.[20] Oddey points out that the idea of the

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[17] Heddon & Milling, 2006, p.3
[18] Govan, et al, 2008, p. 4
[19] Oddey, 1996, p. 10
[20] "The 1970s." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2010, www.history.com/topics/1970s

democratic decision making collective 'grew out of a socio-political climate that emphasized democracy, so that many groups were interested in breaking down the patriarchal and hierarchical divisions of the traditional theatre company.'[21] Traditionally, theatre functions under a strict hierarchy of the (often male) playwright-director relationship, whose vision all other artists work to serve. For example, actors are guided by the director to portray the character in a certain way that fulfills the director's vision of the story instead of deciding for themselves. This single vision method squashes the opportunity for any new ideas outside the director's vision to develop. Heddon and Milling state that many early devising companies sought 'to have the actor as a creative contributor to the making of performance, and not an interpreter of text.'[22] Seeking a way to fulfill this creative urge, artists began to reject the playwright's theatre, and pursue a non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, multi-vision form instead. In a certain way, devising frees the artist from the constraints of traditional theatre, allowing them to discover a different form of leadership and method of creating work. Heddon and Milling describe this aspect of the practice in a fluid, stream of consciousness way, mimicking the undefinable-ness of the practice itself, '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…'[23] By withdrawing from the hierarchical narrative set forth by traditional theatre, devising artists open up a variety of possibilities.

Not only did devising serve as a rejection of playwright theatre's hierarchical oppression, but also a way to challenge and question the type of work playwright's theatre represented.

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[21] Oddey, 1996, p. 10
[22] Heddon & Milling, 2006, p.7
[23] Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 4

Resonant with Lehmann's construction of postdramatic theatre, devised theatre allows the artists to discover everything that exists outside of the text. It engages with materials in a way playwright's theatre does not. For example, space influences and informs creation processes, allowing the ensemble to draw upon the existing politics of the space and engage with them when creating work. Devised work is attracted to unconventional performance spaces for this reason. Oddey expands, 'Choosing a space or location to perform in is a preliminary consideration for a group, and may be the core reason for devising a particular product. How the space is organised and structured for performance is a part of the developing process.'[24] An excellent example of space focused devising is UK/Berlin based collective Gob Squad whose work attempts to 'draw art out of the empty space,'[25] and allow the real life events that take place there to inspire and influence their work. Of course they do present performance in theatres but Gob Squad has also performed work 'on the roofs of houses, in car parks, nightclubs, hotels and city streets,'[26] allowing them the opportunity to create a unique portfolio of site specific and space influenced work which has brought the collective immense success, landing them performances in venues like The Public Theatre in New York City and London's Soho Theatre.[27]

A second point of cohesion between devised theatre and Lehmann's postdramatic theatre is a disregard of illusion. Devised work regularly employs unconventional and simple technical elements, shying away from the magical theatrical design we've come to know. Often, this work makes no effort to hide the inner workings of the show, proudly displaying costume changes and

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[24] Oddey, 1996, p. 17
[25] Gob Squad, "On Space," *Gob Squad and the Impossible Attempt to Make Sense of It All*, 2010, p. 1
[26] Gob Squad, 2010, p. 1
[27] Gob Squad, www.gobsquad.com

manipulation of technical elements onstage. Rather than ruining the illusion of magic, this

creates an atmosphere of honesty and intimacy, and at times even results in a magic of it's own.

Pigpen Theatre Co. exemplifies the kind of innovative use of material and technical elements

that has become a hallmark of devised theatre. The company uses their limitations almost as

gifts, leaving space for them to create fantastical stories with just shadow screens and

soundscaping. The troupe is able to fashion entire worlds by using 'common items like

flashlights, crates and burlap sacks while conjuring dozens of characters.'[28] The oddity of using

something as simple as a household mop to portray a dog is part of what makes their shows so

special; you never expect it but it makes perfect sense to those willing to believe.

An integral part of devising is the importance placed on discovery. Many devising

processes are different, but most encourage exploration and foster an environment of

experimentation in order to generate new and exciting work and make accidental discoveries. It's

no accident that 'devise' is a synonym for 'discovery.'[29] Oddey states that devising work offers a

'freedom of possibilities for all those involved to discover; an emphasis on a way of working that

supports intuition, spontaneity, and an accumulation of ideas.'[30] This creative freedom is what

artists were searching for in response to the constraints of traditional theatre. Devising rehearsal

rooms have the opportunity to try something and then throw it away because there isn't an

answer already decided or a pre-existing text to serve or a vision to fulfill; the work doesn't exist

before it is discovered. Govan, Nicholson, and Normington discuss how different devising

processes harness this freedom into working methods, 'Although the material for devised

[28] Ken Jaworowski, "'The Old Man and the Old Moon' at the Gym at Judson." *The New York Times*, 2012,
[29] "Synonyms for 'Discover.'", *thesaurus.com*, www.thesaurus.com/browse/discover?s=t
[30] Oddey, 1996, p. 1

performances may be generated through spontaneous improvisation, the processes of working

are also likely to include an eclectic and experimental mix of playing, editing, rehearsing,

researching, designing, writing, scoring, choreographing, discussion and debate.'[31] Of course

traditional production processes may employ some of the methods mentioned above, but only if

it serves the vision and the text. Devising processes use a wide variety of strategies and skill sets

to see what there is to be made from them.

Inevitably, with experimentation comes failure. Ideas tried in the rehearsal room don't

always work, but in devising that's not a negative outcome. In fact, failure is often celebrated in

devising processes. Sara Jane Bailes, university lecturer and leading researcher on the poetics of

failure, explains the process of failing using the instance of forgetting a line of text from a play

during performance: by forgetting the line, the actor now has a number of choices in how to

proceed. The actor could improvise a new line, say parts of the line that they remember, do an

action that moves the play forward, and so on.[32] What Bailes is bringing attention to is that

although the intended action (reciting the line as written) didn't occur, it did create the possibility

for a number of alternative actions to take place. In her own words, failure 'can be understood as

generative, prolific even; failure produces and does so in a roguish manner.'[33] In the devising

rehearsal room, failure functions in this way, but also as a learning tool. A devising ensemble

may know that they want a certain outcome, but there are a multitude of ways to achieve the

outcome, if one way doesn't work, they might learn something about the way that will work.

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[31] Govan, et al., 2008, p.7

[32] Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service*. Routledge, 2011, pp. 2-3

[33] Bailes, 2011, p. 3

Allowing for failure in the process also allows for a certain vulnerability to exist in the proceeding work; Matthew Goulish writes about how 'failure produces transparency'[34] in his introduction of The Institute of Failure, a project instigated by Goulish and Tim Etchells investigating the purpose and meaning of failure. Goulish's idea of transparency means that even though the thing is failing, it provides an opportunity to see the work that is behind it. This level of exposure is part of what creates such a special relationship between spectator and performer that has come to be an important characteristic of devised theatre.

Devised work prioritizes the relationship between performer and spectator, highlighting the necessity to engage with and relate to each other. Oddey discusses the level of personal involvement and commitment of a devising performer as being much more invested as opposed to an actor in a traditional theatre setting because much of the work is born out of personal interest. She states, 'Devised theatre offers the performer the chance to explore and express personal politics or beliefs in the formation and shaping of the piece.'[35] Because the performer is committed to making the performance instead of just filling an actor sized hole in the production, there is an intrinsic sense of self in the piece. They have something to say and the devising process gives them the vehicle to say it. This often creates intimate and highly relatable work and offers the opportunity for a special bond between the spectator and performer. Oddey confirms this, 'Both spectator and performer engage in a devised performance in a different way to traditional text-based theatre, because of their direct, personal involvement with the process.'[36]

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[34] Matthew Goulish, "Lecture in the Shape of a Bridge Collapsing ." *Institute of Failure*, Institute of Failure, www.institute-of-failure.com/mattEssay.html
[35] Oddey, 1996, p.11
[36] Oddey, 1996, p. 21

The importance placed on the relationship between spectator and performer in devised work exemplifies Rancière's theory. By creating highly personal work, the devising performers are able to engage with the spectators in an active way.

Devised work not only upholds the ideas set forth by Rancière, but also takes them to a higher level. Devised work recognizes the spectators as active, but also provides an opportunity for work to be made for, and sometimes with, a specific community. Because the work is coming from a place of personal investment and is created from the self, it 'has the potential to address specific issues with a community.'[37] Many programs have been developed to foster devised performance art in communities, mainly focusing on those including children and senior citizens. Freelance devising artist Ashley Marinaccio recently wrote about her experience working to create devised theatre with a group of senior citizens, explaining that although the seniors were skeptical at first, they worked together to create an incredibly cathartic piece of theatre. Marinaccio highlights the importance of making devised theatre in this setting, 'Performances by and for community members allowed for participants to meet new friends, expand their social circles and be seen as dynamic and capable individuals. Theatre programming helps seniors regain a sense of self-confidence in cases where mobility and independence may be lost due to health conditions.'[38] Creating devised performance in this specific community allowed for an important and necessary focus to be put on the senior artists and also provided a sort of group therapy. Both the devising ensemble, facilitator, and spectating audience were able to take part in a special moment forged by the devised performance.

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[37] Oddey, 1996, p. 20
[38] Ashley Marinaccio, "We're Not Done: Creating Ensemble Theatre and Community with Senior Citizens." *HowlRound*, 2017, howlround.com/we-re-not-done-creating-ensemble-theatre-and-community-with-senior-citizens

Devised theatre will always be difficult to define as the thesis of the practice itself lies in uncertainty and unlimited possibility. The process of attempting to define devised theatre has resulted in a number of agreed upon ideas:

1. Devised theatre was born out of a socio-political climate demanding democracy and equality, it rejects single vision art, challenges the playwright's theatre, and questions text based work.

2. Devised theatre cannot be determined to a single process or way of working, but many processes encourage exploration, experimentation, and self discovery and allow for failure as a means of creation.

3. Devised theatre performance is highly personal and completely unique; productions are often a result of the artists' interests and beliefs and cannot be exactly reproduced by another ensemble.

4. Devised theatre highlights the relationship between audience and performer, often creating work in response to a specific community based need.

Today devised theatre seeks to create a special, intimate experience showing how the world looks from a collection of views and inviting the spectators to become a part of it. The practice provides a more personal attachment to creating performance and shares that with its audiences. The freedom granted by this collaborative method allows for the representation of multi-vision experiences, but also leaves some uncertainty concerning leadership. The idea of collective

decision making is attractive to the artist desiring an equal voice in the rehearsal room but can also lead to questions of democracy and authority. True collectives without any leaders often lose valuable rehearsal time debating decisions and catching up on administrative work, whereas ensembles working with an artistic director risk the potential of falling into the practices of conventional theatre. The democratic ethos of devising processes and the hierarchy introduced by a devising director seem contradictory, creating a problem area in an already highly undefined practice.

1.4 Devising and Democracy

The main focus of this research is democracy and hierarchy in collaborative theatre making, so it is useful to define what democracy means and how political terminology may describe the hierarchical structures found in collaborative theatre groups today. The links between democracy as a political idea and devised theatre are undeniable. Robert A. Dahl's attempt at describing democracy begins with, 'All of us have goals that we cannot attain by ourselves. Yet we might attain some of these by cooperating with other who share similar aims,'[39] which reads similar to the 'group of people working towards the same goals'[40] consistently referenced throughout devising ideology. It's important first to discern in what sense we are using the word democracy. The word itself comes from the Greek *demos*, meaning the people, and *kratos*, meaning rule, so simply translated democracy means majority rule.[41] The current semantics surrounding democracy are not quite as simple. Bernard Crick offers a

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[39] Robert A. Dahl, *On Democracy*. Yale University Press, 2015, p. 35
[40] This exact quote can be found in Oddey, 1996, p. 28, but has often been used in off the cuff explanations of 'What is devised theatre?' in the author's experience
[41] "Etymology of 'Democracy" *Online Etymology Dictionary*, www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=democracy

comprehensive explanation of the different facets of the word, breaking it down into three main

categories: democracy as 'a principle or doctrine of government,' as 'a set of institutional

arrangements or constitutional devices,' and as 'a type of behavior.'[42] The first category refers to

a government that behaves in a democratic way and upholds democratic ideal; a governing

system can be democratic in the way it behaves without actually being a democracy. The second

definition indicates democratic practices and tools a governing body might include in their laws

and processes. The third describes acting in the spirit of democracy. Crick describes this as 'a

way of life' in which people are 'treating everyone else *as if* they were an equal.'[43] Although in

the beginning artists may have crusaded for their art to fall under the first two, the third

definition seems to be the most suitable for what devising ensembles actually practice.

Considering the demand for a non-hierarchical and completely democratic art form, it's

difficult to imagine that a devising company can exist with a director leading it, but most do. In

fact, 71.9% of ensembles registered under the Network of Ensemble Theatres describe

themselves as having an artistic director.[44] Heddon and Milling confront the hypocritical ideal

asking, '[I]s it necessarily the case that devising companies should be non-hierarchical? Were

they ever?'[45] They then go on to name a lengthy list of clearly defined artists occupying a

directorial role in a devised theatre company. Oddey offers the explanation that as the political

climate changed, so did the ideals of devising. It became more about 'skill sharing,

specialization, specific roles, increasing division of responsibilities, such as the role of

director/deviser or the administrator, and more hierarchical company structures.'[46] It seems that

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[42] Bernard Crick, *Democracy: a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2007, p. 5
[43] Crick, 2007, p. 10
[44] See Appendix
[45] Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 5
[46] Oddey, 1996, p.8

the shift from the fiercely democratic methods of the 70's to the more structured, collaboration

focused spirit of the 90's could have taken cue from their surrounding socio-political climates,

but perhaps it also came from a place of learning and the idea of editing the model to work more

efficiently. This shift then bears the question of democracy once again; is this the right word to

describe what is being done? Clive Barker boldly calls the devising process as not far off from an

oligarchy, 'or even dictatorial control by a more democratic way of working,'[47] and he's not

entirely wrong. Calling devised theatre oligarchic is tempting as a number of companies are run

by a few key people, but the semantics blur the accuracy. Oligarchies, or 'the exercise of power

by the richest citizens—who happen always to be 'the few,''[48] depend on the small number of

people in power holding the most material or financial wealth. This poses a problem for the

politics of the devising ensemble because it's not necessarily an association based on wealth.

However, if we are to consider 'the few' to simply be holding the most 'power resources,'[49] then

it may make sense in terms of structure.

Barker gets closer with his idea of a more democratic version of dictatorial control. Crick

describes the liberal stance of "At least the Communists claim to be democratic!" as upholding

the major ideals of democracy, i.e. the majority of the people were 'consenting to be ruled in a

broadly popular way and with a type of regime that needed to mobilize and enthuse the

masses.'[50] In a way this is similar to how many contemporary devising ensembles are run: a

leading artistic director oversees the process as a whole, but with varying levels of authority.

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[47] Clive Barker, "Foreward." *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*, Crowood, 2013, p. 6
[48] Jeffrey A. Winters & Benjamin I. Page, "Oligarchy in the United States? | Perspectives on Politics." *Cambridge Core*, Cambridge University Press, 1 Dec. 2009
[49] Jeffrey A. Winters & Benjamin I. Page, 2009
[50] Crick, 2007, p. 10

Many devising directors seek to guide the ensemble towards generating material and facilitate a process to help create the best work from the ensemble. Ben Yalom describes the role of a devising director best,

> Through whatever tools they have, the collaborative director must create a space that encourages the greatest contribution from everyone else in the room. They must set tasks and challenges that inspire brilliant ideas and general awesomeness on the part of the other artists. They must glean the really hot ideas, hopefully a wealth of creativity beyond that of their own single perspective. And they must make selections between the offerings. At its best, this collaborative approach engages actors and designers deeply, giving them a profound sense of investment and ownership.[51]

Yalom removes the politics of the discussion and gets at the heart of a devising director's job - helping the ensemble craft the work. This description speaks about the devising director in a gentle, nudging way that elicits a non-biased, parental figure out of the role. This devising director guides the ensemble and provides a frame for the devising process, driving the work away from meandering improv and towards creating a piece of thoughtful, cohesive performance. I suggest that this version of the devising director could be best described as a 'facilitator.' To apply etymology again, 'facilitator' is the noun derived from the verb 'facilitate,' which in English is defined as 'to make easy or less difficult, to help forward, to assist the progress of.'[52] The word originates from the French *faciliter*, 'to render easy,' and also from the

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[51] Ben Yalom, "Ensemble Creation: The Director's Roles." *HowlRound*, 2 May 2016, howlround.com/ensemble-creation-the-director-s-role

[52] "Definition of 'Facilitate'." *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com, www.dictionary.com/browse/facilitate

Latin *facilis*, 'easy to do.'[53] The goal of the devising director as described by Yalom definitely

seems to be one of creating a more seamless and efficient process, therefore making the devising

process easier, but in a way that doesn't overpower the importance of process as creation. The

nudging and guiding behavior demonstrated by a devising director of this characterization seems

to help the ensemble move forward and progress. For these reasons I find that 'facilitator' is an

efficient descriptive term for this branch of devising directors.

1.5 Conclusion

The transition in theatrical thinking sparked by Hans-Thies Lehmann's idea of

postdramatic theatre made room for new, more experimental practices to develop. Theatre

consumers and artists alike no longer needed closure, illusion, and drama. Instead, they were

allowed to delve into the world of contemporary performance, investigating what else theatre

could be. Rancière's recognition of the audience member as an active spectator contributed to the

rapidly developing breach in traditional theatre practice, inspiring artists to make engaging,

intimate, community focused work. The combination of these two theories laid the foundation

for progressive new practices to emerge; theatre artists began experimenting more, discovering

and developing fields of practice like physical, participatory, and devised theatre. Devised

theatre's ideology is founded in unpredictability and variety, making it a difficult practice to

define. Although today's theatrical thinkers debate many aspects of devised theatre, they do

agree that it is an inherently democratic practice that prioritizes collaborative work and collective

decision making. The fact that many devising companies today operate with an artistic director

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[53] "Etymology of 'Facilitate'." *Online Etymology Dictionary*, www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=facilitate

presents an interesting contradiction and raises questions concerning democracy and hierarchy in

a collaborative setting. Can a devising ensemble be truly democratic while working with a

clearly designated leader

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 In Defense of Case Studies

The methodology used for this research is predominantly a case study model with the exception of the statistical data collected from the Network of Ensemble Theaters.[54] The choice of methodology became clear when confronting the expansiveness of the research questions. To ask for a concise answer to a question concerning a practice founded on unpredictability is impractical and unrealistic. Considering the highly limited available research, a case study seemed most appropriate. Theoretical research on devised theatre bears so many dependent variables, it's nearly impossible to collect quantitative data. The diverse forms of process and structure inherent to devising ensembles is the leading reason the research conducted in this study is qualitative in nature, meaning that in near opposition to the 'number-crunching'[55] of quantitative methods, this research is more focused on 'discerning patterns, trends and relationships between key variables.'[56] Focusing on two specific examples allows for the obscurity of the many different variables at work to become more manageable.

The case study method lends itself to research 'which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings.'[57] This proves to be the most effective way to collect and analyze the highly variable research attempting to answer the pattern and trend based question of how can a director function in a devising ensemble. Narrowing the focus to two

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[54] See Appendix
[55] Jonathan Grix, "The 'Nuts and Bolts' of Research." *The Foundations of Research*, 2001, p. 32
[56] Grix, 2001, p. 33
[57] Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, "Building Theories from Case Study Research." *The Academy of Management Review*, 1989, p. 534

ensembles ensures that the research conducted can be thorough and offers specific examples of answers. According to academic writer Martyn Shuttleworth, the method of research should fulfill two objectives: offering the researcher 'a way of gaining insight into a particular issue' and enabling another researcher 'to re-enact the first's endeavours by emulating the methods employed.'[58] The use of case studies in this thesis is validated by this concept; at the end of this research project I will have amassed a wealth of insight into the devising processes and hierarchical structures of two ensembles I regularly follow and engage with and I will have presented a succinct model of conducting this type of research that could be repeated by other researchers and even adapted to investigate a number of theories and questions.

2.2 Limitations and Potential Issues

There are a number of limitations I have kept in mind while designing this research, the most obvious being the small sample group from which to collect data. Although focusing on two examples narrows the large scale representation of this study, it seems like the best way to begin. As mentioned earlier, it would be incredibly difficult to create a research method that can produce a definitive answer to this question, but there are a number of ways to try. Practice as research would be a beneficial next step for this study as it can generate new empirical data to add to the continued discussion concerning hierarchy in collaborative theatre making. The opportunity to test contrasting hierarchical structures in a devised ensemble setting has the potential to develop a new, valuable branch of this theory that could help construct a more precise narrative around this subject. Although executing a practice as research experiment

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[58] Martyn Shuttleworth, "Case Study Research Design." *Explorable*, Explorable.com

seems ideal, I found it was important to use the data and resources already available to begin investigating this theory, and to do so in such a micro-focused way will help me in future research endeavors.

A second limitation I considered is the idea of passivity and bias regarding my involvement with this study. My main concern was that I would not be able to be 'more of an observer than an experimenter'[59] as there is 'no right or wrong answer in a case study.'[60] As a current practitioner of devised theatre, it is difficult not to have opinions on what I think is the ideal hierarchical structure of an ensemble or what I define as a devising director's role and responsibilities. It was important throughout this study to maintain a sense of inquiry and observation as opposed to finding evidence in order to create an argument. The idea of presenting information and not proving something as correct or incorrect was a crucial note I continued to remind myself of during this process.

2.3 Determining Factors

The essential element of my case study process was choosing which ensembles to analyze. The key determining factors in choosing the two ensembles were:

1. Availability of published resources and existing research

2. Comparable size, age, and reputation

3. Personal familiarity with their work

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[59] Shuttleworth
[60] Shuttleworth

My initial instinct was to collect first hand research via interviews from the chosen ensembles and observations of their rehearsal periods, but it quickly became clear that there were a number of resources of this kind already available. Therefore, I made the decision to structure my case studies around existing interviews, publications, and research. This made the first factor extremely important as I was not going to conduct first hand research in order to collect the data. I searched for ensembles that were already well discussed in theatre research and had a number of published documents detailing their work and process, if not documents authored by the ensembles themselves. I also looked for ensembles that have a sense of transparency about their process and were happy to share it with others. Elevator Repair Service (ERS) and Forced Entertainment both succeeded in this first qualification as both are the subject of a collection of easily accessible research and other publications. The second factor is important because I wanted to compare ensembles that were at similar points in their career and growth; I wanted for them to be 'on the same playing field' in order to compare them fairly. Both ERS and Forced Entertainment have been working consistently as devising ensembles for a significant amount of time and have similar reputations. The third factor falls under more of a personal preference. I thought it would be better to work with ensembles I am familiarized with as the research would primarily be second person. I've seen the work of both ERS and Forced Entertainment in the past and have participated in workshops with ERS so, in conjunction with the other two factors, I decided the two ensembles would be adequate choices for the case studies of this research.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

The following case studies are investigations of two ensemble theatre companies,

Elevator Repair Service and Forced Entertainment. These studies use existing interviews and

reviews collected from various news and magazine sources, as well as *Performance Theatre and*

the Poetics of Failure: Forced Entertainment, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service by Sara

Bailes, *Certain Fragments* by Tim Etchells, and *Making Contemporary Theatre: International*

Rehearsal Processes edited by Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender. Background research for these

studies also included viewings of essential performance and process recordings (*Cab Legs*,

Making Performance, and *The Travels*), review of both ensemble's social media and websites,

and a workshop under the direction of Elevator Repair Service's John Collins, Lindsay

Hockaday, and Mike Iveson organized by The Drama League in New York City on February

20th and 21st, 2016. The author has also attended a work in progress showing of Elevator Repair

Service's *Measure for Measure* on April 19th, 2017 at the Vorhees Theatre, CUNY City College

of Technology in Brooklyn, NY. The following studies seek to form a narrative investigating the

hierarchy of each ensemble from the aforementioned sources.

3.1 Case Study #1: Elevator Repair Service

Elevator Repair Service is an ensemble of artists creating original work based in New

York City. Founded by artistic director John Collins in 1991, the group gets its name from 'a

job-aptitude test, intended for the non-college-bound, that Collins took for fun when he was

twelve or thirteen'[61] that deemed him suitable as an 'Elevator Repair Man.'[62] With a repertoire of

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[61] Rebecca Mead, "Putting 'The Great Gatsby' – Every Word of It – Onstage," *The New Yorker*, 2010
[62] Sara Bailes, "This America: A Conversation with John Collins about Elevator Repair Service," 2002

nineteen shows, ERS has dominated the downtown theatre scene of New York City, providing

theatre that has been described as a 'vast, flapping freak flag,'[63] 'antic but rigorous,'[64] and

'slightly cracked and loose-limbed.'[65] Making a reputation for themselves as a true experimental

and even avant-garde theatre company, ERS has become a household name for contemporary

theatre fans worldwide. Throughout their career, the ensemble has been focused on creating

adaptations of great literature 'that turn the act of reading into not just acting but action — a

dynamic physical process,'[66] by performing verbatim lengths of novels onstage. Their

productions, *Gatz* (2006), *The Select (The Sun Also Rises)* (2009), and *The Sound and The Fury*

(April Seventh, 1928) (2015), are all installments in a series of literary adaptations. The

productions, adapted from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun*

Also Rises, and William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* respectively, birth a revolutionary

new genre of experimental theatre, blending verbatim text and highly sensory staging. Art begets

art isn't a foreign idea for ERS, as many of their original works take inspiration from other great

works of art. For example, *Highway to Tomorrow* (2000) is an interpretation of Euripides' *The*

Bacchae and *Cab Legs* (1997) pays homage to Tennessee Williams, using the playwright's piece

Summer and Smoke as inspiration for the text of the production. Not to mention their most recent

work, *Measure for Measure,* attempts to adapt Shakespeare's play of the same name.[67]

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[63] David Cote, "Fondly, Collette Richland." *Time Out New York*, 2015
[64] Ben Brantley, "Review: 'The Sound and The Fury,' Elevator Repair Service's Take on Faulkner," *The New York Times*, 2015
[65] Jason Zinoman, "On the TV: Re-Enacting Kerouac Interviews," *The New York Times*, 2006
[66] Brantley, 2015
[67] ERS website, www.elevator.org

3.2 Elevator Repair Service - On Process

According to ERS's website, the simplified version of their creative process begins with four to six 'intensive work periods' occurring within a two year time frame that then culminates in work in progress showings. After the work is considered complete, the company then presents it in New York City for an official run.[68] When starting the process of a new project, 'all available company members and occasional guest artists assemble, and from this conjunction of minds and bodies are planted the seeds of a play.'[69] The membership of ERS is fluid as ensemble members hold full time day jobs and pursue other artistic projects. Once assembled, 'all devising periods begin in a certain amount of uncertainty'[70] which contributes to the collective ownership of the work. ERS often starts their devising process by bringing in a variety of sources of individual interest to share with the ensemble. These can range from video clips and movies to general ideas, themes, and questions. In the case of *Gatz*, ensemble member Steve Bodow brought the book, *The Great Gatsby* into rehearsal as proposed source material.[71] At one point in the process of devising *Cab Legs*, ensemble member James Hannaham offered footage of Indian movie musicals and director John Collins brought in vintage cartoons from the 1930's.[72] During this period of the process, each member of the ensemble has the opportunity to bring in their own ideas and source material which are then discussed and played with by the group as a whole.

Once the ensemble has a designated source material and 'a series of clear but loosely defined interests and objectives,'[73] they move into the next stage of the process which focuses on

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[68] ERS website, www.elevator.org

[69] Julie Bleha, "A God, A Thermos, A Play: ERS Tackles Euripides' Bacchae." *TheatreForum*, no. 23

[70] Sara Jane Bailes, "Elevator Repair Service - Cab Legs (1997) to Gatz (2006)," *Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal Processes*, Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 89

[71] Mead, 2010

[72] Bailes, 2002

[73] Bailes, 2013, p. 89

transforming the material into something workable. Devising ensembles often feel lost on how to start generating original work, but ERS has continually cited their way into the work as translating the source material into a 'basic tasks,'[74] things that every person in the ensemble can do, 'as a way of cutting into material, subverting it and/or beginning to generate new possibilities from it.'[75] This almost forces the ensemble to create work from the source material without overthinking it. One of ERS's preferred practical tasks is to create a dance. Sometimes the dances mimic details represented in the source material, using the physicality of the images and videos presented as choreography; ensemble member Rinne Groff gives an example of this in an interview stating, 'Okay, let's make a dance of this man's hand gestures.'[76] The dances and practical tasks could also take a more abstract form, looking to interpret and translate the ideas and themes of the material instead. Either way, the idea of jumping into a physical task has proven to be a successful way to begin for ERS. Upon rehearsal observation, Sara Jane Bailes writes:

> Making a dance often provides a useful practical way of beginning to devise a world and mood for a piece; it also brings the company together in a shared activity and focuses them towards a concrete outcome that quickly gets them on their feet. Once made, a dance provides a block of material around which other sections expand in both a contrived and more *ad hoc* fashion.[77]

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[74] Rinne Groff in an interview with Coco Fusco for *BOMB Magazine*, 1999
[75] Bailes, 2013, p. 89
[76] Fusco, 1999
[77] Bailes, 2013, p. 89

The dances provide a way in for the ensemble and gives them a strong jumping off point for creation. As Bailes mentions, it also provides a piece for the rest of the work to build around, creating an important structural tool as demonstrated in *Cab Legs*. In an interview with Bailes in 2002, Collins mentions that *Cab Legs* began from a fascination with the scenario of firefighters waiting around for a fire to happen, and the idea of the period of time before something happens. The structure for this production was largely based around the dances as the event being waited for. Collins states, 'It was going to be a way of structuring a dance piece; we were going to put these dances together and in between the dances everyone was going to be waiting around for some alarm to go off.'[78] As with *Cab Legs* and most ERS productions, once a structure is in place a period of experimentation and cutting, replacing, and editing takes place, which then culminates in work in progress showings, time off, and then more working periods. This cycle repeats until the piece is ready for its full official presentation and run.

3.3 Elevator Repair Service and Hierarchy

ERS makes no effort to pass as anything other than an ensemble working with an artistic director, as nearly every article, interview, review, and publication mentions the company was founded by current artistic director John Collins. The area of interest then is, *how* does Collins work as a devising director? The company as a whole maintains a certain fluidity of specialized roles that 'tend to develop organically'; some members will only act as devising performers while others multitask as designers and technicians for various productions.[79] This sort of interdisciplinary environment is integral to creating the 'democratic ethos'[80] ERS works under.

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[78] Bailes, 2002
[79] Bailes, 2013, p. 88
[80] Bailes, 2013, p. 87

At times, Collins is joined in co-directing by ensemble member and 'director type' [81] Steve Bodow. The two artists, working together as co-directors most consistently between 1997 and 2002, have a 'fluidity and alliance'[82] in the rehearsal room which contributes to ERS's highly collaborative and seemingly democratic devising process. Rehearsal observations conducted by Bailes report that the two 'intuitively complement one another'[83] by breaking up the main focuses of their directorial roles; Bailes notes that Bodow tends to target text based choices while Collins hones in on troubleshooting.[84] This tag-team structure can definitely have a positive hierarchical effect in the rehearsal room, allowing for multi-vision decision making and fostering a team-like effort throughout the process.

An interesting factor to consider are the subconscious semantics surrounding ERS's discourse in interviews. Although many interviews are conducted with Collins alone, others pull in various ensemble members and occasional co-director Bodow. In an interview with Bailes for *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, Collins consistently speaks in a 'we' vocabulary about the creation of *Cab Legs*, even when asked questions that are directly phrased in first person, he responds with 'we':

> **SB:** So <u>**you**</u> would have information the audience was intentionally kept unaware of?
>
> **JC:** Yes. Because the other thing <u>**we**</u> were interested in then was in seeing how

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[81] Alexandra Kuczynski, "Floor, Please: Elevator Repair Service's Comedy Channel," *Paper*, 1994
[82] Bailes, 2013, p. 87
[83] Bailes, 2013, p. 87
[84] Bailes, 2013, p. 87

little could happen on stage, and having scenes where next to nothing could have happened...That's how **we** would stage the scenes, with **them** just waiting for the alarm to go off, and **we** came up with a lot that we like about that.[85]

It could be debated that Bailes was using 'you' and the inferred 'you all,' or even referring to the ensemble itself as a singular object, but based on her continued pattern of usage throughout the interview, it's more likely she is implicitly addressing Collins as an individual. Another ambiguity is what Collins means when he says 'we'. He could be referring to himself and Bodow as the interview is discussing *Cab Legs*, which they co-directed, or it could be a reference to the ensemble as a whole. Collins meticulously references other ensemble members by name when discussing specific ideas and work they contributed in other parts of the interview, so it is doubtful that the former is the case. An interesting point to note in the section quoted above is the usage of 'them' when speaking about the performing ensemble. Although the case is strong for the 'we' narrative implicating the ensemble as a whole, this does show distinct, yet unavoidable divide: Collins never performs with the ensemble so he could never use 'we' when referencing something the performers are doing onstage. This kind of behavior validates and echoes the questioning of how can a devising ensemble employ a separate, non-performing director and maintain the ideals of devised theatre.

Another interesting occurrence concerning semantics are the verbs Bailes uses to describe Collins in the rehearsal room in her observations. Collins 'asks,'[86] 'argues,' and 'reminds,'[87] but

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[85] Bailes, 2002
[86] Bailes, 2013, p. 92
[87] Bailes, 2013, p. 94

never 'directs' or 'demands.' Contrary to the assertive authority of the traditional director, Collins seems to apply a more guiding demeanor to his 'direction' of the ensemble. Perhaps Collins exists as a director in order to question, suggest, and organize instead of controlling and commanding the ensemble. This seems to fit under the 'facilitator' categorization derived from Yalom's insights on working as a devising director as Collins does hold a position of authority in the ensemble, but also works in a way that fosters a sense of collaboration and democratic behavior in the rehearsal room. Although I wouldn't necessarily agree that ERS works to 'negate singularity and hierarchical top-down formations in favor of collective decision-making,'[88] as they don't function as a true collective hierarchically, I would agree that they prioritize collective decision making and work extremely hard to create multi-visionary work. As made obvious by the extensive repertoire of text-bending and physically inquisitive pieces, ERS also qualifies as questioning and challenging playwright's theatre. The foundation of ERS's devising process lies in the ensemble's personal interest and functions on a framework of experimentation and failure. For these reasons I would describe ERS as a devising ensemble operating under an artistic director/facilitator while still upholding the core values of devised theatre.

3.4 Case Study #2: Forced Entertainment

Forced Entertainment is a devising ensemble of six artists based in Sheffield, United Kingdom. Although the U.K. is their home, Forced Entertainment's work is wildly popular throughout mainland Europe and is recognized around the world. After a period of shifting membership, the ensemble has been comprised of artists Tim Etchells, Terry O'Connor, Claire

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[88] Bailes, 2011, p. 171

Marshall, Cathy Naden, Richard Lowdon and Robin Arthur since 1989.[89] Led by artistic director,

Tim Etchells, the ensemble has created an impressive portfolio of work during their thirty plus

years together. Their shows have a 'thrown-together quality'[90] that often results in a seemingly

non-performative piece of theatre in which performers are addressed by their own names and

address the audience directly and pragmatically.[91] Etchells attributes the now signature aesthetic

to the ensemble's ongoing interested in the 'blurring of the real and the pretended.'[92] For a group

that takes their name from the 'contrived nature of the contractual exchange between performer

and spectator upon which all live entertainment is predicated,'[93] it's no surprise that their work

seeks to 'explore the fragile boundaries between what we might call reality and performance.'[94]

This sort of radical expository theatre puts performers in front of an audience in a way that

allows the audience to recognize their active role in the theatrical exchange, resulting in a

reputation of extremes: some critics love their work while other hate it. In fact some critics love

certain shows but hate others, validating Forced Entertainment's noted versatility and

experimental nature.

3.5 Forced Entertainment - On Process

Etchells' ensemble driven text, *Certain Fragments*, describes Forced Entertainment's

devising process in a sentence, 'The process we've worked through has always mixed

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[89] Sarah Gorman, "Forced Entertainment's Early to Middle Years: Montage and Quotation."*British Theatre Companies: 1980-1994*, edited by Graham Saunders, Methuen, 2015, p. 190
[90] Alex Mermikides, "Forced Entertainment - The Travels (2002) - The Anti-Theatrical Director."*Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal Processes*, edited by Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender, Manchester University Press, 2013, p. 101
[91] Peter Billingham, "5: Tim Etchells and Forced Entertainment." *At the Sharp End: Uncovering the Work of Five Leading Dramatists*, Methuen Drama, 2007, p.169
[92] Billingham, 2007, p. 169
[93] Bailes, 2011, p. 63
[94] Billingham, 2007, p. 180

improvisation with writing, argument, discussion, and, latterly at least, a great deal of watching back through video-tapes of the previous day's work.'[95] Allowing for a large amount of their material to come into being from an environment of exploration, the ensemble operates on a 'see-what-comes'[96] disposition. Literally. In rehearsal observations, Alex Mermikides reports that, 'Forced Entertainment do a lot of sitting, smoking, drinking coffee, talking and lapsing into extended silences. What they are doing is 'waiting for something to happen.''[97] This laid-back approach of finding a place to start may come off as lackadaisical to the undiscerning eye, but it's an essential element to the ensemble's commitment to multi-visionary, fully collaborative work. Etchells characterizes Forced Entertainment's process as one that 'refuses to know, at the outset, what it is looking for,'[98] and he states that this method of starting allows the work itself 'remains ahead of our thinking.'[99] The ensemble's attitude of collective decision making from the very start of the process is integral to maintaining the precarious balance of equality fostered between devising ensemble and devising director. Despite the ensemble's generous embrace of the nothingness and not knowing-ness of where to start, they do start with a small amount of source material brought in from the outside. Etchells claims that 'no one would bring anything too complete to the process,'[100] but often ensemble members and Etchells himself would present vague ideas of interest or some fragments of material. It's important to the ensemble that the source material is wholly unformed and unattached so that 'there'd be more spaces for others to fill in...more dots to join.'[101] This creates a meticulous balance between single and multi-vision

[95] Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*. Routledge, 2009, p. 17
[96] Gorman, 2015, p. 199
[97] Mermikides, 2013, pp. 106-108
[98] Etchells, 2015, p. 17
[99] Etchells, 2015, p. 17
[100] Etchells, 2015, p. 51
[101] Etchells, 2015, p. 51

work; the source material can start from a single ensemble member, but it is then transformed by the group into an idea together.

From this point, the ensembles work with a 'system model'[102] that employs compositional elements and rules to begin creating work. The systems can take the form of 'live games,' formulas for improv, or experiments of general ideas. After a trial of a potential system is completed, the ensemble discusses and assesses the potential of the system.[103] These discussions are 'very much a group process. Everybody creates material, everybody discusses and critiques material, everybody watches back the videos.'[104] After a series of trials, discussions, and potential systems, the most sustainable performance is then transcribed by Etchells and is used for 'small-scale work-in-progress showings' on the last day of this period of work.[105] This process can be repeated many times over a number of rehearsal periods until the right system is found. Forced Entertainment holds no bars in trying out ideas and dismissing them, but usually saving them for later. Once their ideal system is found, Etchells gets to work on scripting the show, a task which he sees as a process of 'mixing, matching, cutting, pasting,'[106] often splicing and fine tuning ensemble member's original written material. During more intense periods of rehearsal, just before the formal presentation of a performance, Etchells often makes revisions to the script overnight. In this period the ensemble could work through multiple iterations of the script days before opening night, but in a way the constant potential for change this late in the process seems to hold true to the Forced Entertainment nature.

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[102] Mermikides, 2013, p. 108
[103] Mermikides, 2013, p. 108-109
[104] Billingham, 2007, p. 165
[105] Mermikides, 2013, p. 109
[106] Mermikides, 2013, p. 116

3.6 Forced Entertainment and Hierarchy

Forced Entertainment is often written about by critics and academics as under the direction of Tim Etchells, and their website also lists Etchells as the artistic director, but the company itself tends to speak more predominately about Etchells as a writer. Maintaining an ethos that is 'collaborative and shared,'[107] Etchells works as a filter for the ensemble's work, acting as a 'postmodern editor or dramaturg'[108] for the ensemble. In Mermikides' rehearsal observations for *The Travels*, Etchells takes the text based material generated by the ensemble and works to piece it together in a performance-like structure. This seems to be a way of avoiding single vision authorship, but Mermikides notes that Etchells edits the raw material which blurs the lines of authorship and single vs. multi-vision theatre making.[109] In an interview with Peter Billingham, Etchells describes his role in the process as: 'I'll pitch in some ideas, some text – it might be a paragraph, it might be a page – it might just be me running onto the stage and whispering into someone's ear 'Talk about blah – blah – blah.''[110] This free-form style of scripting seems to be less about writing and more about guiding the process of creation.

For most of the process, Etchells functions as an outside eyes figure; someone who is immersed in the process but isn't a part of the performance. As someone working on the piece but not performing, Etchells finds that he has a less biased but still informed perspective which allows him to 'make some editorial decisions that they [the ensemble] can't make.'[111] Forced Entertainment is dedicated to documenting their rehearsals on film, which helps the ensemble to

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[107] Billingham, 2007, p. 180
[108] Billingham, 2007, p. 180
[109] Mermikides, 2013, pp. 115-116
[110] Billingham, 2007, p. 165
[111] Billingham, 2007, p. 166

review the work and help make decisions as a group. Collective decision making can be tedious and result in what the ensemble identifies as a 'loop,'[112] a period of repeated debate in which not much may actually get done. Although this process can take a considerable amount of time, Etchells views it as an important part of their collaborative method which 'was never about perfect unity but about difference, collisions, incompatibilities.'[113] The disagreements and debates are part of what makes Forced Entertainment's work a true example of collaborative theatre-making.

According to ensemble member Robin Arthur, Forced Entertainment functions under a 'pragmatic socialism.'[114] Socialism in the simplest sense is a 'common ownership.'[115] This seems to be an accurate description of how Forced Entertainment works; everyone has the opportunity to be a part of the decision making process even though they work under an artistic director. In terms of hierarchical ideology, Forced Entertainment has found their niche, but trying to define their structure in relation to the collaborative theatre world is where it becomes more complicated. The ensemble is led by an artistic director, but the artistic director doesn't have full authority over the performance; the ensemble creates and critiques work together, but Etchells' perspective holds a different power as an outside eye. Forced Entertainment seems to exist in a grey area that many collaborative theater making companies occupy. Mermikides addresses this issue, 'In coupling the director-led and the system models, Forced Entertainment has brought together two seemingly incompatible notions of creative authorship, pairing a commitment to

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[112] Etchells, 2015, p. 62
[113] Etchells, 2015, p. 56
[114] Mermikides, 2013, p. 118
[115] "What Is Socialism?" *World Socialist Movement*, 2016, www.worldsocialism.org/english/what-socialism

anti-hierarchical group creation with the precision and rigour that comes from the clarity and uniqueness of an individual vision.'[116] This analysis candidly attributes Forced Entertainment's structure to both collaborative and singular working methods, suggesting they work in a way that we may not have the terminology to describe. However, it does seem that Etchells fits into the description of a facilitator as his main function is to guide the ensemble and help create a frame in which to generate work. Etchells serves as a form of leadership that exists to push the process along and create a cohesive performance, much like that of the facilitator. Based on their process of creating material, it's clear the Forced Entertainment prioritizes multi-vision work, in fact they insist on 'deferring authorship'[117] as a whole. The ensemble's highly exploratory process places an importance on experimenting, testing out each new system as they approach it, in order to find the voice of their performance. Often, the systems come from a personal interest, resulting in work that is intrinsically tied to the performers as people. Because of these reasons, I would classify Forced Entertainment as a collaborative ensemble working under the authority of a devising director or 'facilitator' while maintaining the ideals of devised theatre.

3.7 Conclusion

This study of Elevator Repair Service and Forced Entertainment has raised a fair few similarities between the ensembles in both their process and company structures. Both ensembles tend to begin their process with a 'see what happens' mentality, looking to tease a concept out of the mere presence of artists in the same room together. Although ERS relies more on proposed source material, both processes place an importance on the group finding the starting point

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[116] Mermikides, 2013, p. 119
[117] Mermikides, 2013, p. 105

together. The processes main difference lies in the methods of generating work; ERS begins in a highly physical manner, turning to the natural instincts of the body in movement to spark material, whereas Forced Entertainment devises experiments and games to test different system models in order to find out what source material to pursue. The later part of both ensemble's processes mimic each other, citing revision and editing methods followed by work in progress showing and then more revision. The interesting difference is how the ensembles are led through their process. ERS director John Collins tends to take a more practical directorial stance, helping the ensemble to make choices concerning staging and structure while troubleshooting ensemble created material, but Forced Entertainment's Tim Etchells plays more of a writer-director role, guiding the ensemble to generate material and then shaping it into a structured performance. The leadership styles may differ slightly, but the hierarchical idea remains the same: both ensembles function under a director while maintaining a feeling of democracy. With both directors seeming to fall under the category of facilitator, the ensembles are able to practice collective decision making while sustaining a distinct sense of leadership and direction. These case studies validate the idea that devising ensembles can work with an artistic director and manage to preserve their democratic ethos, upholding the core values of devised theatre.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The progressive ideas introduced by the shift to postdramatic theatre are integral to the contemporary theatre that we know today. Hans-Thies Lehmann's philosophy created space for new work, radically different to that of the pre-existing text-serving theatre, to develop and grow. This opportunity, further validated by Jacques Rancière's appeal to recognize and engage with an active audience, gave permission to artists seeking to experiment with their work and explore the possibilities of the world other than text prioritized theatre. Lehmann and Rancièr's work also instigated a certain disregard of hierarchy, power, and authority in theatre, placing less importance on the playwright-director relationship and encouraging the hybrid creator-performer. Considering the crusade against text based and serving theatre, it's unsurprising that those who perpetuate it also came into question. In the spirit of creative freedom and fulfillment, artists became less interested in bolstering the playwright and director led theatre, and began practicing more collaborative based creation methods. This rejection of hierarchy and warrant to create freely and inquisitively led to the establishment of the many forms of contemporary theatre we know and practice today, but most significantly the development of devised theatre.

The spirit of devised theatre is grounded in an inherent sense of democracy and collaboration. Originating in a revolutionarily awake socio-political climate, devising demanded everything the outside world couldn't: democracy, equality, representation, and intersectionality. The rebellion from playwright's theatre mimicked that of the rebellion in the world; originating

devising artists demanded a practice that didn't succumb to the mainstream conventions of a hierarchical process. Their practice emphasized collective decision making and multi-visionary performance and encouraged failure and self discovery. Fragments of this politically charged version of devised theatre are still present in the practice we know as devised theatre today. Devising ensembles still engage in collaborative based processes, placing importance on democracy and experimentation, but with some adjustments, such as working with an artistic director. Although the induction of a somewhat hierarchical role seems counterintuitive to the devised theatre movement, perhaps it is the result of a practice constantly trying to improve itself.

The concept of a director in a devising ensemble seems to disregard the paramount virtue of devising, a necessity for democracy, but modern ensembles have made it their task to discover how the two might function together. Elevator Repair Service and Forced Entertainment both work with a director, but based on the accounts of their processes, still manage to cultivate a democratic and fully collaborative environment. It's important to note that neither ensemble have cracked the code completely, neither of their processes are completely democratic but neither are completely hierarchical either. The worth in this research lies in the *how* they are working. With the development of the term facilitator based on Ben Yalom's description of a devising director, it's a little clearer to see how this system might work. Both John Collins and Tim Etchells perform their role in a way that guides the ensemble instead of forcibly directing them. They work *with* the ensemble to create work instead of their performers working *for* them. Everyone in the room, directors included, is working towards creating something they believe in together.

Most simply, both ensembles operate with an artistic director, but the extricating factor is their transparency. They don't have anything to hide and they would love for you to know exactly how they make theatre. This honest exposition of themselves is part of the reason why their leadership structures work. Like most of devising, they're figuring things out and will work with these hierarchical structures until they don't work anymore. Then they'll figure it out again. It's all a part of the process that they're committed to together.

'In what ways can a director function in a devising ensemble?' The question itself is a contradiction, placing a director, the epitome of authoritative creative leadership, in the same realm as devised theater, a predominantly collaborative and democratic process. It seems impossible and hypocritical, but perhaps the contradiction is what makes it work. Devised theatre thrives on putting things together that probably shouldn't be. As a practice based on exploration and experimentation, it seems only natural to have come to a question of how can this be, we cannot have both things at the same time. But the evidence states otherwise; clearly a devising ensemble can exist with a director while maintaining a commitment to the core values of devised practice. Both Elevator Repair Service and Forced Entertainment, and countless other working ensembles throughout the world, are living proof of it. And still the question stands, why and how can these contradicting ideas exist in the same room? Perhaps the answer can be found in another question, one that is foundational to much of devised theatre: why not?

Appendix

A. Report of Statistical Findings: Percentage of Ensembles Identifying with a Artistic

Director in the Network of Ensemble Theatres

A.1 Introduction

The following is a statistical report based on data collected from the Network of

Ensemble Theaters members registry. This study uses the ensembles listed as members of NET

to create statistical data concerning the percentage of ensembles working with an artistic director.

The data was collected by accessing each registered ensemble's website and/or NET member

bio.

A.2 Qualifying Elements and Exceptions

Qualifying elements for ensembles working with an an artistic director are as follows:

- ❖ Ensemble website and/or NET bio list the company under the leadership of an artistic

  directing, producing director, and/or any combination of the two

- ❖ Ensemble website lists a production or multiple productions, current and past, with a

  "Directed by" line

Qualifying elements for ensembles working as a true collective as follows:

- ❖ Ensemble website and/or NET bio does not list any distinctive form of leadership

- ❖ Ensemble website does not contain any productions, past or current, with a "Directed by" line

- ❖ Ensemble website and/or NET bio speaks in a "we" based narrative

Exceptions are as follows:

- ❖ Member profiles registered as 'Individual,' 'Student,' and 'Affiliate' were excluded from this survey.

- ❖ Member profiles listed as 'Ensemble' but leading to institutions and repertory theatres were excluded from this survey.

- ❖ Member profiles that did not contain a bio or website, or contained information that was unclear were excluded from the statistical data.

- ❖ Member profiles listed as 'Ensemble' leading to duets of performers were categorized as unclear unless an artistic director was specified.

A.3 Limitations

The researcher recognizes the limitations set forth by this data. Collecting data from this sample group provides a small, un-generalized statistic local to the United States. Even so, this data is useful as a small, localized sample of the qualifications in question.

A.4 Conclusive Findings

Out of 176 total membership profiles surveyed, 126 were conclusively led by an artistic director, 16 were conclusively working as a true collective, and 34 were unclear. 71.59% of ensembles surveyed identify as being led by an artistic director, 9.09% of ensembles surveyed identify as a true collective, and 19.32% of ensembles surveyed were unclear.

A.5 Collected Data

Key Terms

NWL - No Website Listed on NET profile

D - Duo of artists

IAW - Inactive or Incorrect Website link provided on NET profile

NB - No Bio listed on NET profile.

*A note on websites - Ensembles marked *NWL* or *IAW* categorized successfully listed sufficient information in their NET member profile bio to be categorized.

The following is a list of ensembles surveyed organized their qualifying categories listed in order of appearance on NET's member registry.

Ensembles led by an artistic director:

Borderlands Theater, Tucson, AZ, http://www.borderlandstheater.org/

The Carpetbag Brigade, San Francisco, CA, https://carpetbagbrigade.wordpress.com/

Artist's Laboratory Theater, Fayetteville, AK, http://artlabtheatre.com/

13th Floor, San Francisco, CA, http://www.13thfloortheater.org/

Animal Cracker Conspiracy, San Diego, CA, *NWL*

Black Swan Arts & Media, Oakland, CO, http://www.blackswanarts.org/

Cornerstone Theater Company, Los Angeles, CA, http://cornerstonetheater.org/

Critical Mass Performance Group, Los Angeles, CA,

http://www.criticalmassperformancegroup.com/

Dandelion Dance Theater, Oakland, CA, http://www.dandeliondancetheater.org/

Dell'Arte International, Blue Lake, CA, http://dellarte.com/

Eye Zen Presents, Emeryville, CA, http://www.eyezen.org/

foolsFURY Theater Company, San Francisco, CA, http://foolsfury.org/

Four Clowns, Los Angeles, CA, http://fourclowns.org/

Los Angeles Poverty Department, Los Angeles, CA, https://www.lapovertydept.org/

Ragged Wing Ensemble, Oakland, CA, http://www.raggedwing.org/

Rogue Artist Ensemble, Los Angeles, CA, https://www.rogueartists.org/

Theatre Movement Bazaar, Los Angeles, CA, http://www.theatremovementbazaar.org/

Theatre of Yugen, San Francisco, CA, http://www.theatreofyugen.org/

square product theatre, Boulder, CO, http://www.squareproducttheatre.org/

Su Teatro, Denver, CO, http://suteatro.org/

Telluride Theatre, Telluride, CO, http://telluridetheatre.org/

ARTFARM, Middletown, CT, http://www.art-farm.org/

HartBeat Ensemble, Hartford, CT, http://www.hartbeatensemble.org/

dog & pony dc, Washington DC, https://dogandponydc.com/

Out of Hand Theatre, Atlanta, GA, http://outofhandtheater.com

The Object Group, Decatur, GA, *NWL*

Honolulu Theatre for Youth, Honolulu, HI, http://www.htyweb.org/

Kumu Kahua, Honolulu, HI, http://www.kumukahua.org/

On The Spot Improv, Mililani, HI, www.otsimprov.com

PlayBuilders of Hawai'i Theater Company, Honolulu, HI, http://www.playbuilders.org/

Migration Theory, Boise, ID, www.migrationtheory.org

Halycon Theatre, Chicago, IL, halcyontheatre.org

Lookingglass Theatre, Chicago, IL, https://lookingglasstheatre.org/

Rivendell Theatre Ensemble, Chicago, IL, http://rivendelltheatre.org/

ArtSpot Productions, New Orleana, LA, http://www.artspotproductions.org/

Goat in the Road Productions, New Orleans, LA, http://goatintheroadproductions.org/

Junebug Productions, New Orleans, LA, www.gomela.org

Mondo Bizarro, New Orleans, LA, http://www.mondobizarro.org/

Beau Jest Moving Theatre, Portland, ME, http://www.beaujest.com/

Happenstance Theater, Rockville, MD, www.happenstancetheater.com

Infinite Stage, Silver Springs, MD, http://www.infinitestage.com/

Single Carrot Theatre, Baltimore, MD, http://singlecarrot.com/

ANIKAYA/Akhra, Inc., Somerville, MA, https://anikaya.org/

Eggtooth Productions, Greenfield, MA, http://eggtooth.org/

ETTA International & The Rainbow Players, Shutesbury, MA, http://www.etta-international.org/

Ko Theater Works, Amherst, MA, http://www.kofest.com/

Serious Play! Theatre Ensemble, Northampton, MA, http://www.seriousplay.org/

Sleeping Weazel, Boston, MA, http://www.sleepingweazel.com/

A Host of People, Detroit, MI, http://www.ahostofpeople.org/

The Hinterlands Ensemble, Detroit, MI, http://thehinterlandsensemble.org/

Children of the Wild, Ashfield, MA, www.childrenofthewild.org

DalekoArts, New Prague, MN, http://dalekoarts.com/

Green T Productions, St. Paul, MN, http://www.greentproductions.org/

Pangea World Theater, Minneapolis, MN, http://www.pangeaworldtheater.org/

Sandbox Theatre, Minneapolis, MN, http://www.sandboxtheatreonline.com/

Six Elements Theatre Company, St. Paul, MN, http://www.sixelementscompany.org/

aetherplough, Omaha, NE, http://www.aetherplough.com/

theatre KAPOW, Manchester, NH, http://www.tkapow.com/

Blackout Theatre, Albuquerque, NM, http://www.blackouttheatre.com/

B3W Performance Group, Jackson Heights, NY, http://www.b3w.org/

Blessed Unrest, New York, NY, http://blessedunrest.org/

Bond Street Theatre, New York, NY, http://www.bondst.org/

BrickaBrack, New York, NY, http://www.brickabrack.org/

Chinese Theatre Works, Long Island City, NY, http://www.chinesetheatreworks.org/

Civic Ensemble, Ithaca, NY, http://civicensemble.org/

Convergences Theatre Collective, New York, NY, http://www.convergencescollective.org/

Drama of Works, Brooklyn, NY, https://www.dramaofworks.com/

HonestAccomplice, New York, NY, http://www.honestaccomplice.org/

Irondale Ensemble Project, Brooklyn, NY, http://irondale.org/

Letter of Marque Theater Company, Brooklyn, NY, http://www.lomtheater.org/

Mabou Mines, New York, NY, http://www.maboumines.org/

NACL Theatre, Highland Lakes, NY, www.nacl.org

Negerkunst Studio, Hastings on the Hudson, NY, www.negerkunst.com

Parallel Exit, Brooklyn, NY, http://parallelexit.com/

Ping Chong & Company, New York, NY, http://www.pingchong.org/

Pregones Theater, Bronx, NY, http://pregonesprtt.org/

RenegadePG, Brooklyn, NY, http://www.renegadepg.com/

Ripe Time, Brooklyn, NY, http://ripetime.org/

SITI Company, New York, NY, http://siti.org/

Sojourn Theatre, New York, NY, http://www.sojourntheatre.org/

Soledad Ensemble, New York, NY, *NWL*

The Civilians, Brooklyn, NY, http://www.thecivilians.org/

The New Stage Theatre Company, New York, NY, http://www.newstagetheatre.org/

The New Wild, Brooklyn, NY, www.thenewwild.org

The Syndicate, Brooklyn, NY, http://www.wearethesyndicate.com/

The Ume Group, New York, NY, http://www.theumegroup.org/

Theater Mitu, New York, NY, http://www.theatermitu.org/

Theatre Nohgaku, New York, NY, http://www.theatrenohgaku.org/

This is Not a Theater Company, New York, NY, https://www.thisisnotatheatrecompany.com/

Urban Bush Women, Brooklyn, NY, http://urbanbushwomen.org/

WaxFactory, New York, NY, http://waxfactory.nyc/

Cleveland Public Theater, Cleveland, OH, http://www.cptonline.org/

New World Performance Laboratory, Akron, OH, https://nwplab.com/

Wandering Aesthetics, Akron, OH, http://www.watheatre.com/

Hand2Mouth Theatre, Portland, OR, http://www.hand2mouththeatre.org/

Shaking the Tree Theatre, Portland, OR, http://www.shaking-the-tree.com/

Applied Mechanics, Philadelphia, PA, http://www.appliedmechanics.us/

Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, Bloomsburg, PA, http://www.bte.org/

<fidget>, Philadelphia, PA, www.thefidget.org

Hatch Arts Collective, Pittsburgh, PA, http://www.hatcharts.org/

idiosynCrazy productions, Philadelphia, PA, http://idiosyncrazy.org/

New Paradise Laboratories, Philadelphia, PA, http://newparadiselaboratories.org/

Ombelico Mask Ensemble, Philadelphia, PA, http://www.ombelicomask.org/

Sam Tower + Ensemble, Philadelphia, PA, http://samtower-ensemble.org/

Swim Pony Performing Arts, Philadelphia, PA, https://swimpony.org/

Team Sunshine Performance Corporation, Philadelphia, PA,

http://www.teamsunshineperformance.com/

The Bearded Ladies Cabaret, Philadelphia, PA, http://beardedladiescabaret.com/

Touchstone Theatre, Northampton, PA, http://www.touchstone.org/

The Berserker Residents, Philadelphia, PA, http://www.berserkerresidents.com/

Strange Attractor Theatre Co., Newport, RI, https://www.strangeattractor.org/

Antigravity Theatre Project, Warwick, RI, https://antigravitytheatreproject.org/

Andrea Ariel Dance Theatre, Austin, TX, http://www.arieldance.org/

DNAWORKS, Santa Fe, NM, http://www.dnaworks.org/

Forklift Danceworks, Austin, TX, http://www.forkliftdanceworks.org/

Generic Ensemble Company, Austin, TX, http://genenco.org/

Next Iteration Theatre Company, Houston. TX, http://www.nextiterationtheater.com/

Progress Theatre, Houston, TX, http://www.progresstheatre.com/

TAPROOT, Charlotte, NC, http://www.digdeepgetdirty.com/

Sandglass Theater, Putney, VT, http://sandglasstheater.org/

Akropolis Performance Lab, Lake Forest Park, WA, http://www.akropolisperformancelab.com/

eSe Teatro, Seattle, WA, http://eseteatro.org/

Fantastic.Z Theatre, Seattle, WA, http://www.fantasticz.org/

Square Top Theatre, Spokane, WA, http://www.squaretoptheatre.org/

The Horse in Motion, Seattle, WA, http://www.thehorseinmotion.org/

UMO Ensemble, Seattle, WA, http://umo.org/

TAPIT/new works Ensemble, Madison, WI, http://www.tapitnewworks.org/

Ensembles working as a true collective:

Flam Chen, Tucson, AZ, http://flamchen.com/

Post Natyam Collective, Los Angeles, CA, http://www.postnatyam.net/

Right Brain Performancelab, San Francisco, CA, http://www.performancelab.org/

Buntport Theater Company, Denver, CO, buntport.com

A Broken Umbrella Theatre, New Haven, CT, http://abrokenumbrella.org/

Guerilla Opera, Middlesex, MA, *NWL*

The Peñasco Theatre Collective, Peñasco, NM, http://www.penascotheatercollective.org/

Flux Theatre Ensemble, Forest Hills, NY, http://www.fluxtheatre.org/

New Light Theater Project, New York, NY, http://www.newlighttheaterproject.com/

New York Neo-Futurists, New York, NY, http://www.nynf.org/

Strike Anywhere Performance Ensemble, New York, NY, http://www.strikeanywhere.info/

thingNY, Queens, NY, http://www.thingny.com/

AGA Collaborative, Albuquerque, NM, http://www.agacollaborative.org/

Lightning Rod Special, Philadelphia, PA, https://lightningrodspecial.com/

PEP, Charlottesville, VA, http://www.performers-exchange.org/

Victory Hall Opera, Charlottesville, VA, http://www.victoryhallopera.org/

Ensembles categorized as unclear:

Grey Box Collective, Tempe, AZ, http://www.greyboxcollective.com/

PULL Project, Gardena, CA, NWL, *D*

UpLift Physical Theatre, *IAW*

Lisa Fay and Jeff Glassman Duo, Urbana, IL, http://www.lisafayandjeffglassmanduo.org/, *D*

Bird on a Wire, Goshen, IN, *NWL*

Danger Boat Productions, Minneapolis, MN, http://dangerboat.net/, *D*

Shooting Columbus Ensemble, Tucson, AZ, www.deniseuyehara.com

Pang!, Los Angeles, CA, http://danfroot.com/

The Independent Eye, Sebastapol, CA, *IAW*

SuarezDance, Santa Monica, CA, http://www.suarezdance.org/

Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health, Chicago, IL www.icah.org/

The Warehouse Project & Gallery, Summit, IL, http://www.thewarehouseprojectgallery.org/

First Generation, Northampton, MA, http://www.performanceproject.org/

New Orleans Queer Youth Theatre, New Orleans, LA, http://www.loudnola.org/

Fire Drill, Plymouth, MN, http://fire-drill.org/, *D*

EarSay, Sunnyside, NY, www.earsay.org

Is This You Productions, New York, NY, *NWL*

Almanac Dance Circus Theatre, Philadelphia, PA, https://www.thealmanac.us/

Looking for Lilith, Louisville, KY, *NWL*

LastCall, New Orleans, LA, *IAW*

Theater Offensive, Boston, MA, *NWL*

zAmya Theatre Project, Minneapolis, MN, *NWL*

M.U.G.A.B.E.E. (Men Under Guidance Acting Before Early Extinction), Utica, MS, *IAW*

The Weft and the Weave, Las Vegas, NV, *NWL*

Theatre Grottesco, Santa Fe, NM, *NWL*, *NB*

Tricklock Company, Albuquerque, NM, *NWL*

Frozen Feet Theater, New York, NY http://www.frozenfeettheater.org/

People of Interest, Staten Island, NY, *NWL*

North Carolina Theatre for Young People, Greensboro, NC, *IAW*

Fuse Theatre Ensemble, Portland, OR, https://www.facebook.com/FuseTheatreEnsemble/

VORTEX Repertory Company, Austin, TX, *NWL*

WHEW, Houston, TX www.whewnow.org

Roadside Theater, Norton, VA, *NWL*

theater simple, Seattle, WA, https://www.theatersimple.org/

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