A STAGE OF OUR OWN:
WOMEN DEVISING THEATRE IN AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND

BY

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Abstract

Women have been at the forefront of devised theatre since it became a prevalent method of making in New Zealand in the 1970s, and yet they are underrepresented in our history and discourse. Scholars across the globe have written about the connection between women and devised theatre. In 2016, Syssoyeva and Proudfit went so far as to say that “The history of modern theatre is a history of collaborative methods and the history of collaborative methods is a women’s history” (5). However, almost no literature exists in New Zealand about women in devised theatre. This thesis begins that research by making some of the history of women devising in New Zealand more visible and asks how this new knowledge could affect the current experience of women in devised theatre.

This study originates from my own devising experiences as a woman theatre practitioner and investigates the perceived tension between our undocumented history and the problematic experiences of women in devising today. The autoethnographic methodological approach of this research included interviews with thirteen individual women who were selected as significant devising practitioners and an online questionnaire exploring gender in devised theatre that collected over 100 anonymous responses. This led to six months of practice as research where myself and four other women devised a series of showings that focused on process not product. Using an intersectional feminist approach, we explored gendered behaviour in a devising process and investigated possible solutions to some of the difficulties that we, the interviewees and the questionnaire respondents had experienced. Overall, the thesis demonstrates that the lack of knowledge about our own devising theatre history, and the scarcity of documentation in our industry means that it is difficult for practitioners to learn from one another, to progress the conversation, and to create devised theatre spaces that are free from oppression.
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Forgive yourself for the decisions you have made. The ones you still call mistakes when you tuck them in at night.

And know this:

Know you are the type of woman who is searching for a place to call yours.

Let the statues crumble. You have always been the place.

You are a woman who can build it yourself. You were born to build.

Extract from *The Type* by Sarah Kay
1 Introduction

1.1 PROLOGUE

In my life I have been interrupted. I have been ignored and I have been talked over. I have had my ideas taken by other people who then present them as their own - sometimes they do not even realise that they are doing this. This happens in day-to-day life, it happens in rehearsal spaces, and in devising rooms. Not only that, it happens in places where I have absolutely no control over it. In a review of _A Show About Superheroes_ (2014), a play that I performed in and helped create, I had my name left out of a credit to My Accomplice, the theatre company that I co-founded. The reviewer misinterpreted the programme and credited many of our productions to the two men in our company, ignoring my significant involvement in all of them. In a national magazine listing I have had my name completely misprinted for a play I co-wrote; and in the list of the 2014 Chapman Tripp Theatre Award\(^1\) nominations, published in the Dominion Post newspaper, my name was not listed beside _Everything is Surrounded by Water_ (2014), the play I co-wrote that was nominated for Outstanding New New Zealand Play of the Year. My contribution to these projects was being erased by the media.

Fast forward to 2018 where we are living in a #MeToo and Time’s Up\(^2\) world with silences being broken all around the globe. Despite this progress, a major news outlet for the

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\(^1\) The Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards were an annual awards ceremony celebrating theatre in Wellington New Zealand. They were established in 1992, and since 2015 they have been called The Wellington Theatre Awards.

\(^2\) #MeToo is a movement founded by Tarana Burke in 2006. The MeToo hashtag spread virally in October 2017 on social media to help demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment. Time’s Up is also a movement against sexual harassment founded on 1\(^{st}\) January 2018, by Hollywood celebrities in response to the allegations of sexual harassment in the industry and #MeToo.
Wellington region recently published a diminishing and derogatory interview with the directors of two of the biggest arts festivals in New Zealand; the New Zealand Fringe Festival and the New Zealand Festival. The reporter commented on the directors’ bodies, appearance, fashion choices, and continually referred to them by their gender and not their job title (see Figure 1). The outrage from the New Zealand theatre community was immediate. A petition to “Stop Sexist Media” which was started on Change.org, has garnered at least 2,238 signatures and resulted in several letters to the editor. This sort of sexist commentary focusing on women’s bodies rather than on the creative work they do and the significant contributions that they make occurs all around the world, and it is simply unacceptable. New Zealand has a wealth of powerful and dynamic women who have been making theatre and art for decades and they are refusing to be silent. They need to be acknowledged, their work needs to be documented and studied, so that we can learn from each other.

Then our industry may have the potential, as Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement write in *Upstaging Big Daddy*, to forcibly intervene “in the dreary cycle by which distorted representations lie unchallenged and after a while, become substitutes for deeper truths” (Donkin and Clement 2).

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**A festival born on the fringes**

As the fat lady sings for one festival, another is still cranking along, reports Tom Hunt.

One arrives on a pushbike in a yellow, fruit-themed dress and pink highlights in her hair. The other is dressed in charcoal and black. New Zealand Fringe Festival Wellington director Hannah Clarke and New Zealand Festival director Shelagh Magadza have different looks but the pair agree on a lot. For one, they both like art. “It is OK to fail,” Clarke says. She is not referring to her clothes but rather to the 150 eclectic, sometimes bizarre, often low-budget shows that make up this year’s Wellington Fringe Festival, which still has a week to run after the international festival wraps up.

For Magadza, who is running her final festival, failure would not be so nice. The number of shows — many significantly more polished, with bigger budgets — that have sold out in her event suggests she will be fine.

Neither woman gets much time to see one another’s festival but they agree that the fringe was born from the international festival and they live alongside each other symbolically.

It was about 1990 that Wellington’s arts community started discussing that it was missing out on performing when all the big acts came to town for the international festival.

So the international festival called a meeting with local artists, city councillors, and other arts organisations and the New Zealand Fringe Festival was born.

It was hardly a new idea. Edinburgh’s massive fringe festival was

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*Figure 1: Screenshot of Dominion Post article by Tom Hunt taken from PressReader.com*
My research into women in devised theatre in New Zealand began in 2010 and was inspired by my involvement in a devising process where I did not use my voice. Maybe I was not interrupted or ignored during that process, but I was too afraid and nervous most of the time to offer up my opinions. It was my first experience devising a two-act performance through collaboration. This production not only inspired me to continue devising as a way of making theatre, it also created a thirst for knowledge, to understand how and why devising works and what can happen when it goes wrong. In 2010, I embarked on my Honours degree in theatre where I wrote a dissertation about women in devising in New Zealand. That work served as a broad introduction to the topic, but it was only scratching the surface of several decades of devised work made by women theatre practitioners in New Zealand. This PhD project continues that research.

**Researcher Perspective**

In his formative text on performance theory, Richard Schechner wrote, “Who I am is not irrelevant. I will be leading you on a journey. You ought to know a little about your guide” (Schechner 1). This research was conducted, and this thesis was written from my own perspective, which at the time of writing, is the western perspective of a twenty-nine-year-old female Pākehā New Zealander with over a decade of experience within the New Zealand theatre industry as a performer, devisor, writer, director and producer. Academic writing is often distant and impersonal, where even researchers in Humanities are “usually expected to be scientists, collecting technical data by rigorous methods, making hypotheses and testing them” (Traweek 432). In *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (2010), Nina Lykke agrees that “A traditional scientific report indicates the identity of its narrator via the name on the book cover... But in the text itself, readers do not meet a textually personified version of this name” (Lykke 164). However, Lykke argues that in “Feminist Studies texts, which epistemologically are based on a politics of location and situated knowledges, will often focus on the question of how the researcher subject is written into the text” (Lykke 165). As this project has developed

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3 Pākehā (noun) New Zealander of European descent - probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa/New Zealand (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
from my own experience and creative practice, I cannot, as the researcher, be completely separate from the research and my own voice will be present at different points throughout the thesis.

As Schechner notes, “You ought to know a little about your guide,” therefore it is useful to include some information here about my background, particularly my theatre career, because it has influenced how I have approached this project (1). I have been working as a theatre practitioner since moving to Wellington in 2007 where I completed my undergraduate and honours degree in Theatre at Victoria University of Wellington. In 2009 I was one of the devisors and performers in the BATS Theatre STAB commission Death and the Dreamlife of Elephants by A Slightly Isolated Dog and performed in the return season at Downstage Theatre in 2011. I have been a freelance producer on several productions, and most significantly for this project, I produced MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand (2010) which is one of the case studies for this research and is discussed in Chapter Three. I am also one of the founders and creative directors of My Accomplice along with Uther Dean and Paul Waggott. Since 2009 we have made fifteen shows together, several of which have won New Zealand Fringe Festival Awards and have been nominated for Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards. The productions of My Accomplice have been a combination of devising and script-based work. Even when we have a text, we use many devising techniques in our rehearsal rooms. In 2014 our STAB Production, WATCH by Uther Dean and Meg Rollandi, re-opened BATS Theatre at its newly renovated Kent Tce home, and won several Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards. This theatre work, alongside my tutoring experience in the Theatre Programme at Victoria University, has led me to approach this project as a practitioner, investigating the problems that I have faced within the industry.

4 BATS Theatre is a not-for-profit performance venue established in 1989 in Wellington. It was renovated in 2014 and now has three performance spaces. The majority of productions staged there are New Zealand works.
5 Originating in 1995, STAB is a valuable and sought-after commission awarded by BATS Theatre, with the assistance of Creative New Zealand (the main funding body in New Zealand), to allow theatre artists to experiment in a supportive environment.
6 Downstage Theatre which was the longest running theatre in New Zealand was established in Wellington in 1964. It closed in 2013 due to a lack of adequate and stable funding. The theatre building itself that housed Downstage is known as the Hannah Playhouse and is still available as a venue for hire.
The Context of New Zealand in Devised Theatre

New Zealand has a strong history of colonial style theatre from the United Kingdom and Europe, but also very much present within our theatre ecology is Māori and Pacific Theatre which flourished in the 1980s. The combination of these influences makes for a unique style often referred to as hybrid or syncretic theatre which uses Western dramaturgy or practices to highlight indigenous or Pākehā perspectives. In The World Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Theatre: Volume 5 Asia/Pacific, the section discussing New Zealand written by David Carnegie with Rose Beauchamp and Anne Forbes, still presents an accurate picture of the New Zealand theatre industry and community despite being published in 1998. Carnegie states that:

- Subsidized professional theatre in New Zealand divides into three main categories: producer theatres (with their own buildings), producer companies (with no venue), and mixed producer/presenter venues (companies with their own building which mount some plays themselves as well as making their theatre available to outside shows) … Artistic personnel often move from one theatre to another, sometimes being hired just for an individual show. A loose company may be created from time to time, since the professional theatre population is very small… Non-venue producer companies tend to be small and are more likely to rely on project funding than annual funding from the Arts Council.7 (Carnegie 336)

It is worth noting that in the section on dramaturgy Carnegie discusses the plays of Renée and Lorae Parry and writes, “Women writers were prominent in amateur playwrighting competitions in the period before and after World War II, but not until the 1980s did many women playwrights come to national attention on the professional stage” (Carnegie 345). There is a brief mention of devising when Carnegie discusses the work of Theatre At

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7 The Arts Council is now known as Creative New Zealand (CNZ).
Large and other key devising companies such as: Theatre Action, Red Mole and Dramadillo, who are all are mentioned in the section on Puppet and Mask Theatre. However, there is no explicit discussion of women in devised theatre and barely any mention of feminist theatre in New Zealand.

In *Performing Aotearoa: New Zealand Theatre and Drama in an Age of Transition* (2007), Marc Maufort writes that the “extraordinary productivity of the New Zealand stage has not received its full scholarly recognition thus far” (Maufort 13). *Performing Aotearoa*, edited by Maufort and David O’Donnell, offers a review of the critical literature published about New Zealand theatre up until 2007, and a series of essays discussing a broader “range of perspectives on the history of New Zealand theatre and drama in the past forty years or so, combining dramatics, theatrical, historical, gender studies, and dramaturgical perspectives” (Maufort 14). Within this volume is a chapter by Murray Edmond called “Re-membering the Remembering Body: ‘Autonomous Theatre’ in New Zealand,” where he discusses some of the early devised theatre in New Zealand, and a chapter by Stuart Young titled “Masque(e)rades of Masculinity: Cross-Dressing Women on the New Zealand Stage.” While this text offers a more modern discourse on theatre in New Zealand, it is now over a decade old and does not explicitly explore the connection between women and devised theatre.

Heddon and Milling write that “At the core of all devising or collaborative creation is a process of generating performance, although there is an enormous variety of devising processes used” (Heddon and Milling 3). This is certainly true of the theatre industry in New Zealand and devised theatre is particularly prevalent in this country. A significant

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8 Theatre At Large was co-founded by Anna Marbrook and Christian Penny in 1990. They were influenced by Théâtre de Complicite and French clown-master Philippe Gaulier.
9 Theatre Action was founded by Francis Batten in 1971 after studying with Jacques Lecoq in France. This is a lineage which has continued with many New Zealand theatre practitioners studying with Lecoq or at Ecole Philippe Gaulier.
10 Red Mole was co-founded by Alan Brunton and Sally Rodwell in 1974 and are one of New Zealand’s most well-known alternative theatre companies. They toured their rough political devised theatre both nationally and internationally and were based in New York in the late 70s and early 80s.
11 Dramadillo was a touring physical theatre company founded by Nick Blake in 1982. They worked a lot with Francis Batten.
amount of the original work in our Fringe Festivals is devised; a quick glance through the programmes reveals very few productions with a designated writer or playwright. In fact, the three nominations for Production of the Year at the 2017 Wellington Theatre Awards were all created collaboratively or devised (Wellington Theatre Awards – “Awards 2017”). There are several possible reasons why devising is such a popular method of theatre making in this country, some of which will be discussed in Chapter Two. One could make the connection between devising and the stereotypical “do-it-yourself” attitude of New Zealanders. This “number 8 wire mentality” lends itself to the process of devising and collaborating to create something new with whatever resources are available. As New Zealand is borderless, international devising practices and processes of influence must travel to this country. Ways of making and teaching are then passed down and consequently they evolve and change.

At this point I would like to clarify the terms and definitions that this thesis employs. In New Zealand, the most common term used when describing theatre that is made collaboratively, sometimes without the involvement of a writer, is ‘devising.’ Therefore, this is the term that I will use throughout. However, I am aware that some definitions are difficult to clarify and as Syssoyeva and Proudfit articulate in their text Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance, “one person’s devising is another’s collective creation; indeed, one person’s collective creation may be another’s directorial dominance” (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 5). They suggest that this is a problem in academic and professional jargon, and in collective theatre-making because, “all language refuses to stay put and signify neatly” (5). However, Syssoyeva and Proudfit do helpfully explain the shift to using the word ‘devising’ as we use today. They write that:

The historical shift to the term *devising* (a word which emerges into increasingly widespread usage in Canada, England, and the United States in the 1990s) marks an apparent practical shift away from overt emphasis on the perceived political potential of communitarian collaborative practices, to a more emphatically aesthetic emphasis on the generation of new work, irrespective of the politics of group dynamic. Devising, simply put, seems to lean toward some version of
creation ex nihilo, and away from a concern with ideologies of group practice. (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 8)

However, as this thesis will argue, consideration of the political group dynamic within a devising process is essential for that process to be emotionally ethical and sustainable.

The connection between feminist theatre and devised theatre has been written about by many international scholars such as: Alison Oddey, Elaine Aston, Sue-Ellen Case, Lizbeth Goodman, Elin Diamond, Alex Mermikides, and Jackie Smart among others. This thesis explores the connection between women and devising from the unique perspective of New Zealand.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study focuses on making visible some of the history of women’s devising in New Zealand and explores, through case studies and practice as research, how new knowledge could affect the experience of women in devising rooms today. After reviewing the relevant literature in my field which includes: devised theatre, feminist theatre, women in devised theatre, and devised theatre in New Zealand; I developed a set of questions around women in devising in New Zealand and collated various problematic experiences in devising rehearsal rooms. For the purposes of this study, the “problematic experiences” specifically refer to the negative experiences of women in devising processes in New Zealand. The discovery of these issues originates from both my own experience and the experiences of my creative research collaborators, and the experiences of my primary research participants, consisting of thirteen interviewees and over 100 questionnaire respondents. While this study is not attempting to solve these problems or eliminate any negative involvements in devising processes, I am hoping to open up this conversation, make these women visible and their voices heard, and offer some practical and philosophical suggestions about how we could improve devising processes in New Zealand.
The primary question that this study explored was:

❖ Despite a strong history of feminist devising in New Zealand since the 1970s, women are still often having negative experiences in devised theatre. By exploring devising processes through an intersectional feminist methodology, with qualitative and practice as research, how could we improve women’s experience in devised theatre processes in New Zealand in the 21st Century?

The secondary questions that this study explored were:

❖ How have the contributions of women theatre practitioners affected devised theatre in New Zealand?
❖ While a lack of documentation is an industry wide issue in New Zealand theatre, the documentation that does exist tends to focus on and emphasise script-based work. Therefore, what have been the consequences for our theatre industry if the work of women devisors in New Zealand has been undocumented for so many years?
❖ How does gender affect the dynamic and the power structures in devising processes in New Zealand?
❖ How can you make your voice/someone else’s voice heard in a devising room? How can we navigate the opportunity to speak versus the ability to speak?
❖ How can doubt and the unknown be used as a positive feminine force within devising rooms to alleviate anxiety and encourage equal collaboration?

I would like to acknowledge now that this research is of course limited in its scope. This study explores the experience of women because I chose to write from my own perspective. I have focused on women while being wary of invoking a “sole feminine subject, ‘woman,’ who embodies universal criteria without regard for intersecting hierarchies of power” (Vigoya 861). This study seeks to include anyone who identifies as a woman or with the female gender. Gender is of course a vulnerable term, constantly subject and subjected to change. In her ground-breaking work discussing gender as a
performative act in *Theatre Journal* in 1988, Judith Butler wrote that gender is “…an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts” (Butler 519). In the chapter “Performativity and Performance,” Moya Lloyd uses Oakley (1972) to demonstrate that a classic differentiation between sex and gender is that “…sex was regarded as the fixed biological bedrock upon which culturally variable gender, masculinity, and femininity, was constructed” (Lloyd 573). However, Lloyd goes on to discuss Judith Butler’s argument in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that “…sex is just as constructed as gender” (Lloyd 573).

This thesis will attempt to avoid using essentialist binaries such as woman versus man, although some interviewees and questionnaire respondents have used these terms. I will instead focus on feminine and masculine behaviours. In *Gender and Qualitative Methods*, Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkko write that, “Feminist theorists use concepts of feminine and masculine to refer to social constructions” and that it is useful to “think of femininity in the plural – femininities – and to see femininity as an umbrella term for all the different ways in which women are defined by others and by themselves” (Järviluoma, Moisala and Vilkko 16-17). While these behaviours are socially constructed and contentious, they are still present within the collaborative environment of a devising room and are useful in order to discuss the research I have conducted. I will discuss some specifics of these behaviours in section 1.4.

### 1.3 METHODOLOGY

“Great art accumulates relevance and meaning as it moves beyond the control of its creators; weak art decides in advance what the piece is about.”

(Peggy Phelan 571)

As outlined in 1.1 Prologue, my experience with devising theatre began in 2009, which was followed by my Honours dissertation in 2010. Therefore, this PhD research has
always been fuelled and inspired by my own experience working in collaborative devising processes. This required an integrated methodological model using qualitative research and practice as research. The data collection for this research included an anonymous questionnaire, interviews with thirteen key informants and a series of comparative case studies. The questionnaire was created via an online survey platform and distributed by email and social media amongst theatre practitioners who had some experience with devised theatre. It received over 100 responses from a range of theatre artists. The key informants for the interviews were selected carefully; they are all women at different stages of their theatre careers. Some were chosen as they were the directors or leaders of the nominated case studies. Others were chosen due their significant impact on the contemporary theatre industry, particularly as devisors or makers of their own work, or because they are current leading voices within our theatre industry. The interviews followed a semi-structured method where a flexible approach to questioning is taken in order to allow the researcher freedom to respond to each individual (Sarantakos 179). In addition to the interviews with the key creatives of each of the case studies, I also interviewed: Claire O’Loughlin of critically acclaimed devising company Binge Culture; Stella Reid and Jane Yonge, two young directors who were both nominated for Director of the Year at the 2017 Wellington Theatre Awards and worked together on the devised work *The Basement Tapes* (2017); Sophie Roberts who is the current Artistic Director of Silo Theatre in Auckland; and Jo Randerson, successful playwright and Artistic Director of Barbarian Productions, a hugely successful and influential collaborative company.

The case studies themselves have been selected to reflect a range of productions, styles and women makers of devised theatre in the 21st Century. They include:

- *Demeter’s Dark Ride* (2005) imagined and led by Madeline McNamara

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12 Established in 1997, Silo Theatre is a leading producer of contemporary work in New Zealand and curates annual seasons of work.
- **MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand** (2010) by MINGE Collective, directed by Fiona McNamara, and dramaturged by Eleanor Bishop
- **Dust Pilgrim** (2015) by Red Leap Theatre and directed by Julie Nolan
- **Power Ballad** (2017) by Julia Croft and directed by Nisha Madhan
- **Stages of Change** (2013/14 and 2016/17) by The Conch and directed by Nina Nawalowalo

The case studies changed significantly over the course of the research. Some were cut because they were development seasons and I believed it to be unfair to compare those works; some others were eliminated because as the research evolved they simply became less relevant. Other than **Sniper** and **Demeter’s Dark Ride**, I chose case studies where either I had already seen the work, or in the case of **Dust Pilgrim** and **Power Ballad**, I saw them while conducting my research. There is an online documentary about **Stages of Change** and I have seen The Conch do similar work with their Conchus Youth Programme performances at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. I used this approach of distant familiarity because information about devising productions of New Zealand’s past is scarce. Therefore, beyond interviews with practitioners, there was not a huge amount of information for me to draw on to build a picture of a production if I had not seen the performance myself. I would like to clarify here that other than **MINGE** I was not personally involved with any of these case studies. While I was the producer for **MINGE**, I was not a part of the devising, I did not attend rehearsals, and my name was only included on the poster because the decision was made that the entire collective should have their name acknowledged. The spirit behind this acknowledgement is also present within this thesis, and Appendix H contains lists of the original cast and crew for each of the productions discussed.

The primary research of the questionnaire, interviews and case studies then informed my own practice as research. This consisted of six months of practice as research where myself and four other women devised a series of showings that focused on process not product.
Using an intersectional feminist approach, we explored gendered behaviour in the devising rehearsal room and investigated possible solutions to some of the difficulties that we, the interviewees and the questionnaire respondents had experienced. These four collaborators were Meg Rollandi, Karin McCracken, Trae Te Wiki, and Isobel McKinnon. They were an integral part of this research project and through their involvement I was able to investigate feminist methodologies and devising techniques in an actual devising process. I also conducted individual interviews with Rollandi, McCracken, Te Wiki, and McKinnon at the conclusion of the practical research.

Performative research or creative research has many definitions and several different terminologies to describe it. In Dunedin Sounding: Place and Performance, Suzanne Little writes that, “Some of these definitions and terms overlap, and a number are used interchangeably. This may suggest a lack of rigour; however, it can be argued that it is due to the relative newness of the field” (Little 20). Common terms include: practice as research, performance as research, practice-led research, and practice-based research. For clarity, my thesis will use the term ‘practice as research,’ the only exception being when I am quoting from a source that uses a different term. Kershaw et al. explain that practice as research, “indicates the uses of practical creative processes as research methods (and methodologies) in their own right, usually but not exclusively in, or in association with, universities and other HE institutions” (Kershaw et al. 64). To explore this definition further, Brad Haseman in “A Manifesto for Performative Research” defines performative research as being similar to many aspects of qualitative research but with some key differences (Haseman 102). The distinction he claims “is found in the way it [performative research] chooses to express its findings… findings are expressed in non-numeric data, they present as symbolic forms other than in the words of discursive text. Instead, research reporting in this paradigm occurs as rich, presentational forms” (Haseman 102). In Research Methods in Theatre and Performance Kershaw et al. writes that, “…practice as research in the performing arts pursues hybrid enquiries combining creative doing with reflexive being, thus fashioning freshly critical interactions between current epistemologies and ontologies” (Kershaw et al. 64). However, as Andrew McNamara
writes in his article “Six rules for practice-led research,” there is a danger “if one’s own practice is the focus of the research enquiry,” because the researcher often becomes “over-reliant on the use of ‘I’” (5). He urges that for practice as research to be successful, researchers and artists need to “shift from the quasi-confessional mode of the artist statement to a research model that requires a critical reflection involving the communication of the contribution to knowledge and its findings” (McNamara 5). So, while this research had to come from my perspective, it needed to go beyond the parameters of my experience and analyse the devising practices of the wider New Zealand theatre community.

This led me to use the autoethnographic approach in my methodology. Ellis, Adams and Bochner define autoethnography as,

…an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner)

In Not Magic But Work: An ethnographic account of a rehearsal process Gay McCauley writes that, “The experience of ethnography is that the participant/observer in the field has to be both vitally enmeshed in the daily experiences of the people being studied and, at the same time, sufficiently distanced to make observations” (McCauley 9). Autoethnography however, deliberately includes personal experience to resist “colonialist, sterile research impulses of authoritatively entering a culture, exploiting cultural members, and then recklessly leaving to write about the culture for monetary and/or professional gain” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner). Autoethnography values stories as well as theories where the researcher’s own perspective becomes just as valid as those they are writing about. Ellis, Adams and Bochner write that autoethnography is trying to:
...concentrate on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that would sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner)

For this project, I specifically employed an autoethnographic layered account, which focuses “on the author’s experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner). This methodology allowed me to create a research model that avoided the trap of practice as research that McNamara describes, while still using my own personal experience and the experience of the community. The language that Ellis, Adams and Bochner use to describe layered accounts shares a lot of similarities with aspects of devising theatre processes. They write that,

...layered accounts use vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection to ‘invoke’ readers to enter into the ‘emergent experience’ of doing and writing research, conceive of identity as an ‘emergent process,’ and consider evocative, concrete texts to be as important as abstract analyses. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner)

In order to create an autoethnographic layered account I needed to lead the devising process of my creative component, but I also needed to perform in the showings. It was important for me to perform to experience as much of the process as possible. However, I do acknowledge that to lead a process I needed to be able to step outside of it. Consequently, there were multiple collaborators and performers so that I was able to see it from an outsider’s perspective. My reasoning for doing this is that the experience a performer has is profoundly different to that of a director, but both roles allow a researcher to collect valuable information. As a performer, one can engage with the audience empathetically, see their faces, respond to their energy, and witness the effect the work is having far more successfully than a director sitting in the audience. However, a director in a rehearsal room possesses more critical reflexivity as they can see the whole work while it is being made. By using an autoethnographic approach and performing and directing/leading, I could collect both kinds of research. There are limited resources when
studying devising in New Zealand, therefore my own experience and that of my collaborators is just as vital as existing academic texts. Our own practice has value, our personal experience is politically useful for this research.

Ellis, Adams and Bochner do acknowledge the various critiques of autoethnography. They write that, “Critics want to hold autoethnography accountable to criteria normally applied to traditional ethnographies or to autobiographical standards of writing. Thus, autoethnography is criticized for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner). Among other criticisms autoethnography is labelled as “insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and therapeutic” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner). However, I agree with Ellis, Adams and Bochner that these “criticisms erroneously position art and science at odds with each other,” which is an unhelpful binary for any research. Autoethnography is an appropriate methodology for this project because this research is inspired and fuelled not only by my own experience, but also by the experiences of my peers and colleagues in the New Zealand theatre industry. Like Ellis, Adams and Bochner I believe that:

…research can be rigorous, theoretical, and analytical and emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena. Autoethnographers also value the need to write and represent research in evocative, aesthetic ways. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner)

**Influencing Devising Methodologies**

This section details three significant and influential devising methodologies that are commonly used by devising practitioners, which were also employed throughout the practice as research by myself and my collaborators. We were greatly influenced by the primary research and the methods of the interviewees, but we also used the methodologies developed and written about by the women below.13

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13 It is worth noting that these methodologies were all developed by women, with the exception of RSVP Cycles, which were developed by a husband and wife, Lawrence and Anna Halprin. Anna is not credited as an author of the original text and is often left out by theatre scholars such as Richard Schechner in Performance Studies: An Introduction, where he credits Lawrence and his architect Jim Burns as the creators of RSVP.
RSVP CYCLES

Resource, Score, Valuation, Participation is a creative process developed by Lawrence and Anna Halprin and then published in RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment (1970). Gyllian Raby claims that Anna and Lawrence Halprin wrote this text “to free creators from normalizing cultural assumptions and to alert them to different creative strategies” (Raby 94). Raby goes on to discuss RSVP in detail in her article “Improvisation and Devising: The Circle of Expectation, the Invisible Hand, and RSVP.” Raby describes RSVP as a “compass of interconnective creative mindsets rather than a prescriptive ‘how-to’ methodology” (Raby 94). We used RSVP as our structure within the creative component because, “The range of creative modes inherent in RSVP serves a spectrum of voices... it invites shared ownership precisely as it resists normative and stereotypical narratives” (Raby 97). The different modes of RSVP are outlined in the table below using the descriptions for each from Lawrence Halprin’s own text (Halprin 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R</th>
<th>Resources which are what you have to work with. These include human and physical resources and their motivation and aims.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Scores which describe the process leading to the performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Valuation which analyses the results of action and possible selectivity and decisions. The term “valuation” is one coined to suggest the action-oriented as well as the decision-oriented aspects of V in the cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Performance which is the resultant of scores and is the “style” of the process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Meanings of the RSVP Cycles

However, the RSVP Cycles are not intended to be as linear as the above table implies. On the cover of Lawrence Halprin’s text RSVP Cycles is an image which far more accurately represents the creative process and shows how the cycles relate to each other. Lawrence Halprin explains that, “Each part had its own internal significance, but got really cracking only when it related to the others... Together I feel that these describe all the procedures inherent in the creative process” (Halprin 2). He also includes a simple compass diagram which can be seen in parts of the image below. Halprin writes that this compass diagram, “describes the multidimensional and moving interconnectedness between all the
elements of the cycle. It can alternatively read, P, R, S, V or any other combination… The sequence is completely variable depending on the situation, the scorer, and the intent” (Halprin 2).

Figure 3: Representation of the RSVP Cycles at work

RHIZOME THEORY

In the article “Devising theatre and consenting bodies in the classroom,” Mia Perry discusses the connections within a devised theatre piece using the structure of a botanical rhizome and nomadic thought as discussed by Deleuze and Guattari. She writes that, “A rhizome describes a network of lines rather than points, within which there are multiple entryways and places of departure, and every line can connect to any other…” (Perry 96). The natural shape of the rhizome provides a “symbolic structure” that resists binary thinking and hierarchical organizational systems (Perry 96). In a biological context the rhizome is a plant root structure that occurs underground. But when applied to theatre this theory is useful in order to create both the collaborative structure of the devising group and to understand how the dramaturgy of devising can operate as there can be many points of connection with the work, as opposed to a more traditional narrative of cause and effect. This simple biological image below illustrates the possible abstract difference between using a rhizomatic structure compared to the more hierarchical structure of a tree and its roots, which incidentally mirrors traditional patriarchal theatre organisations.
GROUND RULES AND PAPER WALLS

In Joan Schirle’s article, “Pothole in the Road to Devising,” she discusses some of the difficulties that she has experienced when devising and offers advice to help overcome these issues. There are two methodologies in particular that we employed throughout the practice as research. ‘Ground Rules’ is a process of the collaborative group creating a manifesto or basic guidelines at the beginning of a project, “as a way of hanging a banner of ideals and intentions” (Schirle 91). Schirle writes that “Collaborative principles encourage artists to develop trust and respect, come to a common understanding of the challenge, and to be clear about intention, roles, and agendas” (Schirle 91). During our process we devised a collaborative agreement which we added to throughout the six months. As a part of the second showing, these promises were written in chalk all around the outside of the performance space. Schirle’s other technique ‘Paper Walls’ is useful as it allows the group to visualise the work that you are making and enables you to record and structure the work. Schirle articulates that “In devising, there is always the possibility that you will end up with a piece very different from what you started to make…” (Schirle 94). In order to combat this, she suggests covering the walls of your rehearsal space in “long sheets of paper, labelled ‘theme,’ ‘intent,’ ‘characters,’ ‘scenes,’ ‘resources,’ and so
These pieces of paper become a compass or a road map that the group can use to stay on the intended course.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A feminist approach to anything means paying attention to women. It means paying attention when women appear as characters and noticing when they do not. It means making some ‘invisible’ mechanisms visible and pointing out, when necessary, that while the emperor has no clothes, the empress has no body.

(Gayle Austin 136)

To investigate the impact that women have had on devised theatre in New Zealand, the theoretical framework for this PhD will be based on feminist theatre theory. Some of these key feminist theatre texts include: Feminism and Theatre by Sue-Ellen Case (1988), Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own by Lizbeth Goodman (1993), Feminist Theatre and Theory by Helene Keyssar (1996), The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance edited by Lizbeth Goodman with Jane de Gay (1998), and Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook by Elaine Aston (1999). While Mark Fortier proposes in Theory/Theatre: An Introduction (1997), that feminism is the theory which has had the most significant impact on theatre and society in the past thirty years (Fortier 107), Goodman writes in Contemporary Feminist Theatres that, “There is not one feminism, nor one feminist theatre” (Goodman 3). Both Fortier and Goodman were writing in the 1990s and now in 2018 there are even more strands of feminism as the movement and theory has continued to grow and diversify.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory as a whole is too large a framework for this research. However, when one begins narrowing the focus to one particular strand of feminism, many difficulties can occur. Different political divisions of feminism often disagree with each other, and each
Gayle Austin writes in her chapter “Feminist Theories: Paying attention to women” that, “One of the most basic issues in working with feminist theory is defining the various political types of feminism and making one’s own preference clear at the onset of critical work” (Austin 137). However, Austin also cautions against putting too much importance on categories as there is a danger inherent in taking political sides (Austin 137). Austin goes on to discuss three categories of feminism that Sue-Ellen Case and Jill Dolan wrote about in their ground-breaking texts from 1988; liberal feminism, radical (or cultural) feminism and materialist feminism. Of these three strands of feminism Austin states that “both Dolan and Case prefer to adopt a materialist position” (Austin 137). For the purposes of this research a materialist feminist framework has some benefits. Austin summarises this division as:

**Materialist**

1. Minimizes biological differences between men and women
2. Stresses material conditions of production such as history, race, class, gender
3. Group more important than the individual.

(Austin 138)

Austin’s last point, that materialist feminism prioritizes the group over the individual, is especially important for this research as devised theatre also places great importance on the group because it is a collaborative art form.

I discussed earlier in this chapter how the concepts of sex, gender, masculinity and femininity are all socially constructed. However, it is worth unpacking some of the stereotypical behaviours that emerge from these concepts, as they can still cause issues in
devising processes. An influential study in feminist theory regarding concepts of androgyne and masculine and feminine behaviour, comes from the work of American psychologist Sandra Bem. In the 1970s, Bem developed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), a questionnaire designed to measure psychological androgyne. Bem published articles on this work in the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* in 1974 and the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* in 1975. Writing in 2003 in *Women and Men in Management*, Powell and Graves describe the BSRI instrument thus:

The BSRI contained 20 masculine items, 20 feminine items, and 20 filler items [thought to be gender neutral] ... Individuals were asked to rate the extent to which they thought each item was characteristic of themselves. Masculinity and femininity scores were calculated by averaging individuals’ self-ratings for the respective items. Rather than measuring beliefs about others, the BSRI measured beliefs about oneself in relation to traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity. (Powell and Graves 48)

Some of the categorised masculine items on the BSRI scale were: “aggressive,” “analytical,” “competitive,” “dominant,” “individualistic,” and “has leadership abilities” (Davis 59-60). While some of the feminine items included: “adaptable,” “conscientious,” “sincere,” “tactful,” “theatrical,” and “truthful” (Davis 59-60).

Since its development, the BSRI “has been widely used but also widely criticized” (Hoffman and Borders 39). In 2001, Rose Marie Hoffman and L. DiAnne Borders conducted a study called, “Twenty-five years after the Bem Sex-Role Inventory: A reassessment and new issues regarding classification variability.” Like Bem, Hoffman and Borders also surveyed a group of undergraduates, asking them how they felt about the BSRI traits, and they received markedly different results. Hoffman and Borders wrote that of all the BSRI traits:

...masculine and feminine were the only items on the entire inventory that met the 75% agreement level necessary to be classified as such... Clearly, college undergraduates in this study perceived BSRI items very differently from the gender-stereotypical way the 1970s college undergraduates who served as judges
While decades of feminist theory and studies like Hoffman and Borders’ from 2001, demonstrate that the cultural constructs of masculinity and femininity have obviously advanced since the 1970s, the constricting and stereotypical expectations around gender outlined in Bem’s BSRI scale can still be found in society today. The rhetoric surrounding the 2016 United States Presidential Election is clear evidence of this. Georgetown University linguistics professor Deborah Tannen wrote in Time magazine in March 2016 that, “While the requirements of a good leader and a good man are similar, the requirements of a good leader and a good woman are mutually exclusive… when [Hillary] Clinton is tough, a characteristic many see as unfeminine, it doesn’t feel right, so she must not be authentic” (Tannen). Some of these stereotypically gendered behaviours can also be found within my primary research in many of the questionnaire responses; several of my interviewees also discussed masculine and feminine behaviours and how these can affect their devising rehearsal rooms.

However, even with studies like these, gender and gendered behaviours are problematic to define and much of the research around it has been widely contested. In Cordelia Fine’s 2010 text Delusions of Gender: How our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference, Fine debunks the pseudo-scientific myth of hardwired difference between men’s and women’s brains. She asserts:

> When we confidently compare the “female mind” and the “male mind,” we think of something stable inside the head of the person, the product of a “female” or “male” brain… we can’t understand gender differences in female and male minds – the minds that are the source of our thoughts, feelings, abilities, motivations, and behaviour – without understanding how psychologically permeable is the skull that separates the mind from the sociocultural context in which it operates. (Fine xxvi)

Nevertheless, Fine also acknowledges how deeply engrained stereotypes are in our society and these have “a ripple effect on the mind” (Fine xxvi). She begins her first
chapter by describing a scenario where a researcher asks the reader to write lists that describe what men and women are like. Fine contends that it is unlikely the reader would object and exclaim, “what can you mean? Every person is a unique, multifaceted, sometimes even contradictory individual…” (Fine 3). Rather, Fine suggests that the reader would start writing and most likely the lists from a survey like this would end up representing old fashioned stereotypes. Fine writes:

One list would probably feature communal personality traits such as compassionate, loves children, dependent, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing. These, you will note, are ideal qualifications for someone who wishes to live to serve the needs of others. On the other character inventory we would see agentic descriptions like leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, competitive, dominant, independent, and individualistic. These are the perfect traits for bending the world to your command, and earning a wage for it. I don’t have to tell you which is the female list and which is the male one: you already know. (Fine 3-4, original emphasis)

Fine goes on in Delusions of Gender to analyse multiple pseudo-scientific studies around gender; she proves just how flimsy their arguments are and discusses the difficulty of making any conclusions about the differences of gender that do not take society into account. In the epilogue Fine writes, “…it is still the case today that gender inequalities, and the gender stereotypes they evoke, interact with our minds in ways that create inequality of access (237).

In light of these arguments, this research adopted aspects of post-structural feminism which is most concerned with a “radical deconstruction of the male/female binary” (Davies et al. 88). Writing in 2006, Davies et al. contend that the new feminist poststructuralist subject is theorized as “fluid, fragmented, with more open boundaries, as co-existing with the texts in which it is constituted, texts in which contradictions can be embraced, as texts that one can play with, and, through that play, generate new possibilities of being” (Davies et al 87-88). The description of this subject has clear parallels with a devising process. Post-structural feminism is a useful approach as it assists the research in examining devising processes by focusing on the importance of how
something is produced. A post-structural feminist approach enabled my collaborators and I to critique and question any underlying structures or binaries that existed in our rehearsal room.

A key underlying issue is the concept of power and the potentially problematic and unproductive dynamics that it can create in collaborative environments. As Foucault writes, “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 93). Many of the issues in devising processes cited by my interviewees and questionnaire respondents, could be categorised as problematic power dynamics. However, as Mary Beard articulates in her 2017 manifesto Women & Power, there are significant complexities in the relationship between gender and power. Beard writes that her basic premise is that:

…our mental, cultural template for a powerful person remains resolutely male. If we close our eyes and try to conjure up the image of a president or – to move into the knowledge economy – a professor, what most of us see is not a woman. And that is just as true even if you are a woman professor: the cultural stereotype is so strong that, at the level of those close-your-eyes fantasies, it is still hard for me to imagine me, or someone like me in my role. (Beard 53, original emphasis)

As a Classics professor at Newham College, Cambridge, Beard cites examples from thousands of years of literature as evidence that, “as far back as we can see in Western history there is a radical separation – real, cultural and imaginary – between women and power” (Beard 70). This separation could have a real effect on collaborative devising processes, particularly with multiple genders present within a room. Beard’s advice is that, “You cannot easily fit women into a structure that is already coded as male; you have to change the structure” (Beard 86-87). Consequently, by adopting a post-structural feminist approach in the practice as research, we were able to explore and question concepts of power within a woman only space. Beard writes that to do this we need to think “about power differently. It means decoupling it from public prestige. It means thinking collaboratively, about the power of followers not just of leaders. It means above
all, thinking about power as an attribute or even a verb (‘to power’), not as a possession” (Beard 87).

Despite the strength of materialist and post-structural feminist frameworks, they were developed several decades ago and glaringly omit the theory of intersectionality. Though the term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, the ideas behind it had existed within Black Feminism for decades. Intersectionality has only entered mainstream consciousness in the last decade or so, with an article appearing in the broadsheet The Telegraph in 2014 titled: “‘Intersectional feminism.’ What the hell is it? (And why you should care).” There has been much debate by feminist scholars about intersectionality in recent years and there are many critics of the theory as well as advocates. In Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing, Nina Lykke suggests a broad umbrella-like definition that says:

Intersectionality can, first of all, be considered as a theoretical and methodological tool to analyze how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations. (Lykke 50)

Brittney Cooper writes in The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory published in 2016, that intersectionality is “the most visible and enduring contribution that feminism, and in particular black feminism, has made to critical social theory in the last quarter century” (385). Despite its criticisms that “the framework does not sufficiently attend to a range of critical questions,” the acknowledgement that within any environment, (including a rehearsal room), there will be different intersecting groups with different levels of oppression, is really important to create an equal and healthy devising collaboration (385). As Cooper reminds us, “…intersectionality is most useful not as an account of all the intricacies of the subjectivity of any intersectional group, but rather it is useful for
exposing the operations of power dynamics in places where a single axis approach might render those operations invisible” (401).

The theory of intersectionality informed the practice as research by assisting me and my collaborators to analyse the intersections of power that occur within devised theatre in New Zealand, particularly those power dynamics that occur in rehearsal rooms. For example, when examining why a woman’s voice was being silenced within a devising process, intersectionality reminds us that there are many complex possibilities as to why that is occurring, as opposed to a single binary answer. Throughout the practice as research, my collaborators and I often discussed these potentially silencing intersections in terms of privilege. For instance, a wealthy white male is in a more privileged and “powerful” position to speak because they are not weighed down by the intersections of gender, race or class. Intersectionality is also relevant to my qualitative research in several ways. Firstly, it informed my approach for selecting the women devising practitioners who became my key informant interviewees, and my practice as research collaborators. As acknowledged at the beginning of the chapter, this research is written from my point of view, so when selecting the interviewees, it was critical to include a range of perspectives to diversify the research. The different intersections represented by my interviewees include: ethnicity, race, sexuality, age, and motherhood. While the interviewees all have some kind of tertiary qualification in theatre, their backgrounds are varied and include a wide-range of other subjects including: education/teaching, design, law, creative writing, and Māori resource management. Secondly, several of the case studies in this research have also been analysed using an intersectional framework, particularly those productions that are clearly examining gender, ethnicity, race, and/or class.

**Models from other disciplines**

This research also employs several practical theories drawn from other disciplines. In particular, Srilatha Batliwala’s work on Feminist Leadership. In the paper *Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud*, Batliwala attempts to
“pull together existing definitions and concepts around leadership, view these through a feminist lens, place them in the context of social justice and feminist leadership, and then attempt to articulate a new and more rigorous conceptual framework for feminist leadership” (Batliwala 4). Batliwala asserts how critical it is to examine not just what leadership is but what good leadership could be, especially in the context of feminist leadership, “…since our concern is not merely with capacitating more women to play leadership roles, but to lead differently, with feminist values and ideology” (Batliwala 5). Batliwala helpfully defines leadership and then goes on to discuss what feminist leadership looks like. Quoting Charlotte Bunch from 2002, Batliwala writes, “Studies have shown that women tend to lead more inclusively. They have been peace-makers and reached across ethnic lines… Women have led a lot, but their leadership is not recognized” (Bunch qtd in Batliwala 11). Batliwala also includes in her article some “Non-Negotiables” for Feminist Leadership. The first of these explicitly aligns with intersectional feminism: “Feminist leadership must include an active participatory attitude, and inclusion, at all levels of the organization. This applies particularly to integration of people/women from marginalized groups” (Batliwala 25, original emphasis). Several of the other “Non-Negotiables” also examine the use of power. Batliwala writes that “Decision-making must be transparent” and that this “involves a clear, shared decision-making process that pools strengths of participants, and allows everyone to have some power” (Batliwala 26). Furthering this, Batliwala writes that “our practice of power” has to be transformed by the “values, principles, and non-negotiables” that drive our feminist politics (Batliwala 26). She writes that, “Feminist leadership must be used to intervene in structures of power that keep the world unjust” (Batliwala 26).

I used Batliwala’s definitions of feminist leadership extensively throughout my practice as research, particularly her model of The Self and the four key components of the Feminist Leadership Diamond, as can be seen in the image below. Batliwala asserts the importance of The Self in feminist leadership. She writes that because “Leadership is practiced by people,” it is therefore “shaped and transformed, in practice, by the SELF – the particular attributes, talents, histories, experiences, and psychic structure that each
individual brings to the leadership role” (Batliwala 29). As a result of this influence, the figure below more accurately depicts the four elements of feminist leadership, surrounded by factors of The Self. Batliwala states that The Self is essential to understanding feminist leadership because, “women’s psychic structures have been constructed not only through the usual institutions, socialization processes and experiences (like family, school, peers, etc.), but through the particular nature of the patriarchal structure in which they have lived and the oppressions they have consequently negotiated” (Batliwala 31). However, the model of The Self and the Feminist Leadership Diamond provides feminist leaders with the tools to “address their internalized – and often unrecognized – dilemmas with the kind of overt authority, responsibility and accountability that leadership roles bring” (Batliwala 31).

![Figure 5: The Self and the Feminist Leadership Diamond (Batliwala 30).](image)

Another practical theory that structured the thinking throughout the creative research was Brené Brown’s Shame Resilience Theory. In her article “Shame Resilience Theory: A Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame” Brown acknowledges that shame is “the master emotion of everyday life” (Brown 43). Shame Resilience Theory (SRT) is a theory for understanding shame and its impact on women. It identifies the different processes
and strategies women use to develop shame resilience. In her article Brown offers a working definition of shame and a conceptual identity and proposes that shame is a psycho-social-cultural construct. SRT is a useful theory to consider within a New Zealand context when connected with the Māori concept of whakamā. While the online Māori dictionary defines whakamā as to be ashamed or embarrassed, it is more complicated than this and has spiritual associations rather than simply being psychological. These ideas will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

The final practical theory to consider is Empathetic Partnership, a framework developed by Nicole Flemmer, Lida Dekker, and Dawn Doutrich for Primary Care Practice in 2014. While this theory comes from *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners* and may seem irrelevant to theatre practice, the framework of Empathetic Partnership can be directly applied to a devised theatre process. Not only that but Flemmer et al. write that among other sources, “Empathetic Partnership is influenced by the concepts of New Zealand nursing’s cultural safety” (545). Cultural safety is a “conceptual guide informing nursing education and practice with influences from critical social and feminist theory” (546). According to Flemmer et al., cultural safety was introduced in New Zealand in the 1980s and encourages all healthcare professionals to “recognize and understand the inherent patient-provider power imbalance and to recognize and honor the patient’s culture(s)” (546). Subsequently, Empathetic Partnership is especially applicable to an intersectional New Zealand devising process and throughout the practice as research, my collaborators and I attempted to follow the theory’s key elements. Flemmer et al. write that the need for Empathetic Partnership arises out of the fact that, “Most patients experience some sense of vulnerability and uncertainty… patients are often asked to discuss the most intimate parts of their lives… personal health status, daily practices, relationship, sexuality, and much more” (545). These scenarios are also true of devising rehearsal rooms and like any healthcare system it is important for devising processes to “focus on creating safe environments and effective and meaningful partnerships” (545). Empathetic Partnership builds on this theory and creates a framework of six key elements, all of which are applicable in a devising rehearsal room. They include: Reflection, examining one’s own
personal beliefs and bias; Environment, whether or not the physical environment is open and affirming; Language, identifying and using common language to make patients safe and comfortable; Knowledge, having the appropriate knowledge base for the work; and Partnership and Empathy, a relationship of accompaniment where “traditional power dynamic dissolves and creates a space for an effective partnership to develop” (547-549).

Feminist Theatre Pedagogies

The theoretical framework for my practice as research was also comprised of several feminist theatre pedagogies. Several of these texts were inspired by a pivotal book called *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter* (1993) edited by Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement. *Upstaging Big Daddy* “offers ways of thinking about directing in theatre as intimately connected to a growing and shifting social awareness” (Donkin & Clement 2). They argue that if conscious directing choices are made then theatre has the potential to intervene “forcibly in the dreary cycle by which distorted representations lie unchallenged and after a while, become substitutes for deeper truths” (Donkin & Clement 2). Donkin and Clement with their contributors make several suggestions as to how artists can combat these distorted representations which will be discussed further in the literature review.

One of the most important theoretical texts for the creative component of this research was *Radical Acts: Theatre and Feminist Pedagogies of Change* (2007) edited by Ann Elizabeth Armstrong and Kathleen Juhl. This text is a compilation of essays and interviews (many with practical exercises) which discuss how students, teachers and audiences can all be more effectively engaged by using feminist approaches to teaching. The second section of *Radical Acts* is entirely devoted to practical methods and feminist approaches to teaching theatre, such as feminist tools for teaching improvisation and examining gender in the classroom, which align well with the goals of my creative component. But more importantly the ideology of this text represents the aims of my entire PhD project. In the introduction Armstrong and Juhl write that,
…feminist pedagogies in theatre construct communities where knowledge emerges through our encounters, and especially through our confrontations, with one another. A feminist theatre pedagogy suggests that what we do with our bodies on the stage has the potential to reverberate and transform both the artists who make the representations and the community members who witness them (Armstrong & Juhl 7).

By using the combination of the theoretical frameworks outlined, I believe that this project is well supported to incite change within theatre practitioners, students and audiences alike.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is described by Davidson and Tolich as being like an “academic whakapapa”¹⁴ because it locates the research within a certain context and helps you to discover connections to extant ideas and theories (95). This review will present an analytical review of the literature relevant to this research. However, it will not attempt to cover all literature on feminist theatre or devised theatre; rather it will focus on academic writing that is relevant to the New Zealand theatre ecology. Firstly, this review will outline the key literature about devised theatre before focusing on women in devised theatre to provide a context and understanding for this research.

Devised Theatre

Devised theatre can start from anything. It is determined and defined by a group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes, or specific stimuli … A devised theatrical performance originates with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted. A devised theatre product is work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration.

¹⁴ whakapapa (noun) genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
Alison Oddey’s *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* establishes a definition of devised theatre in the first widespread publication about the form. Despite its popularity among theatre companies internationally and here in New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s, the topic is considerably underrepresented in academic literature. This is could be because devising, even more so than traditional forms of theatre, is an ephemeral art form. Devised theatre is often made collectively in the rehearsal room and therefore is often not recorded as a formal script or process. This means that the final performance product can sometimes exist just in the minds and bodies of the collaborators that made it. Despite this difficulty, it is now being written about more frequently, beginning with Oddey who states in her preface that the primary reason she wanted to write her 1994 handbook is that she felt “there was a lack of information on the subject” (*Oddey Devising Theatre* xi). Thus, *Devising Theatre* was “the first book to propose a general theory of devised theatre” (*Oddey Devising Theatre* i). Oddey’s text is both theoretical and practical; she uses many different case studies and examples to discuss the multitude of different ways that theatre can be devised and the meanings behind the possible processes, before including a final chapter offering practical ideas and suggestions for those learning to devise.

Unfortunately, the conversation that Oddey hoped would begin after her text was published was limited until the 21st Century (aside from her own chapter in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance* in 1998). In 2002, Chris Baldwin and Tina Bicât published *Devised and Collaborative Theatre: A Practical Guide*. Even more so than Oddey’s text, this more recent text offers practical advice for practitioners looking to devise. Baldwin and Bicât’s book is organised into chapters titled by the individual practitioners that might come together to create a devised theatre performance such as: “Set Design,” “The Actor-

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15 While some writing exists on this topic in New Zealand such as Murray Edmond’s PhD Thesis from 1996 at the University of Auckland, “Old Comrades of the Future: A History of Experimental Theatre in New Zealand, 1962-1982,” it is still noticeably lacking, especially where gender is concerned.
Performer” or “Music and Composition” (Baldwin & Bicât 5). Each chapter then describes and discusses that role, offers advice and different exercises to use in the rehearsal room. One of the examples where this text deviates from Oddey’s is that it contains an entire chapter on “The Director.” While Baldwin and Bicât state that the director should work in collaboration, they also write that:

> The director is one of the key figures in any theatre production but especially so in devised theatre. When a company begins to plan a devised production it is the director, over and above anyone else, who must have a clear picture of what needs to happen on the creative front at specific moments in the process (Baldwin and Bicât 12).

On the other hand, Oddey in 1994 describes devised theatre as an “an alternative to the dominant literary theatre tradition, which is the conventionally accepted form of theatre dominated by the often patriarchal, hierarchical relationships of playwright and director” (Oddey Devising Theatre 4). Comparing these two texts together we can then see that, in less than a decade, devised theatre has possibly shifted from being completely non-hierarchical and collaborative, to be more leadership orientated with individual companies working with structures that are successful for them.

As devised theatre moved more into the mainstream, (especially in the United Kingdom as Nicholas Hytner took over the artistic directorship of the National Theatre in 2003 and encouraged the form), more academic writing on the topic began to appear in both the UK and the United States. In 2005 Joan Schirle wrote an article from an American perspective published in Theatre Topics called “Potholes in the Road to Devising.” Schirle’s article provides a solid background on devising, and while much of her discussion is based on practicality and “how to” devise, she does offer some interesting theory in relation to process and definition. She writes that devising, “…suggests a means of working – a how – based on the intentional relation of artists to the making of the work and to each other … Devising is a chosen means of working together to create something original for the stage (Schirle 95-96, original emphasis). Furthering Oddey’s definition,
Schirle begins to clarify exactly what is meant by devising. She argues that it is a process not a product; it is a specific way of making theatre that differs from traditional scripted theatre structures.

While Schirle is arguing that devising is different from collaboration, in the academic literature on this topic, there is occasionally confusion between the terms “devising,” and “collaborative creation.” Some scholars analyse them as separate ways of working, while others use the terms interchangeably. In 2006, Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling published *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, which was arguably the first academic text to look at the theory of devising critically since Oddey’s in 1994. Heddon and Milling use both the terms “devising” and “collaborative creation” throughout their text. While they believe that the two terms have different emphasis, they also write, “At the core of all devising or collaborative creation is a process of generating performance, although there is an enormous variety of devising processes used” (Heddon & Milling 3, original emphasis). Heddon and Milling open their text by stating that while devising as a “mode of making performance” is used throughout the world and taught in many universities and institutions, very “little critical attention has been paid to it” (Heddon & Milling 1). Heddon and Milling do acknowledge Oddey’s work, but they do slightly criticise her text for its emphasis on the ideology of democracy and non-hierarchical company structures. They break down the “freedom” of devising that they claim Oddey puts forward and ask “…where these beliefs about devising arise from and whether they are accurate in relation to historical and contemporary practice, and sustainable within contemporary social structure” (Heddon and Milling 4-5). However, Oddey herself said that her text “is neither definitive nor prescriptive but sets up a conversation about devising theatre” (p. xii). Whilst critical, Heddon and Milling are still very interested in the work that Oddey started and state that, “…it is curious that the conversation that Oddey hoped would result from the publication of her book has never really taken place” (Heddon and Milling 1). Just under a decade later I argue that the conversation is gathering speed in international academia. However, in New Zealand the literature published about theatre so very rarely focuses on process, that discussing devising becomes almost impossible.
Heddon and Milling examine the history and methodologies of devising in post-war Britain, Australia and the United States of America. They claim that “devising practice is taught at universities in all three countries” and that a lot of devised work from each country travels to international festivals (Heddon & Milling 1). As a New Zealand theatre practitioner and researcher, I find it interesting that New Zealand devised work is not included in this text at all, despite the possible similarities and links between New Zealand and Australia analysed in comparison to the UK. There are many possible reasons for this, for example, New Zealand is a small country with a lack of funding to tour internationally. Although a few New Zealand companies do travel overseas, getting funding for a devised work is very difficult, and if their work is written about academically, the focus is normally just on the product not the process. As a result, the devised work we produce in this country may not be as well-known internationally.

Heddon and Milling also deconstruct the “mythic” status of devised theatre. A lot of the literature on this subject praises devising as a positive way of working. Jackie Smart agrees in her chapter “The Feeling of Devising: Emotion and Mind in the Devising Process” that, “Academic literature on devising tends to emphasize its positive aspects” (Smart 102). She states that these positive aspects “…are important elements that draw artists towards collaborative creative working methods,” but explains that she has also learnt over twenty years of making and teaching devising theatre that “…these undoubtedly appealing qualities of the devising process can also be sources of confusion and distress” (Smart 102). Heddon and Milling’s list of the qualities that devising is often imbued with quite accurately summarises the idealistic notions that sometimes plague the form, which they argue are no longer accurate or useful in the 21st Century:

Devising is variously: a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between art and life; the erasure of the gap between spectator and performer; a
distrust of words; the embodiment of the death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge for spectators; an expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental; non-literary. (Heddon and Milling 4-5)

The length of this list implies a sardonic quality, however, in my experience as a practitioner I have heard many of these phrases used to describe the false utopian ideals of devising.

In 2007, just one year after Heddon and Milling’s publication, Emma Govan, Helen Nicholson and Katie Normington published *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*, where they too agreed with Heddon and Milling that these idealistic qualities were no longer applicable to devising. Govan, Nicholson and Normington’s text, while appearing shortly after Heddon and Milling’s, focuses more on contemporary practice and offers some helpful definitions and reasoning as to why practitioners devise their own work. They claim that, “By questioning orthodoxies, devised performance has set new challenges for both audiences and performers and has thereby made a significant and enduring contribution to the contemporary theatrical landscape” (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 3). While several academic texts discuss the collaborative and democratic appeals of devising, Govan, Nicholson and Normington add that “The appeal of devising performance for practitioners lies in its pliability and porousness” (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 4). This pliability could also be another reason why devising appeals to women. Not only can they work in collaboration, but they can also mould and shape their own process to suit themselves, rather than relying on existing patriarchal structures.

Already, in this literature review, we can see that it is difficult for scholars to agree on a single and simple definition for devised theatre. Govan, Nicholson and Normington state that, “If devising is most accurately described in the plural – as *processes* of experimentation and sets of creative *strategies* – rather than a single methodology, it defies
neat definition or categorisation” (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 7, original emphasis). Despite this, Govan, Nicholson and Normington also offer that “It is useful to begin with definitions, even when they are unreliable and constantly in flux” (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 4). They go on to agree with Schirle and Heddon and Milling, that “Devising is widely regarded as a process of generating a performative or theatrical event” (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 4). However, they caution that one cannot use this “umbrella term” to denote a particular genre or “style of performance,” because pieces of devised theatre are so often incredibly unique (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 4). To acknowledge these differences Govan, Nicholson and Normington focus on the contemporary practices of devising practitioners and how those processes have developed and adapted to changing times, instead of telling a narrative history of devised theatre.

Since the publication of Heddon and Milling’s text in 2006 and Govan, Nicholson and Normington’s text in 2007, the conversation about devised theatre appears to be gaining traction with international academics. In fact, Govan, Nicholson and Normington even predicted that, “Devised performance, always associated with the counter-cultural fringe, is becoming increasingly commercially successful and entering the mainstream” (Govan, Nicholson and Normington 4). This transition can be seen quite clearly by analysing the productions of the National Theatre in London under the directorship of Nicholas Hytner, as Alex Mermikides does in her 2013 article “Brilliant theatre-making at the National: Devising, collective creation and the director’s brand.” Mermikides’ article examines how devised theatre in Britain in the 21st Century has become far more mainstream, but that this popularity has perhaps come at the cost of its identification as a collective practice. Even earlier than this though discussions about devising and the pedagogy of devising began to appear much more frequently both in full texts and in theatre journals. In 2008 Bruce Barton released his edited text Collection Creation, Collaboration and Devising which discusses devising from an American view point, and in 2009, UK theatre company Frantic Assembly published The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre, in which they discuss their own work, and offer a series of practical exercises and methods for devising.

Some of the most recent publications that are influential to my research are by editors Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit. Their two studies from 2013, *A History of Collective Creation* and *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance* argued that collective theatre making did not emerge as a “New Left political theatre” phenomenon in the 1960s and 1970s, but rather it is an “ongoing, resistant tradition emerging, in its European and North American context, circa 1900 and running throughout the twentieth century and on into present day devising practices” (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 3-4). The authors clarify from an internationalist perspective the “aesthetic, processual, and political links between theatrical devising in the contemporary period, collective creation practices of the 1960s and 1970s, and pre-war experiments in collaborative theatre-making” (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 4).

Syssoyeva and Proudfit’s most recent publication from 2016: *Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance: The Rise of Women Theatre Artists in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* is even more important for my research. In this volume, their aim is to “historicize the enormous, ongoing contribution of women to collective creation; and to investigate questions about the relationship between gender and collaboration, authority, authorship, and attribution” (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 4). The sections in this volume by twenty-one different scholars detail the history of women in devising and the significant themes that thread their work together. Syssoyeva and Proudfit acknowledge that they are “painfully aware of the limited global scope of our current offering” and recognize that as it focuses on the United States, Canada and Quebec, and parts of Europe, “it is also predominantly Caucasian in emphasis” (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 11). As stated in Chapter One, my research is attempting to fill a small gap in this global offering by writing about New Zealand.
While this review has cited many of the differing opinions about what exactly devising is and what it can be, there seems to be at least one connection throughout many of these texts. This is that, a devised theatre production will always look different, the products cannot necessarily be compared and contrasted as there is no “correct” way to devise. However, the point that many scholars do seem to agree on is that devising is a process or a set of processes, that theatre makers can use to make theatre in a collaborative way. This means that in order to begin discussing and analysing devised work, one must focus on the process of the particular practitioner or production and not just the product. A discussion about process is something that is currently lacking in New Zealand theatre literature. Devising productions in this country are numerous, but they are performed and then too often disappear. Many of the women in this country who were devising their own work, when the form first became popular in the 1970s and 1980s, are still well known today. They are more known for their scripted works because we have access to those texts. Their devised work may survive in a description of the final production or in reviews, but as a result of no one discussing or writing about their processes, the work itself has faded.

**Women in Devised Theatre**

> Working without a theatre script is both an exciting challenge and a frightening way to practice theatre. There is a journey ahead that is unknown, dangerous, full of risk, fear, exhilaration, energy, creativity and much more. When it is a woman who finds the script, through her own body and in her own words, she has first to find the body, the words and the confidence to speak out; to be seen and to be heard.

(Aston, *Feminist Theatre Practice* 142)

The majority of academic texts written about devised theatre that this literature review has cited thus far have been written by women. This is not simply a coincidence, as many of these scholars have also written about the relationship between women and devised theatre. Since the rise of feminist and women’s theatre, with the second wave of feminism, women began making their own theatre and a common way they did this (rather than
performing existing and often patriarchal plays) was to devise new work. In 1984, Helen Keyssar was one of the first scholars to start writing about feminist theatre with her publication *Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays of Contemporary British and American Women*. Keyssar was soon followed by Sue-Ellen Case with *Feminism and Theatre* in 1988. After these two publications, several other feminist theatre scholars such as Lizbeth Goodman, Elaine Aston, Peggy Phelan and Jane de Gay began publishing their own texts. Along with many others, all these women wrote about the sheer impact that feminism has had on theatre. Elaine Aston writes in *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* that although women had made theatre prior to these movements, the theatre that came out of the feminist movement was the first time in theatre history that women practitioners were being noticed (Aston 58).

Women have been making theatre throughout history, but their work has gone unrecorded and thus has been hidden. With the feminist movements, the work of these women began to be uncovered. Sue-Ellen Case writes in *Feminism and Theatre* that, if we re-examine the word playwright so that the word means someone who is a ‘maker’ of plays, rather than just a ‘writer’ of plays, we can see that the first women making theatre were “the women mimes who performed in the market places, the streets and before the theatre in classical Greece and Rome” (Case 29). These women were ‘makers’ rather than ‘writers,’ and the term ‘makers’ is one that is commonly used today to describe those who work in devised theatre. When considered in this way, these women mimes could be seen as being the first women making devised theatre, but unfortunately “patriarchal theatre histories generally refer to them as ‘actress-courtesans’” (Case 30).

In 1993, one year before Alison Oddey published *Devising Theatre*, Lizbeth Goodman writes in her text *Contemporary Feminist Theatres* that feminist theatre companies commonly make devised theatre because “…devising ideally produces scripts based on collective rather than individual experience” (Goodman 103). By 1999, Elaine Aston devotes a whole chapter to devising in *Feminist Theatre Practice* and writes that, “…devising is especially important to women who are marginalised by dominant culture
and theatre and therefore have most to gain from ‘authoring’ their own scripts” (Aston Feminist Theatre Practice 143).

Along with several other mentions of the relationship between women and devising, Alison Oddey also commented on it again in 1998 in her chapter “Devising (women’s) theatre as meeting the needs of changing times” in The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance. In this chapter Oddey places her original 1994 text Devising Theatre within the climate of the late 1990s. While she does make some interesting points in this chapter, almost two decades later, it is a little outdated. However, she does discuss the origin of the relationship between women and devising by saying that the “…natural relationship between women and devised theatre in the 1970s,” arose out of an environment “…which encouraged women to find voice together through the collective, democratic process of devising” (Oddey “Devising (women’s) theatre” 119). Oddey states that this climate which necessitated devising has passed and that women (in the late 1990s) are interested “in working with a writer, a script and with other artists” (Oddey “Devising (women’s) theatre” 119). However, she also quotes Alison Andrews, director and performer of The Alison Andrews Company, who argues that the devising process is still valuable to women theatre practitioners in the late 1990s. Andrews notes:

I think it [devising] appeals to women as a creative way of working – we are perhaps more naturally co-operative and instinctively collective in practice. It is potentially a way of working which has ideological affiliations with feminism. Devising is still potentially a counter-cultural method of producing work – and a clear option for artists who don’t want to work in mainstreams theatre. It means you don’t need a specialist, it goes against the modern view of a separation between art and mass culture . . . and breaks away from the idea that a piece can be recognizably ‘finished’ after a certain time (Andrews qtd. Oddey, “Devising (women’s) theatre” 122).

Although, even if a director of a devised project or the collective company do take steps to ensure that their process is imbued with feminist ideology, sometimes there can be
internal anxieties or issues that are out of our control. Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement write about this in their book *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter*. Donkin and Clement wanted to create a phrase or idea that practitioners could call up to fight these representations, so they animate the figure of ‘Big Daddy.’ They write that, “Like the Big Daddy of Tennessee Williams’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, he carries with him a combination of paternal protection with ambient (hetero- or homo-) sexuality… his judgments are so powerful that they will resonate in everyone’s head long after he is offstage” (3). Christine Young, in her article “Feminist Pedagogy at Play in the University Rehearsal Room,” succinctly describes ‘Big Daddy’ as “a sly manifestation of the persuasive cultural conditioning that prompts women to seek approval from the very power structures they wish to dismantle…” (Young 138-139). The third part of Donkin and Clement’s text also deals directly with devising. They write that:

The contributors to part 3, ‘Constructing the Text,’ have decided that the work of the feminist director includes creating a theatre piece as well as directing it. This decision appears to have been made not simply because these directors wanted to avoid the canon, but because there was a collective power and spirit moving through their companies for which no text yet existed. (Donkin and Clement 7)

In the late 1990s, Oddey argued that “The politics have moved on: women want to do more than just develop projects with other women” (Oddey “Devising (women’s) theatre” 120). Nearly two decades after this was written, I argue that the politics are shifting again. However, no matter what the feminist politics or agenda is at any particular moment, women creating their own theatre by devising with collectives is an effective way of telling their stories and enables them to be artists in their own right. As there is no “correct” way to devise, processes can be adapted to whatever the production requires. Oddey agrees with this and writes, “The unique, eclectic process of devising offers a variety of working methods to all those interested in a thinking, creative way of making theatre” (Oddey “Devising (women’s) theatre” 123). However, Oddey also suggests that the economic climate of the late 1990s made devising a very difficult option for theatre companies as funding systems were grounded in “models of ‘traditional’ play...
creation, rehearsal and production in Britain” (Oddey “Devising (women’s) theatre” 123). As a theatre practitioner and researcher in New Zealand in 2018 I would argue that Oddey’s statements about late 1990s Britain are true of New Zealand today. In the 2015 Creative New Zealand Arts Grant funding round, the twelve grants awarded to theatre applications were for presenting/touring/remounting costs or specifically script development funding, rather than new devised work (“Who got funded” Creativenz.govt.nz, 2015). However, in the 2018 Arts Grant round, out of seven grants awarded to theatre, two were specifically given to companies that were explicitly making devised projects (“Who got funded” Creativenz.govt.nz, 2018). While this does show an increase, the majority of works being funded are still scripted. It is difficult to say whether this is indicative of a funding bias, and more research into the funding patterns of Creative New Zealand would be required to prove this.

Despite how dispiriting this might seem, devised theatre is still being made in New Zealand and it is still being made by women. Devising naturally aligns with the politics of feminism, in fact, Syssoyeva and Proudfit stated in their 2016 text *Women, Collective Creation, and Devised Performance*, that “The history of modern theatre is a history of collaborative methods and the history of collaborative methods is a women’s history” (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 5). So, when a theatre company or individual wants to make a feminist statement of any kind, it makes logical sense for them to consider the processes of devising. While politics are always changing, a fluid theatre-making process, such as devising, can always be adapted to the changing times and the changing stories of theatre practitioners. Oddey closes her 1998 chapter with a statement that still rings true both overseas and here in New Zealand, and it is one of the reasons why this particular research is so important. Oddey writes that we must focus “…on women as artists or theatre makers in their own right” (Oddey “Devising (women’s) theatre” 123). Women are too often ignored or hidden from theatre history in this country. Even if their work is devised and is therefore more difficult to write about, this cannot be an excuse anymore, because that work has helped (and is still helping) shape New Zealand theatre.
1.6 THEESIS OVERVIEW

This project is a 75,000-word thesis with 25% of the PhD devoted to practice as research. The structure of the written text prioritises the voices of the women from the research by incorporating the key informant interviews throughout.

Following this introduction, “Chapter Two - A Line of Descent” traces the genealogy of women devising in New Zealand, first by outlining all the relevant New Zealand literature about devised theatre and attempting to highlight the key women practitioners throughout our history. Secondly, Chapter Two presents the first two case studies of Madeline McNamara and Kerryn Palmer with their respective devised works *Demeter’s Dark Ride* (2005) and *Sniper* (2004). These two women have made a significant contribution to our theatre industry and the discussion highlights these achievements. “Chapter Three - Stop, Collaborate, and Listen” begins with the case study of *MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand* (2010) by MINGE Collective. I argue that this production was a turning point in our devising history as it represented a younger generation of women coming together for the first time to devise an explicitly feminist work. I produced this production, so I have written this section from my own perspective as well as including the voices of director Fiona McNamara and dramaturg Eleanor Bishop. This case study sits alongside my analysis of the online questionnaire and interviews to present the current landscape of women devising in New Zealand. Many of the issues highlighted within the MINGE case study are still evident several years later in my primary research. “Chapter Four - The Politics of Process” presents three exemplars of women practitioners currently devising who all embed their process with a feminist politic. Julie Nolan from Red Leap Theatre, performance artist Julia Croft, and Nina Nawalowalo from The Conch, are all leading women in New Zealand devised theatre. They represent several different intersections of feminism and their chosen respective case studies of *Dust Pilgrim* (2015), *Power Ballad* (2017), and *Stages of Change* (2013/2016-17), demonstrate a wide range of politics and processes. “Chapter Five - Devising Women: The Creative Component” is a detailed discussion of the six months of practice as research.
conducted by me and my four collaborators. Appendix F: Scripts of Creative Showings and Appendix G: Digital Recording of Creative Showings, are essential companions to Chapter Five and are referenced throughout. Finally, in “Chapter Six – Born to Build: Conclusions and Recommendations,” I present my key findings and make recommendations for further research and future practice.
SHONA: Umm … have you got a spare script? Sisters?

GEORGINA: Well, Shona, you see we’re still in the process of getting it together; you see, we work as a cooperative …

SHULAMITH: That means we ALL write it and we all decide what goes on – no boss, no director.

JO: Bloody shambles.

SHULAMITH: To the fundamentally inartistic the true creative process may appear to be a shambles at times, Jo.

(Betts, Revenge of the Amazons, 2.11)

*Revenge of the Amazons* by Jean Betts was first performed in Wellington, New Zealand in 1983. Betts writes, in the published text of her re-imagining of Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, that she wanted “to provide more comic parts for women” (*Betts, Revenge of the Amazons*). Many of these comic parts were in the form of The Fallopian Thespians theatre group who took the place of Shakespeare’s Mechanicals. They were Betts’ parody of women’s devising theatre collectives, “mostly to give us feminists an opportunity to laugh at ourselves – and to prove that we could, at a time when many didn’t believe it possible” (*Betts, Revenge of the Amazons*, emphasis in original). Even though The Fallopian Thespians are an obvious parody, because *Revenge of the Amazons* is a published playscript, they have become one of the few documented early examples of women devising in New Zealand. While the scene quoted above is being played for comedy, it
still highlights some of the fundamental difficulties of devising, such as clear communication, achieving consensus and leadership within a collective.

This chapter traces the line of history of women devising in New Zealand. The first section is a review of the relevant literature about devising that already exists in New Zealand, with an attempt to draw attention to some of the key women practitioners who have been hidden in our theatre history. The second section presents the first two case studies and key interviewees for this research: Kerryn Palmer and her production *Sniper* (2004), and Madeline McNamara with *Demeter’s Dark Ride: An Attraction* (2005). These two women are important practitioners with a wealth of devising knowledge having begun their careers in the 1980s and 90s. This section will therefore present their history of devising using their own voices and stories. Other than a few notable exceptions, theirs is a history that has not been well documented. I believe their feminist processes are exemplars to be learned from and that they provide a picture of early feminist devising in New Zealand that is worth investigating.

2.1 HISTORY OF WOMEN DEVISING IN NEW ZEALAND

“...every woman you meet has a story”

(Renée qtd. in Dale “Women’s theatre” 162)

In the article “Women’s theatre and why” in volume 18 of *Australasian Drama Studies*, Judith Dale describes Renée as “New Zealand’s most prolific and wide-ranging woman dramatist” (Dale “Women’s theatre” 161). “Women’s theatre and why” is a thorough discussion of the feminist theatre being performed in Wellington in the early 1990s, featuring detailed analysis of the themes occurring in these works. In this article Dale states that Renée started writing plays as she “began to get more and more angry about the fact that there were no really good parts for women.... So I wanted to do something about that... every woman you meet has a story” (Dale “Women’s theatre” 161-162). Many
of Renée’s plays, especially her trilogy of, *Wednesday to Come* (1985), *Pass It On* (1986) and *Jeannie Once* (1991) feature “…women we don’t see on stage but who are all around us” (Dale “Women’s theatre” 162). Devised theatre is another way to put these women on stage in New Zealand, a way that even Renée would like to try. In an interview with Lisa Warrington, in Issue 18 of *Australasian Drama Studies*, Renée said, “I’ve never tried doing what happened with Caryl Churchill and Monstrous Regiment – collaborative theatre. I’d really like to try that…” (Warrington 75). Thankfully, many other companies did try it here in New Zealand.

But why did they try? Why would anyone choose to devise a piece of New Zealand theatre? Where did it come from and what were the influences? There are several possible answers here, some of which this section will discuss. Peter Falkenberg, a senior lecturer in theatre and film studies at the University of Canterbury, asked similar questions in his article “Why Devise? Why now? Why New Zealand?” in Volume 15 of *Theatre Topics*. He writes that “Devising theatre acknowledges an ongoing process of coming to understand where one lives,” and that “A country built upon colonization must be seen in the act of continually devising an identity for itself. How else to represent such acts if not by following the same provisional path?” (Falkenberg 40). So many of New Zealand’s great and canonised play scripts examine our identity as a nation; *Foreskin’s Lament* by Greg McGee, *End of the Golden Weather* by Bruce Mason, *Shuriken* by Vincent O’Sullivan or *Wednesday To Come* by Renée, to name just a few. However, Falkenberg argues that devised theatre processes, as opposed to traditional scripted theatre, are a better way to do this. He writes, “Perhaps instead of conforming to a fixed script which is always in danger of being frozen in some other place, time, and ideology, it is better to look for identity through a provisional art, where texts and participants become the material of performance in a dialectical process” (Falkenberg 40).

Falkenberg’s ideas of moving away from fixed scripts and looking instead at performance as a collaborative dialogue were published in *Theatre Topics* in 2005. However, theatre makers in New Zealand had been devising their identities and their theatre for several
decades prior to this. The New Zealand theatre scene was dominated by traditional British theatre models and texts until the political upheaval of the 1970s, when there was a mood of rebellion against the state and out of this feeling, devised theatre in New Zealand was born, as theatre makers rebelled against the status quo (O’Donnell “Devised Theatre”). However, if one were to glance through some of the history books of New Zealand theatre such as; New Zealand Drama by Howard McNaughton, New Zealand Drama: A Parade of Forms and a History by Bruce Mason, New Zealand Drama 1930-1980 by John Tompson, A Dramatic Appearance: New Zealand Theatre 1920-1970 by Peter Harcourt, you would notice that not only are they all written by men, but that also most of their content is filled with traditional patriarchal theatre practices as they were all published before the mid1980s. Therefore, the history of devised theatre in New Zealand is hardly documented at all and women are mentioned more as actresses than they are as playwrights, directors or makers of their own theatre.

Despite the lack of documentation on this subject, some literature on devised theatre in New Zealand does exist, however it is often only mentioned or briefly discussed as an addition to more traditional forms. An exception to this is the writing of Murray Edmond. Edmond’s 1996 PhD Thesis at the University of Auckland was titled “Old Comrades of the Future: A History of Experimental Theatre in New Zealand, 1962-1982.” Edmond also contributed an article to issue 18 of Australasian Drama Studies called “Lighting out for Paradise: New Zealand Theatre and the ‘Other’ Tradition.” However, at first glance, this article may not necessarily seem to be about devising as Edmond defines the two kinds of theatre that he is discussing in a different way. Edmond uses Martin Green and John Swan’s book The Triumph of Pierrot (1986) to discuss the “manifestations of the commedia dell’arte spirit in New Zealand in the 1980s” (Edmond “Lighting out for Paradise” 183). His article uses terminology from the Italian Renaissance rather than the terms one might use today such as; devising, collaborative theatre or collective creation. Edmond illustrates two styles of theatre making in New Zealand. The first is “the literary line” or “the ‘Erudita’” which one can understand as being traditional theatre making that begins with a playwright and a script in an established venue (Edmond “Lighting out for
Paradise” 186). The second he calls “the Dell’Arte line” which was “much more radical in its grasp of style and innovation” and “had a very different attitude to local and nationalistic issues” (Edmond “Lighting out for Paradise” 186). Edmond’s Dell’Arte line can be seen more or less as early devised theatre in New Zealand. He writes that in the 1970s “The Dell’Arte saw its destiny as forging a local identity,” in much the same way as Falkenberg discusses devising and identity in his 2005 article (Edmond “Lighting out for Paradise” 186). According to Edmond, the Dell’Arte line faltered in the early 1980s due to funding issues but he writes that “During the 1980s it has resurrected itself in several modes: for example, feminist cabaret and some Māori theatre groups can be seen as belonging in part to the Dell’Arte line” (Edmond “Lighting out for Paradise” 186). Edmond also cites the influences of Jacques Copeau, Etienne Decroux, Jean-Louis Barrault, Jacques Lecoq and Francis Batten who studied with LeCoq (Edmond “Lighting out for Paradise” 185). Batten returned to New Zealand in 1971 and established Theatre Action which influenced many other devising companies, and Edmond goes on in his article to discuss some of these companies such as; The Topp Twins16, Inside Out17, Front Lawn18, Dramadillo, Red Mole, and Hen’s Teeth19, all New Zealand companies who created performance using devising processes in the 1970s and 1980s. Edmond discusses this particular time period of the early 1970s in more detail in his chapter “Re-membering the Remembering Body: ‘Autonomous Theatre’ in New Zealand,” from the collection of essays Performing Aotearoa: New Zealand Theatre and Drama in an Age of Transition (2007). Here he focuses on the influence of Lecoq and Grotowski and discusses some of the works of Francis Batten, Theatre Action and Red Mole.

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16 The Topp Twins are the folk singing and activist sister comedy duo act of Jools and Lynda Topp. Since 1981 they have been performing on stage, television and film. In 2018 they were appointed Dames Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

17 Inside Out was formed in London in 1983 by company directors Mike Mizrahi and Marie Adams, where the founding members trained. They created self-devised work that toured Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia. They are based in Auckland and are still making work today.

18 The Front Lawn was founded in 1985 by Don McGlashan and Harry Sinclair. They were a musical/theatrical duo known for their touring live performances, and in 1989 and 1990 were joined by actor Jennifer Ward-Lealand.

19 Hen’s Teeth are an all-female satirical cabaret comedy group. They formed in 1988, performed throughout the 1990s, and in 2017 had a reunion production at Circa Theatre.
Rather fittingly for this research, Edmond closes his *Australasian Drama Studies* article by ruminating on the idea that, due to the “spontaneous” and “unconscious” nature of the Dell’Arte line, “perhaps to try to document such a ‘textless’ theatre is an error, or maybe an impossible act. Its record could be its betrayal” (Edmond “Lighting out for Paradise” 204). The ephemerality of devised theatre still makes it difficult to discuss and write about today. However, Edmond immediately overturns his concern by stating that discourse and analysis can also “bring the world of the unconscious into focus. And a discourse is something that has failed to happen in New Zealand theatre. A world of discourse would be a useful, a valuable thing. It would provide sustenance, environment, an ecosystem” (Edmond “Lighting out for Paradise” 205). Edmond was writing this in 1991, but in 2018, the New Zealand theatre discourse seems to still be struggling and Edmond’s prediction that “an important part of it will be about the Dell’Arte and its manifestations” does not appear to have been fulfilled (Edmond “Lighting out for Paradise” 205). While some publications in New Zealand, such as the *Playmarket Annual* (our national playwriting agency’s magazine) and literary and art criticism website *The Pantograph Punch*, do publish some research, interviews or think pieces about theatre, hardly any of them focus on devising or collaborative theatre. However, one of the aims of this research is to reignite that conversation, and I agree with Edmond that it is important to discuss the ‘Other’ tradition of New Zealand Drama by looking at where it came from and who the influences were.

Along with Murray’s writing there are two articles from the New Zealand film, theatre and television criticism magazine, *Illusions* in 1986 and 1987, which discuss an influential devising company from the Philippines called PETA (Philippines Educational Theatre Association). Edmond also mentions this company in his article as an influence on the Dell’Arte line as they toured New Zealand in June/August of 1987. Eugene van Erven’s article on PETA in issue 3 of *Illusions* discusses at length their way of working and how “the Filipinio theatre of liberation has been developing process workshops through which drama is placed in the hands of the poor as a weapon with which to attack oppressive structures” (van Erven 8). Working with communities of people PETA would set up
Integrated Arts Workshops which would last three days, during which participants would improvise together and “gradually and collectively compose a dramatic story that relates their experiences of exploitation and oppression on the local level” (van Erven 8). Like a lot of the academic discussion about devised theatre today, PETA prioritised their process and used it as a tool because “In the theatre of liberation, the performance itself is far less important than the group process and the discovery of one’s own creativity” (van Erven 10). Less than a year after the publication of van Erven’s article, three members of PETA had visited New Zealand and held workshops, mainly with Māori groups, in a tour organised by Roma Potiki in association with Eugene van Erven. Illusions then published an interview with the touring group, Potiki and van Erven in Issue 6 in 1987. PETA and their tour would have influenced devising and collaboration within Māori theatre in New Zealand, and Roma Potiki went on to form her own company He Ara Hou. Together they “devised the production Whatungarongaro20 in 1990… the play portrays a dysfunctional and violent modern Māori family and incorporates elements of traditional Māori drama” (Derby and Grace-Smith). Judith Dale also writes about Whatungarongaro in her article “Women’s theatre and why.” Dale describes the production as being very different to from the other script-based productions of the time. She writes that, “the play was collectively devised from a basis of group improvisation and workshopped, as the programme notes explains, ‘within a Māori kaupapa21 and with strong commitment to community based mahi22’” (Dale “Women’s theatre and why” 172).

Before He Ara Hou however, there were many other companies devising their theatre in the 1970s and 1980s in New Zealand but information on their processes is rather scarce. There are mentions within articles and some reviews but too often the documentation is lacking. The New Zealand section of The World Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Theatre: Volume 5, Asia/Pacific, for example, focuses mainly on traditional theatre models and

20 whatungarongaro (verb) to disappear (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
21 kaupapa Māori - Māori approach, Māori topic, Māori customary practice, Māori institution, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology - a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
22 mahi (noun) work, job, employment, trade (work), practice, occupation, activity, exercise, operation, function (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
playwrights. However, there is one specific brief mention of devised theatre. In a discussion of theatre companies, Auckland’s Theatre At Large are mentioned as being, “…more project-based and adventurous. Its directors, Anna Marbrook (b. 1966) and Christian Penny (b. 1964) have become known for the physicality and theatricality of their shows, usually devised from improvisation by a company assembled for the project…” (Beauchamp, Carnegie, Forbes 340-341). This chapter on New Zealand theatre also discusses women writers (Beauchamp, Carnegie, Forbes 345). The plays of Renée are discussed quite extensively as are a few by Lorae Parry, but the chapter neglects to discuss Parry’s devising work with companies such as Hen’s Teeth and the characters of Digger and Nudger created in collaboration with Carmel McGlone. Judith Dale mentions Hen’s Teeth however, in her article “Women’s theatre and why” in issue 18 of Australasian Drama Studies (Dale “Women’s theatre” 161). Dale also reviews Hen’s Teeth: The Second Bite, A Season of Women Comedians in issue 10 of Illusions magazine. Of course, due to the nature of a theatre review, she is only looking at the finished performance and so does not comment on the process of how Hen’s Teeth created their work. An important point that Dale does raise in her review “Once Bitten, twice shy? No way!” is the connection between women and comedy. She suggests that, when the women of these companies started making their own work, they perhaps decided to tackle difficult issues by first making the audience laugh. Dale writes in her review of Hen’s Teeth that the comedy is “done well, though perhaps you are a little surprised to find it done at all since women have so long been credited with not having a sense of humour” (Dale “Once Bitten, twice shy?” 32).

Other early devising companies often worked in cabaret styles or included sketch comedy in their performances and several including Red Mole, Theatre Action, Dramadillo and Theatre At Large, also used mask and puppetry to heighten their work (Beauchamp, Carnegie, Forbes 349). Red Mole Theatre Company was co-founded by Alan Brunton and Sally Rodwell in 1974 and was the only company, from the 1970s and 1980s, that continued making work together throughout the 1990s until the sudden deaths of Brunton in 2002 and Rodwell in 2006. In the 1970s, Red Mole toured the country and regularly performed their rough and exciting theatre in Wellington at Carmen’s The Balcony. They
soon “became New Zealand’s alternative theatre brand name to the world” (Theatre News). In 1978 Red Mole went to New York “staging performances taking energetic ideas from cabaret, circus and street parades and using improvised comedy sketches, political commentary, costumes, masks and music” (Dekker). They were a vibrant theatrical partnership, often working with other collaborators, however Rodwell also “forged her own very strong individual career” including being a part of Hen’s Teeth (Dekker). Diana Dekker writes in Rodwell’s obituary that “She believed it was only in the early 1980s that women’s humour began to have a public voice, yet women had always had to have ‘an incredible sense of humour. They’ve had to make light of the most impossible situations’” (Dekker). Rodwell was inspired by women’s companies, such as Split Britches in the 1980s from New York to create her own work with other women. In her 2000 interview with Theatre News she said, “I never wanted to leave Red Mole, which I love, but I enjoyed sometimes removing myself from this milieu and working with other women, making pieces that concerned us, containing issues that we felt needed to be aired separately” (Theatre News). After creating several women’s events and concerts in Wellington, such as Not Broadcast Quality, Rodwell states that “… women’s theatre in Wellington got stronger and stronger” (Theatre News). Through these events and her full length devising work with Madeline McNamara, the two co-founded Magdalena Aotearoa Trust in 1997. Magdalena Aotearoa is the New Zealand branch of The Magdalena Project, an international and intersectional community of women artists that originated in Wales. Magdalena Aotearoa encourages and supports the work of women in the performing arts in New Zealand and is still operating today (“Magdalena Aotearoa – About”).

The rough devised theatre of 1970s and 1980s can perhaps be described as the first wave of devising in New Zealand, with many works using comedy and cabaret to explore their questions. In the late 1990s, there was a revival of devised theatre which could be referred to as the second wave of New Zealand devising. By this time, a few international academic texts had been released about devised theatre and influential theatre makers, such as Robert Lepage and his company Ex Machina, were touring their devised productions around the world, including bringing The Seven Streams of the River Ota to the International
Arts Festival in New Zealand 1998. The combination of these factors meant that devising in the late 1990s was far more aware of dramaturgy; it was more polished, structured, and was getting more critical acclaim than past works (O’Donnell “Devised Theatre”). Another influence on this polished revival of devising, according to Mel Johnston in her article in issue 26 of Playmarket News, was that devised theatre was now being taught at Victoria University of Wellington, in particular by John Downie. In her article, Johnston examines the work of four young devising companies: Trouble, Under Lili’s Balcony, Jealous, and Open Book. Three of these four companies formed out of Victoria University’s Theatre Programme and all of them are “…doing more than telling stories; they’re engaging with the development of theatrical form and process” (Johnston 10). The founders of Jealous, Tracey Monastra and Emma Willis met in their final year at Victoria whilst studying directing with John Downie. Johnston quotes Monastra as saying “There’s something about the fact that Victoria’s not focused on acting… you’re not there as an acting student, you’re there as a student of everything, I think it just readies people a) for collaboration and b) for being able to wear all those hats. Which you have to if you want to make work” (Johnston 11).

Perhaps unlike the rough devising of the 1970s and 1980s in New Zealand, these four companies that Johnston writes about were now so strongly interested in design that it became a part of the narrative. “This integration of the elements of theatre – light, sound, design and site – is something that seems to connect these companies. The ‘text’ is all of these things, not simply the words you start with” (Johnston 11). Both Andrew Foster from Trouble and Stephen Bain from Under Lili’s Balcony are interested in how all the elements of theatre can form the narrative in their work. Foster writes that the audience experiences a narrative which is “contained in more than just words” (Johnston 11). Bain goes so far as to say “I think it’s bullshit that whoever does this – [mimes typing] we call the writer, and I kind of hate the closed-mindedness of that” (Johnston 11). In this new wave of devising these theatre makers were re-defining what theatre meant for them and their audiences, just like their predecessors.
Of the four companies that Johnston discusses, Jealous was the only one where the founders were just women. However, there were women in the other three companies working in collaboration with men. Women have been making devised theatre in New Zealand since the form first began, and they make up a large part of our theatre history. However, it sadly seems to be the trend that unless those women have gone on to become playwrights themselves, they are often not included in our theatre literature. For example; one of my interviewees, Jo Randerson, who was a co-founding member of Trouble, also became a very successful playwright. Randerson has ten plays registered with Playmarket, a published short story collection and was awarded the Bruce Mason Playwriting Award in 1997. As she is a published writer, Randerson’s work is documented and celebrated. She has however, also had a huge impact on devised theatre in New Zealand and always uses collaborative performance methods with her company Barbarian Productions, but this history is somewhat unrecorded. While women playwrights are more likely to be included in our theatre literature, the information is still scarce. There are a few dissertations that examine the topic, such as Colleen Cleary’s 1993 MA thesis “Women Writing for Theatre in New Zealand in the 1980s.” In this thesis Cleary catalogues and studies those New Zealand women who have written for the theatre as playwrights and she also lists all the women/feminist theatres groups from 1943 to 1992. Susan Dunlop also wrote a thesis which looks at women in theatre in 2002 called “The Role of Women in the Culture and Context of a Developing New Zealand Theatre 1920-1950.” In explanation for deliberately focussing on women, she writes that it is “because the majority of existing New Zealand Theatre history publications have primarily focussed on work done by men” (Dunlop 2). More recently, Hannah McKie’s PhD thesis from 2014, “A "theatre of unease": Three stage plays and a critical survey of women’s playwriting in New Zealand between 1920 and 2013” examined the themes present within women’s playwriting in this country. While none of these texts focus on devised theatre, they do at least record the history of women working in theatre in New Zealand.

23 Established in 1983, the Bruce Mason Playwriting Award recognises the work of an outstanding emerging New Zealand playwright with a significant prize of $10,000.
Amongst the more recent writing about devising in New Zealand is Bert van Dijk’s text *Devised Theatre: A Practical Guide to the Devising Process* published in 2011. Aside from Murray Edmond’s writing, van Dijk’s book is the most substantial and explicit writing about New Zealand devising. While van Dijk does not focus on gender, this book is still a significant contribution to our devising literature. It is presented in three parts; the first is a more general discussion exploring the benefits and limitations of devising, the second details van Dijk’s own philosophy and method of devising using the underlying principles of the natural elements, and the third is a series of practical exercises.

The Playmarket Annual also occasionally includes articles about gender and women in theatre, or devised theatre, however, those topics have not yet coincided. In the 2005 Annual, playwright Fiona Graham wrote the article, “Engendering Theatre,” where she argued that women write differently. She asks, “How does your gender, your experience of being male or female, engender your work in the theatre?” (Graham 9). While Graham is focused on playwrighting many of her points are about gender in the theatre industry in general which could also be applied to devised theatre. For example, she cites a study conducted by Creative New Zealand in 2003 called *Portrait of the Artist – A survey of professional practicing artists in New Zealand*, which discovered that the “average male artist earns twice as much as his female colleague ($31,500 male to $15,100 female)” (Graham 9). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that Playmarket is the national playwrighting agency, the Annual focuses more on playwrighting as opposed to collaborative or devised theatre. However, in 2010 Jean Betts contributed an article which focused on how Playmarket can assist with script development and which included a section on devised work. Betts writes:

> Problems often arise when the play evolves into something different from the original plans, as often happens; this is the nature of devising and part of its appeal; but informal agreements can lose their relevance leaving some people feeling exploited… However, entering into a reasonably formal agreement at the start is much more likely to ensure that friendships are undamaged, and that the working atmosphere remains creative. (Betts “Getting your play on” 31)
Furthering this assistance, Playmarket also created a booklet called *Group-devised work: The Rights of Co-Writers, Devisers, Co-Creators, Actor/Writers & co*. This booklet is available on request and includes a wealth of excellent advice for devising collaborators.

Another modern source in New Zealand for theatre literature and criticism is the website *The Pantograph Punch.* In 2017 they published an article by Natasha Hay called “Landing the Kite by Working with the Wind: Playwright and Devising” (originally published in the 2015 Playmarket Annual under a different title). Hay explores the art of collaboration with a group of playwrights who often work within devising processes. They are Eli Kent, Jo Randerson, Rachel Callinan, and Vela Manusaute. While the article is from a playwrighting perspective, all four writers discuss the value of working in collaborative processes. Hay quotes Randerson speaking about her collaborative process using a hunting metaphor:

> Hunting in a pack, according to Jo Randerson, means there are more of you to catch the beast – “that entity often unknown, a mysterious but uniquely formed creature of its own right, perpetually just around the corner.” The challenge however, she says, is to stay focused and not run off in all directions. “Or, you all run off but make sure you come back together. It’s not that everything has to be done collectively. But that we don’t abandon collective responsibility and just rely on one hunter to catch the beast.” (Hay)

Vela Manusaute also describes his devising process with the South Auckland company Kila Kokonut Krew as being a living entity. Hay writes that Manusaute “feels his best work happens when sharing ideas with other creative people... ‘It’s an organic process that only comes alive on the floor’” (Hay). While this article does not focus on women or gender within devising processes, it illustrates that in the New Zealand theatre industry, working collaboratively or using devising methods is a consistently popular method of making and is therefore worthy of more study.

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24 Established in 2011, The Pantograph Punch publishes arts and cultural commentary about Aotearoa New Zealand, from personal essays to criticism and reviews to interviews and analysis (Pantograph-Punch.com)
One of the aims of this research is to uncover those women in New Zealand who have not published plays, who have not been recorded in history thus far, but who devise their own work and tell their own stories, because, as Renée said, “…every woman you meet has a story” (Renée qtd. in Dale “Women’s theatre” 162). The devised theatre of New Zealand’s past is difficult, if not almost impossible, to access now because it was never recorded, which means that, as a theatre industry we are missing a large part of our history. While theatre literature in this country often looks to the canonised plays (most of which were written by men) for reflections of our society, the devising work by women could have just as many insights to offer us. As Falkenberg suggests in his Theatre Topics article, New Zealand as a colonised nation is in a constant process of redevising our cultural identity and so we must look to devised theatre as legitimate form because “Perhaps it is time to see devised performance as a way of keeping the freedom as well as the relevance of the art, which is always fleeting… like identity, like life” (Falkenberg 40).

2.2 LEADING WOMEN – MADELINE MCNAMARA AND KERRYN PALMER

The potential of devised theatre is fantastic, because if your process is thought through then you’re really exploring processes that need to be used in this world to solve major issues between people and nations… you’re not just making theatre, you’re devising solutions.
(Madeline McNamara, personal interview, 2015)

I never pretend to know everything, and I never go into a project, even if there is a text, knowing what it’s going to look like. I always believe that more heads are better than one… I don’t want to pretend that I know what the final outcome is going to be.
(Kerryn Palmer, personal interview, 2015)
This section will discuss two devised works, both STAB\textsuperscript{25} Productions at BATS Theatre from the early 2000s, by two different Wellington based directors. They are \textit{Sniper} (2004) directed by Kerryn Palmer, and \textit{Demeter’s Dark Ride: An Attraction} (2005) directed by Madeline McNamara. The reasons for combining these two works within this section are twofold. Firstly, both these productions share a large number of similarities, they began life in the same way and share similar theatre forms. Secondly, given that both of these productions were produced over a decade ago, I did not personally see them, and while there are some existing newspaper reviews and both productions are mentioned in Emma Willis’ 2017 \textit{Australian Drama Studies} article about the history of STAB, any other information available about them is difficult to source. This is part of the consequence of a lack of documentation about devised work produced in New Zealand. Therefore, this section will primarily use the personal interviews that I conducted with Palmer and McNamara to discuss these two extraordinarily ambitious productions by these two leading women.

McNamara and Palmer are both graduates of the Master of Theatre Arts in Directing (MTA) course that was offered between 2001-2016 and was co-taught by Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School and the Theatre Programme at Victoria University of Wellington. Palmer graduated in the class of 2003, while McNamara was in the class of 2004, having completed the degree part time over four years. McNamara has played a significant leadership role in the feminist theatre scene in New Zealand. Prior to completing the MTA McNamara worked in theatre overseas in the 1970s and 1980s and performed in some of Red Mole’s productions – one of New Zealand’s most famous and significant alternative theatre companies. McNamara also played the titular role in the premiere of Lorae Parry’s classic play \textit{Eugenia} in 1996 at Taki Rua Theatre\textsuperscript{26}, and she established The Magdalena Aotearoa Trust in 1997 with Sally Rodwell. Palmer meanwhile, grew up in the Wairarapa and Wellington in the 1970s and 1980s, surrounded by the upheaval of political theatre at the time. Before undertaking the MTA, Palmer had

\textsuperscript{25} As referred to on page 14, STAB is an annual commission from BATS Theatre.

\textsuperscript{26} Established in 1983, Taki Rua produce, commission and develop theatre with a distinctively Māori voice.
also studied theatre and completed her teacher training at Victoria University of
Wellington and taught drama at Heretaunga College.

There were four major directing assignments as part of the second year of the MTA. One
of these was the Technical Directing Project:

A supervised practicum leading to a short public performance with the focus on
technical theatre. The 20-minute performance will demonstrate design and
technical complexity, and also creative and technical competence in creating a
performance based on a myth or classic story (Toi Whakaari and Victoria
University).

Both Sniper and Demeter’s Dark Ride began their lives as one of these Technical Directing
Projects before being successfully commissioned by BATS Theatre to be developed as the
STAB Productions for 2004 and 2005 respectively. Established in 1995, STAB (BATS spelt
backwards) is a commission that encourages innovation. Emma Willis writes in her article
“A Rare Opportunity to Fail: STAB’s Legacy of Theatrical Experimentation,” that STAB is
a “successful and long-lived commission” that has “funded works that push the
boundaries of performance practice... a hot house for the creative and professional
development of emerging practitioners” (Willis 86). Both Sniper and Demeter’s Dark Ride
pushed theatrical boundaries, particularly with their audience experience. Not only did
these two productions share a similar development history, but both works are also pieces
of promenade theatre and are site generic27. However, before this section delves into the
individual productions, it is useful to first discuss the two women who led these
processes, their history and what devised theatre means to them.

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27 Andy Field writes for The Guardian that site-specific theatre was originally described “as ‘performance
specifically generated from or for one site’, with the inference being that layers of the site would be carefully peeled
back through a performance that was not an imposition upon the location but sprung forth from it” (Field). Whereas site generic theatre is more of an umbrella term that can represent performance that does not necessarily take place within traditional theatre venues.
Madeline McNamara – A History of Political Devising

On the evening of July 6th in 2015 I arranged to interview Madeline McNamara about her experience in devising and her STAB production Demeter’s Dark Ride. It was mid-winter on the stormy south coast of Wellington. McNamara invited me into her home, we shared dinner, and sat beside the fire while she told me her story. When asked where she first discovered devising, McNamara recounted a rich history that began in the late 1970s in London. She told me:

I’d just discovered the feminist movement, and those raging second wave feminists. I was in a lesbian feminist theatre company called Hormone Imbalance and they were devising and creating work… we were also part of a Women’s Arts Alliance, and we were kind of using theatrical techniques and devices to explore political ideas of feminism… it was trying to create new work, trying to disseminate ideas or understand ideas… it was all political. (McNamara)

The way that McNamara described this work clearly connects with the theoretical framework surrounding materialist and post-structural feminism as was discussed on pages 31 and 33. McNamara’s first encounter with a devising process prioritised the group over the individual and was concerned with deconstructing the heteronormative female/male binary. These early investigations have continued throughout her work both overseas and in New Zealand. After her work with Hormone Imbalance McNamara was in London for a few years before travelling to the United States of America where she worked with a company called Double Edge Theatre in Massachusetts. Double Edge Theatre was established in 1982 by Stacy Klein and is still operating today. McNamara describes their work as “extraordinary. She [Klein] was very influenced by the work of Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, and so I was introduced to that kind of work which was a different way of devising that was incredibly physically based.”

Upon returning to New Zealand McNamara was involved in a few scripted feminist productions. However, she found this process quite difficult having now discovered devising. She says, “I was so influenced by the intense kind of improvisational physical work that we had done with Double Edge that I was kind of appalled, really, that you just
read the script and you created your character and we were directed in quite a conventional way.” Instead, McNamara became involved in the political theatre of “Pākehā supporting the Tino Rangatiratanga movement, and the work around the opposition to the 1990 celebrations of 150 years since the signing of The Treaty of Waitangi.” She says that this return to fringe theatre was where she was able to find her politics again. McNamara was also involved in the feminist devised comedy company Hen’s Teeth – named after the saying ‘as rare as hen’s teeth’ – founded by Kate JasonSmith. Hen’s Teeth first performed at Circa Theatre in December of 1988 and broke box office records (Edmond “Plays and playwrights”). McNamara says that everyone involved in the company were “asked to devise a piece of comic theatre, and that actually got a lot of us doing our own work for the first time” (McNamara). The cast for the first season of Hen’s Teeth called Hen’s Teeth: The Second Bite, included Dame Kate Harcourt, Helen Moulder, and Lorae Parry and Carmel McGlone who debuted their famous characters of Digger and Nudger (Theatre Aotearoa). Hen’s Teeth performed as a company regularly throughout the 1990s and then after a sixteen-year hiatus, they performed again at Circa Theatre in 2017 as part of WTF! Women’s Theatre Festival.

Figure 6: Hen’s Teeth 1988 Poster (Edmond “Plays and playwrights”)

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28 tino rangatiratanga (noun) self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy (MāoriDictionary.co.nz). The idea of tino rangatiratanga is that Māori are in charge of their land and resources and have authority and independence over their affairs. This was guaranteed to them under article two of The Treaty of Waitangi.

29 The Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand’s founding document. It takes its name from the place where it was first signed on 6th February 1840. The treaty is an agreement, in Māori and English, that was made between the British Crown and about 540 Māori chiefs (NZHistory.Govt.NZ)
Through Hen’s Teeth McNamara also met Sally Rodwell from Red Mole Theatre. Together they coordinated a festival of women’s devised performance called Not Broadcast Quality at The Depot Theatre in Wellington in 1990. McNamara says that her collaborative partnership with Rodwell gave her a “kind of real sense of me creating my own work” (McNamara). Of Not Broadcast Quality McNamara says that it was similar to Hen’s Teeth but “it didn’t necessarily have to be comic... it was a provocation to create a small piece, five minutes, could be ten or fifteen... it allowed people to just have a provocation to create something completely unique, over like ten nights, fifteen acts a night and that’s a lot of acts.” In our interview, McNamara spoke about the importance of companies like Hen’s Teeth and festivals like Not Broadcast Quality. They were opportunities for women to make their own work and discover their own voices and artistic vision. She said, “Some of them [the devised pieces of Not Broadcast Quality] were really extraordinary and they never got performed again, but they were amazing.” McNamara’s commitment to a feminist process that highlights women’s voices (particularly with festivals like Not Broadcast Quality), has been significant throughout her career and even today she continues to inspire younger theatre makers.

In the early 1990s, after some time spent “working a straight job to try and make money,” McNamara says that playwright Lorae Parry convinced her to be involved in her new play Front Women (published in 1993), which was then followed by Eugenia in 1996. Even though they were scripted plays and McNamara says that she never felt that it was “quite my scene, my place,” she says that they were “wonderful experiences,” and that “they got me back in the whole theatre life of New Zealand... in lesbian theatre, and women’s theatre.” Another key influence at this time was McNamara’s ongoing creative partnership with Sally Rodwell. In my interview with Jo Randerson, she spoke about the influence that both McNamara and Rodwell had on her own work and the respect she has for both women. Randerson said, “Sally Rodwell was someone who inspired me a lot and inspired so many people with that work... and Madeline’s work, I feel very conscious of

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30 The Depot Theatre (later renamed Taki Rua) opened in Wellington in 1983 with the aim of producing solely New Zealand Work.
Madeline McNamara’s incredible vision and skill as a theatre maker” (Randerson). Together, McNamara and Rodwell under their company name of Toad Lilies, devised a work called Crow Station: A Semi-Divine Side Show which was based on the characters that they had created for Hen’s Teeth and Not Broadcast Quality. In McNamara’s eulogy for Rodwell she described these characters thus: “The Nobodies were homeless and hapless nomads who carried their homes on their backs and lived in the in-between spaces, women who loved and fought and entertained each other in insalubrious ways” (Magdalena Aotearoa – Sally Rodwell). Crow Station had a clear political agenda and was in fact discussed in Jane de Gay’s and Lizbeth Goodman’s text Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women (2003). de Gay and Goodman write that Crow Station explored the tensions between power and powerlessness and “…introduced the legend of the Sibyls as an analogue to the situation of contemporary homeless women” (de Gay and Goodman 32).

It is conceivable that Crow Station could be read as having an intersectional feminist dramaturgy, exploring the intersections of gender and class while examining characters who live in the in-between and do not fit neatly into societal categories. Crow Station is a clear example of McNamara’s belief that political devised theatre can make a difference to the world. Through the characters of The Nobodies, McNamara and Rodwell were not “just making theatre,” they were trying to make a difference and inspire social change (McNamara).

In 1994, McNamara and Rodwell travelled to the Magdalena Project Festival in Cardiff and performed Crow Station. As mentioned on page 65, The Magdalena Project, founded in Wales in 1986, is an intersectional cross-cultural organisation committed to creating opportunities for women performers around the world to make new and original work. The organisation facilitates “critical discussion, support and training” and it is “…a nexus for diverse performance groups and individuals whose common interest lies in a commitment to ensuring the visibility of women’s artistic endeavour (The Magdalena Project). McNamara and Rodwell’s experience in Wales of “this festival and the dynamic multicultural structure of the Magdalena Project inspired them to expand the network into Aotearoa and the South Pacific” (Magdalena Aotearoa – About). The Magdalena
Aotearoa Trust was established in 1997 and is still operating today. Becoming a part of the Magdalena network fuelled McNamara’s love of devising. She told me that it was inspiring “seeing and being a part of the work that was being made by women all over the world” (McNamara). Just a few years later McNamara enrolled in the MTA degree where she told me “everything seemed to be devised,” and from there Demeter’s Dark Ride was born.

**Kerryn Palmer – Devising for New Zealanders**

Sitting in her office in the Theatre Programme at Victoria University of Wellington, Kerryn Palmer recalls for me her first encounter with devising as an undergraduate student in this very programme. She remembers in her first year of her theatre degree Angie Farrow\(^\text{31}\) taught a weekend workshop where they told stories from their childhood and then had to make into creative pieces. Palmer says, “It was a fantastic process how Angie structured that whole weekend. Devising is scary, you don’t have a script, but I still use her same methods for my own teaching. How you can start with just an idea and develop it into a performance” (Palmer). While Palmer completed her theatre degree in the early 1990s, she also remembers being profoundly influenced by the original New Zealand work coming out of Wellington in the 1980s, having previously only been exposed to the “classics” which felt distant and removed:

> I saw a lot of the quality work in the 80s at Downstage and Circa\(^\text{32}\) as part of my high school drama course, they were big canonical works like *A Doll’s House* and Shakespeare. But then The Depot opened, and it blew my mind, I remember seeing Theatre at Large there, and I definitely saw more New Zealand work at BATS from 1989. This is when I started to think about things outside of following scripts. That early New Zealand made work… it was so visceral, the engagement from the

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31 Angie Farrow is an award-winning playwright and an Associate Professor at Massey University specialising in theatre and creative processes. While more known for her work as a playwright, she has also been influential as a teacher of devising and collaborative processes.

32 Established in 1976, Circa Theatre is a professional theatre in Wellington. The Circa Council curates an annual season of work in its two performance spaces.
performers, it was really present and loud, it didn’t feel like you were looking at something from a distance.

As Palmer was at Victoria University in the 1990s she, along with the practitioners mentioned in Johnstone’s Playmarket News article including Tracey Monastra, Emma Willis and Jo Randerson, was taught by John Downie. Palmer recalls Downie being “quite influential during university” and remembers him encouraging her to devise for the third year directing pieces. She says, “that was my first experience of leading devising on the floor, the craziness of that, trying to make sense of something from everyone’s ideas... I worked with live musicians and created a physical script with the actors from a piece of German poetry.” Palmer’s first theatre work out of university was with Jenny Wake and Calico Young People’s Theatre Company. While it was a scripted piece the process was full of collaborative technique such as accepting offers from the performers, being completely open to change, and trialling sections of the piece on the floor. Palmer told me that many of her own philosophies were formed during that experience. She said,

Jenny had written the play, but it was a first production and we openly worked the script in the room. We rehearsed in a school, so we had our demographic around us and could trial it. And I remember Jenny being so open about testing new things and taking on board what we as actors offered. A lot of my practice has come out of that. It’s not just taking a script and putting it up, it’s questioning and playing and workshopping.

Early on in Palmer’s theatre career, she was involved in developing many original New Zealand works, and she noticed that, even in these scripted processes, there was a “really close relationship there with devising, those lines are quite blurred, the way you can work with a writer in the room.” This sense of collaboration is relatively common in New Zealand and Palmer told me that she has seldom worked in a more “traditional” manner,

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33 Jenny Wake is the founder and artistic director of Calico Young People’s Theatre established in 1991, which specialises in professional theatre for young audiences and in theatre. Wake has a Master’s in Children’s Theatre from Humboldt State University in California.
“apart from working with occasional male directors where you follow the structure of text interpretation and break it down into beats… my experience has always been getting into a room and seeing if we can make this together. I always want to push the boundaries… what can I do to make this text more interesting?”

While talking to Palmer about her history of devising, I noticed that the point she kept circling back to was about the importance of making work that is relevant for herself and her audience. It strikes me that Palmer is very much making work that is representative of Batliwala’s model of The Self and the four key components of the Feminist Leadership Diamond (Power, Politics and Purpose, Principles, Process), as previously discussed on page 38. Palmer’s theatre work is always deeply connected to the personal, which is also how Batliwala writes about leadership. Like Batliwala’s model of feminist leadership, Palmer’s devising process is “shaped and transformed” by “the particular attributes, talents, histories, experiences, and psychic structure” of each individual in her company (Batliwala 29). This style of leadership enables her to create work that personally connects to both the devisors and the audience. Palmer says, “In my theatre making I always ask, ‘what is the point of doing it?’ It needs to be relatable to New Zealanders for me, we need to come to the theatre and see ourselves and hear our stories.” Palmer remembers the shift to New Zealand made work in the 1980s and 90s with the Māori theatre movement34, feminist theatre, and the Pacific Underground35 all making vibrant work that told the stories of this place. These three movements are all connected by their rebellion against mainstream New Zealand theatre. This work that Palmer was seeing and being inspired by was quite possibly the same work that McNamara was making during this time as mentioned above. The history of women devising in New Zealand is a genealogy passed down to each new wave of makers. Palmer told me how a lot of her own devised work has come out of this need to tell our own stories. She says:

34 New Māori playwrights made a great impact on New Zealand theatre in the 1980s and flourished in the 1990s. The Depot Theatre, which focused on New Zealand work, played an important role in staging many of these plays (Edmond “Māori and Pacific Theatre”).
35 Companies and playwrights from the Pacific community began to present original plays on the professional stage in New Zealand in the 1990s. Pacific Theatre in Auckland and Pacific Underground in Christchurch, were instrumental in initiating this (Edmond “Māori and Pacific Theatre”).
A lot of my work is historical. It was telling stories I wanted to tell in an interesting way. I mean, I love Shakespeare, but what’s the point of me telling those stories? I made a decision early on that if I was going to put the effort in to make a piece of theatre, there needed to be a reason.

**The Processes of Madeline McNamara and Kerryn Palmer**

The theatre careers of Madeline McNamara and Kerryn Palmer demonstrate an example of the rich contribution that women devising practitioners have made to the ecology and history of New Zealand theatre. This section will explore the current devised theatre approaches, opinions, and styles of McNamara and Palmer, before discussing the two individual case studies *Sniper* (2004) and *Demeter’s Dark Ride* (2005). I noted a strong similarity between these two directors when in my personal interviews with Palmer and McNamara, they both spoke at length about the importance of collaboration. Palmer said, “For me devising is all about the collaboration, everyone has equal part in how that work comes about” (Palmer). Similarly, McNamara said that she believed devising was when a director, or a leader of some kind, has an idea that they are:

…pretty fired up about, or researching, or interested and curious about… and then bringing that to a group of collaborators that you love or whose work you love… and working to engage them with your vision and bring them into a working relationship. That you then collectively experiment with, explore, develop and then ultimately create something that is the sum of all those parts. (McNamara)

This style of devising aligns with Perry’s discussion of rhizome theory as outlined on page 28. Both Palmer and McNamara encourage equal collaboration and artistic buy in throughout their devising processes. This is reflective of Perry’s argument that using a rhizomatic shape can offer your process a “symbolic structure” to help you and your collaborators avoid binary thinking and dismantle hidden hierarchies that may be present in the rehearsal room (Perry 96).

While both Palmer and McNamara were credited as the leaders of these two case studies, (Palmer was credited as the director of *Sniper*, and *Demeter’s Dark Ride* was credited as
being imagined and led by McNamara), neither operate within a conventional directing hierarchy. In my interview with her, Palmer said [as cited earlier], “I never pretend to know everything, and I never go into a project even if there is a text, knowing what it’s going to look like. I always believe that more heads are better than one… For me, it’s really important that everyone has an equal kind of stake in it” (Palmer). Likewise, McNamara believes strongly in equal collaboration and avoiding the trap where there is a “powerful, charismatic, visionary person leading it” as there is a danger of “using people, who deliver your vision” (McNamara). Alex Mermikides also writes about this idea of “using” performers in her article “Brilliant theatre-making at the National: Devising, collective creation and the director’s brand.” In her discussion of the work of Theatre de Complicite and director Katie Mitchell, she writes, “The implication that a devising director enters the rehearsal room with a preconceived vision of the proposed production, as Mitchell seems to do, goes against the general representation of devising as the creation of work ex nihilo” (Mermikides 161). To counter this feeling of devisors/performers only being present to deliver a vision, McNamara focuses on her process. In my interview with her, McNamara spoke about the importance of both the product and process. She said:

I think it sort of behoves you to have to think about process as well, and what is a feminist process, or what is a process that is non-hierarchical, or egalitarian, or where power issues are evident and worked through, or whatever. That makes it stronger… If your process is thought through, then you’re really exploring processes that need to be used in this world to solve major issues between people and nations… (McNamara)

Both directors also recognised the benefits of devising and emphasised that this way of working allows you to tell your own story, whether that is personal history or one’s own philosophical ideas. McNamara said, “I think the benefits [of devising] are the way you can take your own ideas and start from those, and those ideas are very current because you are of that time, and so that work is very fresh… you’re not an interpreter, you are a creator” (McNamara). Adding to that, McNamara also spoke about how the potential of devised work can feel infinite. She said, “I think there’s something about scripted work in
this country, there’s a kind of limited sense of repertoire… whereas devised work, it’s kind of limitless.” While she acknowledged that even within a devising process, “choices have to be made” and structures need put in place to help the devisors focus their material, McNamara’s process is embedded with a feminist leadership style. Together we discussed the need for some kind of leadership within a collaborative process. McNamara described it as the company coming together and “endowing somebody with trust to make decisions.” This style of leadership that we both recognised as being essential, aligns with one of Srilatha Batliwala’s points from her article “Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation.” Batliwala writes, “Feminist leadership is not a one-way or top-down process, but leads through consultation, participation and consensus-building. These leaders do not preach participation and responsiveness to their constituencies as much as they practice it” (Batliwala 35). This is the way that McNamara leads her creative process, it is always a horizontal structure rather than hierarchical.

Their collaborative directing styles and feminist processes lead both directors to gravitate towards devising as a method of making. However, both Palmer and McNamara discussed with me the difficulties and limitations of devising. For Palmer, the key issues around devising in New Zealand are a lack of time and resources, especially considering the lack of opportunity to re-mount a production. She gave me the example of Pandemic, her most recent STAB production from 2013:

We did one really kind of experimental season of that [Pandemic], and I really want to do it again, because I know what didn’t work. It’s nearly impossible and it’s just so frustrating because we live in this culture in New Zealand where people go, “Oh yes here’s this amazing show that’s come from overseas!” But those people have been working on that show for ten years. And I get one crack and lots of people love it, but the theatre critics go, “It wasn’t quite immersive enough” or “It was too immersive.” And it’s like yeah! We didn’t have an audience until 3 nights before, of course some stuff isn’t going to work… So, I think that is a massive limitation. I think it really restricts how works develop and I find that incredibly frustrating. (Palmer)
McNamara’s concerns with devising are also connected to the amount of time one has within a process, specifically how a devised work is edited or constructed. She compared this to the editing process of scriptwriting, where one script may go through several drafts as it is honed and crafted. However, McNamara remarked that editing in a devising process is just “one of a number of processes that goes with devising” (McNamara). She also commented on the speed and the theatrical ambidexterity that is required when several parts of the devising process are happening at the same time.

It [editing] probably has to be quite quick, because you’re editing, you’re researching, you’re creating material, you’re improvising, you’re editing, you’re choosing, you’re putting it on. So that editing process isn’t as refined as it probably is if you’re a single scriptwriter. And who is the editor? Who’s the one choosing? And if that’s the director of the devised process, you have to make sure that’s set up where that person has been endowed with that trust to make that decision.

The approaches of these two directors have a lot of similarities, but their work differs from each other in terms of content. McNamara’s original work is overtly feminist, while Palmer often focuses on the historical or makes work that tells a personal story or connection. Palmer has created devised work around both the 1918 influenza outbreak in New Zealand and the Wahine Maritime disaster in 1968. Even though her work may not always be about a feminist subject, Palmer’s process most certainly reflects feminist values. She told me about the difficulties of sustaining a directing career in New Zealand, especially if you are a woman with children, but that working within a devising process can work in your favour in that respect. Palmer said:

I try to work around childcare for people and I think that’s not a thing that many people do. It’s actually changing the thinking, to make it easier for women to do it. You know, especially older women. So many actors just drop out then because it’s just too hard. I want to work around my own kids, but also because that’s what really important to a lot of women. So how can I arrange this rehearsal so I can still pick my kids up from school? And I find that a lot of male directors, that it’s not even on their radar. It’s just not even there. (Palmer)
According to Palmer, this empathy embedded within her process can sometimes have a detrimental effect because she prioritises people over what may be deemed as being best for the work itself. She confides in me that “The thing that keeps me up at night and I think it’s definitely a feminist issue, is this guilt of balancing creative decisions with being empathetic and not wanting to upset the people who have spent so long working and devising that particular scene that maybe you want to cut” (Palmer). Palmer’s process clearly aligns with Jackie Smart’s advice from her chapter *New Dramaturgy* (2014) that “a creative process based around human interaction should take account of the full scope of human emotions that feed into it” (Smart 102). However, Palmer notes that she does not think that this issue is something that keeps all directors awake at night:

I just don’t think it’s an issue for a lot of masculine directors. They would just cut the scene, not re-hire the actor who was difficult to work with. But I always try and see the bigger picture, I think about how is that actor going to feed her children if I don’t re-cast her, I don’t want to devastate the performers who have worked so hard on that scene, even if I do know it isn’t good for the work. (Palmer)

The strength of Palmer and McNamara’s work begins with their processes and in the case of both *Sniper* and *Demeter’s Dark Ride*, they had the chance to trial both the process and the production as part of their MTA degree the year before they premiered at BATS Theatre in STAB. This first trial run is perhaps why *Sniper* and *Demeter’s Dark Ride* were so successful and are often referred to as notable STAB Productions. While exploring how STAB artists often seek out new ways of engaging with their audience, Willis writes:

Installation, immersive and participatory works are some of the most striking examples of this… The [*Sniper*] proposal developed the tagline ‘Theatre not for the faint hearted’ and said that the production wanted to experiment with ‘putting people in situation … experiencing theatre in their whole body. They are bombarded with sights, sounds and physical sensations’ … *Demeter’s Dark Ride: An Attraction* transformed the entire theatre into an immersive theatrical environment. Based on the Eleusinian Mysteries, the interactive performance was structured as
a fairground ‘ride’ with nine different stops throughout the building.” (Willis 96-98)

Despite the vast ambition of both productions, Sniper and Demeter’s Dark Ride both began with a personal connection. Sniper directed by Palmer was inspired by her family history as her sister-in-law worked for the Red Cross for five years during the Siege of Sarajevo. Her research for the MTA technical piece began when she saw the photograph below of cellist Vedran Smailović. Palmer recalls:

This beautiful poster of this cellist was over my father in law’s bed, it has always been a really striking image… I have this really strong memory of standing on the edges of Sarajevo and going, ‘Oh my god this is where the snipers would sit’… The story behind this cellist is that he would get dressed in his tux and would go every day to the different sites of where there had been massacres and bombings and play that music in front of the snipers. And they never shot him. It was a cultural response and a cultural way of protesting about the war. He would just play this piece of music in memory of these people. So that was such a rich starting point and from there and I started to research. (Palmer)

\[\text{Figure 7: Poster of cellist Vedran Smailović (Palmer’s private collection).}\]
For McNamara, the inspiration behind *Demeter’s Dark Ride* had been building for quite some time. At the Magdalena Festival in 1994 McNamara met Nor Hall, a post-Jungian psychotherapist and author, and Linda Wise from Roy Hart Theatre. McNamara described for me a ten-day workshop where they “incubated dreams and created” from various texts that Hall had written about her patients and Greek Mythology (McNamara). McNamara describes Hall as “kind of like a dramaturg in the psychologist’s chamber.” This initial creative spark was amplified when McNamara read Hall’s book *The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine*, which she describes as being about “the myth and legend of Demeter and Persephone, looking at different sorts of phases of women’s lives, the sort of virgin and the mother and the crone... it was very strong and symbolic, it wasn’t fantasy, it wasn’t fluffy, it was just brilliant writing.” These ideas all came back to McNamara when she was looking for a structure for her MTA technical piece. She began exploring the legend of Demeter and Persephone in more detail. McNamara was interested in how Hall described the legend as a metaphor and how it could become a piece of immersive theatre:

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*Figure 8: Demeter’s Dark Ride poster and programme image (McNamara’s private collection).*
She [Hall] talked about it as a kind of metaphor for the creative journey, and also the psychological sort of journey in terms of the cycles of depression and hibernation. Seeing those time of depression and hibernation as part of a legendary ‘going under’ and then surfacing. Then I was very interested in how that related to the sort of scary dark rides of fairground America, Halloween and carnivals, and the Phantasmechanics that created these extraordinary things.

Palmer was also interested in creating an immersive promenade experience as she had seen a few pieces in this style where she felt disconnected. She told me that she found it annoying when it seemed like there was no purpose behind the audience moving. When creating *Sniper*, she said, “I wanted it to be quite visceral, I wanted people to really experience something rather than just sitting back. I think it was all to do with the fact that we sat back and watched the war on TV, as opposed to what it would have been like to be inside it” (Palmer). *Sniper* had an intensive research period and workshopping process with the actors and designers both for the twenty-minute MTA version and again
when it was developed into forty minutes for STAB. This method of working so closely with all the collaborators meant that some aspects of the production became integral to the dramaturgy of the piece. Palmer said, “One of the best things about it for me was that all the music was live, all the sound, it was all done on a cello. So, all the gun shots, were made from cello. That was part of working with that musician from the beginning, she was a full collaborator.” In the MTA version, the piece began with the audience being captured at gunpoint and put in the back of a truck, but after feedback from the audience, Palmer says, “We shifted it all, so that when the soldiers came in the feeling was more like, ‘we need to escape, we need to take the children, and get you out of Sarajevo.’ So, it was more inviting them on a journey… I wanted people to feel threatened, but I didn’t want to completely alienate them from the experience.” This meant that the narrative of the STAB version was more focused on following a family and their children, with the audience cast as Red Cross workers or Press, giving them a sense of purpose within the production. This new focus on the children is perhaps unsurprising given Palmer had her first child at the end of the MTA. She told me that, “It was a very full on year. I can’t even believe that I pitched it to STAB, I really didn’t have much of a concept of what it was like to have a baby, I just thought ‘yeah no problem!’ I have really strong memories of turning up to pitch with a six-week-old baby.”

Figure 10: Promotional image from Sniper (Palmer’s private collection).
The process for *Demeter’s Dark Ride* was expansive, and like *Sniper*, it developed considerably over the MTA and STAB seasons, and it required many key collaborations between McNamara and her team. She told me that the process was elliptical. She would share her research by devising presentation events, meet individually with collaborators and discuss in groups what that research had sparked for people, before they would all go away, devise pieces, and then bring them back to the group. However, the most important collaboration was with the designers. McNamara says that the relationship with lead designer Lisa Maule was central to the process, and that “Lisa often set me provocations... so those were co-writing processes where we described what we wanted to have happen in each thing” (McNamara). The final piece was forty minutes long and played several times each night with all the performers having to reset and repeat. McNamara describes the audience’s journey through each space as “the stopping places of Demeter on her sorrowful journey to find her daughter Persephone... I associated a particular kind of technology with each of those attractions. I was interested in exploring mirrors or Pepper’s Ghost\(^{36}\), or some form of illusion, all of them were to do with devices and wonder and lenses.”

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\(^{36}\) Pepper’s Ghost is a special effects technique for creating transparent ghostly images. This technique has been a staple of theatres and haunted houses since the 1800’s.
As every space was being designed in collaboration with Maule, McNamara began to work with the performers who were going to be inhabiting each space. She says that was “a matter of trying to work with those people to see how they could animate that space on their own, because they often weren’t interacting with other people” (McNamara). As a director McNamara faced the huge challenge of creating an ensemble when all of her actors were performing in separate spaces. She told me that “Some of those rehearsals were hard. But I felt like I had to keep those things all going, that work with the technologists, the technology in each area, the work with Lisa, the work with the costumes… and then how was I, as Madame D’Ott, to get in there...” Not only did McNamara lead this massive process, she was also one of the performers. Her character Madame D’Ott was a presence throughout the piece and conducted magic during the final section. With the help of another MTA student, Pedro Ilgenfritz, who seconded to the production, McNamara told me that she was able to lead and be a part of the process. This is similar to my own work within my practice as research. McNamara said, “He got me inside it [the production] as a character and I started to direct as Madame D’Ott... so I found my character and other people found theirs in relation to her.”

Figure 12: Madeline McNamara as Madame D’Ott in Demeter’s Dark Ride, photo by Jenny O’Connor (McNamara’s private collection).
In *Demeter’s Dark Ride* the audience went through the experience as themselves visiting each attraction. But in *Sniper* the audience became characters inside the production. In his review for *The National Business Review* John Smythe describes the experience thus:

Gathering in the foyer [of the Starlight Ballroom on Willis St]... each audience member is assigned a UN, Red Cross, or press dog-tag and photographed... they are then taken via a carpark to a basement to celebrate the 10th birthday of a boy called Sacha... a blackout is easily rectified with candles, which add to the beauty of the traditional song the boy’s mother sings... the mood is smashed by the sudden opening of the roller door, blazing headlights and the arrival of a covered truck... we guests are bundled aboard the truck. The drive in darkness, with no view outward, is disorientating and the beginning of a strangely bonding experience.” (Smythe “Audience laps up Sniper”)

The experience of the audience was important for Palmer because she wanted them to have purpose, and to be fully immersed within the world so that they could really feel what it might be like to be in that situation. Originally *Sniper* was going to be a series of vignettes, but it began to emerge with an episodic feminist dramaturgy and a strong narrative focusing on the children. Sue Ellen-Case’s describes feminist dramaturgy as being “elliptical rather than illustrative, fragmentary rather than whole, ambiguous rather than clear, and interrupted rather than complete” (qtd in Gale & Deeney 514). Palmer says, “I realised through this process that narrative is really important for me, and when I devise pieces I have to have a really strong concept of what’s going on” (Palmer). There was still a lot left up to suggestion and interpretation, and while at the end the audience members get out safely, they do not know what has happened to the children after they were taken away by soldiers. The last image the audience sees of the little boy is of him sitting on a swing. Palmer says, “He’s swinging into the light and then the next time the swing comes back, it’s empty. People found that image shocking.” In his review Smythe describes the moment thus, “More projection depicts the sister’s attempts to escape pursuit. She doesn’t survive. At least Sacha is still alive. He’s on a swing... Then, without a sound or change in rhythm, the swing is empty. A simple yet shattering image” (Smythe “Audience laps up Sniper”).
Despite not being cast as part of the narrative, the audience experience of *Demeter’s Dark Ride* was equally as immersive. They arrived outside BATS Theatre to a festival atmosphere; there was music on the street, chestnut sellers “and there’s sparks going everywhere” (McNamara). After some instruction from the guides and an appearance by Madame D’Ott, the audience are taken outside and led to a side entrance into the ground floor theatre (now called The Random Stage). McNamara describes it as entering “a kind of complete darkness inside a labyrinth… squealing sounds, various smells and touch. We had little areas for people if they were claustrophobic, so they could get out… it was a completely disorientating experience.”
Part of the goal for McNamara and her team, by setting this ride within BATS, was to “take a familiar space and make it completely unfamiliar.” They used every level of the building. This was quite an achievement, because at this time upper levels of the building were still occupied by the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, a fraternal organisation who leased the ground floor to BATS Theatre.37 After exiting the labyrinth, the audience saw a puppet show depicting Persephone’s capture, a complex technical feat including a miniature Pepper’s Ghost. Curtains above the audience opened and they were then presented with Demeter as an archaeologist in a diorama with a video backdrop, “scraping away looking for clues of Persephone’s disappearance.” There was a room full of mysterious objects, then a tiny red room which was experienced by only a few with the character Barbo “a filthy foul mouthed masturbatory figure,” “this little goddess who

37 The Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes owned the BATS Theatre building from 1976 to 2011 when it was bought by Sir Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh.
cheered Demeter up out of misery.” The audience then found themselves back in the stairwell of BATS, going up the stairs past Sally Rodwell as the Eleuromancer who “would prophesise but was never to be believed,” and into the top room of BATS which is now called the Heyday Dome. There the audience met Madame D'Ott and her fellow Phantasmechanics and musicians, then McNamara performed a magic show. She recounted to me some of D'Ott’s magic:

Each night we would get a little supply of liquid nitrogen from the university and I dipped an orange poppy in it, which I would then break... I had this big solid iron bowl, with white pepper on the surface and I had this wand and on the bottom of it was a bit of soap. And the magic trick is that you just touch the surface of the pepper with the soap and it completely opens it up, it cracks like the opening of the earth. Then the audience drank some nectar, and I did some other rituals and then they went back down and went out. And then it started again.

As the audience left the ride and made their way back into the real world, they would come back down past Sally Rodwell as the Eleuromancer again. A surreal part of the experience that McNamara did not even know about. She told me:

Sally had decided she was an old carnival queen, and she had done her bit, so she’d be off duty... when I came down and saw her doing that, it was just so funny. She wouldn’t interact with anyone at all, she would just be sitting there in all her costume glory, her gloves and her white face, and she’d just be sitting there reading the fucking newspaper. Or smoking or drinking a glass of wine, she was off duty.
Both *Sniper* and *Demeter’s Dark Ride* were epic productions built on a large scale and led by determined and fierce directors. They were critically acclaimed and were both nominated for Most Original Production at the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards in Wellington in 2004 and 2005, with *Sniper* winning in 2004. For Palmer and McNamara however, the most rewarding aspect of these productions was the reaction from their audience. In *Sniper* the audience was split up at the beginning and the end, and Palmer told me that it was fascinating watching the audience learn about themselves as they were being confronted with a high-pressured scenario within a safe environment. She said:

There’s this bit at the checkpoint where we took the kids off the audience group and told the audience ‘you move on, you move on.’ And this woman said to me at the end, ‘I always thought I would be the one who would stand up for the children. But at that moment when that woman had a gun at me, even though I knew it was fake, I knew I would never do it.’ And at the end when we had couples separated, some people refused, and it’s not like the actors were going to do anything, but it
made other people say, ‘I can’t believe I just let my wife go. What in me made me do that at that moment that I was confronted?’ (Palmer)

Similarly, McNamara recalls some of her audience having life changing experiences and some who saw the performance eight or nine times. She told me the story of one performance when a woman fainted in the top room. Coincidentally, McNamara’s friend had given her a set of smelling salts as Madame D’Ott, and she told me, “It [the scene] was all about birth and death and resurrection… and I remember going down to her like I was doing this magic trick, and nobody saw me use the vapours under her nose, and she just came back to life” (McNamara). McNamara recalls meeting the woman outside after the performance and that she said to McNamara that the performance had changed her life.

Theatre that has this effect on an audience is what pushed Palmer and McNamara to keep going. Both directors spoke to me about how difficult the processes were, especially wrangling productions of this magnitude. Palmer says, “We are restricted by what we think we can’t do… And yeah it is hard, but it’s also doable” (Palmer). McNamara recalls that at the end of the nine-month process for STAB where “we tried to pay everybody as much as we could and look after everybody,” that she was completely exhausted (McNamara). She told me that, “At the end of it I didn’t know what to say, I was completely numb to the end of it… but it was also kind of a phenomenon, like that was the thing that it was.” Of the audience reaction to Sniper Palmer says, “It was fascinating, which is what I love about this type of theatre, is what it can make you realise about yourself. You’re not just sitting their passively, you are actually inside it and brings up different feelings and experiences” (Palmer). McNamara echoed this sentiment and told me that after Demeter’s Dark Ride,

Some of the audience felt like they would now see life in a different way, they didn’t quite know what they had experienced, but something had shifted in them. And god that’s as much as you can hope for in theatre. You don’t necessarily know why you’re changed, but you are and that goes into your entire being. (McNamara)
In this chapter I have made visible some of the genealogy of women devising in New Zealand. With the available literature being so limited, it is difficult to paint a detailed depiction of our early devising in the 1970s and 80s without conducting a full historiography and collecting many oral histories. Nonetheless, this chapter takes the first step towards uncovering the rich history of women devising in New Zealand by presenting the relevant literature in the first section and then discussing Kerryn Palmer and Madeline McNamara’s ambitious works in the second section. Through the literature review I have demonstrated that devising practices and processes often travel to this country. New Zealand is a borderless nation, so ways of making and teaching are brought here and passed down, meaning that they evolve and change. Many New Zealand practitioners have studied with Jacques Lecoq, Philippe Gaulier or John Bolton (who also studied with Lecoq), and their influence means that a lot of our devised theatre is physical, involves puppetry, mask and clowning. However, the influence of Robert Lepage in the 1990s gave us more structured dramaturgy with integrated and complex design. The combination of these influences makes a devised theatre style that is unique to New Zealand.

This lineage of male clowns inspiring New Zealand’s devised theatre is more documented and trackable through our theatre literature, however, it means that the significant contribution of women is missing from our devising history. In the first section of this chapter I focused on the women within the literature as much as possible and then deliberately chose to interview McNamara and Palmer to document their histories for the first time. McNamara’s work is so integral to New Zealand’s devising theatre ecology, especially her work with Sally Rodwell of Red Mole and their establishment of Magdalena Aotearoa. McNamara and Palmer’s commitment to a collaborative feminist process that leads with empathy offers an alternative devising methodology, one that is worthy of study.
The epic devising processes of *Sniper* and *Demeter’s Dark Ride: An Attraction* had such a clear impact on the makers and their audience that they are still talked about over a decade later. Yet so much of the detail and history of how they were made has never been discussed. I was fortunate to be able to interview both Palmer and McNamara and have them share their processes, memories and photographs with me. Without their voices and input, this analysis would have been difficult to collate. One of the goals of my thesis is to acknowledge and document this work, so that future generations can learn from directors like Palmer and McNamara, two directors who champion feminist processes and theatre that makes a difference. These case studies show just a glimpse of the rich tapestry of women devising in New Zealand and address some of the key themes of this research such as; feminine/masculine behaviours, collaboration, feminist leadership, and empathy. I selected the case studies of *Sniper* and *Demeter’s Dark Ride* because they were devised works that I was familiar with. Despite not personally seeing the productions, they were talked about and known within my community. This selection obviously focuses the research, however, there are so many more devised theatre productions led by extraordinary women in New Zealand that I could have chosen. They may be beyond the scope of this thesis, but all these productions are a part of our theatre history and their significant contribution should be recorded and recognised.
I’m often in a rehearsal room and I get talked over the top of, or I say something, and everyone ignores me, and then someone who is taller and louder than me, with a deeper voice says the same thing and people listen.

(Fiona McNamara, personal interview, 2015)

In my interview with Fiona McNamara, director of MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand (2010), she spoke about her observation that, in the New Zealand theatre industry women, “seem to get oppressed in the key creative roles, their voices seem to get silenced” (McNamara). Her experience quoted above, of having someone talk over the top of her, is one that many women could relate to. Certainly, it was one aspect that drove all the women who collaborated on MINGE to create a performance that was “about women, by women, for women” (McNamara). While MINGE premiered at BATS Theatre in 2010, Fiona recounted these still fresh experiences to me in an interview in 2015, implying that these problems were still occurring five years later. In fact, this experience of women being talked over, being ignored, not being listened to, or having their voices silenced, is the most common experience that I have found in all my research into women devising in New Zealand in the 21st Century.

Following on from the history recounted in Chapter Two, this chapter looks at the current decade of devising in New Zealand. I will explore this devising landscape firstly through the case study of MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand (2010). This production was a turning point in our recent devising history, as a younger
generation of women from different mixed gendered theatre companies based in Wellington, came together to make their voices heard. In 2010, in the Wellington theatre community, there were not many examples of feminist devised work. MINGE Collective were aware of their predecessors and some of the feminist devising of New Zealand’s past, but they consciously chose not to research this work, because they wanted to create something new that spoke to their current present experience. MINGE was being devised while I was completing my Honours degree, so this production has always been one of the inspirations for my research into women in devised theatre in New Zealand. Following this case study, this chapter will analyse the primary research data from my online questionnaire and explore some of the issues for women in contemporary devising in New Zealand that were addressed by my interviewees. The case study of MINGE sits alongside my data analysis to illustrate that, the problems that the women of MINGE experienced and the reasons they came together as a collective, are still affecting women today.

3.1 A NEW DECADE – MINGE

*I think a large part of MINGE for me was wanting to be in a room of female makers and deal with female-centred questions. I'd been in a few devising processes where I felt like my questions as a woman weren’t given priority and thus I felt I wanted to make a space where those questions were given priority.*

(Eleanor Bishop, personal interview, 2016)

In 2010 in Wellington, fourteen women, who had been making theatre as individuals or with other companies, came together and collaboratively created a new piece of devised theatre. *MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand* (2010) was an exploration of feminist issues told in a cabaret style with songs, puppets, and dancing. One male reviewer described *MINGE* as “timely, insightful and very entertaining” (Smythe “Timely, insightful”). Another male reviewer acknowledged that while it was
“received on its second night with rapturous applause from a largely female audience,” he criticised the performance because it “ignored the fact that men exist on Earth too” (Atkinson). Of course, that was the entire point for this production. MINGE Collective was created because these women wanted to rebel against the gender constructs and constraints that they felt they had been restricted by throughout their careers in the late 2000s. They were a new generation of theatre practitioners in their 20s and they wanted to (as those women who came before them did) put women’s stories back on the New Zealand stage. In my interviews with director Fiona McNamara and dramaturg Eleanor Bishop, who started the project together, they both spoke about their desires to devise a work that focused on women. McNamara said:

We wanted to do something that was for, by and about women essentially. So, we decided to devise… I guess we wanted to make something new. We got together a lot of the women we had worked with in theatre before… it was quite a big group; about ten or twelve of us. People who we knew and people who were both interested in making theatre and interested in women’s issues. (McNamara)

MINGE Collective was established in the spring of 2009 by a group of women with a mutual love for theatre and womanhood and a strong desire to make theatre with a purpose. The size of the collective and the number of participants fluctuated slightly throughout the process, but the core company of high calibre artists remained the same. These women all came from different theatre backgrounds and many of them had worked with or had established other mixed gender theatre companies such as; The Playground Collective38 or Binge Culture.39 I find it interesting that the chosen name for the group, MINGE Collective, is reminiscent of Binge Culture and The Playground Collective. This could suggest a feminist rebellion by these women, by deliberately subverting the perhaps more masculine theatre companies that they were involved in. Despite coming from

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38 The Playground Collective is a New Zealand theatre company established in 2007 and led by Eleanor Bishop, Eli Kent and Robin Kerr. They create a mixture of script based and devised theatre.

39 Established in 2008, Binge Culture is a collective of Wellington-based artists. Their work happens in theatres, public spaces, and through digital platforms. The current company includes: Ralph Upton, Claire O’Loughlin, Fiona McNamara, Joel Baxendale, Rachel Baker, and Oliver Devlin.
different companies, the collective was not a particularly diverse group, and McNamara acknowledged that, “there was some criticism that it was just one kind of woman, that we were young privileged white women… we should have been clearer that it wasn’t all womanhood” (McNamara). While this statement may be true, this does not mean that the collective completely rejected intersectionality. Within the group there were intersections of motherhood, and sexuality with several members of the group identifying as queer. Though they may have all been white, these women did not look the same and there were also intersections of body type in the group, as can be seen in the poster image below.

The collective also recognized this issue of homogeneity in the final performance with a scenario about privilege. When analysed now this scenario connects with Cooper’s writing about intersectionality as discussed on page 35. As cited, Cooper asserts that intersectionality is most “useful for exposing the operations of power dynamics in places where a single axis approach might render those operations invisible” (Cooper 401). This particular scenario demonstrated that even within a seemingly homogenous group there were invisible intersections that could create power dynamics. In this game each performer would step forward if they answered yes to a particularly privileged statement that was read out. At the end of the game the Minges were not in a straight line, there were differences between all of them. However, the game did acknowledge that all the members of the company were between the ages of 20-35, they were all relatively middle class and all of them were white. To combat this issue, during the process, MINGE Collective had reached out into the wider community and collected stories from women beyond the devising group. With permission, several of these stories were performed in the final show and all of them were published in a zine. Director McNamara says, “We knew we wouldn’t be able to put all of those into a one-hour show, so we created a zine… that process was much bigger than just a theatre show.” Along with the zine, the collective also started a public Facebook page which was one of the first Facebook pages for a theatre event/group in Wellington and it became increasingly popular leading up to the production. The Collective posted articles, had discussions, and engaged with the public about their work. This was an important goal for the Collective and McNamara says,
“There was so much interaction with it and we were posting all the time, I really wanted to have a Facebook page that wasn’t just publicity for the show.”

MINGE Collective focused solely on women’s stories, both their own and from women beyond their devising group. This meant that large parts of the final performance were in the style of verbatim theatre; women’s stories, told in their own voices. For their devising process and the production, this created a culture of listening. Both McNamara and Bishop cited how valuable and meaningful the devising process was for MINGE. Bishop in particular said, “I would now view MINGE as a social practice project where the process of making the art is the art. A large part of the devising process was spent in conversation, discussing our paths to womanhood, our lives as artists, being female artists” (Bishop). McNamara explained, that to create this culture:
It [the process] started with a lot of whakawhanaungatanga.\(^{40}\) Getting together and just talking a lot. The first meeting was at my house and we all had dinner together, everyone brought food... It was great, and we just hung out and talked about theatre but also got to know each other... We started talking about our experiences of devising but also just who we were and our own life experiences. (McNamara) The company began meeting irregularly to discuss and share ideas about women in theatre, and the specific problems that they had themselves encountered. As the Collective’s discussions developed, a desire emerged to create an original piece of devised theatre. This was the point at which I joined this process, as the producer. I was not directly involved in the devising of the performance itself, but I observed the process and was at some rehearsals, so, as well as using the interviews with McNamara and Bishop, I will also be giving my own perspective on this case study.

The Collective deliberately chose the somewhat provocative title of MINGE for their company and for their show to enable them and other women the chance to reclaim the word. They wanted to use the word in a positive way to help banish any fear of the female body. By removing negative connotations from the word, by putting it in media releases, wearing it on a badge, even just saying it out loud, MINGE Collective were challenging the stereotyped perception that talking about women’s bodies in this way is shameful or disgusting. McNamara also spoke about how the word ‘Minge’ can be more inclusive because it does not refer to anything specific. She said:

Minge is a funny word. It’s weird and funny, and it’s unclear what it’s actually referring to. And I think that that works really well in feminism. There’s a Facebook group that I’m quite into called Vag Talk, but that is inherently problematic, and it excludes anyone who doesn’t have a vagina. But the thing with MINGE is... it’s just kind of inclusive in its silliness, and that was a way we were able to access a lot of groups of women, because we didn’t take ourselves seriously, and the show really was comedy. It was a celebration.

\(^{40}\) whakawhanaungatanga (noun) process of establishing relationships, relating well to others (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
The devising process for MINGE took place over approximately two years. The collective spent about 12 months in a research phase, where they would meet, share their stories and experiences, and stories of other women around Wellington. This process quite closely followed the work of Forced Entertainment, a British theatre company with a male director who devises their work. McNamara has used this process frequently in her work with her theatre company Binge Culture, and so adapted it for this project. The first phase of the devising process for MINGE was gathering material. Once the more structured rehearsals started, they would try out ideas or stories using improvisation techniques, making lists, or devising games. Finally, they started to explore the bigger questions of
structure and how the performance would be framed. There was a wealth of material to draw from so the structure of the piece became a kind of cabaret performance with monologues. Bishop told me that the breakthrough moment in the process was when they, “decided to use the tropes of various female characters/representations as the basis for our characters. Then the structure evolved to allow each character to have a vignette” (Bishop). This framework was a compromise as it allowed the company to include a lot more material than a more traditional narrative might have. This was a difficult period during the process as there were conflicting opinions within the Collective about what the final piece should look like. Many of the performers were unhappy with the framework and felt that it had been forced on them as time pressures started affecting the process. This is a familiar issue in devising processes and is similar to what happened to my collaborators and I during the practice as research, this will be discussed in Chapter Five. Anne Wessels writes that, “Conflict, closely associated with speaking and staying quiet, is also a critical component of devising” (Wessels 133). However, the conflict within Minge Collective’s process was challenging and required mediation from both myself as the producer and the production manager.

On reflection, both McNamara and Bishop can see how these issues developed and how they could have approached the process slightly differently. Bishop acknowledged that, “prescribing an entire structure and then making the piece was not useful in a process like ours, which had so many different ideas. Letting the structure evolve from the making could’ve allowed more freedom, and a more innovative piece” (Bishop). As the director, McNamara found it difficult to lead such a collaborative and personal process where it was important that everyone in the collective had a sense of ownership. In our interview together, she gave me this example, “If someone is talking about their own very personal experience, how can you ever cut that from a script, or how can you even shape it? It’s so difficult to find a way to do that sensitively” (McNamara). This is similar to the issue of empathy that Kerryn Palmer raised in Chapter Two. It is difficult to find the balance and create empathetic leadership. McNamara also acknowledges how much she learnt from
MINGE, particularly regarding clear communication and defining roles/positions within the company. She told me:

When we started I was trying not to take the “I’m the director” kind of role. But as you get further through, the need for a stronger director figure becomes greater. You can start openly, but once you start to really craft it, you need that leader more. And if you haven’t established yourself as that at the beginning, it’s very hard to establish yourself as that at the end... It’s just that people aren’t used to it, and are suddenly like, “Oh why are you now telling me what to do?” But, if you are telling people what to do from the beginning, they’re less likely to collaborate.

I find this to be a common issue within devising processes. Both Madeline McNamara and Kerryn Palmer addressed how leadership can be problematic in the previous chapter and there are several examples of poor communication or lack of definition around leadership positions within the questionnaire and interview responses. Not only this, but the above quote from Fiona McNamara accurately describes my own experience within my practice as research. At the beginning of the practice as research process my collaborators and I tried to create a completely equal process where the leadership was shared between all of us. This stalled our process several times and eventually I took on more of a leadership role. However, by practicing a style of feminist leadership, as outlined in Batliwala’s article and discussed in Chapter One, our process now had direction but remained collaborative and egalitarian. These ideas will be explored further in Chapter Five.
The overall ambition for MINGE was also something that made the process difficult, especially when it came time to craft and shape the final performance. McNamara described it as a “ridiculous task” to have set themselves and said, “I think at one point we joked that we would call it A Short History of Womanhood. We were just going to cover everything… motherhood, abortion, eating, fat activism, sexuality, all these different things and that is so much to put into a really short show” (McNamara). Bishop also pointed out that having such broad devising questions for the work made it difficult to focus and drive the process forward. She said, “It was a struggle to make because I think the desire to make female centred work was not a strong enough artistic question to drive the making of the work itself. It was too broad a basis to begin work” (Bishop). MINGE Collective came together because they felt like their voices were being ignored in the theatre that they were making, and they wanted to create feminist work. As Bishop says, this scope was far too big, and this diluted focus may have led to some of the difficulties in the devising process. However, covering so many different issues and giving each
performer an equal opportunity did mean that *MINGE* was able to connect with a wide audience.

![Figure 19: Production image for MINGE, photo by Ness Fowler Kendall (Researcher's own collection)](image)

The narrative structure of the character vignette with a variety/cabaret style had some strong feminist dramaturgies built into its structure, and as Bishop says, this kind of theatre, “has roots in feminist and queer performance” (Bishop). In 1988, Sue-Ellen Case identified the feminist dramaturgical aesthetic as “elliptical rather than illustrative, fragmentary rather than whole, ambiguous rather than clear, and interrupted rather than complete” (Case 129). Like Case’s description, *MINGE* did not follow a traditional Aristotelian narrative structure with an exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and a dénouement at the end. Instead, it was far more episodic and elliptical. *MINGE* was also an ensemble production. Other than the MC who guided everyone through the show, there was not a lead character, the collective worked as an ensemble supporting each other throughout. An alternative way to think about Case’s elliptical structure is that feminist dramaturgies can also be described as becoming, emerging and/or transforming. They do
not necessarily end like a traditional narrative, instead they show change. In a reflection of this idea each monologue or character arc in MINGE presented a stereotype/archetype in transformation by using verbatim stories from women. They deconstructed the stereotype by using real women’s voices and sharing their actual experiences.

On a lush pink and gold set with fairy lights, golden trees and a cushioned chaise lounge, the MC character, dressed in a Marie Antoinette style costume created by Josephine Hall, guided the audience of MINGE through the performance, with many allusions and references to notable feminist texts and famous women peppering her dialogue. At the beginning of the performance, each of the other cast members introduced themselves before assuming a particular female stereotype which were based on beauty pageant style sashes; the Victim, the Tomboy, the Maiden, the Mother, the Power Woman, the Overachiever and the Fat One. This created a Brechtian blur between the actor and the character. What was real and what was performed was deliberately never made entirely clear. Each performer came forward to talk to the MC about their character, told their

Figure 20: Production image for MINGE, photo by Ness Fowler Kendall (Researcher’s own collection)
story, usually in a monologue form, and eventually, overcame this stereotype by transforming and finally emerging as their own person. The Collective used musical numbers and puppets throughout to create a joyous feeling for the audience and to emphasise the celebratory nature of the production.

However, it was not just a light comedy cabaret and there were moments of MINGE that were much more serious in tone. Some of the monologues were emotional and shattered their stereotypes, while others were played more for laughs. The Tomboy character presented a complex issue in two ways. She was feeling pressured to come out as a lesbian, so she responded with a passionate and hilarious song about having sex with women. This was later followed by an emotional monologue about the complexities of gender which was a verbatim story from the MINGE Zine. These contrasting scenes gave the character the emotional depth to transform their stereotype and emerge as a three-dimensional person. The Mother stereotype was also completely subverted. After she shared some baking with the audience and sang a song about being a Kitchen Queen, she performed a stand-up comedy style routine about pregnancy tests, the morning after pill and abortion. The Power Woman told a story of a night out that ended in sexual assault. With delicate vulnerability the performer described how her own power was taken away from her. By simply telling the story as it happened, it forced the audience to confront an incredibly serious issue without pre-judging it. This monologue, in particular, was very effective in performance. It begins with the Power Woman describing a night out with a guy who has been flirting with her. They kissed in the bar, she offered to drop him home and then he invited her inside. What feels so far like a monologue about sex positivity suddenly takes a darker turn:

He’s kneeling down in front of the computer and I’m standing. He’s tall and his head still comes way up past my waist. He puts his arms around me, and we stay like that, in the dark, and it’s nice. Really, really nice …

Before long we are lying together on the mattress couch. We are kissing, and it’s still nice. He is touching my breasts and running his hands down the length of my body. He keeps
doing this and we keep kissing and I hardly even realise as he ties my hands behind my back.

When I do realise I have to marvel for a second that he manages to do this. I am lying on my back, with my hands underneath me, and they are firmly tied together with his belt. It’s like the worst magic trick I have ever seen.

(Minge Collective “The Sleepover” 1)

The rest of the monologue did not go into explicit detail of what exactly happened, but it illustrated the confusion that this woman felt. She slept at his house and when she woke up they were nestled together, she then dressed and went home. It raised questions of who had the power and who abused it. This monologue was confronting for a lot of the audience and it was a moment that stayed with many. The performance did not provide any kind of answer at the end and did not go into much detail about the consequences of the story. What was more important was that this story and this voice were being presented at all. For McNamara, who is now the general manager of the Sexual Abuse
Prevention Network\textsuperscript{41} in Wellington, it was critical that the Sleepover monologue was handled delicately. She told me:

It was a monologue about a situation that many people wouldn’t class as sexual assault or could easily lead to victim blaming or slut shaming... it was quite subtle, but it was something that the actor did really well, and did it with such sincerity, that a lot of people told me that it really opened up their eyes to issues around consent... There was a lot of positive feedback about that being treated really sensitively by all the performers on stage at the time. You could tell that the audience was really listening to it, it was certainly the darkest moment of the show, and certainly the most emotionally intense moment of the show, and really got people thinking about issues of consent and how they manifest in more subtle ways, or more confusing ways. (McNamara)

The issues presented in \textit{MINGE} such as; sexual assault, abortion, gender identity and sexuality, are not often seen in mainstream theatre (although it is increasingly becoming more common). Sometimes if they are included in a play they can quickly become the focal point. The style and framework of \textit{MINGE} meant that this did not happen. Perhaps the Collective tried to tackle too many issues in one production, but by putting them side by side and allowing some to be funny and some to be serious, the production was able to present these voices without judgement or prejudice and create something unique. The collective was able to entertain and challenge the audience, and still end the performance with a joyous musical number. McNamara agrees that while there was “definite interrogation,” she believes that “\textit{MINGE: An Interrogation and Celebration of Womanhood in New Zealand} was more successful as a celebration” (McNamara). McNamara is proud that the production raised all these issues, even if they were not able to come to conclusions about them. She says, “You can’t even tackle abortion in a one-hour show,

\textsuperscript{41}“Sexual Abuse Prevention Network (SAPN) is a Charitable Trust and a collaboration of Wellington Rape Crisis, Wellington Sexual Abuse HELP Foundation and WellStop. The Network was founded on a joint commitment to the prevention of sexual violence from a community development perspective, focusing specifically on education and preventative strategies for youth that promote healthy sexuality” (SexualAbusePrevention.org.nz).
you can’t tackle just one issue and we were tackling everything… but it really was a celebratory environment” (McNamara).

MINGE illustrates that devising methodologies can greatly assist in how these stories are told and how these issues are raised. By collaborating with other women practitioners who were not part of the core collective throughout their rehearsal process, MINGE Collective was able to reflect and present many different voices, instead of the singular voice of a playwright. This has strong connections with both materialist and post-structural feminism as outlined in Chapter One. MINGE Collective clearly prioritised the group over the individual, and like how Davies et al. describe the feminist poststructuralist subject, as cited earlier, the process for MINGE was “fluid, fragmented, with more open boundaries” than a traditional scripted process (Davies et al 87-88). Ironically this received some criticism from reviewers. McNamara found it frustrating that MINGE was criticised “for not being more of a linear narrative and fleshing out stories

Figure 22: Erin Banks as The Tomboy and Ally Garrett as The MC in MINGE, photo by Ness Fowler Kendall (Researcher’s own collection)
in a traditional way,” when the aim of the Collective was to “tell all of these stories at once… they were starting and emerging and becoming those ideas, without necessarily coming to a conclusion, they were supposed to be the beginning of something” (McNamara). Years later, Bishop reflects that, while the production may not have been critically well received, the representation of these voices struck a chord with their audience. She told me:

The production was received well by its target audience which was young women… I think the production set out to bring a group of diverse female theatre makers together to see if we could collaborate on a project, which was a great exercise. It allowed the makers themselves to get in touch and think deeply about their own experiences which I valued immensely. The work was difficult because of the diversity of the makers, but on reflection, years later, it’s gratifying to look at how many of the participants have gone onto create vastly diverse work as makers in their own rights. (Bishop)

Figure 23: Production image for MINGE, photo by Ness Fowler Kendall (Researcher’s own collection)
Donkin and Clement write, as cited earlier, about theatre which only presents masculine ideals as a “dreary cycle,” where “distorted representations lie unchallenged and after a while, become substitutes for deeper truths” (2-3). They write that:

In that cycle, a short circuit develops: Not only do real human beings begin to replace what they know about their lives with what they see being represented, but they also begin to lose sight altogether of how they feel and what they know. Theater audiences, and most alarming, theater artists abandon their own truths in favor of some larger Truth, because their little truths have nowhere to settle in what the critical theorists refer to as a master narrative. (Donkin and Clement 3)

MINGE is an example of a theatre performance that challenged these “distorted representations” and put women’s stories back on the New Zealand stage in an overt way. Some of the stories were funny, some sad, some confronting and some joyous. But all of them were about women and were told using a woman’s voice. The women of MINGE Collective were speaking for themselves; they refused to let someone else speak for them. There was an audience of women and men for this production who wanted to hear a different story, this resulted in MINGE performing well at the box office with an 83% house across the season and four sold out performances.

Writing in 2018 within the context of this research, MINGE could be considered a turning point for the Wellington theatre community. Since this production I have seen an increase in feminist devised productions being performed in this city. While the process and production were by no means perfect, no piece of theatre or art ever is, MINGE was a moment in our theatre history where a younger generation of women came together for the first time in the Wellington theatre community, to ensure that their voices would be heard on stage. If we do not talk about them, and write about them, those stories could once again become lost. Since MINGE premiered at BATS Theatre in 2010, and especially since I began this research in 2014, there has been a steady rise of women theatre artists and work that addresses a feminist agenda. In my interview with McNamara, we spoke about this increase and how important it was to see more theatre works that were “For, By and About women,” a catchphrase that MINGE Collective used regularly when
describing their work. McNamara then elaborated for me exactly what she meant by that and how she carries that into the work she makes today:

So, the ‘For’ is about the audience, it’s about how it feels for them, that they have a connection to the work, also that it’s ‘For, By, and About’ them in a way. And the ‘By’ that it’s made by female artists and female technicians so it’s promoting opportunities for women in the arts. And the ‘About’ being about representation and showing the ideas that don’t often get talked about. I think all of those elements are really important. So that it’s a show for an audience that often doesn’t get works made directly for them or where they see themselves represented. It’s an opportunity to participate and for there to be work for women... for them to say their stories on stage. (McNamara)

3.2 THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

I stated in the previous section that MINGE (2010) was a turning point in feminist devising for the Wellington theatre community. However, the opening quote from Fiona McNamara recounting an experience of someone speaking over her, demonstrates that the problematic experiences and reasons the women of MINGE came together as a collective, are still affecting them today. In fact, these problematic experiences are still affecting many women in devising in New Zealand today. As outlined in Chapter One, this research was fuelled by my own experience as a woman devising in New Zealand. When this project began, the first thing I set out to do was to gauge the opinions, feelings and perspectives of other practitioners in relation to gender and devising. This section will analyse that primary research by examining the questionnaire data and some of the interviewee responses, in order to explore what the current landscape looks like for women devising in New Zealand.

What this research illustrates is that there is a contradiction present within devising. While many of the respondents praise the benefits and value of devising, especially in its
methodological ability to include multiple voices and work collaboratively, many of the women cite experiences in devising processes where their voices were shut down and they were figuratively shut out of the rehearsal room. To set the scene, I will begin by employing a United Kingdom comparison and present the existing data around gender in the New Zealand theatre industry with a focus on devising, to illustrate where we are situated in comparison to another Western theatre industry. This chapter will then delve into my own research by examining the questionnaire results; I will employ theories about emotion and devising to analyse the long form questionnaire answers, with some additional input from my interviewees, before concluding by suggesting some possible solutions to the issues raised.

Arti Prashar, artistic director of the London based theatre company Spare Tyre, elegantly describes the contradictory feeling that sometimes comes with devising:

What contemporary devising in Britain facilitates is a moment to be equal, a moment to understand diverse viewpoints, a moment to experiment with and without rules, a moment to be oneself. But it’s just a moment in a safe creative space and then you open the door to the harsh reality of our lives in Britain today.

(Arti Prashar qtd. in Mermikides and Smart 258)

While the theatre industry in the United Kingdom may still be dominated by men and devised theatre may not always be the utopian exception, women do still see “devising as a space in which they can have greater creative input than is possible for them otherwise” (Mermikides and Smart, 258). This “harsh reality” of Britain that Prashar articulates can also perhaps be seen in the New Zealand theatre industry. While we may be approaching a moment of change, the perception from the research that I have conducted is that our stages and our stories are still dominated by the masculine.

It is useful to compare the situation of devising in New Zealand’s theatre industry to that in the United Kingdom, as so much of our early settler culture, and certainly our first western style theatrical performances, were heavily influenced by the British. In the 1800s, stages in New Zealand were filled with touring companies from the U.K. and amateur
dramatic societies made up of colonial settlers, the majority of whom came from Britain. In the *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre* David Carnegie writes that,

Colonization of New Zealand… introduced theatre, in the European sense of the word, in the wake of settlers and government officials. The discovery of gold in 1861 brought expansion, prosperity and an audience sufficient to attract regular Australian, British and North American touring companies. They provided the bulk of stage entertainment until well into the twentieth century (Carnegie 333).

For the first half of the 20th Century, any new writing was distinctly British. As Carnegie states, “New Zealand literary and cultural self-expression was still very new, so theatre generally followed British fashions in choice of plays and styles of presentation” (333). Fast forward 100 years or so and there are still similarities in the way both countries talk about devised theatre. For instance, the actual term ‘devising’ is far more common in both the U.K. and in New Zealand. This claim is supported by Heddon and Milling in their text *Devising Performance*. While they do not include New Zealand in their study, they do write that “British and Australian companies tend to use ‘devising’ to describe their practice, whereas in the USA the synonymous activity is referred to most often as ‘collaborative creation’” (Heddon and Milling 2). Comparing the U.K. devising scene with New Zealand is particularly useful for my PhD project, because there are academic scholars in England who are also investigating the connection between women and devising.

In 2016, Alex Mermikides and Jackie Smart published the first findings of their “Women and Devising” project in Sysoyeva and Proudfit’s anthology of essays: *Women, Collective Creation and Devised Performance*. Mermikides and Smart’s study examines how gender intersects with devising performance practices in the UK. With a similar methodology to my own PhD project, they held a symposium with professional women devising practitioners, conducted interviews and sent out an anonymous survey. One of the ways their project differs from mine is that there has already been some significant progress in UK in terms of research that examines gender representation in theatre. Mermikides and Smart begin their chapter with this research background stating that:
An independent survey conducted by the *Guardian* newspaper of gender representation in the top ten subsidized theatres in 2011-2012 revealed “a stubborn 2:1 male-to-female problem.” Companies funded by the Arts Council of England (ACE) employ more women than men (59 percent of all permanent staff across all art forms and roles are women); however, the ACE admits that only “a minority of those are in senior positions.” More surprisingly perhaps, the disproportionate representation of men in “senior” positions also exists within the devised theatre that is currently entering the mainstream: only 16 of the 47 devising companies currently core-funded by the ACE have female artistic directors. (Mermikides and Smart 255)

While New Zealand has a much smaller population than the UK, and therefore our theatre industry is also much smaller, this sort of comprehensive research that *The Guardian* undertook is almost non-existent in this country. In my interview with Sophie Roberts, the current Artistic Director of Silo Theatre in Auckland, we spoke about how this lack of research makes it difficult to understand what the situation is regarding gender representation within our theatres and within devising. There is a gap between the diversity of practitioners creating the work and what stories actually make it onto our main stage. Roberts said, “There are a lot of women in leadership roles, even if you look at Auckland, I feel like it’s primarily women running the sector here… Doesn’t necessarily mean it’s changed what we’re seeing on stage yet. I don’t know what that’s about” (Roberts). If research like *The Guardian* survey was conducted in New Zealand, perhaps then the industry would have some hard data to examine and use to make change. Another difficulty, however, is that our current funding models are also very different from the Arts Council of England. The main funding body in this country is Creative New Zealand (CNZ). CNZ distributes recurrent funding to some of our mainstream professional theatres and major companies through the Toi Tōtara Haemata (Arts

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42 “Creative New Zealand funds arts activity by New Zealand artists, arts practitioners and arts organisations, both within New Zealand and internationally… We fund across a variety of artforms: craft/object, dance, inter-arts, literature, multi-disciplinary, music, nga toi Māori, Pacific arts, theatre and visual arts. We fund the arts from three broad pools of money: General, Māori and Pacific. These pools feed all of the regular arts funding programmes” (Creative New Zealand “Statement of Intent” 16).
Leadership) Investment Programme and the Toi Uru Kahikatea (Arts Development) Investment Programme. However, it usually can only fund individual practitioners or companies on a project-by-project basis through the contestable “core programmes such as Arts Grants, Quick Response and the Creative Communities Scheme” (Creative New Zealand 3). This can create an unstable working environment for those artists all applying for the same funding rounds.

Despite these differences between the United Kingdom and New Zealand, Playmarket, New Zealand’s national playwriting agency, did release research in early 2016 that surveyed what was being performed in our major producing theatres, for the five-year period 2011-2015. Of the 348 professional productions only 28% were written by women, leaving the other 72% dominated by men. They also examined whether the productions were an original work from a New Zealand playwright, or from an international playwright. However, this survey did not explicitly consider works created collaboratively using devising techniques. Nor did it examine any of New Zealand’s fringe theatres that operate on a co-operative based model. The figure below illustrates the low numbers of works by New Zealand women in our theatres from 2011-2015, with the exception of Capital E, the National Theatre for Children.

![Percentage of Works by NZ Women in NZ Theatres 2011 - 2015](Playmarket.org.nz)

*Figure 24: Playmarket Research 2011-2015: NZ Women in NZ Theatres (Playmarket.org.nz)*
In 2018 Playmarket released a follow up study that examined the plays of 2017 and this research depicted the significant difference in the amount of works by women. In this more recent study Playmarket also widened their scope and included the seasons of all theatre companies funded by CNZ under the Tōtara and Kahikatea models. This means that in addition to the companies being studied from 2011-2015, the 2017 data also included the receiving houses of BATS Theatre, The Basement, Te Pou, and the producing companies of Massive Company, Tawata Productions, Barbarian Productions, Indian Ink, Red Leap Theatre, The Conch, and Young and Hungry. The inclusion of these companies creates a much more detailed picture of the work being performed in New Zealand in 2017. The figure below shows the national percentages that were collected. While Playmarket’s studies are one of the few exceptions, this lack of research and data analysis about non-traditional performance makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the current state of gender representation in New Zealand’s theatre industry, especially when considering theatre that is made with non-traditional processes such as devised or collaborative theatre and performance art.

Figure 25: Playmarket Research 2017 “Media Release: An abundance of NZ work entertains the country) (Playmarket.org.nz)

At the time of writing however, there are some shifts within our industry. On the 19th September 2016, the 123rd anniversary of women gaining the right to vote in Aotearoa, a
group of theatre practitioners met to discuss the representation of women in New Zealand theatre. Around one hundred people attended the two sessions at Circa Theatre in Wellington and there was also a group that met in Auckland the day before. The Circa contingent was made up of predominantly women, of all ages and stages in their careers including actors, directors, designers, writers, producers and academics. To begin the event there were two introductory presentations, the first from Kate JasonSmith, one of the founders of the feminist comedy troupe Hen’s Teeth. JasonSmith welcomed everyone and spoke of the times she has experienced injustice and discrimination against women in the New Zealand theatre industry. I gave the second presentation and spoke about my research, looking to the future and how we need to listen to our women artists because we all have something to say. After these introductions, everyone in attendance broke into small discussion groups led by a convenor to identify the key barriers to achieving gender equality in our industry. After sharing these thoughts, the groups reconvened, honed their ideas and devised possible solutions and actions that could be taken. From this several working groups were formed around the different possible actions, with the intention being that they will work together to make change happen. JasonSmith and I were then interviewed on Radio New Zealand the week following the initial hui\(^{43}\), where we spoke about how the organisation was going to move forward.\(^{44}\) The smaller working groups all met again in Wellington on 11\(^{\text{th}}\) March 2017, just after International Women’s Day, where a proposed new data collection examining women in the industry in much more detail than previous research was discussed. This work is currently underway. Since then, a significant social media presence has been set up by the organisers via a closed group on Facebook called Women in NZ Theatre. Currently, there are over 1000 members using the group “as a way to network, share opportunities and articles, discuss ideas, and generally support your fellow wāhine\(^{45}\) theatre practitioners in New Zealand” (Women in NZ Theatre - Facebook).

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\(^{43}\) hui (noun) gathering, meeting, assembly, seminar, conference (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).

\(^{44}\) Radio Interview with Kate JasonSmith and Hannah Banks:

\(^{45}\) wāhine (modifier) female, women, feminine (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
However, despite the efforts of the Women in NZ Theatre group, and some studies by Playmarket and other individuals, the existing data and writing about diversity and representation within the New Zealand theatre industry is scarce in comparison to the large studies that exist in the United Kingdom. This lack of research puts my project in a difficult position as there is very little existing research about women in devising in New Zealand for me to expand on. However, it also makes my research vital for our theatre industry and national academic literature. I therefore needed to complete my own primary research by conducting personal interviews with professional women theatre practitioners and by creating an anonymous online questionnaire to try and capture a wider sample of opinions about gender and devising in New Zealand.

The Questionnaire

Alison Oddey defines devised theatre as “...work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration” (Oddey Devising Theatre 1). However, according to my research, many women working in devised theatre in New Zealand today are feeling marginalised and silenced during the creative process. My online questionnaire was a way to hear from those women directly, an opportunity for them to tell someone their story. This questionnaire became one of the primary methods of data collection employed for this project. The questionnaire commenced at the end of 2014, via an online survey and was distributed by email and social media amongst theatre practitioners who had some experience with devised theatre. A total of 119 responses were received from a range of theatre artists working in a variety of areas. The total number of responses dropped by one with each question, followed by a more significant drop when the questions shifted from multiple choice to short answer questions. However, question fifteen, the final question, still received a total of sixty-three short answer responses.

The first few questions gathered background data about experience, gender and qualification. Of the total 119 responses at the beginning of the questionnaire, 77% identified as female, 22% identified as male, and 1% preferred not to answer. While I
encouraged people of any gender to complete the questionnaire, it is perhaps not surprising that the responses are predominantly from women as the title of the questionnaire was, “Women in Devised Theatre in New Zealand in the 21st Century.” Another factor to consider is that because the questionnaire was sent out by me personally via email and social media, this may have attracted a slightly younger demographic. This means that the data might be somewhat skewed towards younger women, however, some observations can be made.

The following cross tabulation data tables show some thought-provoking intersections between gender and experience, or field of expertise. When asked about their level of experience or years within the New Zealand theatre industry, 34% of the respondents who identified as women and 46% of the respondents who identified as men, selected 4-7 years as their answer. What this suggests is that the majority of the questionnaire respondents considered themselves to be emerging to mid-career practitioners. More surprising was that 13% of women indicated that they had less than four years of experience within the theatre industry, while 0% of the male respondents selected these categories. At the other end of the scale, even with a small sample size of male respondents, 15% of them indicated that they had 15-20 years of experience in the industry, meaning that they possibly considered themselves as established practitioners with long careers. Contrasting, only 6% of women indicated that they had 15-20 years of experience. What this data potentially proposes is that career longevity in the New Zealand theatre industry could be gendered, with male practitioners being able to sustain careers over longer periods of time, while women begin to disappear from the industry. This could be linked to Kerryn Palmer’s point as discussed in Chapter Two, that it is especially difficult to sustain a career in theatre if you are a woman with children. However, this is only a suggestion; because

46 The glossary on the CNZ website defines Emerging Artist as someone who has received recognition for the public presentation of at least one work in the area of arts practice for which they’re applying funding, is recognised by peers or experts in the artist’s area of arts practice and has specialised training or practical experience in their area of arts practice

47 The glossary on the CNZ website defines Established Artist as someone who has recently achieved the successful public presentation of at least three high-quality artworks, events or programmes in an area of arts practice and has endorsement and support for their work from at least two peers or experts in their area of arts practice and is acknowledged as being established in their area of arts practice.
this sample size is small, and the gender split is slightly unbalanced, considerably more research needs to be completed to prove this hypothesis.

Figure 26: Cross tabulation data “Gender and Experience”

There was also an interesting gendered difference between the respondents when they were asked “What title best describes you?” These titles were of different positions within the theatre industry that can be found within both devised and collaborative theatre and more traditionally scripted processes. The key difference that this data set identified was the gender difference between the top creative leadership positions and more managerial positions. This data supports what was discovered in The Guardian Survey in the United Kingdom, that funded companies employ more women than men but only a minority of women were in senior positions (Mermikides and Smart 255). The data clearly shows a gendered divide between the creative positions and the managerial positions. For example, while 44% of women selected director, 60% of men selected director, and only 33% of women described themselves as a writer, compared to 44% of men. When we examine the more managerial or “behind the scenes” positions of production manager or stage manager, only 4% of men selected that title, while 21% of women respondents stated that they work in that position.
Following these background questions, were two multiple-choice questions to gather the respondent’s opinions about gender representation on and off stage in New Zealand. Question 6 asked if there are balanced numbers representing all genders onstage. This question focused on gathering data about the gender of the characters and performers that we see on our stages in New Zealand; are there a balanced number of roles being written or devised for all genders? Do we have balance in the gender of our performers?
Question 8 asked if there are balanced numbers representing all genders \textit{offstage}. These are the practitioners behind the scenes; producers, directors, playwrights, designers, reviewers, artistic directors of companies etc. If the respondents answered no to either question, they were then asked to clarify their chosen answer and explain their opinion. The two questions and the gendered responses can be seen in the figure below.

The results for these questions are clear and illustrate a fairly strong opinion from all questionnaire respondents that there are not balanced numbers representing all genders in New Zealand theatre. However, there is a difference between onstage (characters, performers etc.) and offstage (producers, directors, playwrights, designers etc.), with 65\% of women and 84\% of men asserting that our gender representation onstage is unbalanced; while only 43\% of women and 50\% of men agreeing that the gender representation is unbalanced offstage. This data suggests that there may be problems with gender representation both on and off stage, but perhaps the problem is less severe in production areas rather than in performance. Below is the figure showing the raw data for both questions which more clearly depict the difference between on and off stage.
Before the questionnaire moved into asking short answer questions, I wanted to gather one more specific piece of data around representation. This question asked about the kind of theatre that the respondents were involved in and whether it was scripted or devised. Although a binary between scripted and devised theatre is inherently problematic, for the purposes of the clarity of this questionnaire, I only included these two categories. The question was: if you are involved in making theatre, are you generally more involved in scripted or devised theatre work? 41% of the respondents stated that they were involved in an even amount of both. While devised theatre alone was only slightly behind scripted
at 26% and 31% respectively. This data suggests that the New Zealand theatre industry has quite an even split between different kinds of theatre making, suggesting that it is imperative that devised theatre is also investigated, studied and written about by academics and practitioners.

![Pie chart showing devised vs. scripted work](image)

The first half of my questionnaire illustrated that even with a small sample, there is interesting data worth researching in the New Zealand theatre industry regarding gender. Some of the issues raised, such as representation within certain roles, requires further study beyond the confines of this thesis. The second half of the questionnaire was made up of short answer questions which allowed the respondents to go into detail about their experiences and perspectives on devising. The short answers revealed that my respondents, particularly those that identify as women, oftentimes have a complicated and contradictory relationship with devised theatre, and they discuss both its freedoms and its shortcomings.

**Emotional Devising**

I love making something new. I love drawing on all of the talents in the room (not limiting practitioners to the ‘role’ they have come on board for). I love laughing. I love failing. I love researching. I love rolls of butcher paper and sharpies. I love using that weird prop that
happened to be in the corner that then becomes an essential cornerstone of the whole production. I love getting to make up the story. I love being part of a tribe. (Anonymous questionnaire response)

As outlined in the literature review in Chapter One, the ephemeral nature of devising processes creates a particular challenge for both academics and theatre practitioners, when it comes to defining, discussing and analysing the work that is created and how it is made. However, a common thread that does emerge from academic literature which discusses devising or collaborative theatre is a tendency to focus on the positive aspects that these processes can provide, without considering the realities. The response quoted above from my questionnaire was answering the question, “What draws you to devising as a way of making theatre and performance?” While this question was not asking the respondents to focus on any negative aspects of devising, the above quote is a clear example of the way practitioners can sometimes look at devising as a perfect process. However, in answer to the next question that same respondent described a difficult devising process that they were involved with. This complex relationship with devising was echoed by several other respondents. They were able to sing the praises of collaborative devising processes, while also writing about all the times those processes have failed and created negative experiences.

In *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, Heddon and Milling list all the mythic qualities of devising and suggest that in the twenty-first century it is now entirely possible to question these “ideals” of devising (Heddon and Milling 5). A cursory glance through my questionnaire responses support their claim that these devising utopia “ideals” are an illusion. Devising is difficult and creates a uniquely vulnerable space. In *Theatre and Feeling* Erin Hurley includes a description of collective creation from Québécois actress, director, and writer Pol Pelletier. Pelletier accurately describes the emotional intensity in a collaborative process which can lead to damaging behaviour:

Collective creation is exhausting. You spend three to five months with the same group of people, five or six days a week, eight hours a day... Everyday, since you
couldn’t hide behind a script, a director, a role, you had to expose yourself – who you were, what you believed, what you loved, what you wanted. And that meant you related to the other, really, truly, brutally sometimes. (Pellitier qtd. in Hurley 6-7)

This heightened intensity and extreme vulnerability can make devising processes quite dangerous spaces. Certainly, in twenty-first century New Zealand, devising processes are not always a positive experience for the practitioners in that rehearsal room.

As my questionnaire moved into short answer questions, it became clear that some of the respondents have had such bad experiences that they no longer want to create theatre using devising processes. In response to the question, “What draws you to devising as a way of making theatre and performance?” one respondent said:

Right now? Nothing. I had a very bad experience in devising as one of two females in an all-male company. I felt like I wasn’t heard or cared for… I felt like I wasn’t taken as an intelligent equal. If I were to make a devised piece now, I’d be interested in doing a solo or duo show. Somehow that’s how I feel like I will be heard. I think that also takes a lot of courage and to be honest, I’m not sure how much I have. Right now, I feel needed by other companies to do a production role. I like that role because I’m confident I can do it. I don’t feel any confidence about being so vulnerable on stage. Now I really don’t know what I’d want to say before I start putting something on stage. I’d feel judged. (Anonymous questionnaire response)

This woman’s artistic voice has been completely silenced by a negative devising process. Her courage and confidence that her own voice is valuable has been destroyed. She was not alone in feeling this way.

While the majority of answers from female identifying participants painted a similar picture of difficulty, there were some that swung in the opposite direction. For example, these two responses were to the question “Do you think that your gender has presented
particular CHALLENGES or DIFFICULTIES in relation to your devising work?” The respondents wrote:

I have not encountered any difficulties due to my gender in the theatre industry within Wellington, except having to wear a sports bra to more vigorous rehearsals! (Anonymous questionnaire response)

Gender doesn't exist. Only the patriarchy would tell you it exists. I only work in projects that are gender blind, so these issues do not come up. (Anonymous questionnaire response)

The stark difference is these two answers compared to the lived experience of multiple respondents describing difficult and painful processes was surprising. There was also a complexity in the 22% of the questionnaire responses from male identifying participants. In answer to the same question about whether they had faced challenges and difficulties due to their gender, there were a few responses such as, “No. But I’m a man. So...” (Anonymous questionnaire response), and “As a white male, I’m in no position to complain. The worst I have to deal with is people assuming I’m a horrible person because I’m male” (Anonymous questionnaire response). However, there were also nuanced and thoughtful responses such as this one from a practitioner grappling with their own politics and how it affects their process:

As a male theatre maker who would consider myself a feminist it has irked me more and more recently that I have generated a series of theatrical stories that reinforce a standard; hetero-normative, white male centric, heroes quest style narrative. I have a current resolution 'no more male protagonists' that I’m yet to effectively deploy. I have found this is encumbered by the people I choose to work with - males who aren’t striving for such a strict line who reflex back to exploring male stories... In an unsustainable medium it’s hard enough to build your own sandcastle, let alone knock it down for not being perfect. (Anonymous questionnaire response)

While there were male identifying responses that illustrated problematic experiences and difficult process, none of these participants wrote about the experience of being silenced or ignored.
In Jackie Smart’s chapter, “The Feeling of Devising: Emotion and Mind in the Devising Process,” she articulates some theories behind why my respondents might have felt shut out or shut down in a devising room. Smart agrees that:

Academic literature on devising tends to emphasize its positive aspects: the sense of liberation from conventional restrictions; the satisfaction of connecting with one’s ‘deeper’ self; the excitement of working closely with others, sparking off their ideas and sharing your ideas with them. (Smart 102)

While she acknowledges that these are all important reasons that artists may initially choose to create collaboratively, she also states that in her experience, she has learnt that “these undoubtedly appealing qualities of the devising process can also be sources of confusion and distress” (Smart 102). But why? What is it about devising that causes this? According to Smart, it could be because there are two tensions that exist within every devising process. The first tension is “between divergence and coherence,” meaning the “interpretative openness” that occurs within a devising process due to the multiple voices and visions in the room, and the need, as the process reaches production, to “shape these into a coherent theatrical experience” (Smart 102). The second tension is that devising processes require trust, openness and clear communication, but the process itself can often cause anxiety and insecurity within participants, which can be destructive. Devising processes can be full of contradictions. Participants should all feel a sense of ownership over the work and should feel comfortable offering up their ideas at the beginning of the process as this is what “gives devising its richness and complexity” (Smart 107). However, they also need to be willing to have those ideas shaped, edited or maybe even cut to create a coherent theatrical piece (Smart 106). This connects directly to the point that Fiona McNamara made as the director of MINGE, about how difficult it was to balance leadership and collaboration within that process. One of my questionnaire respondents also pointed out that even in what appears to be an open and trusting rehearsal room hidden hierarchies can silence participants and cause anxiety:

In the rehearsal room I feel that my judgement is more open to question or my suggested ideas have been overlooked dependent on the social hierarchy and
competition between the males in the room. (Anonymous Questionnaire Response)

Smart also discusses the views of Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold who worked in the early 20th Century. He observed, “An actor can improvise only when he feels internal joy. Without an atmosphere of creative joy, of artistic élan, an actor never completely opens up” (Smart 108). For Meyerhold the term ‘élan’ means a “feeling of joyful playfulness that he suggests is generated through an atmosphere of mutual trust and creative freedom within the group” (Smart 108). This concept can absolutely be applied to devising as we know it today, however this atmosphere is not always created within a process, and something that prevents that is anxiety. A performer or deviser’s anxiety could be being caused by something within the rehearsal room, or it could be something in their own life which blocks their artistic élan. Smart’s response to these problems is succinct. She writes:

> It might seem obvious to say that I think dramaturgies of devising process should be emotionally intelligent and emotionally ethical – which practitioners would imagine their processes were not? ... a creative process based around human interaction should take account of the full scope of human emotions that feed into it. (Smart 102)

Discussing emotion can however, be complicated and it is often entrenched in stereotypical gender roles. In *Repurposing Composition: Feminist Interventions for a Neoliberal Age* (2015), Shari J. Stenberg writes about the feminist repurposing of emotion and uses Worsham (1998) to define emotion as a “tight braid of affect and judgment, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meaning” (Stenberg 48). Stenberg goes further to say that, “Given the entrenched assumptions about emotion – disorderly, irrational, corporeal – it isn’t surprising that it has historically been associated with women,” and she contends that, “discussion of emotion is typically silenced, muting opportunities to examine the
institutional and cultural assumptions that inform predominant views of emotion” (Stenberg 42). This can create quite a battle within a devising process, especially one that is not emotionally intelligent and ethical, and several of the questionnaire responses describe the experience of having their emotions gendered and judged. Bearing these issues in mind, Smart advises that to create a process focused on human emotion, practitioners should begin a “devising process with trust games and ‘getting to know’ exercises” as these encourage the “expression and sharing of emotions” early in a process so that the group can then build on their trust they have developed (Smart 109).

This might seem like logical advice, but there are many response examples within my questionnaire and interview responses of productions and processes that described a failure to achieve this. For example, this next respondent was answering the question, “Do you think that your gender has presented particular CHALLENGES or DIFFICULTIES in relation to your devising work?” She wrote:

I feel isolated most of the time. I think in the rehearsal room, there is sometimes a boy’s club... and to be honest most of the time I felt uncomfortable about my gender being talked about as a gender rather than a person. Sometimes when I try to voice this, I get eyes rolled at me because why should a male care? It doesn’t affect him? He doesn’t feel the struggles. And we’re not here to sympathise with emotions, right? We’re here to make art. But then the art is actually affected because on the way you’ve lost a voice... (Anonymous questionnaire response)

This response clearly articulates the problem that Smart is warning against. When theatre artists are creating work using devising processes, they are dealing with emotion in everything they do. If they set those emotions aside in order to concentrate on the art being made, not only are they potentially shutting down one of their collaborators, they are also putting the work at a major disadvantage. Stenberg writes that “classical rhetoric is often employed in ways that reinforce a reason/emotion binary” and that the emotional intelligence movement often views emotion as something that needs to be managed or controlled (Stenberg 44, original emphasis). In this situation emotion “is deemed acceptable when a ‘rational’ subject deploys it as a tool rather than when a speaker or
writer presumably feels it” (Stenberg 44, original emphasis). The binary of rational versus emotional can become gendered and, in my interview with Julia Croft, she noted that this shutting down of emotion in order to focus on the work was a particularly masculine quality. She told me:

I was talking about this recently, in regard to two different male directors that I’ve worked with, and a couple of women that have worked with both. We were discussing in different processes watching both of these men get fucked in a way, but if they had just walked into the room and gone, “ok guys I’m clearly a bit stuck.” Like you’ve got a whole bunch of people in this room who want to help, who want to make good theatre, but instead of admitting, “I don’t know” – they’ve doubled down on their whole “I got this.” (Croft)

Although, even if a director of a devised project or the collective company do take steps to ensure that everyone’s emotions are being acknowledged by the group, sometimes there can be internal anxieties or issues that are out of our control. Donkin and Clement write about this in *Upstaging Big Daddy*. When I first started this research, reading this book was somewhat of an awakening. I felt as if Donkin and Clement were describing every rehearsal room I had ever been in. They write:

Big Daddy is a complicated character... He needs to be understood as a form of cultural condition that floats in and among real men and women and has profound implications for their artistic work and their relationship with each other. If it were simply a question of the way individual men have positioned and disempowered female directors, actors, designers, or playwrights, it would be relatively easy to identify the villain. But it isn’t simple. Not only is there no obvious villain, but there is not always an external villain. The cultural formations that have created that disempowerment in the first place also have become internalized by women, and that disempowerment perpetuates itself even when the overt exclusion of women wanting professional access and identity is no longer an issue. (Donkin and Clement 4)
This cultural conditioning can be found throughout the entire theatre industry, and in my interview with director/performer Stella Reid, she spoke about her belief that devised theatre processes can fight back against some of that internalised disempowerment. Reid told me that, “It’s a job every day to try and unlearn the script that I need to be in competition with other women” (Reid). Despite this, Reid said that in devising processes that element of competition dissipates and is replaced by a feeling of community. She feels that this is something that is missing from scripted work and described the following familiar scenario:

> You know, there’s one fucking woman character and there’s 170,000 women going for that role. Then there’s 24 male roles, and 24 chill as dudes being like, ‘Yeah I guess I’ll get back into a spot of acting, fancy myself an actor’ and jump into it. And it’s really difficult because that is a lesson you learn from the second you get into the industry, that I need to look at another woman and see them as competition. (Reid)

To counter this toxic feeling of competition, Reid prefers to create devised theatre or use at least use collaborative methods in her filmmaking. In devised theatre the roles can be created for the makers who are in the room. This is something that Reid loves about devising, and when she described the process of making her solo performance, *The Basement Tapes* with director Jane Yonge, she spoke about how that element of competition was not present within their rehearsal room. She said, “One of the most beautiful things about *The Basement Tapes* is that Jane and I developed a relationship of community and I felt really supported by her, and I still do” (Reid).

Unfortunately, the cultural conditioning of ‘Big Daddy’ runs deep, and even within supportive and uncompetitive devising processes, disempowerment for women can be destructive. The following questionnaire response is indicative of the tone of many of the respondents, particularly the women, when they were discussing their belief in their own abilities. It illustrates the point that Donkin and Clement are suggesting that our internal conflicts are often just as debilitating as external ones when working in a collaborative environment. Her response shows the vicious cycle that many of the respondents find
themselves in when they are trying to lead a process and ignore the voice in the back of their head telling them that they cannot do it. The respondent wrote:

When I was working on my own devised show I found that I compromised on some decisions where I knew instinctually that I should stick to my guns, but I think that as a woman I have grown up trying to keep others happy and value harmony and being "liked." I think that this ability to respect others and work well in groups has its upsides also but for me it often leads to me being weaker in decision making than I would like to be. Also, from working with a lot of men and women both on film and TV, in my opinion a lot of male artists have complete faith in their abilities, creative vision and opinions even when they might be wrong. Women on the other hand (myself included) often tend to question themselves and their abilities, this might be more realistic, but I think that having a strong sense of your own value as an artist means that others are more likely to follow and trust you. (Anonymous Questionnaire Response)

This questionnaire response also echoes what Jo Randerson said in my interview with her when we were discussing the different attributes of masculine and feminine makers. She said that she has “definitely learnt from male colleagues” and has “consciously stolen from them,” because “that pig-headedness and self-belief - a bit of that is healthy… but not at the expense of the real strength of doubt and ambiguity and mystery and vulnerability” (Randerson). This idea from Randerson reinforces what Stenberg argues as she goes into more detail about how feminist thinking can re-purpose emotion. Stenberg writes about Brené Brown, a feminist sociologist, who has “argued for repurposing vulnerability, which our culture deems weak, feminized, and shameful, as the very cornerstone of engagement, courage, and agency” (Stenberg 49). So, rather than viewing emotion in a binary with rationality, and seeing it as something that needs to be controlled, managed, or performed in the “correct” way, both Brown and Stenberg argue that there is power in feeling. Stenberg writes,

The countercultural message of vulnerability as a resource, something to value and accept rather than to cover and excise, clearly resonates with public audiences:
Brown’s TEDTalk on the subject went viral and has, at the present, nearly 9 million hits. Feminist scholars remind us that when emotion, once locked away in the private realm, is reconceived as social, it emerges as a potentially forceful rhetoric for fostering collective experience and action (Stenberg 49).

Another factor at play in a rehearsal room (or indeed any room where collaboration occurs) that can affect someone’s participation, is feelings of shame. As discussed in Chapter One, Brené Brown’s Shame Resilience Theory (SRT) acknowledges that shame is “the master emotion of everyday life” (Brown 43). From her research, Brown defined shame as “An intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging” (Brown 45). Brown identified several categories in which women struggled most with feelings of shame and one of these was speaking out. This is something that affects women in all workplaces including devising rehearsal rooms. Brown writes that her participants were vulnerable to shame in areas such as speaking out because they did not want to be labelled with “unwanted identities” such as “loud-mouth and pushy” (Brown 46). These terms appeared when Brown’s participants described the “difficulty of navigating social/cultural expectations that discourage them from sharing opinions that might make others feel uncomfortable or taking an unpopular stand on an issue” (Brown). These specific feelings of shame around speaking out directly connect to what some of my own questionnaire respondents suggested. For example, one respondent said, “If a man has an urgency about a particular plot point or scenario, he is listened to. If I give my input with the same gusto, I’m seen as pushy and mouthy” (Anonymous Questionnaire Response).

In New Zealand feelings of shame can be more powerful when understood as the Māori concept of whakamā.\footnote{\cite{whakama}} While the online Māori dictionary defines whakamā as to be ashamed or embarrassed, it is more complex and must be regarded alongside other Māori...
concepts such as mana. A basic definition of mana is prestige, authority or power. But as Joan Metge writes in her 1986 text *In and Out of Touch: Whakamāa in Cross Cultural Context*, defining mana is complicated because “the word has become part of New Zealand English, used without explanation by Pākehā as well as Māori” (62). Metge writes that when one experiences whakamā, it is a loss of mana. This has a significant affect because “…since for Maori mana is a spiritual force or at least has spiritual implications, whakamā cannot be understood purely as a psychological problem. Maori see it as an illness with a spiritual dimension, an unease which affects the whole person, body, mind and spirit” (Metge 78, original emphasis). Throughout the practice as research, my collaborators and I also explored whakamā and mana in relation to the questionnaire responses, this will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

This obviously complicates the matter further for devising in New Zealand. It cannot be as easy, as Smart advises, that devising practitioners simply need to acknowledge the “full scope of human emotions that feed” into a devising process (Smart 102). If the emotions of the devising practitioners are already disempowered due to the cultural conditioning we all experience living in a patriarchal and hierarchical society, it is going to take a lot more work for those artists to feel capable of trust and clear communication. This struggle is clearly illustrated by the responses that I have collected from both my questionnaire and interviews. In my interview with performance artist Julia Croft, she spoke about the fear of emotion that she has experienced in rehearsal rooms. Croft now works almost exclusively with women primary collaborators. She says, “…that’s not something I decided, it just happened that those are the people that I want to work with” (Croft). She then went on to describe a difficult process she experienced with confident male director: He said to the group, “How’s it going?” And it just sort of unravelled, and I stood there and cried for 45 minutes. I just couldn’t, I tried to speak and started crying, I couldn’t stop. And the guy just ignored me. He left me, didn’t ask if I was ok… he

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49 mana (noun) prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
was uncomfortably glancing at me and then looking away. This absolute fear of emotion. (Croft)

Similar to Croft, Fiona McNamara told me during our interview that she also prefers to work with women in devising rooms. She clarified that it does not have to be exclusively women, especially as she said, “I don’t believe in gender binaries anyway” (McNamara). But she described a feminine devising room thus:

I just find those [feminine] environments so much more supportive and people are listened to a lot more. People are given a chance I think when they normally wouldn’t get given a chance. And it’s not just about who asserts themselves most. Like someone has a good idea that they’re not articulating that well, then you give them the space to articulate it… or come back to it. Don’t override it just because you’ve got something that you can say right now, because it might be a really good idea. (McNamara)

So, what do we do? How can we ensure that our devising processes do not become destructive for the participants? In her chapter, Smart suggests building trust within the group early in the process. She also acknowledges how much time is required for a successful devising process. She writes that “All groups need to go through this process of establishing a place of emotional safety before they can make themselves vulnerable,” and that can take time (Smart 111). Being vulnerable in a devising room can be a scary thing, especially if ideas are not treated with respect. In my interview with director, writer and performer Jo Randerson, she spoke about vulnerability and doubt being key strengths of feminine devising processes as opposed to a more masculine ideology of seeing the “singular truth.” She said,

… a more feminine way of viewing something is to be doubtful about it, and the negative side of that to be anxious about it, but the positive side of that is to be curious and investigatory of the richness beneath that. So, for example I often find that male makers just hold a very authoritative presence in the room, a very definitive presence, you know, “That scene does not work. You are not performing well… I know what the singular truth is.” And I don’t see things like that as a
maker. I see a myriad of factors that affect things and I don’t like to be the sole holder of the truth or the vision. (Randerson)

Randerson also spoke about how best to create and lead a safe space where people feel empowered to make creative offers. Good listening and facilitation are obviously key parts of this because, as Randerson said, “You can’t set up a devising room and then squash people’s ideas and don’t listen, then it’s false, it ends up being the same as being one voice anyway” (Randerson). Silo Theatre artistic director Sophie Roberts agrees with Randerson that leadership in a devising process is essential. Roberts told me that, “Even though I like to work collaboratively and want everyone on my team to have ownership of the work, I still see the role of the director as important in terms of leadership” (Roberts). Roberts remembers having experiences similar to those Randerson described above and says, “I have had to fight for my authority. When I was younger I had a lot of experiences where I was trampled or felt disrespected or not taken seriously. I had to assert myself more because of my age and my gender” (Roberts).

In my interview with Julie Nolan she spoke about the strategies that her company Red Leap employ to avoid voices being silenced or people feeling trampled. She told me:

We make creative contracts. It’s unique to every cast that we work with and we refresh it in every process... Then we are held to contract, so if anyone does anything we can say, hey we contracted not to talk like this, we contracted to talk directly to each other, to confront issues and resolve them in a really direct way, to respect and listen. And it’s amazing how it holds us, even if we just have contracted to respect each other’s ideas. (Nolan)

Contracts or agreements can be useful for keeping a devising process on track, but they need to be core part of the process otherwise they can easily be taped to a wall in the rehearsal room and forgotten about. In my interview with Julia Croft, she spoke about how her collaborator and director Nisha Madhan approaches agreements and how they enable them to focus on the people and not just the work. Croft said:

Nisha always says this nice thing that the agreement we make when we agree to do a show together, is not that we’re going to make a kick-ass show together, it’s
that when shit gets hard, I’m going to look after you. In production week, when you haven’t slept, when you’re stressed, I’m going to make sure that I look after you. I think it’s such a beautiful way of looking at what you’re doing with people in a room. (Croft)

A barrier to productive devising that is discussed in the academic literature and which also appears in my primary research is anxiety. It links back to Meyerhold’s views around artistic élan and it was also something I discussed extensively with Julia Croft in our interview together. She called it “the fear,” and says that once “the playfulness goes, I can’t come up with anything” (Croft). Croft described this moment as feeling like the rehearsal room is “constipated… like you’re trying so hard to squeeze out an idea, but every idea you have in this state is going to be terrible” (Croft). The solution she offers comes from one of her collaborators who Croft works with in Mexico:

She calls it ‘Focused Unfocusing,’ which is the acknowledgement that the work right now is to go to the pub. Or the work now is that we need to go to the beach. It doesn’t mean that we going to stop thinking about it, or talking about it, but we’re not going to let the room get into that tight and anxious space, because that means that no one is listening, and nothing is fun... In panic mode you always think you’ve solved it, but you never have because it’s always a terrible idea. (Croft)

Director Jane Yonge also discussed this during our interview together. When I asked Yonge how devising challenges her or pushes her out of her comfort zone, her response was related to this feeling of anxiety. She said, “I fear failure and the unknown. Devising makes me encounter both things. I don’t like not knowing and being lost: how do I lead a group of collaborators when I have no idea what to do next?” (Yonge). Like Croft, Yonge also identified a similar ‘Focused Unfocusing’ solution to this anxiety. Yonge describes the feeling in the room as being like “white noise... it becomes too hard to listen and think. I become so preoccupied by solving the thing that I hold it too tightly and start to kill it”
(Yonge). When this happens, Yonge’s advice is to “Take breaks, try a different approach. It’s ok to tell other people to stop talking. It’s ok to tell yourself to stop talking” (Yonge).

By linking together Smart’s chapter about the feeling of devising, Stenberg’s writing about repurposing emotion, and my questionnaire and interview responses, I have illustrated the need for emotionally intelligent and ethical devising processes that use a feminist repurposing of vulnerability and the unknown. I believe that emotion and vulnerability are required in order to make a collaborative devised performance. If however, they are not prioritised within the devising methodology itself, if they are seen as issues or ignored by the practitioners in the rehearsal room, then that process has the potential to be damaging for everyone involved. However, if a devising methodology leans deeper into the ideas specifically outlined in this chapter, it has the potential to be more fulfilling for the makers and their audience. When discussing how to repurpose emotion Stenberg argues that,

A pedagogy that values emotion as a resource considers how our emotional investments determine what we choose to see and not see, listen and not listen to, accept or reject. It requires deliberate attention to how we have developed particular emotional investments over our life histories and how these investments subsequently shape subjectivity and color the lenses through which we view the world” (Stenberg 60-61).

Stenberg’s description here is an ideal model for a devising process that is emotionally intelligent and ethical. Emotion in a devising room should not be something that is feared, rather it should valued. Stenberg concludes that, “Feminist repurposing moves us away from viewing emotion as a problem to be controlled and managed, instead offering a new kind of emotional discourse, one that engages, inquires, and mines emotion as a resource for new ways of knowing, writing, and being” (Stenberg 68).

While Smart asks, “which practitioners would imagine their processes were not [intelligent and ethical],” my primary research provides plenty of evidence to suggest this is often not the case in New Zealand devising (Smart 102). However, a reoccurring theme
that emerges from the discussions with my interviewees is that feminist devising spaces that prioritise listening, vulnerability, and community, could be the solution to difficult or toxic devising processes where voices are silenced, and people are disempowered. In my interview with Stella Reid she described the difference she has experienced between men and women in devised theatre and why she believes women are more comfortable with doubt. She said,

In my experience of directing devised theatre, I’ve never had a woman question ‘why?’ as much as men do. So, you go, ‘We’ve got 3 minutes, I want 12 makes, 30 secs long, I want to see what you can do with that prop there.’ And there’s always a guy who goes, ‘why?’… But I’ve never seen a woman doing that. She goes like, ‘Oh there’ll be a reason, I don’t need to know, maybe we’ll find it later.’ And it’s not just about trust… I think women can sit in the unknown a lot better. Even our own bodies, our own psyches, our own orgasms, they are not based around following that Aristotelian structure. We don’t need to have that really crystal clear, one resolution that makes sense, because we have continuing cycles. (Reid)

While there are solutions to the contradictory and emotionally charged processes of devising, some of which have been presented here, in order for these processes to be successful, the companies and practitioners must first acknowledge that they are dealing with other people’s emotions and voices. If you attempt to devise a piece without establishing trust, clear communication and openness, it will affect the work that you create. MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand is a clear example of this. While MINGE Collective came together because they felt shut out of other devising processes, and they successfully devised a feminist theatre work which inspired subsequent practitioners, was successful at the box office and connected with a large audience, their process was not without problems. Jackie Smart notes the importance of trust and clear communication within a process and adds that, “The literature on devising recognizes the importance of generating trust and a sense of safety within the groups but

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50 A classic dramatic structure of Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, Denouement.
has paid too little attention to the anxieties of social interaction which can interfere with these processes” (Smart 112). These are the same anxieties that are evident within the responses to my questionnaire and interviews. Devised theatre is about building something from scratch, but in order for it to be successful we have to stop, collaborate and listen to each other so that we can build it together.
The Politics of Process

We met this guy in Edinburgh who turned out to be the lighting designer for Forced Entertainment. He came to see Power Ballad and he said to me afterwards that, “There’s this fierceness with female Antipodean performers.” He said he sees it in Australian and New Zealand performers saying, “there’s something that Antipodean women do that other women don’t, there’s some kind of directness, and fierceness.” It’s again that thing of looking at your work this close and looking at your country so closely that you don’t see it. (Julia Croft, personal interview, 2017)

This chapter explores the processes of three fierce Antipodean women and specifically examines some of their devised theatre productions as case studies. They are leading examples of intersectional feminist devising in New Zealand and their work explores important intersections of class, gender, ethnicity and race. Each one has a unique perspective on devising, but they all share a similar drive to tell women’s stories. The first is Julie Nolan from Red Leap Theatre. Based in Auckland, Red Leap was formally established in 2008 and is now under the sole direction of Julie Nolan, after Kate Parker resigned her role as co-artistic director in 2015. Red Leap is a company led by women who operate under an ensemble structure, always collaborating and involving their cast in the creation of their work. In the past they have told stories centred around male protagonists, but more recently, all their work has involved the amplification of women’s voices. The second section of this chapter examines the work of Julia Croft. Croft, the youngest of these three women, often creates solo performance works in collaboration with one other person, usually a director. Croft is a political artist who demands revolution. Her works
tackle feminist issues and several of her performances have toured to Australia, Edinburgh and most recently Singapore. Lastly, this chapter will discuss the work of Nina Nawalowalo, artistic director of The Conch. Nawalowalo is an internationally renowned Fijian/New Zealand director and her work comes from a uniquely Pasifika perspective; she devises to create change in women’s lives.

All three of these women are fierce leaders of their devising processes and while they each offer a different point of view, they also have a lot in common as makers. Nolan, Croft and Nawalowalo are all visual makers. They often focus on images rather than words, and in the works discussed in this chapter, a recurring form is the use of physical theatre. In fact, all three of them follow in the physical theatre lineage of Francis Batten who studied with Jacques Lecoq before he returned to New Zealand and established Theatre Action, as mentioned on page 16. Nawalowalo and Croft both studied with Philippe Gaulier in France and Nolan studied with John Bolton in Australia. Like Batten, both Gaulier and Bolton were also trained by Lecoq. This genealogy cements the significant influence of physical theatre, clown, mask and puppetry throughout several generations of theatre practitioners in New Zealand.

But perhaps, most importantly, these three devising women all embed their process with intersectional feminist politics, and their work explores intersections of class, race, ethnicity and gender. This is significant because, as cited earlier, Madeline McNamara pointed out in her interview that it is essential to consider the politics of both the process as well as the content of devised theatre works. She said:

I think that it [devising] is a brilliant vehicle for women and I think it also implies a certain engagement with other people, whether they be men or women, some kind of stance on how you create work collaboratively, and the politics of process, as well as what is ultimately being explored… I think it sort of behoves you to have to think about process as well, and what is a feminist process, or what is a process that is non-hierarchical, or egalitarian, or where power issues are evident and worked through, or whatever. That makes it stronger. (McNamara)
The three practitioners in this chapter are all thinking about the politics of process in their own way. Despite their similarities, they are radically different makers. By presenting their voices side by side, this chapter highlights the different intersections that are present within feminist devising in New Zealand. Nolan, Croft and Nawalowalo, specifically represent intersections of age, race, and motherhood. They are admirable makers, and all have something to teach about how they collaborate, how they run their rooms, how they champion women’s voices, and how they demand revolution and change.

4.1 COMPANY – RED LEAP THEATRE

We [Kate Parker and Julie Nolan of Red Leap] just decided to make a work in a very kind of naïve and innocent way, where basically she and I did everything, produced, directed, found funding, went around and got sponsors, and were in it as well. It’s like a little bug, it gets inside you, and you just go, ‘I’m going to have to make a new work and start the process.’ So that’s how it began.

(Julie Nolan, personal interview, 2015)

Charging into this current decade came Red Leap Theatre, a devised physical theatre company based in Auckland, led by women. Founding members Kate Parker and Julie Nolan met while studying at the John Bolton Theatre School in Melbourne in 1995. In my interview with Nolan in 2015 she described the training thus:

So, he [John Bolton] is very much from the Gaulier and Lecoq lineage of physical theatre training… every day, you get up and you try things out, and you fail dismally and then you get back up the next day hopefully, and you keep trying and keep trying. He was absolutely the inspiration in the way that you can generate your own work… And it really lit a fire in me, that whole thing of just taking the control, deciding to get together with a bunch of people and creating something. (Nolan)
After returning to New Zealand in 1999, Nolan and Parker established themselves as independent theatre artists, creating, performing, directing, producing and teaching their craft often in association with each other. In the early 2000s they collaborated on three critically acclaimed works together. *Moahunting* (2001), where they performed together, *The Butcher’s Daughter* (2003) where Nolan directed, and Parker performed, and *Beyond The Blue* (2008) which they co-directed (*The Arts Foundation “Kate Parker – New Generation Award”*). In 2008, Parker and Nolan formalised their partnership and launched Red Leap Theatre Charitable Trust with founding Producer Lauren Hughes. At the time, having a theatre company led entirely by women was unique in New Zealand. In fact, four years after the official formation of Red Leap, Janet McAllister published an article in the New Zealand Herald titled “Men still pull strings in Auckland Theatre” (McAllister). So, when Parker and Nolan formed Red Leap, they were a bright and shining example of a company of women making their own work.

![Figure 33: Production image for Beyond The Blue, image by Rowen Baines (The Arts Foundation)](image)

In 2008, Parker negotiated with Australian author/artist Shaun Tan to develop his wordless graphic novel *The Arrival*, which tells a universal immigrant’s story, into a theatre production. *The Arrival* made Red Leap Theatre a household name. Originally
commissioned by the Auckland Arts Festival in 2009, it went on to appear in the New Zealand Festival in 2010, which is where I saw it at The Opera House in Wellington. On its website Red Leap write that, “Like Tan’s book this production is a tribute to migrants, refugees and displaced people worldwide. It is ultimately a story of overcoming hardship, of humanity and of hope” (Red Leap Theatre – The Arrival). An intersectional feminist reading of *The Arrival* reveals an exploration of class and ethnicity and is full of questions about belonging. The lead character leaves his family behind in an impoverished town and travels to a strange city that is full of foreign customs. His only possession is a suitcase and each stranger he meets carries “their own unspoken history: stories of struggle and survival in a world of incomprehensible violence, upheaval and hope” (Tan “Books – The Arrival”). *The Arrival* toured throughout Asia and the Pacific and won six Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards in Wellington in 2010, including Production of the Year and Best Director.

*The Arrival* was a visual feast thanks to an impressive set design by John Verryt. The spectacular pop-up storybook imagery glided between each location, constantly full of surprises. The tightly choreographed ensemble transformed before the audience’s eyes, they shapeshifted into everyone and everything. A complete cityscape grew out of a spiral in the centre of the stage, huge elegant birds swept through the air, with floating tumbling ladders are impossible for the ensemble climb. Chaos and calm swirled around the Traveller who is haunted by the shadows that plague his home and the pain of leaving his family behind. In his review of the 2012 return season in Auckland, James Wenley wrote:

I think you can make the case for *The Arrival* as a New Zealand classic... Maybe, as a nation of travellers, both coming to, and coming from our country – The Arrival’s story of a Traveller seeking out a new land, speaks to something of our collective New Zealand experience; the sensations of discovery and exploration, and why we our audiences and creatives have embraced this story. (Wenley “Review: The Arrival”)
The Arrival was a faithful adaptation of Shaun Tan’s original graphic novel, but it was injected with its own life and story. This production is still what Red Leap are most well known for. Perhaps this is because the structure provided by Shaun Tan’s original artistic storytelling, offered Red Leap a simple and clear story to hang its astounding images from. In my 2015 interview with Nolan, when asked what the disadvantages of devising were, she gave a clear answer:

Structure, narrative, story. It’s really hard I think to spend all your time on so many elements as a devising person, because you’re creating design as you go along, because you’re often creating a sound score and visual things and all of that stuff as you go… so you can get those visual moments that you don’t want to let go of, that are brilliant, but they don’t always feed the story you’re trying to tell. Getting the balance right I think is a really big challenge. (Nolan)
Red Leap describe itself as a devised physical theatre company (Red Leap Theatre – Company). All its theatre works can be connected by a focus on visual storytelling, ensemble, and the power of imagination. While some of its works are adaptations or are inspired by existing stories, they never begin with a script. Rather, their devising process begins with “ideas, themes, people in the space... from there we generate the work, we find the goal to then create the piece” (Nolan). Collaboration and connection between an ensemble are incredibly important for director Julie Nolan. Speaking about her passion for collaboration, she said, “I have a very big belief that the energy of people in a room is much greater than, for example what comes out of my mind.” The connection that Red Leap creates between its ensemble can become electric on stage and pulls the audience into each moment. When Nolan spoke about why Red Leap loves devising and collaborating she said:

I think the connection that you build is like nothing else, there is such a joy in the creating process and the connection you build... it’s a really crucial thing, if you don’t have that connection with your actors I think it would be really hard. [When devising] you are embarking on a terrifying journey together, you don’t know the
finished outcome. You’ve got no guarantees, no one has already said, “this is a brilliant script, it’s done amazingly well on Broadway, pick it up.” You have to have a massive amount of trust and a massive amount of faith.

Red Leap’s follow up to The Arrival was an original devised piece called Paper Sky, it premiered in 2011 and was directed by both Julie Nolan and Kate Parker. Paper Sky centres around the protagonist Henry who is a writer and a recluse. As he writes, his imagination comes to life, “pages fly, a woman is drowned, memories catch fire, love burns” (Red Leap Theatre – Paper Sky). A woman moves in next door to Henry and discovers his writing; discovers that his heroine is fighting for her life in a “papery world,” so she “challenges Henry to face the truth of his stories” (Red Leap Theatre – Paper Sky). Like The Arrival, Paper Sky was also commissioned by the Auckland Arts Festival and then won two Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards for Most Original Production and Best Set Design for the Wellington season at Downstage Theatre, which is where I saw it in 2012.
While *Paper Sky* was also praised for its wild imagination and beautiful imagery, this production received some criticism of its narrative. Ewen Coleman, reviewing for *The Dominion Post*, wrote that the, “ending of the production becomes a little drawn out and loses focus” (Coleman). James Wenley, reviewing for Theatrescenes, felt that, “it was the imagery that drove the story, rather than the story driving the images” (Wenley “Review: Paper Sky”). In my 2015 interview with co-director Julie Nolan, she reflected on what a difficult process it was. She commented that the company got stuck several times and that it took four seasons for the work to feel complete, much like a written script would take multiple drafts (Nolan). Nolan then said:

...when I look at Paper Sky, it became a little classic three act play and it’s quite a traditional hero’s journey in a way. And our main protagonist is a man... it was quite subconscious the way that happened... We just went on some sort of instinct around building the story I suppose.

When I saw *Paper Sky*, I remember being surprised by the female character’s lack of depth in comparison to the male protagonist, it felt like she was only there to serve his story. In our interview I commented to Nolan that is interesting that woman co-directors, working
from instinct and wanting to create a love story, still ended up with a male protagonist. Nolan replied, “Yeah it’s really weird, and I know Kate used to say sometimes, ‘Why are we making a show about a man who lives in his room? Why are we doing that?’” (Nolan).

There has been a notable shift in recent years for Red Leap Theatre and it is now much more focused on telling women’s stories. This is evident in their manifesto from the company website, which can be seen in the figure above. Red Leap now explicitly states that it will celebrate and support women’s stories and talents. This shift is evident in Red Leap’s more recent work and in my interview with Nolan herself, who said:

I’m getting more and more interested in giving women a voice, because I’m personally really concerned about women’s issues and women’s health and wellbeing… Because as we know, the male voice is incredibly powerful and incredibly strong. So, standing up and saying, “this is how we communicate, and this is what we know, and these things are good” and being able to express it in a way that’s then universal, is incredibly powerful…

This new focus can be seen in their two latest works, Dust Pilgrim from 2015/16 and Kororāreka: The Ballad of Maggie Flynn written by Paolo Rotondo, which premiered in 2017. While not a devised piece, Kororāreka featured a cast of five women and told a uniquely
New Zealand story “unravelling the legacy of the women in our past” (Red Leap Theatre – Kororāreka).

*Dust Pilgrim* however, was devised by the company in 2015, working with Paolo Rotondo as a dramaturgical advisor. *Dust Pilgrim* began its life as an adaptation of a Gabriel García Márquez story, because after the difficulties of the Paper Sky process, Red Leap did not want to create another devised work without a strong narrative supporting their lush imagery. However, according to Nolan, “As we went into the process we found out that we couldn’t get the rights to the story because he [Márquez] recently died, and his estate is completely tied up” (Nolan). While working with Rotondo as a dramaturg allowed Red Leap to develop a more cohesive narrative, as Nolan said in my interview with her in 2015 (directly following the premiere season in Auckland), “…we just didn’t work with him [Rotondo] enough. We have created this quite beautiful world, it’s very visual, it’s very physical, but still the narrative isn’t strong enough. So, in our next development period we’ve got to really start digging into that and commit to that.”

Following that second development period, *Dust Pilgrim* had seasons in Hamilton, New Plymouth and Wellington in June and July of 2016. I saw it during its Wellington Season at Te Whaea, from where it was awarded Best Set and Best Lighting design at the Wellington Theatre Awards later that year. Red Leap describe *Dust Pilgrim* as “an intimate yet epic tale of a young woman’s fight for freedom in a world where dreams and premonitions are as real as the wind” (Red Leap Theatre – Dust Pilgrim). Set in a recognisable, yet magical, faraway place, *Dust Pilgrim* presents the audience with, “a life built on dust and shifting sands” (Red Leap Theatre – Dust Pilgrim). The lead character, young woman named Panuelo, escapes her tyrannical mother and shows how one small person can make one small action and pull down whole systems of oppression (Red Leap Theatre – Dust Pilgrim). In this production, Red Leap are examining intersections of gender and motherhood. The relationship between Panuelo and her mother drives the narrative, and she constantly struggles against the restrictions of being a young woman in a world that is divided by class and gender. *Dust Pilgrim* began with an empty black
stage and sandbags full of dust swinging out of each wing. The performers ran, they dodged the weight of the bags, the weight of the oppression. The dust was transformative, it became water, smoke, tears; it showed the passage of time and the movement of the characters as they travelled far and wide “encountering a world of tricksters, prophets, boundaries and borders” (Red Leap Theatre – Dust Pilgrim).

![Production image for Dust Pilgrim](Red Leap Theatre – Dust Pilgrim)

The inspiration of Gabriel García Márquez provided Red Leap with a style and a world to play in, but they also gleaned inspiration by exploring the oppression of women in society today and the atrocities that still occur. Nolan said that:

*Dust Pilgrim* originated from looking at women in the world today. A big inspiration point was the Boko Haram kidnapping of 200 young girls in Nigeria. We thought, how does that still happen in the world today? And then we just started looking into women and oppression and we started talking about the oppression in our own lives, the time pressures and all the work. And Kate and I are both mums. So, it [*Dust Pilgrim*] came out of all of that.
With clear inspiration coming from the director’s own politics, *Dust Pilgrim* is Red Leap’s most overtly feminist work. While their devising process is always grounded in materialist and post-structural feminist frameworks as discussed on page 31 and 34-35, *Dust Pilgrim* was also exploring ideas around women and power. As cited earlier, Mary Beard writes that “our mental, cultural template for a powerful person remains resolutely male” (Beard 53). While Red Leap do explore the dynamic of a powerful male character, (an example of which can be seen in the image below), the primary toxic power dynamic investigated in *Dust Pilgrim*, is between mother and daughter. This grounds the work in a more intersectional complexity, while examining age and class and how these affect the power that we hold.

![Figure 40: Production image for Dust Pilgrim (Red Leap Theatre – Dust Pilgrim)](image)

The dust became a metaphor for these ideas and allowed the production to capture the feeling of these issues, while still placing them within a magical and imaginative story. Early in the creative process, when the ideas were still being shaped, it was clear that this story would take place in a desert. At the forum following the Wellington performance that I attended, director Julie Nolan spoke about how the set designer, Poppy Serano, brought the dust into the room at the very start of rehearsals. Serano pushed them to use
the dust all the time, meaning that this scenographic element was completely entwined with the narrative. It told the story with the performers. The bags of sand-like dust represent the weight of oppression that the protagonist is trying to escape. The audience watches how some characters shrug off that weight, and how some are burdened and forced to carry it. As soon as a bag is ripped open, it’s a race against time and we watch as the uncatchable sand runs through their fingers and slips away.

With only three performers, Dust Pilgrim is more intimate and simple when compared to The Arrival, but Red Leap still manages to create a sense of the epic with this production. This is partly achieved through the electric connection between the ensemble. Ella Becroft, Alison Bruce and Thomas Eason work tirelessly and seamlessly together. The importance of connection that Nolan discussed in her interview is evident while watching this cast. When I asked Nolan what the advantages of devising theatre are, she again spoke about connection:

I think the connection that comes from devising is the thing that keeps you going with it. The connections are like no other… I think the shared ownership, the ability to have people feeding in and to have things developing in unexpected
ways... you can’t quite predict what’s going to happen, the uniqueness of the finished product and the kind of joy of making it actually. (Nolan)

![Figure 42: Production image for Dust Pilgrim (Red Leap Theatre – Dust Pilgrim)](image)

Red Leap Theatre clearly prioritise the people that they collaborate with and always admire what each person brings to a process. In their manifesto, they state that they believe in the company and in the human spirit. This is an excellent example to follow when making theatre and it supports Jackie Smart’s claim that, “a creative process based around human interaction should take account of the full scope of human emotions that feed into it” (Smart 102). When I asked Nolan how she and her collaborators work together in this respectful and feminist way, she said:

> We make creative contracts. It’s unique to every cast that we work with and we refresh it in every process. Part of that contract is things like listening properly to each other or whatever it is the company chooses it to be, and then we are held to contract. So, if anyone does anything we can say, hey we contracted not to talk like this, we contracted to talk directly to each other, to confront issues and resolve them in a really direct way, to respect and listen. And it’s amazing how it holds us, even if we just have contracted to respect each other’s ideas.

Red Leap Theatre is now one of the biggest theatre companies in New Zealand. They are regularly funded through Creative New Zealand’s Toi Uru Kahikatea Investment Programme and are a resident of Corban Estate Arts Centre in Auckland. Their focus and
commitment to devising and collaboration is exemplary in this country. In my interview with her, Nolan constantly reinforced that collaboration and multiple voices present in the rehearsal room are what makes their work successful because, “as a director I don’t have all the answers.” At the time of writing, there are now many women theatre practitioners working collaboratively and creating feminist theatre, either in companies or as independent artists. Much has changed in the past decade, but Red Leap Theatre is still a powerful example of what devising women can do. In 2018, as feminist ways of making are entering the mainstream, Nolan’s words about what devising can do will stay with me:

It [devising] can take issues and things and it can transform them. It can turn them into something that is creative and imaginative and palatable and delicious and make it something that people want to be part of and engage with and have conversations about.

4.2 REVOLUTION – JULIA CROFT

I’m not just going to put on a play and put myself in it, or make myself the lead… I want to re-write the script. That’s fundamentally one of the questions of feminism. Are we just looking at putting more women in positions of power? Or are we looking at re-imagining the system? I think about that in terms of the work I make on a smaller scale. I’m not interested in more women on boards or me having a great character in a well-made play. It’s more like, how do you smash the system and start again? (Julia Croft, personal interview, 2017)

Performance artist and theatre maker Julia Croft has been smashing systems with her solo work since 2015. Croft trained as a performer at Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School, graduating in 2008. She then followed in the footsteps of many other New Zealand performers by undertaking further training at L’Ecole Philippe Gaulier in Paris in 2011, and then with Anne Bogart’s SITI Company in New York City in 2014/2015 (Julia Croft –
Croft is based in Auckland and in the past few years, has started creating her own work using devising techniques, often in collaboration with one or two other women. According to the Artist Statement on her website, she creates “performances that sit between disciplines,” and her work is “part theatre, part dance, part performance art” (Julia Croft – Artist Statement and Bio). In my personal interview with her, in 2017, she said that she is drawn to be a performer, but also wants to be able to create the content. She said:

…devising is the way to do that, otherwise I’m just an actor or a director. I want to perform, and I want to be responsible, at least in part, for the content. I want to build the thing. I want to be a director and a writer and an actor, but I can’t make up my mind, so I try to be all three at once. (Croft)

Croft says that in the beginning of her career she was driven to create and devise her own work simply because she could not find any plays that she liked. She recalls a time, having just graduated from Toi Whakaari, when she read play after play, trying to find something that she wanted to put on, before realising, “If I want to play a woman of any consequence, who isn’t a cliché, I’m just going to have to make it myself, because there’s nothing here that is interesting.” Despite this realisation, Croft admits that she “tried to be a straight actor for years.” In fact, she was a part of the original devising cast for Paper Sky by Red Leap Theatre and in 2014, she received a Chapman Tripp Theatre Award for her performance in Indian Ink’s Kiss The Fish. However, Croft says that, just a few years ago, she finally understood that she did not enjoy being an actor for hire. She says that when she realised this, it felt like a weight was lifted from her. She turned her focus to working out what she felt she was good at, started to build her own content and make her own work.

Talking to Julia Croft about her work, one gets the sense of a revolution building. The political is always personal and there is a difference in the way that she discusses devised theatre. Particularly, as she is not completely comfortable with the actual term devising itself due to its stereotypical connotation with a more masculine, Robert Lepage style of
devised theatre. Despite this discomfort, in our interview, she described devised theatre as “a disruption of established theatrical hierarchies.” In New Zealand there can be a tendency for professional theatre to get locked into established methods of making and rehearsing. Croft described this as, “…this is how we do theatre: we rehearse from 9am to 5pm, there is a rehearsal report at the end of the day, there is a production meeting.” While we both acknowledged that, for some theatre making processes, those are necessary structures to put in place, they can make it difficult to maintain “a sense of play, lightness and listening.” Croft sees devised theatre as a way to disrupt this mould and says that we need to, “…question all those structures that we’ve inherited and so easily default to, and really examine whether this is the best thing for the work.” Croft’s methodology clearly reflects a poststructuralist feminist position as outlined on page 34-35. She is radically deconstructing traditional ways of making theatre and disrupting theatrical binaries of traditional and scripted versus alternative and devised.

Figure 43: Production image for If There’s Not Dancing at the Revolution, I’m Not Coming (Julia Croft – If There’s Not Dancing)
Like Julie Nolan of Red Leap Theatre, Croft also believes that for devising to work, your collaborators are hugely important. She describes them as partnerships, and in her solo work she regularly collaborates with just a director. For If There’s Not Dancing at the Revolution, I’m Not Coming (2015), Croft collaborated with director Virginia Frankovich. She then worked with director Nisha Madhan on Power Ballad (2017). Croft says that her working relationships with her collaborators are far more important than the shows themselves, and that, “…without getting too poetic, the show is how me and Virginia or me and Nisha’s love expresses itself.” Prioritising these working relationships and the people in the rehearsal room means that their processes are following Jackie Smart’s advice and are emotionally intelligent and emotionally ethical (Smart 102). However, in my interview with her, Croft acknowledged that this is a very difficult thing to do, especially in a capitalist environment where things like, “…the individual star, having to brand yourself, all of us being creative entrepreneurs – it’s sort of counter to a truly collaborative devised way of working that is really aspiring to share a voice, and share a freedom” (Croft). Having that shared voice is important for Croft’s work and she spoke about the importance of having a shared authorship between practitioners, and that the responsibilities of each person should not be limited to their perceived role of “director” or “sound designer.” Croft includes a lot of dance and movement in her work and in our interview, she emphasised the importance in devising of “writing or authoring through means other than text.” She said:

The content, the narrative is being held in other ways than just words. And that content is mostly being built in real time, rather than someone sitting in a room and writing and then six months later, or a year later, or 400 years later, it ends up in a rehearsal room. In a perfect world I think all those elements that are telling the story: the bodies, the image, the text and sound, they’re all happening simultaneously. All those elements of theatre, they need each other.

Throughout our interview together, we used the terms “devising” and “theatre” constantly, but we also discussed how those terms can be limiting for practitioners in New Zealand. Croft sometimes defines herself as a, “live artist, rather than exclusively a theatre
artist... because it doesn’t have the same sense of company [as theatre does] and live art gives you a bit more freedom... but my work is always in some kind of collaboration which is why live art doesn’t feel quite right.” Croft says that she uses the word ‘art’ because the word ‘theatre’ has become “…uncomfortable for me in some ways. I’m way more inspired by performance art than I am by a lot of the theatre I see in this country.” Regardless of which term feels right for each practitioner, Croft noted that it is interesting just how much forms like live art, performance art, and devised theatre “attract women, marginalised bodies, and people of colour.” She noted that particularly in New Zealand, “There are so many women making awesome live art or experimental theatre... The people I look up to are almost exclusively women, there is some sense of women having a natural affinity with those ways of working.” It is immediately clear to an audience that Croft’s performance work is strongly influenced by her interest in politics. She said:

I really liked politics and had a lot I wanted to contribute to that sphere, and I really liked theatre. I always assumed that those things were separate, and you had to pick one. Then in my late 20s I realised that not only are they the same thing, you kind of can’t have one without the other.

Figure 44: Publicity images for If There’s Not Dancing at the Revolution, I’m Not Coming and Power Ballad (Julia Croft – If There’s Not Dancing and Power Ballad)
Croft defines herself as a feminist artist and her artist statement on her website says that, while her work may or may not directly deal with feminist content, (and often it is explicitly feminist), being a feminist artist means that she “seeks to find a feminist process, which is equitable, collective and horizontal” (Julia Croft – Artist Statement and Bio). Croft’s work, particularly her solo pieces since 2015, are all attempting to “challenge patriarchal structures of power, dominance and influence” (Julia Croft – Artist Statement and Bio). We spoke about the difficulty of creating a process that is entirely feminist, and we discussed processes we have experienced where the content may be feminist, “but if you’re not looking after people’s emotional health or not listening to people, then all you’re doing is putting it [a feminist process] on” (Croft). This links directly to what Jackie Smart writes about in her article “The Feeling of Devising,” that devising processes need to prioritise the collaborators and be emotionally ethical. Croft’s feminist process does not shy away from politics or difficult conversations. She says that it is necessary to discuss pay rates, the importance of multiple and intersectional voices, deal with panic attacks, examine different ways of working, and ideally to find a way “for the [feminist] politics to be present in all of it, not just the final product.” This is a sentiment that was also echoed by Madeline McNamara when she spoke to me about the “politics of process” and how important it was for both the content and the method of making to be feminist and politically engaged (McNamara). Croft made the succinct point that:

If your process isn’t feminist as well, then you’re just selling a feminist t-shirt at Supré.\(^5\) That is the theatre equivalent of that. It looks snazzy, I’m going to wear it because it makes me look politically engaged and it’s about women. But it’s probably made by slave children in a factory getting paid $1.50 a day.

Julia Croft currently has two solo shows that she has been touring around the world for the past three years. If There's Not Dancing at the Revolution, I'm Not Coming premiered at the Basement Theatre\(^5\) in Auckland in 2015 and has now had seasons in Auckland,

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51 Supré is a high street fashion store in Australia and New Zealand. It is now owned by the Cotton On Group.
52 Basement Theatre is Auckland’s home for emerging artists. It is a charitable trust and full of original New Zealand work with world premiere’s making up half of its programme.
Wellington (where I saw it at BATS Theatre in 2016), Nelson, Perth, Singapore, and Edinburgh. Croft’s own description of this work is an accurate artist statement. She writes that If There’s Not Dancing is:

...a rich contemporary performance collage of film scripts, pop songs, elaborate costumes, comedy, dance and live art, all stretched, teased, shattered and reassembled in order to challenge the treatment of women’s bodies in popular culture. If There’s Not Dancing uncovers the collective fantasies underneath these bodies, intervenes and explodes them into feminist confetti. (Julia Croft – If There’s Not Dancing)

Figure 45: Production image for If There's Not Dancing at the Revolution, I'm Not Coming (Julia Croft – If There’s Not Dancing)

Julia begins If There’s Not Dancing wearing every single costume that the show requires (as can be seen in the above image); all the props are also hidden within her clothing. Her body has become misshapen with the multiple layers; leotards, t-shirts, pants, a jumpsuit and a tutu, shirts, dresses, and a silk robe, all covered with a pink taffeta princess ball gown. As Julia becomes each new character, she strips away another layer, and begins
dissecting a new persona. Mirrors of different shapes and sizes are dotted all around the stage. These mirrors reflect Julia and her actions, but they also occasionally reflect the audience, encouraging us to question our own response, our own bias. Scenes from Titanic, Pretty Woman, Psycho, Basic Instinct, and more play out on the screen behind her while she creates theatrical vignettes that highlight the objectification of women or present a juxtaposition to highlight the ludicrous way society has become accustomed to a certain depiction of women on screen. The most powerful of these follows the joyful climax of Julia dancing to “Chandelier” by Sia, complete with vulva like pompoms and confetti cannons. Julia then exits and leaves the audience alone to listen to “Love Story,” a sweet and naïve pop song by Taylor Swift that reimagines the story of Romeo and Juliet without the double suicide at the end. However, while we listen to Swift’s music, the disturbing lyrics for “Wait (The Whisper Song) by the Ying Yang Twins flicker across the screen. The juxtaposition of the saccharine and innocent pop music with the explicit, violent and derogatory lyrics forces the audience to confront the stark and uncomfortable difference in these two portrayals of women. The silence that follows is full of tension before Julia returns wearing all the costumes wrapped around her head, just like in the publicity image. The weight of all these characters is piled onto her own personal identity while she stands naked and vulnerable before her audience.

![Image](image_url)

*Figure 46: Production image for If There’s Not Dancing at the Revolution, I’m Not Coming and Power Ballad (Julia Croft – If There’s Not Dancing)*
While one of the goals of *If There’s Not Dancing at the Revolution, I’m Not Coming* was to unapologetically create a mess, *Power Ballad*, which premiered in 2017, sits in direct contrast and is far simpler and more refined. It is part performance lecture, part karaoke party. Armed with a voice manipulator and a karaoke machine, “*Power Ballad* deconstructs gendered linguistic histories and rips apart contemporary language to find a new articulation of pleasure, anger and femaleness” (Julia Croft – *Power Ballad*). In my interview with Croft, we spoke about the inspiration behind *Power Ballad*, and she told me that, after she had made *If There’s Not Dancing*, a work all about image, she started to think about language. Croft said that, “this was around the time of the [2016] U.S. election. I thought about how there are ideologies that are hidden in our language… and sometimes it’s really clear, but sometimes it’s so insidious that you can’t quite put your finger on it” (Croft). Inspired by feminist linguistics, Croft began thinking about language as a patriarchal structure and as a metaphor, “it’s this seemingly immovable system, that can move” (Croft). *Power Ballad* shows that language, like any system that we assume is permanent (gender binaries, capitalism etc.), can actually change. Croft says that she began to see language as a kind of power, and that if “…he who holds the power, holds the narrative,” then she wanted to “gently, or not so gently sometimes, disrupt that.”

In my interview with Croft, she described the devising process for *Power Ballad* with director Nisha Madhan and dramaturg Kate Prior as being very loose. She said:

> I think that’s where the best stuff happens for me. I would just sing songs or do something funny… Our process came out of both of us [Croft and Madhan] having that need for it to be playful. We were constantly searching for what the game is, where the fun is, and if it doesn’t feel fun we would just stop doing it.

To create this playful room, Croft says that they began the process by creating some strong offers to provide a structure. Before devising began they knew that they had a loop pedal that could modify voices, a microphone e, and a karaoke machine. They set themselves certain rules such as, “all text is said in the microphone,” and a goal to discover everything that the pedal and microphone could do. This meant that once they got into the room they could just play together. Their feminist
process made sure that the power in the room was shared, sometimes this included swapping roles. Croft said, “...to show me what a certain bit looked like she [Madhan] would get up and perform and I would direct her. So, there was a fluidity around those roles” (Croft).

I saw *Power Ballad* on the opening night at the Basement Theatre during the 2017 Auckland Fringe Festival. The show began slowly, the lights went down, and Julia entered, walking backwards. Her long hair was spilling over her face and body. She bumped into a light and stopped, we laughed. She adjusted her course and continued walking backwards to the centre of the stage. She reached the microphone stand and took the microphone without her hands ever touching it and moved it around her body. The microphone swung, slid and bumped into her, it was live, and we heard each collision through the speakers. We watched as she reclaimed her body, reclaimed the space around her body, exploring it with sound. She may have been topless, but nothing about this was sexualised. After several minutes she wriggled the mic up between her legs and grasped

Figure 47: Production image for Power Ballad (The Spinoff – Review by Sam Brooks)
onto it with both hands, she now held the power. She put on a black blazer, took off the wig and brought a voice manipulator/loop pedal forward. She started making sounds. She distorted them, pushing her voice lower with the machine. Eventually the sounds turned into a word, the first word she has spoken: “Language.”

Croft revealed to me that this second section of the show, once she has started speaking, was created by her speaking in the Deep Talker voice (her own voice modulated much lower) and then just trying to make Madhan laugh. The Deep Talker section had three games within it, all of which deconstruct different parts of our language and challenge the audience’s expectations. After she has first said the word “language,” Julia moved onto “feminism,” “patriarchy,” “intersectionality,” “oppression,” each word was stretched out, low and guttural, so the audience could draw the full meaning of its weight. As she slowly eased into sentences, the binaries game began where Julia juxtaposed a typically masculine narrative phrase with the words “feminist theatre.” For example:

*Julia: One-man triumphs against the odds!*

*Feminist theatre!*

The second game in this section is called “Just Words” where Julia plays on the dismissive phrase of ‘Oh they’re just words, they can’t hurt you!’ In the *Power Ballad* Programme Croft and Madhan wrote, “All the words they have called you remain in your body. All the words they have called me remain in my body… Is it the language that hurts me or is it how it is used?” (Croft and Madhan). In this section, Julia played with different phrases, repeating “Just words!” in a causal and light-hearted tone after each. Gradually the phrases turn into insults which culminates in:

*Julia: You dumb fucking slut!*

*Just words...*

The final game is “Fact or Feeling.” Julia uses this game to show us that language has so much more connotation and meaning than perhaps we even realise, language can never be dismissed as “just words.” For example:

*Julia: Ham. Fact.*

*Turkey. Fact.*
Christmas Dinner… It’s a feeling.

In a departure from Croft’s image focused devising process, some of the text within these games came from an early part of the rehearsal process where she wrote a huge amount of script, intending for part of *Power Ballad* to be a performance lecture with lists of different language. In my interview with her, Croft said that halfway through the process she discovered that she did not like using language and that it kept shutting down the creativity in the room. She said, “I was freaking out and Nisha said, ‘Isn’t this beautiful, you made a show about how language is problematic and you’re discovering that language is problematic’… a lot of that process was us trying to figure out how to give language enough space to mean multiple things” (Croft). In his review for *The Spinoff*, Sam Brooks articulates how the space that Croft and Madhan created around language made these ideas comprehensible and applicable for the audience. He wrote that one of the successes of *Power Ballad* is how it acts as a:

…conduit for the kinds of ideas that live in textbooks and lectures and makes them into something easily understood and relatable. It’s not particularly engaging to
have someone explain why spoken and verbal language might be a construct of the patriarchy that values masculine expression (or repression) over any other kind of expression, but when you see Croft literally embody the difficulty of a woman trying to fit into masculine expression, see her writhing around trying to talk into a microphone, you get it. You understand it.” (Brooks)

There are many moments in *Power Ballad* that have the potential to linger in the audience’s mind long after they have left the theatre. For me, it was the sections of karaoke, particularly because of the unique moment that occurred on opening night in the Auckland Fringe Festival. Something which Croft tells me has “never happened again.” The screen behind Julia blinks into life with “Karo-fun!” written on it. “We Belong” by Pat Benatar starts to play. Julia approaches the mic and opens her mouth to launch into this classic 1980s ballad, but no sound comes out. The lyrics continue to blink up on the screen while she sings silently, mouth open wide the whole time. It is a strange feeling to listen to this silent singing when we expect words along with the synthesisers and drum beat. But then, on opening night, a man in the audience began singing. Here was this woman on stage, opening her mouth to sing but no sound is coming out, and then her voice was supplied by a man watching her. At first, I felt anger towards this audience member, I felt the women beside me shudder. But then, almost as one, the entire audience rose up together and joined in. The whole theatre was now singing “We Belong” and it created an incredible moment of spontaneous community. We were all singing in the performers language. It was still on her terms, she was still in control of the gaze, but we followed her in it. She kept her eyes closed and mouth open the whole time, but the joy on her face that we were singing with her was undeniable. In my interview with her, Croft said:

    That’s one of my favourite memories of *Power Ballad*, because we had kind of hoped that maybe people would sing, but New Zealand audiences often don’t participate. But when you did, like I was crying behind my closed eyes, because it was just so beautiful… And that’s I guess how the karaoke functions now, or what it’s trying to do in a gentle way. Going, hey collective voices, I’m not going to talk… you can.
Like *If There’s Not Dancing*, *Power Ballad* has now had seasons at the Edinburgh and Perth Fringe Festivals, and Croft has continued to develop the work. For example, she now points the microphone towards the audience during the karaoke encouraging them to have their moment. Another addition is when she sings the 80s hard rock power ballad, “Alone” by Heart in the Deep Talker voice. Croft says that now, when she is halfway through, she just starts screaming. She then gives the microphone to three different audience members (she always tries to choose women) and lets them scream, before turning the microphone towards the whole audience. In my interview with her Croft said,

> I love that bit, watching everyone in the audience, but especially I love watching women who really get into it, just screaming their lungs out. It feels like this great exorcism, this big “fuck you” to have a room of different women just screaming… And that’s such a memorable moment, that communal experience, this public airing of anger feels like a great action, something we all need right now.

In our interview Croft also talked about her favourite addition to the work. During the binaries game in the Deep Talker section, Croft and Madhan added these lines:

*Julia: Shakespeare! Feminist theatre!*
Straight white men! Feminist theatre!
Not all men! Yes all men!

May the streets run red with the blood of the straight white man!

Croft told me that the final line of that quote is her favourite line that she has ever said on stage and that it has made some people in her audiences very uncomfortable. It even caused some men in Edinburgh to walk out of her show due to their discomfort. Croft says that just means that, “It’s doing something, it’s getting a reaction. And looking at the week we just had… like maybe we can #metoo our way out of this, or maybe we just need to fucking scream.”

One of the complexities of Croft’s work is demonstrated by the way that her shows manage to present such justified and righteous anger, while also holding the audience in an intense vulnerability. In our interview together, we spoke a lot about vulnerability and doubt and how they are often serious challenges in a devising process. Croft said that, “It’s really hard to put on new work… You just don’t know how it’s going to land, it’s scary. It’s very vulnerable… but I think you’ve just got to hold your nerve, and that’s hard.” This vulnerability and doubt is expressed very clearly in Power Ballad in a section that Croft refers to as “I Don’t Know.” She says that it was inspired by an article she read in the early 2000s about how surety can be really problematic and perhaps the “most feminist statement you can say is ‘I don’t know.’ How do you make theatrically, intelligently, satisfying stuff that still admits that you don’t have the answers?” The I Don’t Know section begins five minutes after the Deep Talker games. Julia is lying on the ground in the only part of the show where she uses her own un-altered voice. She starts saying “I don’t know” into the microphone repeatedly. Each one is a little different. Croft says,

I still find that bit really moving to perform. Depending on where I am in my life it always has a different meaning. Like, “I don’t know what I’m doing with my

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53 The #metoo movement had gone viral the week prior to our interview on the 24th October 2017, ten days after the The New York Times published a story detailing decades of allegations of sexual harassment against Harvey Weinstein.
life” or “I don’t know what any of this means,” “I don’t know how the song bit will go tonight,” or “I don’t know how to make theatre.” It can mean different things, and I think there’s so much power in that. I mean there’s power in vulnerability, right? We are taught that it’s a real negative and it’s not.

Figure 50: Production image for Power Ballad (Julia Croft – Power Ballad)

Croft’s work is charged, full of revolution and emotion, all the while pushing her audience towards change. She wears her intersectional feminist politics proudly on her sleeve and says, with confidence, that, “The moment has passed when any festival, theatre, or institution should be doing anything other than championing self-generated work, the work of everyone who has been historically othered.” If There’s Not Dancing at the Revolution, I’m Not Coming and Power Ballad are engaging, funny, intellectual, and insightful pieces of devised work. In his review for The Spinoff Sam Brooks wrote that these two shows “speak to your brain while they hit you in the gut” (Brooks). They offer a hopeful feminist attitude for the future. At the end of my interview with her, Croft
offered some simple but inspiring words about how we are all capable of creating change, especially with the art and theatre that we make. She said:

I think about how we’re all just adding our little drop of water, and I just want to put something great into the world. Even if it’s flawed, even if it’s problematic in ways I don’t realise, even if it sucks sometimes, you’re doing something. Some action towards something changing, and that’s your little drop of water. It’s all anyone can do. (Croft)

4.3 CHANGE – THE CONCH

I think how each company or how each artist sets your own framework is important. As you get older and mature and do project after project, you become very specific about your own environment. How to run your room, and how to feel strong enough that when you don’t know the answers, you know that you’ve got open space and you don’t get dominated by any members of your team, that you don’t feel pressurised to come up with the answers, and then they follow you… (Nina Nawalowalo, personal interview, 2017)

The Conch are a leading voice for Pacific Theatre in New Zealand with a trademark fusion style of “Pacific cultural forms with physical theatre, mime, illusion, dance, music and lighting” (Warrington & O’Donnell 141). Co-founded by Artistic Director Nina Nawalowalo and Creative Producer Tom McCrory in 2002, The Conch strives to create ground-breaking works with “intercultural collaboration” using “unique theatrical languages” (The Conch – About The Company). In an interview with The Big Idea in 2013, Nawalowalo and McCrory spoke about what inspired them to form The Conch, and more specifically about Nawalowalo’s “desire to seek a marriage between her international experience and training in European visual and physical theatre forms, with a journey into her Pacific cultural heritage” (Liang). In Floating Islanders: Pasifika Theatre in Aotearoa (2017), McCrory describes this mission as building “a bridge between worlds… to create
pathways for the amazing talent and creativity of Pacific people” (McCrory qtd. Warrington & O’Donnell 141).

The Conch made their mark on the New Zealand theatre industry with their first work *Vula* in 2002, originally presented at BATS Theatre in Wellington. Over the next six years the company toured all around New Zealand and the Pacific, played at the Sydney Opera House, completed a six-city tour of Holland, and had a ten-night season at the Barbican Theatre in London. *Vula* (Fijian for ‘moon’) is performed on a stage flooded with water and by combining magic with traditional song and dance, it tells the story of the relationship between Pasifika women and the sea. It was in this production that Warrington and O’Donnell suggest that “Nawalowalo took her first steps towards creating a rich physical language, drawing on her dual Fijian/European heritage” (Warrington and O’Donnell 144). The Conch’s next devised work, again directed by Nawalowalo, was *Masi* which premiered in the New Zealand Festival in 2012 at Soundings Theatre at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. Almost entirely non-verbal, *Masi* drew on The Conch’s visual and physical style and used the acclaimed talents of British illusionist Paul Kieve\(^{54}\) to create magic on stage. *Masi* told a very personal story which explored the history and mythology of masi (Fijian tapa cloth), and the love story of Nawalowalo’s parents, a Fijian chief and an English nurse who met in the 1950s in Wellington.

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\(^{54}\) Paul Kieve was an adviser on the *Harry Potter* films and created the stage illusions for *Matilda the Musical* and *Ghost the Musical*. Kieve and Nawalowalo trained together overseas and Kieve coming to New Zealand to work on *Masi* was the beginning of The Conch’s relationship with the British Council which led to *Stages of Change* in 2013.
In 2015, The Conch went in a slightly different direction and premiered a scripted work. *The White Guitar* was co-directed by Nawalowalo and Jim Moriarty and was co-written and performed by three members of the Luafutu family, including Scribe, a famous hip hop recording artist. It tells their true story of “a man’s journey from boyhood innocence into the heart of darkness – through violence, drug addiction, prison and gangs – to the possibility of hope, healing and redemption” (The Conch – The White Guitar). *The White Guitar* has been met with standing ovations and sell-out seasons in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, before moving onto a successful regional tour of New Zealand. Nawalowalo says that The Conch was:

…drawn to the raw truth of the Luafutu’s story. It is particularly unique to have a story performed by the family themselves. These three extraordinary men who

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55 Jim Moriarty is an actor and theatre director with more than forty years of experience. He is also a registered psychiatric nurse and in 2001 he was made a member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to the arts. He is the co-founder and artistic director of Te Râkau Theatre. Te Râkau have devised plays with inmates of Arohata Prison and Christchurch Women’s Prison, and they have completed other programmes in Youth Justice Residential Centres and with Māori communities (Te Râkau Theatre – Our people).
have the courage to tell a story of hope found under oppression, a journey from hurt to healing, but above all a belief that the truth will set us all free. (Theatreview – The White Guitar)

Nawalowalo told me that, usually, her work centres around women and women’s stories, but The White Guitar was different, and it required a different approach. She said:

*The White Guitar* was going into a room with a group of men with very big personalities. And I knew that I had to have big personalities around that team to hold them, they’re like race horses. I’m not capable of doing it on my own, I needed male energy meeting that male energy. Jim Moriarty [the co-director] was great because he’s a force himself and he’s got that male thing happening. It’s about what I put around my own team to serve the talent. (Nawalowalo)

I find it fascinating that even a director as experienced and respected as Nawalowalo did not hold that powerful masculine behaviour by herself. The fact that she is able to recognise this and adapt her practice to meet that energy, illustrates just how self-aware her process is. I asked Nawalowalo whether she thinks it is harder to be a woman director, but she firmly believes that being a woman leading a devising process is “the best position
to be in.” Speaking specifically about *The White Guitar*, Nawalowalo told me that she is, “looking to access a softer side of the men. As well as bringing out their maleness, it’s lovely because you [a woman director] provide a difference. And that super masculine male energy is fine because I’ve got that present in my team, so that can be brought out in the room without me.” The Luafutu family do indeed demonstrate vulnerability during *The White Guitar*, and I wonder whether this would have been possible without Nawalowalo and her commitment to embracing doubt and emotion in her process.

Since 2013, The Conch have been funded through Creative New Zealand’s Toi Uru Kahikatea Investment Programme allowing them to expand their outreach and run programmes such as Conchus Youth, in which they work with schools and community groups to train and mentor young Pasifika students and help them achieve their dreams of working in the arts. They also run Conchus Advocacy which is “passionately committed to the development of strong infrastructure for Pacific arts within the Wellington region” (The Conch – Conchus Advocacy). This also includes hosting the Conchus Summit every two years. The theme of 2016’s summit was Women at the Foreground of Pacific Arts where Nawalowalo stated:

> Getting taken seriously as a woman artist in New Zealand is a challenge – getting taken seriously as a brown woman artist is another ball park altogether. My own 30-year career in the performing arts has taught me a great deal about the realities of what it takes to succeed and to negotiate the real social challenges. Overcoming these challenges are what makes our work so strong. (The Conch – Conchus Advocacy)

Nina Nawalowalo is now one of New Zealand’s most acclaimed and internationally recognised theatre makers. In 2017 she received the Senior Pacific Artist Award, the top honour at Creative New Zealand’s Arts Pasifika Awards. CNZ bestowed the award on Nawalowalo because of her “powerful work exploring Pacific themes, her commitment to bringing untold stories into the light and her use of theatre as a vehicle to affect social change” (MacAndrew). This staunch belief of Nawalowalo’s, that theatre can make a
difference and change people’s lives, is what I spoke to her about when I interviewed her for this research in 2017. In a light filled room in the shared space Te Hau Kainga (where The Conch, Taki Rua and Tawata Productions all reside), Nawalowalo told me about her passion for devising, why she strives to highlight the voices of Pasifika women, and her ground-breaking theatre work *Stages of Changes* in the Solomon Islands and Fiji.

Nawalowalo first discovered devising when she was at Wellington Teacher’s College. The drama lecturer Robert Bennett, who also had a company called Mime International, taught illusionary mime and sketch-based theatre. Nawalowalo told me about the impact it had on her, stating that “It completely transfixed me, my imagination was captured inside that storytelling” (Nawalowalo). Bennett then invited Nawalowalo to join his company and tour with them around New Zealand schools, to Tahiti, and then to Russia and Prague (Warrington & O’Donnell 142). Nawalowalo then underwent extensive theatre training overseas at the Desmond Jones School of Mime and Physical Theatre, and she also “studied Mask with commedia dell’arte master Antonio Fava in Italy, Le Jeu and Clown with Philippe Gaulier, and Clown with Pierre Byland in London and Italy” (Warrington & O’Donnell 142). Nawalowalo is a master of her craft with extensive international training and decades of experience. Our interview together highlighted to me just how much knowledge she has.

When asked how she defines devising Nawalowalo offered both a practical and an emotional answer. Thinking practically, she said, “I think devising is constructing and making one’s own story in whatever form and putting it into a theatrical context to communicate that with an audience” (Nawalowalo). She spoke about how she likes to work extremely collaboratively with her performers and designers from the very beginning of a process, and described it as going on a journey together. As Nawalowalo  

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56 Established in 1983, Taki Rua produce, commission and develop theatre with a distinctively Māori voice. Tawata Productions, established in 2004, is a Māori & Cook Islands creative company specialising in the rigorous development and presentation of new work by indigenous artists.
speaks about her craft, one gets the sense that she is a pragmatic director who has spent years honing her skills. She told me that, “Over the years I’ve got more specific about how to create an environment to bring actors or makers into… I’m very into having full control over what it is that one’s making, and for the people in the room to feel happy with where we’re going with it.” In a discussion of the atmosphere in her rehearsal room, Nawalowalo spoke about having “Pacific, Fijian ways of how I have a room.” This includes how the room is set up, having moments and spaces for prayer, and eating together so that the flow of creativity within the team is held “rather than scattering off at lunch time.” Holding these different cultures within her rehearsal room and combining them with traditionally Western theatre practices is an example of how Nawalowalo embeds her process with intersectionality. As outlined on page 36, Lykke suggests that intersectionality can be used as a methodology to recognise and analyse how “different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations” are being produced due the various intersections present (Lykke 50). Nawalowalo’s intersectional politics means that these different intersections of culture and gender work together to create a theatre experience which is unique to Nawalowalo and The Conch. While Nawalowalo is clearly a director in charge of her process, she stresses the critical importance of trust within a devising room and maintains that, for a process to work, a framework must be clearly communicated. She said:

You’re asking actors to work with you, you want to lead them into openness, and they’ll follow you if you’ve got a really nice framework there… Sometimes part of my process is very collaborative, more of a gentle approach. It’s good to have that conversation, to be open. But at different times one goes, “just do that,” and other times you want all the voices. But there must be a cut-off point where that part of the process is over and then it is crafted. That’s what I believe as a director. It’s just how that process is communicated. (Nawalowalo)

In addition to this practicality, Nawalowalo also offered a more emotional response about why she is so drawn to devising as a method of making. She told me that:
One of the things with devising is to do with the beauty of silence and imagery, that’s what first captured my interest in theatre… I devise because personally I’m really interested in telling stories that need to be told that haven’t been told. I’m very interested in hidden stories.

This attitude is reflected in a lot of The Conch’s work. Their devised performances are often non-verbal, instead they tell stories through image and the body. In her chapter in *The Fuse Box: Essays on Writing from Victoria University’s International Institute of Modern Letters*, Nawalowalo writes that as a storyteller, “I don’t want to stand in the midst of the noise shouting for your attention. And so, as a Pacific storyteller, I ask myself what is needed… I need theatre’s silence and stillness and its listening…” (Nawalowalo with McCrory). The way that Nawalowalo listens to her room and the people around her is a key part of her feminist process. Like almost every practitioner interviewed for this research, Nawalowalo never pretends that she has all the answers, she collaborates with her team. As she said, “Now we’ve got Kahikatea funding, I’ve got a full-time producer, an administrator. Part of going into a rehearsal room, I don’t go in alone anymore. I’ve got Tom to work with me… it’s The Conch way of working and methodology” (Nawalowalo).

Despite now having these resources, I asked Nawalowalo whether she thinks it is more difficult to hold and lead an entire process as a woman director. At first, she answered with full confidence and said through laughter, “I think it’s the best position to be in. They [male directors] may think they know all the answers, but sorry guys, you’re not mothers.” She also spoke of her own privilege that she feels, “to have a room, to go on a process, and to have funding to be able to do that.” However, Nawalowalo is not without her doubts, but she has learnt, over the course of her career, what she needs and says, “I love it now being older in my 50s.” Throughout our interview Nawalowalo demonstrated her gift for storytelling as she offered many anecdotes to illustrate how she has grown as a director. She discussed how she has a supporting team around her, and told me this story:
When Paul Kieve came to work with me on Masi, he asked, “Who’s your spatial choreographer?” “I am.” “Who’s your…” “I am.” “Who’s your…” “I am.” And you realise that thing of having other eyes, it’s so amazing. For me it feels like the heat comes off my shoulders. Whereas if it’s all on you, then this thing of doubt… I mean I’m much stronger now, and Tom always encourages me when I doubt and reminds me, “You do actually know what you want. You do know.” But I always go through that, even when I’m re-staging a work I still doubt it sometimes. But I think that’s good too.

Feeling doubtful is a common experience amongst all my interviewees but like Nawalowalo, they all see it as a positive and feminist part of their process. Nawalowalo spoke about doubt being a feminine quality for a director and she described feeling that, “Some men are very sure, they’re very prepared and they know in their mind absolutely what they want, and that’s what they’re making. Whereas I don’t always know what I want until I see it... So, I set something up and say let’s try this.” Nawalowalo never claims to know everything, she is just seeking to tell those hidden stories by exploring, by watching, by listening.

The earlier work from The Conch told quite personal stories but there was still a political and intersectional thread connecting all of it together. Nawalowalo said, “…from my perspective as a Pacific theatre maker, putting any Pacific images on stage is political, it is relevant, it is so important. Female imagery and the voice of Pacific women is so important globally.” This is especially true when considering Stages of Change (2013-17), The Conch’s project, in collaboration with the British Council, to establish a women’s theatre company in the Solomon Islands and devise a work with survivors of domestic violence. Stages of Changes was also recently remounted with a new company of women in Fiji in 2017. Nawalowalo recounted to me that this project began when the European Union “put out bids to do different kinds of aid work and all sorts of programmes in the Pacific.” Nawalowalo and McCrory applied with a concept where they would work with the communities of the Solomon Islands to “highlight the issues around gender-based violence through a two-year journey of making a theatre work that can be toured.” Their
application was successful and Nawalowalo and McCrory travelled to the Solomon Islands several times over two years to cast, make and develop the theatre work. Nawalowalo told me that:

It sort of dawned on me once I’d arrived that I actually had to do it. I was like “oh my god.” I had never put my name to something so political, and I was about to make something about gender-based violence and I was just going, “Oh my god I actually have to do this, what am I going to do?!”

Figure 53: Some of the Stages of Change team in the Solomon Islands. Nawalowalo is centre of the front row, McCrory is standing at the very back. (The Conch – Stages of Change)

With time and reflection, Nawalowalo now describes the process as a “beautiful journey of listening and working out how to approach it” (Nawalowalo). The Conch cast fifteen women from different provinces in the Solomon Islands so as Nawalowalo states, “the voice felt fair.” These women became a theatre company, but as none of them had any theatre experience, Nawalowalo and McCrory decided to start by training them. This was a remarkable sharing of knowledge and power, with Nawalowalo and McCrory giving
these women the gift of storytelling so that they could elevate their own voices. Nawalowalo describes “approaching it through skill-based things... teaching them the basics of stagecraft, just how to stand on stage even, how to walk on stage confidently... working with silhouette, working with light theatrically, which was really exciting for them.” The women also brought their own wealth of knowledge into the space and Nawalowalo told me that she loved “drawing on traditional images of theirs” and “drawing out song... listening to the language, the musicality of a people” to generate her powerful visual storytelling. They created slowly together, making ten minutes then putting it in front of the community, reflecting on it, then coming back on another trip and making ten more minutes. Nawalowalo described it as being trial and error, always engaging with the community of the Solomon Islands.

The final choreographic piece, which was just under half an hour in length, told a visual story about women and violence. Nawalowalo remembers an audience member saying, “You have given the women a voice without saying a word” (Warrington & O’Donnell).
Nawalowalo told me that the piece “incorporates traditional dance and song, and traditional images, in a way of being positive about women and who these women are” (Nawalowalo). The piece uses shadow and light to display violence, rather like looking through a window into someone’s home to make it less confrontational. Everyday objects that women use, such as fans or brooms, are used in a movement context and are transformed to become fish in the ocean or trees in the native bush. Towards the end of the piece several of the women appear in different traditional outfits from the different provinces of the Solomon Islands, as can be seen in the image below, to show that the issue of violence against women is not unique to one island, it is everywhere.

![Production image for Stages of Change at Papua New Guinea University by Faanati Mamea](image)

Figure 55: Production image for Stages of Change at Papua New Guinea University by Faanati Mamea (Used with photographer’s permission, taken from Stages of Change Facebook page)

The original piece toured around the Solomon Islands to local communities and high schools, before being invited to the Melanesian Arts Festival in Papua New Guinea. Nawalowalo was thrilled at this “beautiful opportunity,” especially because it was “the first-time women had ever been selected as part of the delegation, aside from the women who went and did the weaving.” However, Stages of Change did not stop there. They toured to Samoa and Fiji and then the company was invited to Brussels to perform for the
European Union. Throughout the process, a twenty-minute documentary was made featuring footage from a final performance of the work as well as rehearsal footage. It is available on The Conch’s website, and it includes interviews with Nawalowalo, McCrory, and several of the women performers themselves, who speak about their experiences with domestic violence and the journey of making this work. In 2015 the British Council also published *Voices Against Violence*, a book that collected the stories and experiences of the women living in the Solomon Islands who are either survivors of violence and/or participants of *Stages of Change*. In the foreword Doreen Kuper writes:

> What makes this book different is that it captures the voices of Solomon women – not people and organisations talking about our women, but the voices of the women themselves… Violence against women is one of the barriers that prevent women from being themselves and from having self-worth. Silence is another barrier; any voice that breaks the silence, be it from a survivor of violence, or someone committed to ending it, is a voice worth listening to. (Kuper 2)

The Conch are raising the volume of all these women’s voices and in 2016/17, they partnered again with the EU and the British Council to bring *Stages of Change* to Fiji. This time they were joined by Auckland based director Anapela Polata’ivao.\(^57\) Nawalowalo said, “That was really exciting, the two of us being Pacific women working on this together” (Nawalowalo). In our interview together, Nawalowalo told me that she felt more confident working on *Stages of Change* the second time because she knew that the work had toured and been well received by many different audiences. While the base choreography from the original work was just transferred directly, the piece changed in many ways “because it was now in a Fijian context with Fijian images.” Nawalowalo also described this second version as feeling richer. She said, “There is a bit more layering that can go into it this time because of the work of the Solomon women who laid all the

\(^{57}\) Samoan-born and South Auckland raised, Anapela Polata’ivao is an award-winning actor and director. After graduating from Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School, she launched theatre group Kila Kokonut Krew in 2002, and directed their highly acclaimed musical *The Factory*, which morphed into a 2014 web series. Polata’ivao is also one half of comedy duo Pani and Pani; with Goretti Chadwick, she created and presents hit Māori TV reality show *Games of Bros* (NZ On Screen).
foundation.” Nawalowalo is interested in *Stages of Change* being transferred into all Pacific Islands because violence against women is an issue that needs to be addressed and this project has an effect on the communities that see it. During our interview, we also discussed the possibility of this work being performed within a Māori context in New Zealand. Nawalowalo is really interested and said that this would need to be in collaboration with Māori leadership and would have a more of an urban slant, given that it would not be set in the Islands. She said, “Putting it in a New Zealand context would be really interesting, how do we explore violence? It would be really amazing to contribute to that discussion and to get positive press around something that is a real thing.”

At the end of our interview Nawalowalo and I discussed the feminist politics of her process on this project. She told me that the feminist dramaturgy for *Stages of Change* came about by, “Firstly, really listening to the women, and then also listening to a place, a
culture... you have to be really switched on and listening, thinking about how you put something in front of the community.” She spoke about how careful she and McCrory needed to be when they were devising this story, “what to edit out, how to sit on the side of safety,” because of how delicate the political situation is “there’s a lot of violence towards women... it’s a big responsibility what you do.” There is a choreographic section in the work which depicts violence and in the Fijian version Nawalowalo developed it and took it one step further. She says that this moment is the strongest feminist statement in the work and illustrates the, “heart of that message which makes the audience all gasp.” The shocking moment is followed by traditional images celebrating the beauty of women, but Nawalowalo knows that the depiction of violence is, “probably really pushing the boundary, I can feel that it is on the line.” Despite this doubt Nawalowalo told me:

I took the moment a little bit further this time [in Fiji], because domestic violence is such an issue. It’s very real and everyone knows that it’s a taboo subject, and it’s not talked about. Everyone knows that people are getting beaten, it’s everywhere, it’s here, it’s rife in New Zealand in many communities. It’s a thing that’s hard to face, so when you actually put those images on stage, everyone knows, the whole community knows. All the women who were in the piece, every woman in the world will have had some sort of engagement with violence... so it touches a nerve.

Following the first incarnation of *Stages of Change* and while *The White Guitar* was still touring, Nawalowalo and The Conch premiered *Marama*, another new devised work in the Auckland Arts Festival in 2016. Like *Vula* and *Stages of Change*, the story of *Marama* focused on women’s voices, and like all of The Conch’s work, it told a story that has been hidden in the hope that it provoked positive and powerful change. In their press release The Conch described *Marama* as “a powerful call from women of the Pacific – the voices of a vanishing world. The devastating effects of deforestation on their homelands and culture are brought startlingly to life through waiata, chants, dances and rituals gracefully and magically performed” (Theatreview – Marama). *Marama* featured five actors from different parts of the Pacific, “all highborn women of their indigenous culture and carriers of their cultural knowledge” (Theatreview – Marama). Susan Galutia, Gloria Konare and
Grace Tiba, all from different provinces of the Solomon Islands, Tupe Lualua from Samoa/New Zealand, and Awhine Rose-Henare Ashby from New Zealand. Galutia, Konare, and Tiba had all been involved in *Stages of Change* in the Solomon Islands. Bringing these women from the *Stages of Change* project to devise and be professional actors in a high quality and highly visible Auckland Arts Festival production, is further evidence of how Nawalowalo is empowering women in the Pacific and using theatre as a tool for social change. It illustrates Nawalowalo’s intersectional feminist approach in her theatre work and her commitment to giving unheard voices a platform to speak. Nawalowalo acknowledged that there was a definite political statement with the casting of *Marama*. She said:

I specifically wanted the Melanesian image inside an Auckland Festival work… they’re very unseen these images. So, to put that on an international stage and go, that is beauty, that is real, that is unique… All of that is political… Getting seen, being seen out there. I think that our voice in New Zealand is really important. The Conch is about visibility. (Nawalowalo)
With *Stages of Change* specifically, The Conch are using devised theatre to create actual change in the lives of the women they work with and the communities that they perform to. Nawalowalo described for me what a challenging and humbling experience this process was, how moving the final piece of theatre is for anyone to watch, and how brave the women are. She said, “They’re the ones who stand on stage in front of their community and are putting out a message about violence. It’s always nerve wracking, but they are really brave women.” The strength these women required to tell their own stories in front of an audience is empowering and has the potential to raise awareness and help other survivors. At the end of our interview together, Nawalowalo spoke about her belief that devised theatre can make a difference. The Conch creates work that uncovers hidden stories and celebrates the voices of Pasifika women. They do this in their own style using imagery, music, silence and shadows to create a dialogue. Of *Stages of Change* and the power of devised theatre Nawalowalo said:

> It’s sitting on the side of safety to open conversation. It doesn’t blame. It’s delicately asking a community to look at their own behaviour. And that is the power of theatre. And that’s why theatre is for me where it’s at in the world. Because it’s freedom of speech inside everything that’s going on, it’s such a [fast] pace in the world. Being able to communicate what you feel in theatre today... it’s so powerful.

## 4.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented and discussed the works of Julie Nolan of Red Leap Theatre, Julia Croft, and Nina Nawalowalo of The Conch. These women are fierce examples of devising practitioners in New Zealand who embed their processes with feminist politics and create work that hopes to make a difference. Nolan, Croft, and Nawalowalo have some clear similarities, particularly with their visual style of theatre making and their use of physicality and puppetry or object manipulation. All three of these women are a part of the New Zealand devising genealogy which stems from the Lecoq, Gauiler and Bolton
influence as established in Chapter Two. However, these women and their companies have created styles that are unique to them, with devising processes that are grounded in a poststructuralist and intersectional feminist politic. They are leading examples in our theatre industry and their work needs to be recorded, discussed and celebrated within New Zealand’s academic theatre literature. Their processes are self-aware and empathetic, and they are continually working to improve their practice, highlight the voices of others, and make meaningful work.

Established in 2008, Red Leap Theatre exploded onto the scene with The Arrival and set a leading example for a devising company lead by women. Red Leap operate under a collaborative company structure and Nolan and her former co-artistic director Kate Parker have created many works on an epic scale with large ensemble casts. Several of Red Leap’s productions have explored intersections of class, and in Dust Pilgrim, the key relationship between mother and daughter examined the intersection of motherhood. The production as a whole asked questions about the oppression of women and explored toxic power dynamics. Red Leap’s process seems to be evolving as there has been a clear shift in their work from telling more traditional and archetypal stories, to a focus on women’s voices. This is demonstrated in Red Leap’s manifesto where they commit to the statement: “We celebrate women’s stories and talents” (Red Leap Theatre – Company). This is an attitude which needs to be celebrated and encouraged.

Independent artist Julia Croft is also committed to creating work from a woman’s perspective. Like Red Leap, Croft’s work is highly visual, but Croft creates on a more intimate scale, making solo work that is deeply personal and political. Croft deals with potentially problematic or unproductive gender dynamics in her rehearsal process by primarily choosing to work with women. This enables her to keep the devising process open and playful. Almost all of Croft’s theatre work, but particularly If There’s Not Dancing at the Revolution, I’m Not Coming and Power Ballad, examine intersections of gender and dissects portrayals of women in images and text. Croft’s work is overtly feminist, and she strives to make theatre that challenges her audience to think about gender issues in new
ways. However, her work is never just intellectual, it also has an emotional and cathartic quality. Croft’s work inspires revolution and *Power Ballad*, in collaboration with Nisha Madhan, creates moments of community between performer and audience. Whether it is singing together in the performer’s language of karaoke or screaming our collective frustrations, Croft’s work enables audience members to feel seen and heard.

Nina Nawalowalo as artistic director of The Conch also has a clear intersectional focus and creates work that specifically highlights the voices of Pasifika women. She takes the creation of community in performance one step further with projects like *Stages of Change* and brings her work directly into the Solomon Islands and Fiji. Nawalowalo is empowering these women and giving them the tools to create this work themselves. She is sharing her knowledge and power to amplify these hidden stories and voices. Nawalowalo is a formidable artist who has spent many years training and developing her process so that she is able to clearly communicate what she wants and needs in a devising room. Despite her success Nawalowalo still acknowledges the importance of doubt and vulnerability in an artistic process. She leads a rehearsal room with confidence and openness, holding her collaborators in her culturally intersectional feminist space.

It was a privilege to interview these women and learn about their processes, and throughout the practice as research my collaborators and I carried some key principles from these case studies with us. Principles such as: embracing doubt, vulnerability, and emotion in the rehearsal room, practicing honest communication, and creating clear devising frameworks. Learning about how Nolan, Croft and Nawalowalo deal with difficult gender and power dynamics greatly assisted our exploration into feminist and empathetic devising processes. We created contracts/agreements, and rather than fighting against male energy as Nawalowalo described on *The White Guitar*, like Croft, we removed gender dynamics by working in a woman only space for the practice as research. We thought that this would give our process a sense of freedom and the ability to focus without having to engage with gendered power structures. However, as we discovered,
devising processes are never that simple, and complex anxieties that are buried within all of us can disrupt a process no matter who is in the rehearsal room.
5

Devising Women:
The Creative Component

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Women are often afraid of speaking out; of using their voices. Even a vocal, confident woman is often ‘acting’ confidence. She performs with a confidence that does not allow the voice to come from ‘inside’ the body. Historically, women have been driven away from their voices, have been socially conditioned into silence, or have been told that they must speak quietly. We are taught not to shriek or be shrill. We are taught not to express anger.

(Aston, Feminist Theatre Practice, 51)

The previous three chapters of this thesis have discussed many women in the New Zealand theatre industry who have spoken out and made work around issues of gender and equality. Practitioners who used their voices, even if, as Aston writes, they were perhaps afraid to do so. When I first began this project, my intention was to document, acknowledge, and celebrate those women. However, as I began to conduct my research, through the online questionnaire and key informant interviews, it became clear that a problem existed. New Zealand does indeed have a strong whakapapa\textsuperscript{58} of women who have made devised theatre since the 1970s, but as discussed in Chapter Three, my primary research showed that many women today are still having negative experiences in devising processes. Consequently, a tension emerged within my thesis between our devising

\textsuperscript{58} whakapapa (noun) genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
history and the current oppression of women in devising processes. My research questions evolved as I began to investigate how the lack of documentation about women in devising in New Zealand could be affecting women’s current experiences in devised theatre.

This led to six months of practice as research where myself and four other women created a series of showings to investigate feminist devising methodologies and explore our own collaborative experiences. None of these showings were intended to be polished theatrical products, we were much more focused on process. However, these showings were a way to physicalise the research and to invite an audience into the practice as research. Using an intersectional feminist framework and acknowledging the different intersections and privileges within the room, we explored gendered behaviour in New Zealand devising and investigated possible solutions to some of the difficulties that we, the interviewees and the questionnaire respondents, had experienced. This research was entrenched in autoethnography and for the practice as research, I specifically employed an autoethnographic layered account, which focused “on the author’s experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner). Throughout the practice as research, my collaborators and I attempted to embody a shared feminist devising methodology, using principles from Srilatha Batliwala’s work on Feminist Leadership within a framework of Empathetic Partnership as developed by Flemmer et al. The six key elements of Empathetic Partnership (Reflection, Environment, Language, Knowledge, Partnership, Empathy), provided a clear framework for our process. While much of what we explored (check ins/outs, clear communication, contracts/agreements, emotional ethics, a shared feminist leadership), should exist in all rehearsal rooms, we discovered that these things are especially important in a devising process, because of the heightened vulnerability, increased sense of doubt, fear of the unknown, questions around intellectual property, and the potential oppression of creative voices.

59 Feminist Leadership and Empathetic Partnership were outlined in Chapter One.
Throughout the six-month creative process, the research questions were continually shifting underneath us. This is a common issue for practice as research projects, as Brad Haseman writes in “A Manifesto for Performative Research”:

Practice-led researchers construct experiential starting points from which practice follows. They tend to ‘dive in’, to commence practising to see what emerges... This is not to say that these researchers work without larger agendas or emancipatory aspirations, but they eschew the constraints of narrow problem-setting and rigid methodological requirements at the outset of a project. (Haseman 100)

Despite these challenges, the addition of the creative component was important for two reasons. Firstly, the questions for this project come from my own personal practice, I am writing and researching from a practitioner’s perspective, so of course I therefore wanted to investigate these questions through practice as research. Haseman uses Carole Gray’s definition of practice-led research, which helps to further define my perspective as a researcher/practitioner. Haseman quotes Gray’s definition as, “research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners” (Gray qtd. in Haseman 103-104). The practice as research was also important because theatre is an ephemeral art form, it is difficult to study on paper alone as so much of it relies on a live experience and a live response from an audience.

This chapter will specifically deal with the creative component, how the process unfolded, the findings that were discovered, and how this practice affected and developed the research of the entire project. The key voices that are emphasised throughout this chapter, along with my own perspective, are those of my collaborators who I interviewed at the end of the practice as research. Appendices F and G of this thesis are essential companions for this chapter. Appendix F contains all the scripts for the creative work discussed in this chapter, and Appendix G is a digital copy of the performances and discussions from the First, Second and Third Creative Showings.
Creative Questions

The research questions for this PhD project were outlined in Chapter One. But three of them specifically were investigated through the creative component. The primary question that this creative research explored was:

❖ Despite a strong history of feminist devising in New Zealand, women are still often having negative experiences in devising rehearsal rooms. By exploring devising processes and feminist methodology, how could we affect women’s experience in devised theatre processes in New Zealand in the 21st Century?

The secondary questions that this creative research explored were:

❖ How does gender affect the dynamic and power structures in devising rehearsal rooms in New Zealand?
❖ How can you make your voice/someone else’s voice heard in a devising room?

How can we navigate the opportunity to speak versus the ability to speak?

All three of these questions were explored throughout the practice as research, particularly for the second and third showing. We investigated these questions through discussion, improvisation, character games, devising exercises and performative research using the questionnaire responses and interviews. These questions will be woven into this chapter as they become relevant to the process that myself and my collaborators were exploring.

Collaborators

What makes devising so special is the potential freedom or opportunity to move in a number of different directions through a collaborative work process, developing an original theatre product to be performed. It can produce more creative solutions than other forms of theatre, although this is fundamentally determined by group dynamics and interaction.

(Oddey, Devising Theatre, 3)

From the very beginning of this creative component, I knew that I would need collaborators as an essential prerequisite to researching devising processes, group
dynamics and gender. As Oddey explains in the quote above, devising has so much more potential freedom than other forms of theatre creation but suggests that this can be significantly altered by the dynamic between the individual collaborators and how they interact with each other and with the material. Therefore, it was important that those who became involved in this creative component were right for the project.

The first collaborator on board was Meg Rollandi. Meg is a performance designer, visual artist and maker who works across live performance, installation and performance art. She also teaches at the College of Creative Arts at Massey University. Initially, Meg was going to use her expertise to be the visual director and designer. Part of my devising ethos is the belief that working closely with designers is integral to any process and that they should be on the same level as the director. While this project was eventually not particularly focused on performance design, Meg was also a devisor and was able to be the outside eye, which allowed me to perform. Meg is a graduate of Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School with a Bachelor of Performance Design and she has a MDES from Massey University. Meg has been involved with this creative component since I first had the idea of conducting practice as research. We had many meetings and conversations to begin the project where we dreamed around the subject and discussed other collaborators to bring on board. In her collaborator interview, Meg outlined some of her reasons for wanting to be involved, which summarise how I pitched this project to each collaborator. She said:

I was really drawn to the fact that you were interested in exploring this idea of women devising together as being an important part of the theatrical ecology or the history of theatre making in New Zealand... and it being a feminist and political act, a strategy that we acknowledge and use now. I was interested in the historical and also the call to action that I felt was definite in what you described to me... this felt like an opportunity to unpack something about performance making. (Rollandi)
Next involved was Karin McCracken. Karin graduated from Victoria University of Wellington with degrees in Law and Theatre. A former practicing lawyer, Karin is a performer and theatre maker, and during this research process she was also working for the Sexual Abuse Prevention Network as one of their consultants, running workshops and programmes with secondary school students. Trae Te Wiki of Ngati Ruanui, Ngati Awa, Ngati Kahungunu descent was the third collaborator on board. Trae is a performer and devisor who also graduated from Victoria University’s Theatre Programme, where she has been the Māori and Pasifika Support Tutor in the School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies. Trae has also recently been studying towards a Post Graduate Diploma in Maori Resource Management. The final collaborator for this project was Isobel Mackinnon. Isobel is an award-winning independent theatre director and performer and has worked with a range of innovative devising theatre companies including Binge Culture Collective, Everybody Cool Lives Here, and Barbarian Productions.

Once this project had collaborators, the original plan was to create a verbatim performance using material gathered from the interviews and questionnaire. However, as the research evolved, and we discovered new results from our experimentation, we realised that the performance needed to do more than just present the problem to an audience. It needed to explore further, to unpack these issues, to provoke the audience into thinking about their own practice, and ask, “What can we do about this?” So, this project then focused on conducting creative research around gender and devising in New Zealand. We asked questions, discussed ideas, shared our theories and experiences, and then explored and played with them on the rehearsal room floor. This led us to devise three completely different showings as the research developed and we responded to the feedback from each audience. The entire process was led by me, as the researcher, but within the process, we made every effort to create an equal environment where different people could lead the room and hold different responsibilities. This followed a model of feminist leadership that is more inclusive and supportive as detailed in Batliwala’s article which was discussed in Chapter One. Batliwala writes that, “Feminist leaders emphasize the value of collective and multi-layered leadership, the sharing of power and
responsibility, and generally reject the male and ‘Western’ ‘lone ranger’ model of individual leadership” (Batliwala 34). Adopting this model within our process created a more autonomous environment where each of us could take the lead during a rehearsal. For example, early in the project when we were discussing ideal devising processes, Meg led us all through drawing out what a “utopian” process might look like, as can be seen in the image on page 216. This project was a large commitment for these collaborators; six months of part time rehearsal with very little payment. Nevertheless, all four of them were utterly committed to this research, and this project would not be the same without their input and experience.

**Post Graduate Conference Performance**

On 20th July 2016 my collaborators and I had our first meeting together. This research project had begun two years prior to this meeting as I collected all of the qualitative research, and there was an overwhelming pressure to try and explain all of it as I welcomed the four new collaborators into the project. While the others held knowledge from their own experience and practice, I knew all the literature and history. In that first meeting I felt like I was holding all the knowledge of my project but was suddenly opening it up to others, sharing it with them, so that we could collaborate and research together. Sharing my primary research material with them, my interviews and survey results, was an important moment. The problems that my interviewees and respondents were identifying had a very real impact on my collaborators. They had been in those situations as well; we all could empathise and understand these issues. In that room, beginning this autoethnographic process together, we were all on the same page, we had shared experiences and shared issues, and we all knew that devising processes and collaboration in New Zealand could be better than this. This research was an opportunity to address problems that we had all been feeling for a long time.

At that first meeting, other than getting to know one another and discussing the scope of the project, we also did one practical exercise, we made our first Paper Wall. Paper Walls is a common devising technique used to guide a process. In Joan Schirle’s article “Potholes
in the Road to Devising,” she suggests covering the walls of your rehearsal space in “long sheets of paper, labelled ‘theme,’ ‘intent,’ ‘characters,’ ‘scenes,’ ‘resources,’ and so on” (Schirle 94). These pieces of paper become a compass or a road map that the group can use to stay on the intended course. Our first Paper Wall consisted of every devising technique or exercise that we could think of on that first day. Some of the techniques we wrote up on the wall were positive and some reminded us of negative experiences. For example, we had all found “free writing” to be useful in the past. In this exercise you just spend a small amount of time, perhaps 3 minutes writing about a provocation, but your pen is not allowed to leave the paper. This unlocks the sub-conscious and allows ideas to flow freely. Whereas, we all found the moment when a devising director says, “You’ve got 5 minutes, make 10 ideas” to be very stressful and that it stifles creativity. For us, these moments in rehearsal create distress as opposed to positive stress, because we feel judged and anxious. Making this Paper Wall felt like an appropriate place for our team to start, to pool our collective knowledge before adding to it throughout the process.

Figure 58: Paper Wall of Devising Techniques (Researcher’s own collection).

After that initial meeting, our first goal together was to make a short performance for the upcoming School of English, Film, Theatre and Media Studies’ (SEFTMS) Postgraduate Conference. This conference was at the end of August 2016, so we had a month together to do some initial testing and experiment with how this theoretical research could be presented and investigated practically in a theatre space. This section of practical work
was devised just by Karin, Trae, and myself, because Meg and Isobel were involved in another production at the same time. We considered these first four weeks of the process to be an initial testing phase. Rather than focusing on the full scope of the research, we used this time to learn how to collaborate and explore how we could theatricalise the theoretical research. It was the first step for our creative process and through our devising, we discovered a focus on women’s voices and confidence which continued throughout the entire creative component.

We began our first rehearsal by looking to the experts, to the women who have gone before us. Our experiential starting point was the quote from Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook by Elaine Aston that was at the beginning of this chapter. When we read out loud that, “Even a vocal, confident woman is often ‘acting’ confidence,” suddenly something clicked in our rehearsal room (Aston Feminist Theatre 51). Aston’s quote resonated with every single one of us. We all work in the theatre, so we may seem like confident women, but we each have moments when we are afraid, moments when we realise that we are performing. I perform my confidence every time I’m on stage, and I perform when I’m teaching a tutorial or workshop, or any time I have to present a conference paper or speak in public. But there was something comforting when we all related to Aston’s words. Our shared experience of our voices being silenced and struggling with moments when we feel like we do not belong, something that is echoed by the interviewees and questionnaire respondents, became as Trae described in her collaborator interview, “a pou (land post), a strong thing like an anchor, to weight us, to bring us back” (Te Wiki). Brené Brown writes about a similar moment of connection in her study exploring Shame Resilience Theory. She writes:

Across the interviews, the participants reported that one of the most important benefits of developing empathy and connection with others is recognizing how the experiences that make us feel the most alone, and even isolated, are often the most universal experiences. In other words, we share in common what makes us feel the most apart. (Brown 49)
To allow the voice to come from inside, to be able to speak out, to be truthful and honest, one needs to trust the room that one is in. This is key in a devising process. The survey responses from the primary research however, suggested that this trust is not always happening. Aston writes that, “Any performer who is physically and vocally ‘blocked’ will be a poor communicator and creator of theatre” (Aston Feminist Theatre 43). Of course, any performer or maker could be ‘blocked’ in a rehearsal room, but it’s more likely to happen to women because, “Women especially need to free up their bodies and voices from the social and cultural conditioning that has driven them away from themselves, has silenced their voices and has constrained their bodies” (Aston Feminist Theatre 43). These ideas of ‘acting’ confidence became the inspiration platform for the conference performance, especially as we considered that our audience would have been presenting academic papers and speaking in front of their peers all day.

Once we had the inspiration and the theme that we wanted the performance to unpack, we used a devising technique called Splice to begin to theatricalise some of the theoretical research. The Theatre Programme at Victoria University teaches this technique in devising courses with second year level students. The exercise requires volunteers to read a script extract from Robert Lepage and Marie Brassard’s play called Polygraph (1987). In the opening sequence of this play two incongruous texts are merged together. One is a post mortem from a murder, the other is about the breaking up of Germany after World War II. The two texts seem impossibly different but when mashed together the contrasts create new layers of meaning and we begin to see the similarities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Francois</th>
<th>The triumphant Allies enforced a new statute –</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>– by the slicing action of the knife –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francois</td>
<td>– which split the city into international sectors: American, French, British –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>– as the victim attempted to defend herself;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francois</td>
<td>– and to define their sector, the Soviets built a wall over forty kilometres in length, cutting the city in two.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>The victim received cuts to the left hand, the right upper arm, and was pierced through the ribcage and the right lung, to the stomach. We have determined that the fatal cut was given here/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
David and Francois – Right through the heart –
Francois /of the city.
David – between the fifth and sixth ribs.
(Brassard and Lepage 716-717)

This technique of Splicing can be used to explore multiple texts and it was a useful way for us to start creating for the conference performance given that all the resources we were exploring at that time were text based. In the rehearsal room, we had all the survey responses and Elaine Aston’s Handbook. Individually, we each found two excerpts that although different, seemed to work together when spoken line for line. Using this technique gave us some small set script pieces that we could begin playing with and expanding from. Some of these were incorporated into the performance, the final script of which can be found in Appendix G.

Over the second week of rehearsal for the conference performance, we used these small scripts we created through the Splice exercise as springboards for further discussion and improvisation. We would play with and shape them on the floor, but also kept discussing new material that could be added. Over the last two weeks we started to refine and shape all the material we had created so far. Perhaps unsurprisingly, what emerged was a short collage performance that focused on the Aston quote about confidence and the body; a piece that examines the different voices we use in situations and asks why do only some get listened to? It also explored the “idea” of a woman’s body, how it is often described and performed, and how this affects our ability to speak with a confident voice that comes from inside ourselves.

The final performance began with what we called an “Anxiety Soundscape.” So much of our discussion around our voices, bodies and confidence centred around how, at times, we are unable to speak. So, the three performers, Karin, Trae and myself, began the performance by creating a “symphony” of anxiety, full of different kinds of breathing, filler words, apologising, and other verbal and physical ticks. These sounds built to a crescendo and then evaporated. The aim of this was to create a sense of unease in the
audience from the beginning, a feeling that we are not comfortable within ourselves. This snapped into a section that explored different ways of speaking and performing confidence. The first was a contrast between me performing my own confidence (like I had earlier at the conference that day when I had presented a paper), followed by a section where I performed with a lack of confidence and self-esteem that was evident in one of my survey respondents.

Karin and Trae then performed the Aston quote from the beginning of this chapter in two different ways, Karin displayed a nervous uncertainty, while Trae spoke with power and assurance. Despite them saying exactly the same thing, this highlighted how easily we can listen and pay attention to the loudest and most confident voice in the room. The Aston quote ends with some “rules” of how women are told to behave. We devised some of our own “rules” and how they differ to what men are taught; then performed them in rapid succession. The next section used one of the survey questions and the responses to it to highlight a clear gender bias. The survey asked, “Do you think that your gender has presented particular OPPORTUNITIES or ADVANTAGES in relation to your devising work?” While there were a variety of answers, most of the responses from women said that they had experienced almost no opportunities or advantages due to their gender. While the responses from men were far more varied and several acknowledged their male privilege in rehearsal rooms. In the conference performance, we boldly asked this question out loud and then performed a series of answers that overlapped and built to the climax of “No!”

K: Not particularly no.

T: Not at this stage.

H: Hmmm not really.

K: Not in an obvious way I can immediately think ok.

T: Not so much, I’d like to work on something that does.

H: Not really. I don’t think I’m very good at devising.

K: I don’t believe so. Come back in a couple of years’ time.
T: Maybe it’s less confrontational being a woman?

H: In terms of advantages, definitely not. Maybe opportunities?

K: No, not in mixed rehearsal rooms. Maybe in women only spaces.

T: Absolutely not. Unless it’s being typecast into roles.

H: No.

K: No.

T: No.

H: No.

K: NO!

T: I think for conventionally sexy women it can be an advantage.

The last segment of the performance unpacked this so called “advantage” for conventionally sexy women. We called this “The Jane Game,” inspired by Ross Putman’s Twitter account called @femscriptintros. Putman is a film producer from L.A. and he uses this account to tweet any particularly sexist introduction for female leads from the actual scripts he reads. He tweets these introductions verbatim, only changing the names of all the characters to Jane. Putman’s account is still being regularly updated despite movements such as #metoo and Time’s Up; these character introductions illustrate the double standards and clichéd sexism that are still rife throughout Hollywood. We used a few of his original tweets and then devised a few of our own to create a theatrical game. I would read out each tweet as Trae and Karin grabbed props and changed costumes while rushing forward to try and perform each “Jane.” When they got to the front of the stage they would try and say the beginning of a Helene Cixous quote that Aston includes in her handbook, “Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak…” (Aston 51). But I would cut them off with the next “JANE” and the game continued to build until it reached a climax of chaos and mess with the final example.

H: JANE (23) pours her gorgeous figure into a tight dress, slips into her stiletto-heeled fuck-me shoes, and checks herself in the dresser mirror. She is beautiful. She is stunning. She is Jane!

Pause. Everyone is out of breath.
T and K drop the props they’re holding.

H: Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak.

T and K remove the JANE costumes. H helps.

T: Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away.

K: That’s how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak – even just open her mouth – in public.

As the Jane Game dissolved around us with the props and costumes falling to the floor, we all spoke the Cixous quote. This served as a transition, from the heightened performance of all these different “Janes,” to us, as ourselves, trying to speak openly and honestly. The entire performance was building to this moment, highlighting different challenges and prejudices that women face when they try and use their voice, to create a space where the three of us could finally use our own voices. We each had two different phrases that we devised individually; they were candid and emotionally honest statements.

T: I’m afraid that the character I perform is not who I want to be.

K: I’m afraid of being the weakest person in the room.

H: I’m afraid of saying “I don’t know” when asked a question.

T: I’m afraid of not fitting into the ensemble.

K: I’m afraid if I act ugly, people will think I am ugly.

H: I’m afraid of being lonely even though I’m not alone.

The reception at the SEFTMS conference was positive, and informal audience feedback demonstrated that the performance was thought provoking and that we had successfully theatricalised the theoretical research. The energy that Trae, Karin and I were holding that night at the conference was, in part, what made it so successful. We devised this performance by ourselves and no one else had seen a run of it. This gave us a nervous energy which translated into the performance being open and truthful, which was the desired effect. However, when we re-presented this to our other collaborators Meg and Isobel, and to Nisha Madhan (one of my interviewees who was visiting our rehearsal as
an inside eye, the performance felt earnest and the emotional honesty came across as being double percussive or visually tautological. The meanings and feelings behind the survey responses lost their potency as they were being over-stated in performance. This could be due to several other factors. We were performing it for just three people in a non-theatre space, rather than a larger group of 30-40 people, under stage lighting. We had also devised this performance deliberately with the conference audience in mind, so when performed later with a different energy, the effect was markedly different. It also taught us that when performing material from the primary research that is emotional, we did not need to emphasise this by performing it in an emotional way, as that diminishes the power of their responses. We had lost the honesty in the re-presentation and were perhaps trying too hard.

Despite it being less effective when presented a second time, the SEFTMS conference performance was valuable for this creative project. It gave us an early deadline to create something concrete to put in front of an audience, but we had more artistic freedom to create anything, so long as it was connected to the research material. This meant that the first time we played, devised and created together, it was without so many restrictions or directions. This gave us the luxury of exploring and running with our instincts about how to present this material, rather than concerning ourselves so much with how it would fit into the PhD project overall. The conference performance became an early testing ground and provided us with some material and some theatrical games that we continued to use as we developed the project. These moments that recurred in the work will be discussed in the next few sections. The most important aspect of the conference performance, for the overall project, is that we were able to spend this time getting to know one another, to learn how we all operated in rehearsal. It was during this initial testing period that we began to build the specific culture of our process, the feeling within our room. We developed and discussed this throughout the entire project, but the building blocks were put in place during those first six weeks. This became so valuable for us as collaborators

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60 A practitioner or researcher who is familiar with the project and takes an active role in the rehearsal when they visit. As opposed to an outside eye who might sit back and observe.
as we moved into phase two of our process where we encountered more difficulties and grappled with more complex ideas.

5.2 CREATIVE SHOWINGS ONE AND TWO

*It is Doubt (so often experienced initially as weakness) that changes things…* The subtle or violent reconciliation of the outer person and the inner core often seems at first like a mistake, like you’ve gone the wrong way and you’re lost. But this is just emotion longing for the familiar. Life happens when the tectonic power of your speechless soul breaks through the dead habits of the mind. Doubt is nothing less than an opportunity to reenter the Present” (Shanley viii).

The process leading up to the first creative showing could be summarised by one overwhelming emotion: doubt. The above quote, from John Patrick Shanley’s preface to his play *Doubt, a parable*, frames the feeling of doubt as positive and necessary. Throughout phase two of our process, as we prepared for Showing One, we were plagued by doubt. The project questions were continually shifting underneath us and every week we were changing our creative practice and our methods of exploration. Perhaps this could have been anticipated, as I outlined in the introduction of this chapter, because this shifting focus is a part of the nature of practice as research. We had, as Brad Haseman writes, constructed “experiential starting points” from which we could explore the research questions (Haseman 100). But in the practice that followed in phase two we felt lost and unsure, never knowing if we were doing the “right” thing or whether we were researching in the “correct” way.

The first few rehearsals following the Post-Graduate Conference performance were difficult as we tried to bring together what felt like two opposing forces. These were a collaborative and equal devising process where we explored the very nature of devising, versus creative practice as research for my PhD. The complexity of this tension meant that
we only started to really understand it towards the end of the process. We discussed at length the importance of investment in a devising process; how every collaborator needs to be equally committed to the project so that they each have emotional and intellectual buy in. While we tried to create a process that felt like this, our levels of investment could never be equal as this creative research was for my PhD project. The personal benefit for the other collaborators would always be less that what it was for me. This tension could be seen as a mirror for the relationship between a director who holds the singular vision and their performers in any devising process. In the post-process collaborator interview with Trae Te Wiki, she acknowledged that the different levels of investment was something she was aware of throughout the process, but explained that she did not fully understand the consequences of this tension until afterwards. She said, “I was also really mindful, as a collaborator, that it was your PhD, and I wasn’t quite sure how to assist, or what I could do to share some of the load... I didn’t realise a lot of these things until we were almost finished” (Te Wiki). Meg Rollandi also discussed this tension in her interview and she highlighted some of the difficulties of collaborating within practice as research. She said:

I did find it quite difficult at times to navigate the relationship between you and this project being your PhD, this thing that you’re committing so much of yourself and your life to, and then me being who I am with my relationship to that thing... That relationship between it being our project, but also your project. That was quite hard. (Rollandi)

Consequently, this tension within the rehearsal room meant that at the beginning, we overcomplicated the creative research. Rather than investigating one step at a time, we felt pressured in our process that we needed to create an original methodology and solve all the problems with devising, that the questionnaire respondents had encountered. Our rehearsals were dense, foggy, and full of doubt. Perhaps this is the way it needed to be, perhaps we needed those moments of doubt in order to create a breakthrough. Like Shanley, my interviewee Jo Randerson also talked about the benefits of doubtfulness. As discussed in Chapter Three, Randerson spoke about how it is possible to be doubtful but
still positive about something if you use that doubt to be “curious and investigatory” (Randerson). We took this on board and after a few weeks of rehearsal in phase two, we leaned into our doubt. We accepted that we could feel doubtful without feeling anxious and realised that we did not have to provide all the answers, we just had to explore the questions.

So, in late September 2016 we shifted within our rehearsal process. We began pulling creative questions into the rehearsal room and investigating them through discussion and activity. As in any devising process, this sometimes led us down unexpected paths. The creative questions all grew from the main practice as research questions that were outlined at the beginning of this chapter. This new set of questions were, however, more specific and more detailed so that we could practically test new possibilities in our rehearsal room. Our rehearsal plans took on a new shape. Once we had all checked in and given the space the boundaries that it needed that day, we would begin by exploring a question through rigorous discussion, followed by an exercise or activity that would help us practically explore the ideas that we had unearthed. We would then reflect on the exercise, how we felt, whether it worked or helped us to answer the question. This is a specific example of one of our early rehearsal plans.

**Figure 59: Rehearsal Plan No. 2 (Researcher’s own collection).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY 26/9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question:</strong> Break down a devising exercise. Which bits are patriarchal or shut women/intersectional opportunities down?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise #1:</strong> Attempt Frantic Assembly’s “Get Ready.” An exercise from their book for beginner devisers who want to begin to play with movement. Discuss the exercise afterwards. How did it feel? Was it difficult to avoid stereotypes? When did you feel it shut intersectional opportunities down? What would we change to make this exercise more inclusive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question:</strong> What is a feminist language for naming different roles in a devising process? (eg. “Director” is steeped in patriarchy and creates power imbalances in the room).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise:</strong> Play the improvisation game “7 Things.” In a circle, someone calls out a category and then people step into the middle and say their 7 things. This will get imagination flowing quickly, a lot of it may be unhelpful, but we may find something interesting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Eg. Name 7 things a director does.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Eg. Name 7 directors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Eg. Name 7 other words for director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once we have done “Director” also try “Designer” and “Actor.” Then discuss what we discovered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This method of: discussion → activity → reflection, meant that our process was always self-aware. Our devising process was, in fact, researching devising processes. This sometimes gave it a circular and pressured feeling that Trae described in her collaborator interview as being “heightened.” She said:

We talked so much about stuff, and then we would try doing some making… like everything was just super heightened because we were doing things, discussing things, and then we were doing things that weren’t what we intended. We were practically testing stuff, which is really fulfilling to me to always be so self-aware and group aware and then I would leave the room and realise how predominant it all was in everywhere I go. (Te Wiki)

In my interview with Meg Rollandi, she also discussed this circular and heightened methodology. Meg told me that she found it “extremely useful” to be constantly reflecting on our process and discussing our own practice (Rollandi). She described the PaR as “practicing practice” and said, “…the discussion and the attempt to analyse and be curious and poke at things that were a bit weird and not often talked about, I think has been hugely beneficial while I was in the process” (Rollandi).

Within phase two of our rehearsal process there were several key moments of discovery. The first was the two separate occasions that we tested out Frantic Assembly’s “Residency Questionnaire.” We had given ourselves the provocation of breaking down an established devising exercise that we felt was particularly patriarchal or masculine. In The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre by Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett, the technique of the questionnaire is outlined. Frantic Assembly used this technique when they collaborated for the first time with recognised writer Michael Wynne on The Sell Out. In their book, Graham and Hoggett write that Wynne’s technique of the questionnaire:

…invited the cast to offer stories, opinions, details without burdening them with the job of turning that information into a scene… The brilliance of this approach is that it gathers acres of material, all of which has been collected through what looks like a chaotic questionnaire but is actually a carefully crafted and gently disarming document. (Graham and Hoggett 191)
Frantic Assembly now use this process when they do residencies in schools or programmes where they devise with young people. They often go into the residency with a “broad starting point or theme” in mind for the piece that they will create with the students (Graham & Hoggett 191). The questionnaire is usually how they begin the devising process, before they have even discussed what the theme will be, in order to ensure that the students keep their minds open and do not write their answers in direct response to the theme (192). Once the students have filled out the questionnaire, their answers are collected, Graham and Hoggett advise in their book what happens next:

Invariably the questionnaire responses inspire scenes and text. When this happens with your questionnaire, the next stage is to talk privately with the person whose questionnaire inspired it. You are about to make the private public and this must be done without dissolving the trust you have recently developed (and need to rely on). You must ask permission to use the information given. It may also be a good idea to encourage the person to lead this scene as it gives them ownership over the idea. Equally you must judge whether it is better, once given permission, to explore the idea maintaining confidentiality. (Graham and Hoggett 191-192)

What concerned me and my collaborators about this, was that when Frantic Assembly use the questionnaire in student residencies to gather material, there could be problematic power dynamics at work. Having students write their answers down means that they are tangible and permanent, and handing them over to the older and more experienced
instructor could mean that some students might censor their answers or could feel potentially unsafe about divulging this information. These were obviously assumptions that we were making based on what we read and discovered from Frantic Assembly’s published devising guide. None of us have ever taken a workshop with Frantic Assembly and do not know for certain what it feels like to partake in one of their questionnaires.

However, in the interest of breaking down a devising exercise and creating a feminist version of it, we experimented with their questionnaire example from The Sell Out. Rather than write the answers down, we turned it into a performed conversation, taking inspiration from Forced Entertainment’s production Quizoola!, an improvised and durational performance where the performers continually ask and answer questions. We discovered that, by turning it into a performative exercise, this live conversation became a collaboration between the three of us who were present. It was engaging, open, and generous, as opposed to a singular and secretive written questionnaire. The live conversation also created moments of connection between the interviewer, the interviewee and the spectator. Speaking the answers aloud created an ephemeral feeling within the room, which created a space for honesty without fear of our answers being recorded. In our discussion afterwards, we realised the feeling associated with filling in a form or a questionnaire is one of permanence, and that this could create an imaginary pressure to write down the “correct” answer. This connects with the masculine behaviour, as I discussed in Chapter Three, which Jo Randerson addressed in her interview. Randerson stated that she found that “male makers just hold a very authoritative presence in the room” and that they often feel like the “sole holder of the truth or vision” ( Randerson).

By collecting the questionnaire responses in written form, Frantic Assembly becomes the “sole holder of the truth or vision” that Randerson refers to (Randerson). While they may then relinquish their hold of the vision by divulging the content to their fellow devisors

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61 Clips of Quizoola! by Forced Entertainment can be found on the company’s YouTube channel.
and by collaborating with the students and their stories, when this questionnaire method is written and not performed, we thought that it felt secretive and more like a content generating/mining exercise. While, indeed, in our test of this method, a lot of the answers that were spoken could have been used as provocations to create content, but when performed as a live conversation, it could also be an excellent way to create a devising space full of generosity and trust. We believed that this method, performed in this way, could be a successful way to open up the devising space at the start of a process while your collaborators are still getting to know one another and building their trust.

After this initial successful attempt at Frantic Assembly’s questionnaire method, we decided to explore it further by creating our own questionnaire that related to our specific process. By this stage, the theme of voice was beginning to appear in much of our work together, so we decided to use that as our theme and create a new set of questions. For example, “Who is your favourite person to talk to and why?” and “What happens to your voice when you get upset?” However, this second attempt was unsuccessful as we made the critical error of not maintaining some of the controls from the first experiment. We wrote our own questions, but we decided to select them at random from a bag, so they would be kept anonymous. Conversely, a key part of the Frantic Assembly questionnaire is the ordering of the questions with the intention to disarm; they are a mixture of serious and comedic. Two different collaborators participated in the exercise, they had not experienced the first attempt and the room that we were in was a vastly different environment. Rather than being in a softly lit, small and calm room, this time we were in a large classroom style setting and two inside eyes (my PhD supervisors) were present, meaning that the dynamic in the room was very different. In my collaborator interview with Karin McCracken, she spoke about this exercise as being one of the most memorable and powerful moments of the process. She said:

That first interview I did with Issy and then the failed recreation of it was just so beautiful because it was such a mess, and how perfect! The more I think about it the more I realise it had to be like that. It shows how hard devising is… It doesn’t
matter if it’s all women in the room who really like each other. All those dynamics still play out when you have guests or don’t have guests. (McCracken)

Karin articulated that this experiment, “…felt like it really got into the heart of the thing that we were looking at” (McCracken). In the discussion afterwards, it transpired that none of us had felt comfortable and all of us wanted to stop the exercise but did not know how and were trapped by the voices of doubt in our own heads. Karin describes the feeling in the room afterwards as being “gutted” and said:

I feel like we went around in a circle and all went, “Well, I knew it was shit but I didn’t say anything because I was worried that you would feel bad,” “Well, I was worried that you would feel bad if I stopped it.” Which is so generous. Like it was characterised by empathy for each other, we didn’t want anyone to feel bad. So, we all felt bad. But we were desperately trying to make it not as bad as it needed to be. It was kind of amazing (McCracken).

This behaviour could be categorized as stereotypically feminine, none of us wanted to upset anyone so we let the problematic exercise continue. This links back to the point Kerryn Palmer made, as discussed in Chapter Two, about the difficulty of balancing creative decisions while remaining empathetic. Palmer said that she does not think this decision is “an issue for a lot of masculine directors” (Palmer). While this failed recreation of the questionnaire exercise may have been distressing for us, it was a moment of valuable research, one that we returned to for the second creative showing.

As we started to look towards the first showing we kept hitting the same road block that all devising processes are unique. So, in one rehearsal, we each took some chalk and mapped out on the floor what our individual devising processes look like. These processes can be seen in the figure on page 225. Each collaborator then walked the others through her process. In her collaborator interview, Isobel MacKinnon spoke about this exercise being one of the most special moments in the process. She told me that she had a “funny moment of realisation like, ‘Aha! Nobody has any fucking idea! We are all making it up as we go’” (MacKinnon). This made her reflect on her first experiences in devising processes that were “led by men who held rooms as though they were little geniuses...
Like they knew the answers, but they weren’t going to tell you… It’s that strange chemical process where too much anxiety manages to magically calcify into too much ego.” (MacKinnon). However, the five of us mapping out our processes in chalk provided clarity for Isobel. She said:

I had this moment of realising, oh they didn’t know, there’s not some magical knowledge that I’m not party to, it’s actually that all of our processes are very personal structures, where we are just using tools that seem to work for us… it’s that feeling of realising that some people who felt like they were so knowledgeable and all knowing, were not. And also, that my process is no less valid. (MacKinnon)

We found it fascinating to gain this insight into each process and to be able to see how all our creative brains worked differently. Karin also highlighted this moment in her interview. She described it as a “really humbling experience,” because “I got to see all these women that I admire so much, being generous with how they work. It was a little insight into their brains, and I just found that amazing” (McCracken). Following the success of this exercise, we then decided to explore it further for the first creative showing. Holding our five individual processes, we put them together to create a “utopian” devising process that could occur in New Zealand if there were no time constraints or financial/funding difficulties. A photo of this idealistic process can be seen in the figure on page 226.
Figure 61: Five devising processes on the floor (Researcher’s own collection)
Figure 62: “Utopian” Devising Process Map (Researcher’s own collection).
The first showing focused on one question in particular which was: How can multiple people share leadership in a devising process and hold the vision of the work without diluting or confusing it? This question came from the research in which several of the interviewees and questionnaire respondents discussed the singular vision or voice of a director as being problematic in their experiences. In our exploration of this question, we came to realise that no one really knows exactly how to devise. To some extent, practitioners often make their processes up, or they use processes that, we in New Zealand, adapt from overseas that then evolve and change. Practical guides on devising are still often quite philosophical and the structure is not as clear as more traditional or script-based approaches. Creative processes are messy and when you don’t have a clear script or framework to hang your process on, they get messier. In our experience, shared leadership in devising often fails. Perhaps, to share leadership, the process must be clearer and communicated in a shared language and an environment where everyone is comfortable.

For the first showing we mapped out in chalk this “perfect” devising process on the floor where everyone would feel like they belonged, what this process should look like at every step, all the while pretending that time, money and resources present no obstacles. We
then invited some people into the space to observe from the balcony, while we responded to this utopian process in real time, highlighting the realities of devising in New Zealand where time and resources can be serious issues that prevent equal collaboration. Using different colours of chalk, we physically highlighted the problems such as, the lack of funding or the time pressure to complete a process. We also pulled out recurring themes such as, accountability and ownership, adding in our own experiences and some quotes from my interviewees to score the emotional effect of the process. We wanted to respond to this utopian process both theoretically and emotionally as we believe that both those ways of responding are important when exploring devising.

Figure 64: Creative Showing One, the finished floor (Researcher’s own collection).

What emerged from the discussion that followed was that while the showing was interesting, by charting this process on the floor, we were quite literally putting methodology on stage and it was not particularly performative. The push pull relationship of creative versus theory is a challenge in practice as research, and we had become caught in the trap of trying to turn academic research into performance. Consequently, as we moved towards the second showing, we gave ourselves more licence to be theatrical. We returned to some of the ideas from the Postgraduate Conference performance, trusting that performance was still legitimate research.
The process leading up to the second creative showing in December of 2016 was difficult, especially as it was interrupted by the major Kaikoura earthquake on the 14th November. Wellington was affected as the CBD and Victoria University were off limits for 24 hours. I chose to cancel our final rehearsal and the second creative showing, which in turn threw our tightly crafted rehearsal schedule off course. However, working within a framework of empathetic partnership and practicing feminist leadership meant that it was important to me to acknowledge the effect of this earthquake and the ongoing aftershocks. Instead of adopting an attitude of just pushing through it, I chose to adapt our process and prioritise the people rather than the work. As two of my collaborators had other shows opening in late November, we re-scheduled the second showing for the 9th December 2016 (the original date for the third showing), and the third showing for 27th January 2017. While this was a difficult decision to make, it was definitely the right one, as this was the only way that the research and work did not suffer. Thankfully, the earthquake did not cause extensive damage in Wellington and we were rehearsing in a safe building, however, the city did have a feeling of unease and anxiety for quite some time, and this permeated our rehearsal room.

Despite these challenges, moving into a more theatrical style and exploring through practical makes on the floor, meant our rehearsal room became more fun and less weighed down in academic theory and discussion. We re-visited some of the ideas from the Post Graduate Conference performance and created more sophisticated and relevant vignettes. We continued to use chalk as a key element from the first showing and used it to write our performance agreement/contract around the outside of the rehearsal and final performance space. By making the agreement so visible and a part of the floor we stood on, it was a constant reminder of what we had promised each other. We had workshopped and discussed our agreement extensively throughout the process, but only committed to writing something down just before the second showing, although in hindsight, it would have been interesting to see how a physical agreement/contract may have changed. In her collaborator interview, Meg also wondered whether we may have gained more insight by actually creating all these different contracts and then editing them so that we were
“workshopping the physical thing” (Rollandi). However, due to our extension discussion around agreements, by the time we actually wrote one down, it was quite evolved and concise. The statements that we included all carried with them a sense of weight and power. For example, “We will work within our means and that is enough,” “You should always be able to say if you feel unsafe,” or “We promise to uphold and protect everyone’s mana.” These cover many aspects of physical and mental wellbeing which can be jeopardised during a creative process, and we managed to condense those into short sentences.

The biggest addition in our process, for the second showing, was the use of sound. As so many of the themes of this research explore voice, sounds, silence and speaking, we had a whole rehearsal dedicated to this. We started to play with layers of sound, with and without microphones and explore how we might manipulate our voices and examine what effect that would have. It was inspired by the original “Anxiety Soundscape” from the Conference Performance, but we made it more complex by using different levels of amplification and including questionnaire responses, academic writing, and personal experience. Some of this we pre-recorded, and we used it in both the second and third showing. We brought in sound designer Oliver Devlin to assist us with this. My collaborators and I all knew Devlin and a few of us had worked with him before, so we felt comfortable inviting him into our space for a few rehearsals. Devlin recorded each of us performing some of the questionnaire responses, then mixed them, altered some of the pitches, and layered them together.

The second creative showing had a three-part structure, with a dramaturgy that started wide with a large scope and then became more focused and specific with each scene. The first section was a soundscape of layered voices, made up of both live and pre-recorded audio, and consisted of academic texts, personal stories and questionnaire responses. We saw this as the presentation of the problem and an acknowledgment that the issues that women are feeling in devising processes are valid. We layered voice upon voice so that it was richly textured, complex and filled with questions around whose voice we listen to.
Along with the pre-recorded track, I spoke live and unamplified, Trae spoke into a microphone, Karin spoke into a microphone and used a loop pedal to record over her own voice, and Isobel wrote her thoughts in chalk on the floor.

Figure 65: Creative Showing Two: Script Extract of Layered Voices (Researcher’s own collection).

The next section explored possible reasons voices are ignored by looking at some of the available roles for women in both scripted and devised works in New Zealand. This took the form of an entertaining game show, with two performers attempting to portray some of the more problematic characters from New Zealand’s theatre history. For example, the character of Beryl from Glide Time by Roger Hall. Glide Time is one of the most successful and well known New Zealand plays, it was adapted into a radio and television series, but Beryl, the single female character in a cast of seven, is reduced to her physical appearance. This scene was inspired by our original Jane Game using Ross Putman’s tweets. While it was effective in performance and the audience responded to it well, when preparing for the third showing we realised this game was over-simplifying the problem of representation and that the scripted examples seemed to be selected with bias to prove our own point. However, we would not discover how to solve this issue until the very
end of our process, the day before the final showing. The following is an extract of the game from the second showing with an example of a scripted and devised character:

IM: Beryl from Glide Time!

HB runs forward putting on a cardigan and carrying a mug.

IM: Beryl is early to mid-30s. Stout but not unattractive, and preferably with an ample bosom.

HB: Woah what? Where did you get that from?

IM: That is literally her description in the published playscript.

HB reluctantly motions to TTW to get her to throw her something to stuff her top with.

IM: Beryl is quite intelligent but not very educated or informed, having been stuck at home looking after her old mother. Content to accept the job day by day.

KM: The actress in An Awfully Big Adventure62!

TTW runs forward with excitement putting on war helmet and holding a stick.

KM: This part is an ensemble role and plays many supporting characters in several different storylines.

TTW: Does she get to play one of the heroes?

KM: No, because she’s a girl!

The climax of this game involved the two hosts trying to come up with possible roles for women in New Zealand plays. They cannot think of any and end up listing, in quick succession, forty-eight New Zealand plays that only have male characters.

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62 An Awfully Big Adventure was an ensemble devised work for children, produced by Capital E, that explored World War One and followed the stories of two men; one a keen enlistee, the other a conscientious objector.
The first section of the showing was about highlighting the wider problems, and the second section brought this into New Zealand. The third section focused in again by looking at our own process. We re-created and performed the live questionnaire exercise from one of our own rehearsals that had failed (as discussed earlier in this chapter). In the second showing we did it once through normally, but then repeated it three times, and rather than hearing the answers to the questions, a different person’s inner monologue was spoken aloud each time. For example,

“Oh she doesn’t look like she wants to answer this, she looks very uncomfortable.

Ok, lean forward, look very interested, let her know that you care. Smile.”

We wanted to show that even in an open and trusting process with five women there are still times when the voices inside our heads stop us from speaking out. We called this scene “Rehearsal under a microscope” and it was effective in illustrating that feeling of doing nothing because of the voice inside your head. We made the audience move their chairs so that they were sitting with us in a circle to give them that same complicit feeling.
Throughout the second showing, we also used the chalk to respond to the performance as it happened by writing on the floor how we were feeling in between each section. This was challenging as a performer as it felt like removing yourself from the performance, but it was interesting as a way to keep the process happening alongside the “product” of the performance. This then led into the end of the second showing where we gave our audience their own pieces of chalk, encouraged them to move about the space, and respond to anything that they wanted to, to write their own feelings, or to ask questions. This was also an effective method to organically transition from performance to discussion. While the second showing was well received, we felt that it was not enough to just present the problem. The performance and conversation needed to be richer and more robust than that.
Opportunity to Speak vs. Ability to Speak

One of the key themes that began to emerge during our process leading up to the second showing was the “Opportunity to Speak vs. Ability to Speak.” While this became even more important for the third showing, it needs to be unpacked here as a theory first. Throughout the practice as research, my collaborators and I explored ideas around “voice” and the oppression of women’s voices in devising processes. However, “voice” could be considered an abstract concept. In their introduction to Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture, Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones concisely articulate the challenge for scholars interested in women’s voices:

Feminists have used the word “voice” to refer to a wide range of aspirations: cultural agency, political enfranchisement, sexual autonomy, and expressive freedom, all of which have been historically denied to women. In this context, “voice” has become a metaphor for textual authority. (Dunn and Jones 1)
Dunn and Jones argue that, “Too often ‘voice’ is conflated with speech... However, human vocality encompasses all the voice’s manifestations (for example, speaking, singing, crying, and laughing), each of which is invested with social meanings not wholly determined by linguistic content” (Dunn & Jones 1). Despite this, my collaborators and I continued to use the word “voice” throughout our process. However, our definition went deeper than Dunn and Jones’ and it is not constrained by language and speech. We discussed a woman’s voice as being part of their whole identity and linked it to the Māori concept of mana.63 As mentioned in Chapter Three, Joan Metge wrote that the word mana has “become part of New Zealand English,” but that it is generally considered to be a supernatural force within a person (Metge 62). However, mana can have both a personal and social meaning, as well as a spiritual meaning. Metge suggests that mana is, “closely tied up with personality. People who have explored themselves and know their capacities and strengths are more integrated, more sure of themselves and thus more able to concentrate, unify and increase the mana that comes their way” (Metge 70). During the practice as research, Trae described the women who wrote about difficult devising processes in the questionnaire responses, as having had their mana taken away. These concepts all influenced our thinking and enabled us to widen our definition of “voice,” to encompass someone’s whole identity within a process.

The relationship between women and their own voices has been explored by feminist theatre scholars such as, Elaine Aston, Sue-Ellen Case and Lizbeth Goodman. In Aston’s text Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook, she devotes a whole chapter to the importance of women theatre makers re-discovering their voices. She begins with a quote from Helene Cixous highlighting just how difficult it can be for a woman to make herself heard.

“Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language slipping away – that’s how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for a woman to speak – even just open her mouth – in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words...”

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63 mana (noun) prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object (MāoriDictionary.co.nz).
fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine” (Cixous qtd. Aston Feminist Theatre 51).

Aston connects these ideas about voice to devised theatre in the section, “Gender and Devising Projects.” She writes that devising and working without a script can be a challenging and frightening way to make theatre, especially for women, because when a woman devises, “…she has first to find the body, the words and the confidence to speak out; to be seen and to be heard” (Aston Feminist Theatre 142).

Unfortunately, it’s not always in the control of the individual. As Anne Wessels writes in her article “Devising as Pedagogy,” there are “hidden hierarchies” in a rehearsal room which can affect participation and are “linked to the complexities of dialogue/silence and conflict” (Wessels 132). These “hidden hierarchies” can lead to multiple problems which Wessels presents as a series of questions about who is able to use their voice.

“Who is talking, who keeps quiet and for what reasons? What happens when someone says one thing and immediately says the opposite as a form of self-silencing? What conditions have created the silence and who might dare to speak in the face of taboos that have become accepted as normal? When should silence be respected and when should it be shaken up?” (Wessels 132).

This research exploring voice became instrumental for my creative component. As noted earlier, at one of our first rehearsals I read aloud Aston’s quote about confidence and voice from the very beginning of this chapter. It struck a chord with all of us immediately. We all related to the idea of performing confidence within our everyday and our theatrical lives. These ideas about voice and confidence then began to permeate all the work that we conducted throughout the process. We used these theories of voice and how women’s voices are silenced, to analyse the questionnaire responses. By doing this we were able to create two opposing distinctions: the opportunity to speak versus the ability to speak. The opportunity to speak is an external pressure and refers to how many opportunities women are provided with in New Zealand’s theatre industry. This includes women’s roles both onstage and offstage and whether they can speak from a position of leadership,
Perhaps as the artistic director of a theatre company, or in rehearsal room, as the director or leader of that process. The ability to speak refers to something more internal and connects to the ideas that Cixous and Aston are discussing. Even if a woman is given the opportunity to speak, she may not be able to because she has lost the ability. She cannot find her own voice, her own confidence, so she becomes silent. This could be an entirely internalised problem, or it could be due to external pressures or privilege within a devising process. In “Devising as Pedagogy,” Wessels quotes from Megan Boler to describe the “varieties of silence” (132). Boler writes that silence:

…can be voluntary and self-imposed, or it can be the result of external pressures and constraints; silence can be expressive, or it can be empty, unreadable; silence can be temporary, situational, or it can represent a consistent even pathological pattern; silence can signal withdrawal from a conversation, or it can be an indicator of attentive and thoughtful listening. (Boler qtd. Wessels 132)

Faced with the complexity of women’s issues around voice, this theory of opportunity to speak vs. ability to speak provided us with a method of identifying the different problems. My research shows that opportunity and ability are often linked, and both occur multiple times throughout the questionnaire responses and interviews. By creating this theory, my collaborators and I could begin to understand more of our own negative devising experiences and the experiences of those respondents.

5.3 CREATIVE SHOWING THREE

It was so beneficial to be in that space [the PaR rehearsal space]. It was so weirdly cathartic and also consolidating of a lot of things that I experienced and had been full of rage about, but I had felt totally in isolation about them.

(Isobel MacKinnon, personal interview, 2018)
The [third] showing was excellent, the sensitive, tricky and sometimes triggering subject matter was handled with a lightness that made it funny, sincere, and very real.

(Anonymous audience survey response)

Due to the Kaikoura earthquake and the subsequent schedule changes, we decided that the preparation process for Creative Showing Three would need to be shorter, and it therefore became more intensive. It took place over just two weeks in January once everyone had come back from their Christmas and New Year break. This time away from the process was beneficial as it gave us more time to reflect on the second showing and to realise that we wanted to move in a different direction. We kept the soundscape of layered voices and we originally planned to keep the Jane Game 2.0. However, that was replaced at our final rehearsal with an entirely new segment. The drive behind the third showing was the theme of “Opportunity to Speak vs. Ability to Speak.” We used this idea and the theories behind our “voice” (as outlined above), to create a dual approach. We wanted to explore:

- The “products” of how women are being depicted/roles that are available in devised theatre in New Zealand, and how that affects their opportunity to speak.
- The “processes/experiences” of women in the devising rehearsal room in New Zealand, and how that affects their ability to speak.

Despite this dual approach, the third showing was more heavily focused on process and we added in a significant number of our own experiences from devising processes that we had been a part of. We sifted through both the interview and questionnaire responses and used them to create sections of live audio, and then mixed them with scenes where we played out some of our own experiences. We started to weave these threads together as can be seen in our whiteboard brainstorm in the image below.
Given that we only had two weeks and we were generating a lot of new material, some of the structures that we had put in place to look after one another slipped to some extent. While we maintained some aspects of our Empathetic Partnership framework, such as reflecting on our work, making sure the environment was open, and using common language so that everyone felt safe and comfortable, our use of Partnership and Empathy was diminished (Flemmer et al. 547-549). Flemmer et al state that “When an NP [nurse practitioner] practices empathetic partnership by using the 6 key elements described to create a relationship of accompaniment, the traditional power dynamic dissolves and creates a space for an effective partnership” (Flemmer et al. 549). What we discovered is that the time crunch at the end of a devising process, and the pressure to create a finished product, means that the devising room becomes faster, more masculine and muscular, and it often prioritises action over emotion. This makes it much more difficult to maintain the use of all six elements in the Empathetic Partnership framework. This was especially true at our final rehearsal, the night before the third showing. At this rehearsal we
discarded Jane Game 2.0 because it felt at odds with the rest of the piece. It had a simplistic argument and seemed to just be saying, “Look at these bad shows, they had bad representations of women in them,” when we knew that, of course, the situation was infinitely more complex than that. We quickly devised a new segment which was a largely improvised live conversation which unpacked the “myths” of devising and discussed some New Zealand devised works made by our contemporaries. This making was hard and fast, and it felt very different to the rest of our process. In her collaborator interview, Isobel described it as a memorable rehearsal. She said:

> Another really interesting moment in the process, was after having such a liberty of so much time, after being so considerate of each other’s feelings and always hearing everything out… then the night before the final showing, suddenly we had this time pressure and we had conflict in the room for the first time. And it was just fascinating realising that this still happens. (MacKinnon)

The conflict that Isobel is referring to was addressed the next day when we had arrived for the final showing. We had a big discussion about the rehearsal the night before and Trae revealed how difficult and stressful she had found the shift in our making. In my interview with Karin, she said, “It was really hard to hear but so important to hear, it showed that we were really in a devising process because that was real… I felt like Trae was speaking about not feeling validated and feeling unsure of her ideas… it was a great reminder to me that it doesn’t matter if it’s just women in the room, it’s part of the process” (McCracken). Nonetheless, this moment in our process illustrated that because we had taken the time to carefully build an empathetic space and culture, Trae was able to talk about her concerns right before the final showing. As a group we were able to listen, acknowledge her feelings, work through the issues, and still perform the showing. In our interview, Isobel and I discussed how we could not think of another devising process we had been involved in where something like that would have been possible. Isobel spoke of a process she and Meg were involved in at the time of interviewing, where someone expressed to them how wonderful it was that Isobel and Meg were so honest in their communication. Isobel told me:
It’s complicated I guess by varying degrees of ability to be honest or willingness to be honest on a process. It’s also that thing of “I’m afraid of conflict, so I’m afraid of your honesty because I read it as conflict. So, can you just not have it? Or have it, but just don’t talk about it?” And I think about how much of that honesty we have was seeded in that six months of practicing that radical honesty [during the PaR]. And thinking about that ability to deal with that “conflict” and absorb it in a process and respond to it with a lightness. (MacKinnon)

Even though we did, by no means, create a perfect process, at the end of this project, we had created a culture within our room that enabled us to listen to one another and make space, even when someone needed to speak about a problem they were having right before our final performance. We were all able to listen, allow that person the time to speak and be heard, and then still come together as a group and perform.

The final showing took place on 27th January 2016 with an invited audience of approximately forty people. They were a mixture of academics, theatre practitioners, some of my interviewees, friends and family. The tension in my thesis between history and oppression was explicitly put on stage in the final showing. We combined our history
(academic literature and interview quotes) with oppression (our own and the respondents experiences). We used our devising process and showing to make this conversation public, in the hope that we could begin to learn and change. As in the second showing, we began with the soundscape of layered voices. However, Isobel was also speaking this time and telling a story from Jo Randerson’s interview about some advice that had been given to her by Jean Betts. The story from Randerson was:

I remember Jean Betts saying that about making... yeah she was like, “When we were in a really male process, like a very misogynist script, but everyone said, we’re going to cross cast everybody, don’t worry! And then it was just, hey surprise, all the men played the male roles just because they were better.” But anyway, Jean was like, “Go and stand in the middle of the room and scream. If they’re not listening to you, actually scream until they do.” (Randerson)

Once Isobel finished the story, all the voices fell silent and she drew a circle in chalk on the ground, a “scream circle.” This was the only use of chalk for the third showing because we wanted to give this moment and this circle more symbolic power.

Following this moment, we (including Meg who stepped on stage for this section), began the hyper-real discussion that we had devised the night before. Here we talked about actual devised works made by our contemporaries that had problematic depictions of women in them. It was a live and mostly improvised conversation between the performers. It weaved around questions about process versus product and made connections between many of our sources, including the interviews and questionnaire responses. In their collaborator interviews, both Isobel and Karin spoke about this section having a significant impact on them. Isobel described it as feeling, “like setting something on fire,” even though she knew that “there was nothing blasphemous about what we were doing, we were saying the things that probably everyone in the audience would say but in smaller private conversations” (MacKinnon). We, however, were having this conversation in public which made it feel dangerous. Karin told me that she was “wracked with anxiety” (McCracken). She said:
Not as much before, but during and after I was like, “we just went in on about eight different productions.” I felt sick with anxiety after and it’s only with hindsight that I’m like, god that was fucking cool and so the right thing to have done… What we were doing was generous with an audience, it was levelled and measured, public, and honest. And what a terrifying thing to do as a performer… Like we were talking about shows made by our friends and people that we love, but man that’s the work aye. That’s the hard stuff. I wish I had another chance to do that again knowing what I know now, and just be able to sit in it a bit more. Feeling like, god, this is awkward but knowing that that’s perfect. It should feel like that. (McCracken)

Figure 71: Image from Creative Showing Three, photograph by Maja Zonjic (Researcher’s own collection).

This conversation then ended with a discussion of the character that I played in Death and the Dreamlife of Elephants, the first full length devised production that I was involved in, (mentioned in the Prologue of this thesis). In the showing, I put on the original jacket that was a part of my character’s costume (as can be seen in the image above), and we grappled with the fact that, even though I devised this character, she still ended up as the male
protagonist’s friend, without a life of her own. This gave the conversation a complexity, it acknowledged that we had been involved in problematic works as well and moved it away from any kind of essentialist blaming of others.

From there, the piece morphed into an episodic structure. We moved between naturalistic scenes of real life experiences from women practitioners – a meeting turning into a weird date or a director throwing in an offer that the performers should be nude without first seeing if everyone feels comfortable – sections of live audio (a mixture of interview quotes and academic theories), and then back again, giving the whole piece a breath like quality of emerging and then receding.64 This was an intentional feminist dramaturgy and a deliberate avoidance of a traditional Aristotelian structure of an introduction, rising action, climax and dénouement. As we devised this showing, we were holding in our minds Sue Ellen-Case’s description of feminist dramaturgy as being “elliptical rather than

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64 For more detail, see Appendix F: Scripts of Creative Showings and Appendix G: Digital Recordings of Creative Showings.
illustrative, fragmentary rather than whole, ambiguous rather than clear, and interrupted rather than complete” (qtd in Gale & Deeney 514). We also grounded ourselves within a female gaze, defined by Jill Soloway, the writer and director of Transparent, as a method where “emotions are being prioritised over the actions” (Soloway). The final showing focused on women as the subject, prioritising our own experience. In her keynote speech at the TIFF Masterclass in 2016, Soloway said:

The female gaze is not a camera trick, it is a privilege generator. It is storytelling to get you on somebody’s side… I want people to see the female gaze as a conscious effort to create empathy as a political tool. It is a wresting away of the point of view, of changing the way the world feels for women when they move their bodies through the world, feeling themselves as the subject. (Soloway)

By performing these real and recognisable scenes of women’s experiences, we hoped to generate empathy within the audience and encourage new discourse. With this strong grounding in feminist dramaturgy, the third showing ended up mirroring American writer and director Deborah Randell’s description of women’s artistic expression. In her article “A Call To Art: Why We Need Independent Women’s Theatre,” she describes feminist dramaturgy as a, “swirling spiral of contraction and release… Everything is in motion. The idea that we are rooted in the linear storytelling format is simply not true” (Randell).
The final scene in the third showing depicted a woman literally being ignored, and as she struggled to make herself heard, the layered voices audio from the beginning of the piece came back and got louder and louder until, eventually, it sounded like buzzing. During this the performers swapped in and out of the scene, moving to speak into the loop pedal microphone or stepping into the scream circle and screaming to try and top the loud voices that overpowered them. Eventually the performers exited the stage, leaving the audience with the uncomfortable and loud sound of hundreds of voices echoing around the space. This ending was intended to be a question. How can we make ourselves heard and use our voices when everything around us is drowning us out? We did not want to provide the audience with an answer, rather, we wanted to evoke a feeling and spark a conversation.
Discussion and Audience Survey Responses

Feminist pedagogies in theatre construct communities where knowledge emerges through our encounters, and especially through our confrontations, with one another. A feminist theatre pedagogy suggests that what we do with our bodies on the stage has the potential to reverberate and transform both the artists who make the representations and the community members who witness them.

(Armstrong & Juhl 7)

The discussion and the online audience survey that followed the final showing was an important part of the practice as research process. It gave the audience and us the performers, an opportunity to express ourselves together, to discover, like Armstrong and Juhl attest in the quote above, whether we had been transformed by this experience. Our aim had been to provoke the audience to think about this material and spark conversation within the New Zealand theatre community, and the discussion demonstrated that we were successful in this regard. The anonymous online survey that the audience completed after the performance, also gave them all an opportunity to provide individual feedback, without the pressure of a group discussion. Survey responses such as this one, reaffirmed just how important this research is:
This showing was the first real intervention into a problem in this industry that I have ever witnessed in my ten years in the industry... The act of the showing in itself was the eye opener for me... the experience of sitting in a room of collaborators and friends all acknowledging, finally and properly, that yes, these things are real, this does happen, was amazing. (Anonymous audience survey response)

To open the discussion, I led the audience through the questions that we were investigating throughout this process and how, for the third showing, we were focused on a dual approach, as can be seen in the image above and as was outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Following that, rather than ask the audience for their feedback about the form or theatricality of the showing, given that this was a rough presentation focusing on process and not product, I asked the audience what the showing made them...
think about and how it made them feel. The first response\textsuperscript{65} exemplified a collective feeling within the audience and there was a great deal of agreement with this statement:

For the first half I felt really mortified that something I had said or done as a director was going to come out... and I really started to think about my own process as a director and as my own process as a feminist... it made me feel quite anxious. And I felt really emotional in the second half, especially in that bit where everyone was talking, and the apologising, I realised how much I always apologise for everything, even when I’m leading a room. (Confidential audience discussion response)

This response set the tone for much of the discussion that followed, with several other audience members ruminating on their own feelings of doubt or anxiety when they are in a devising process. Together, we discussed how, so often, these feelings are viewed as being completely negative, while being comfortable with the unknown is actually useful in a devising process. One of the audience members then linked this discussion to ideas about doubt being a positive and powerful source in a devising process. These ideas are also present in Patrick Shanley’s preface to his play \textit{Doubt, a parable}, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The audience member said:

What excited me at the very beginning [of the showing] was the word ‘doubt.’ I think that we doubt as women, as feminists, as makers; we doubt ourselves probably more than men do, they may doubt themselves, but they certainly don’t let us know if they are doubting themselves... But I think that that is really exciting, how to elevate doubt as a strategy of strength and creativity and improvisation... I do think being much more comfortable with doubt and having it as an essential part of us as women and our processes and accepting that and not having so much anxiety about it, that’s a really good way of working. (Confidential audience discussion response)

\textsuperscript{65} All audience responses from the discussion will be kept confidential. The discussion is included in the footage of the showing in Appendix H, however their faces are not identifiable. Each audience member was given an information sheet about the project and given the option not to partake in the discussion should they not want their voice to be recorded.
This audience member’s response spoke directly to the heart of this research project. Throughout the survey and interview material, during the practice as research, and my own experience conducting this research and writing this thesis, every part of this process has been laden with doubt. Part of what my collaborators and I were trying to achieve was to explore ways that we can use doubt as a source of strength and creativity. So, to have that recognised by this audience member was an important moment that illustrated that this research was communicating successfully to its audience.

The crucial question inspired by Armstrong and Juhl, posited at the beginning of this section, is whether we were able to “transform both the artists who make the representations and the community members who witness them” (Armstrong & Juhl 7). The aim of the practice as research was that by theatricalising this research in the final showing and performing these experiences in front of an audience, that we might provoke this small section of the Wellington theatre community to reflect on their own practice. While most of the speakers in the discussion were women, the following comment from a male devising director illustrates the effect the performance had on him:

It seems like a lot of the negative experiences that you used in the showing came from times when men were in directorial positions or leadership positions? So yeah… I don’t know, I don’t really know what I’m trying to say here. I guess this is mainly in response to your provocation of how it made me feel. In the last few [devising] projects I’ve mainly been the director with largely female casts, so trying to analyse how I work in those situations through a feminist lens and I feel very ill equipped to do that… but maybe better now, I don’t know. (Confidential audience discussion response)

This male director spoke hesitantly and thoughtfully as he reflected on his own practice in relation to the performance he had just seen. This showing had clearly affected this devising director and helped him to reconsider any problematic or unproductive behaviour in his devising process. This impact is a key purpose of conducting practice as research and the discussion gave us the space to have a conversation about it.
One of the focal points of the discussion, and of the anonymous audience survey responses, was the hyper real conversation scene where we had talked about other devised works and their depiction of women. As stated above, we were very nervous about performing this section of the showing because we were making a private conversation very public. In my collaborator interview with Isobel she spoke about how what we did was so different. She said:

To instead have those conversations openly and without any kind of nastiness, because in those private conversations it fractures away from a critical discourse and becomes a nasty and bitter kind of brewing. Which is just not life enhancing for anyone or good for our industry, or for actually addressing those issues that we were talking about, those quite endemic issues of representation of women (MacKinnon).

The scene had a clear impact on the audience. Even within the room, we felt the tension rise and then settle as it became clear that this was a constructive and compassionate conversation. Several of the responses from the online audience survey wrote about this scene as being challenging and exciting. One respondent wrote, “I found it so brave and terrifying to witness that kind of radical honesty in a performance space, of conversations that I have had in private spaces many times. I felt like this pointed to something about our community and culture of critique and group dynamics” (Anonymous Audience Survey Response). Although what we were saying may have been taken negatively by some, and we were asked during the discussion, why we had not included any positive depictions of women in devising. However, one audience member found this radical and compassionate honesty to be extremely positive. She said:

What I think is so positive about this, is that a group of young female makers are brave enough to talk about stuff that we all talk about when we go out for a drink or when we see each other outside the theatre like, ‘hey I wasn’t really vibeing [enjoying] that show, the depiction of us in that show.’ No one ever says it out loud directly to the community and I think it’s so positive that you guys are brave
enough to actually do that. We don’t need to share a positive story for this experience to be a positive one. (Confidential audience discussion response)

The showing was intended as a work in progress and I explicitly did not ask for feedback on theatrical form or style in the discussion, as I was more interested in what the performance made them think about and how it made them feel. However, the anonymous online survey provided the audience with the opportunity to give more critical feedback, without the pressure of a group discussion. The following response is a useful piece of constructive criticism regarding the structure of the whole piece:

I thought the performance was discordant, but I feel like it had to be since there is a massive clash there between the processes and products you were exploring. I did perhaps feel that I understood what you were trying to get across better in the moments that you were depicting the representation of women in NZ theatre and their experiences over the moments where many of the voices came together - the latter for me was slightly confusing since I couldn’t focus on one specific experience to digest it. Perhaps this was the point - that these experiences are so common, they overwhelm the experience of female theatre practitioners in NZ. (Anonymous audience survey response).

While the intended effect of all the voices at the end was to overwhelm the audience, this respondent makes the excellent point that experiences like that can desensitise an audience to the point where they just switch off. Perhaps if we had added something that anchored the audience in the experience, or even placed them physically within it, that could have created a more effective connection.

A key theme that emerged from the audience survey responses was how the showing had encouraged the audience to think about power structures and dynamics. One respondent wrote that they realised, while watching the showing, just how real power imbalances can be in devising processes. They wrote, “I identified with every situation that was presented on stage. This shows me this problem is systemic, not just within my own personal experience, or necessarily my fault (Anonymous Audience Survey Response). Several
audience survey responses also pointed out that these problematic imbalances in power are not limited to devised theatre processes, and they can indeed occur in any collaborative environment. One respondent wrote:

The showing reminded me how the power structures and dynamics that we encounter in the world at large are brought with us into the rehearsal room. I wondered how many of the problems explored in the showing are specific to the devising process, and how many could be found to be part of any creative process. (Anonymous audience survey response)

The final question I asked in the anonymous audience survey was whether or not the showing had revealed to each audience member something that they had not considered before. One respondent clearly articulated what seems like an obvious issue. However, as they assert, it becomes difficult due to the complicated and uncertain nature of devising. They wrote:

As women we basically face the same sexist oppression in the rehearsal room and devising process that we do on the street. Only it is hard to identify it as that because it’s a different, and supposedly “equal” and “safe” context. But when people, often men, are doing things such as not listening to women in the room, demanding they act in a ‘manly’ way, bully them, etc, that’s just good old sexist oppression packaged up in a pretty “devised theatre process.” (Anonymous audience survey response)

This relates to the practice as research findings that I outlined at the beginning of this chapter. I stated that while much of what we discovered should exist in all collaborative environments, a devised process is often held up as being a space where things like clear communication and equal contribution all happen naturally due to the “mythical” and “utopian” nature of devising. However, as this practice as research illustrated, despite a collective’s best intentions, devising processes can still fail in this regard due to heightened vulnerability, increased sense of doubt, and fear of the unknown. For example, our failed version of the Frantic Assembly questionnaire exercise or the slipping of our Empathetic Partnership framework as we battled the intense time pressure and
need for a product. This means that, in a collaborative environment, even greater attention must be paid to the people involved and how they are feeling. Every devising process needs to establish and communicate clear methodological structures and we all need to practice radical empathy and compassionate honesty.

5.4 DEBRIEF AND REFLECTION

Being a part of projects like this really makes you live your life. You come out of it and you realise you just lived through two years in six months. If we were always doing stuff that is as complex an interrogation and the practical aspect of it as well, then, god, that’s exciting.

(Trae Te Wiki, personal interview, 2017)

It is only with hindsight and time that I have been able to process much of the research that was explored in that final creative showing and discussion. At the time, it was difficult to comprehend what we had achieved, despite the positive feedback from the audience. The autoethnographic experience of being a performer in my own research meant that I felt everything that my collaborators felt. I was not simply sitting on the outside and watching with the audience, I was explicitly involved in the exchange of empathy with them. So, for example, when Isobel and Karin spoke about the hyper real discussion scene feeling like setting something on fire or causing great anxiety, I felt that as well. This gave me a greater insight because I was not just observing, I experienced these moments. The event of the third showing was a high-pressure situation and holding all of that together meant that at the time I struggled to fully understand the impact we had created. In my interview with Meg, she articulated this contradictory feeling that we, as collaborators, had all felt. She said:

I feel like one of the most powerful moments was probably the sort of buzz that happened after the third showing, because I felt like, in what feels like a horribly “typical female” way, we were really doubtful of the potential impact of the thing
that we were showing. Even if people weren’t necessarily into what it is that we showed, that sparking of conversation felt so important and so valuable. And I thought, well that’s great, that’s what we’ve been trying to do. (Rollandi)

Following the third showing, my collaborators and I had a group debrief which mainly focused on the difficulties that we had all felt throughout the process. This was an important step of aftercare as I needed to let my collaborators address any issues in our process before more research could be conducted. The main subject that we discussed at that meeting was that the work that we were making was always for my PhD project. This meant that while the other collaborators were still invested, they had a different level of engagement in comparison to me. Even though this project may have benefitted their individual practice, the work we were making was always fuelling my research. This created an unbalanced level of creative investment for our rehearsal room and the weight of academia always sat heavy on our shoulders. After this initial debrief I gave my collaborators some reflection time before approaching them for individual interviews. This decision benefitted the research greatly because, with time and hindsight, all of us had more clarity and confidence about what we had created together. Their contribution has been invaluable to this research and the interviews Trae, Meg, Karin and Isobel, put so much of this project into perspective. Throughout this chapter I have already quoted from these interviews multiple times, however, this section will focus on our discussions around their most memorable moments from the process, and what they, as individuals, learned and have carried with them into their own work.

All four collaborators spoke about the strong relationship that we formed as a collective. During the six months of practice as research, all five of us experienced personal difficulties and emotional stress outside of the devising process. Consequently, our rehearsal room became a cathartic and empathetic haven of sorts, where we were able to support one another and explore the very nature of collaboration. While our Empathetic Partnership framework did slip towards the end of our process, I believe that because we spent so much time establishing it at the beginning, we were able to address conflict and
respond to it with empathy and lightness. In their article, Flemmer et al. quote Cunico et al. and state that “Empathising means understanding, sharing and creating an internal space to accept the other person, hence helping them to feel understood and not alone” (Flemmer et al. 549). Obviously, this is essential in primary care practice for patient relationships, but it is also necessary in collaborative environments, particularly in devising processes where vulnerability and doubt are heightened. Our devising process for the practice as research was unique in that we had the luxury of time to establish our empathetic partnership. In Trae’s interview she spoke about this time we spent forming connections. She said, “I really valued that time of talking through experiences, I loved doing that. We had a really strong group of women to have those conversations with, which is probably the best thing I’ll take out of it, is the people” (Te Wiki). Meg also reflected on how the process brought us together. She said, “I enjoyed the way this process, at times, felt super crazy, but then super calm. And then, afterwards, I’ve enjoyed the discussion and the kind of space you’ve given us to be able to talk about what we experienced” (Rollandi).

Meg and Isobel both spoke about how this process made them consider the amount of time we devote to devising projects. Meg told me that the whole, overall process was significant for her in the way that we would discuss how a devising process should be made. We would then experience our actual process, and realise, afterwards, that we instinctively did a lot of the things that we had talked about needing to do. She gave the example of, “gaining each other’s trust, which I feel is a huge thing that happened, but was a result of spending so much time together. And for me, that highlighted the time signature that we place on projects and that pressure to churn something out towards a finishing point” (Rollandi). Isobel also talked about the length of devising processes and noted that, when we all drew our individual devising process in chalk on the floor, those processes were all so top heavy. She said, “because of the nature of funding our industry is project dependent, so the delivery of the project is when the process stops. So, all of the clean-up, decompressing and learning, doesn’t happen” (MacKinnon). In contrast, Isobel
then described our process as feeling like “a six month long debrief for every process that I’ve ever worked on” (MacKinnon). She said:

I feel like that time we had, was this time that floated there and allowed me to go back through my own clutter to those processes and extrapolate out the lessons and the things I experienced there. Which there just isn’t time for when you’re going straight into the next thing. Or even when you’re not going straight into the next thing, you’re just fucking tired. And it’s not realistic to say that on your own you should debrief your process for yourself, I think that has to happen in conversation. (MacKinnon)

In these interviews I asked my collaborators how their own creative process may have benefitted from our process. They all gave different answers but they all had a common thread of emotional honesty. Trae told me, “I think that since our process I’ve been really adamant around having that space to be able to express how we feel in all sorts of ways” (Te Wiki). Isobel also spoke about the importance of having a space to address conflict within a process. She told me that while she does not want to be in “conflict riddled processes,” she is now “unwilling to internalise it” (MacKinnon). She said:

There will always be conflict in these collaborative processes… How do you learn to negotiate these with honesty and compassion? Those are two key things. I think too much compassion is going, “Oh I’ll just not deal with it.” And honesty without compassion can be brutal. But those two things: honesty and compassion, I think we really honed those and practiced those, and that’s really core to my process now. But, fuck, it’s hard to work with someone who doesn’t have that understanding. (MacKinnon)

Similarly, Karin also spoke about how she no longer internalises problematic dynamics. She told me that now she feels like she can name the toxic dynamics within a process and recognise when someone is in a difficult state and perhaps needs help or support. Whereas previously, Karin said she was more likely to internalise the horrible feeling and then carry it with her out of the rehearsal room. She said:
There’s something about forcing yourself to recognise what’s going on, I think that’s a skill that you’ve got to practice. And I think we did a lot of that practice in this process. I think I’m less afraid now to talk about how I’m feeling. As women, we’re taught to absolutely monster our needs… and sort of sit in that discomfort. But there’s nothing inherently bad about sharing how I feel. All of us in this process were really measured about how we did that. You know we would say, “I feel bad because this is happening and in order to work effectively I need this.” And that’s a great thing. (McCracken)

Overall, the collaborator interviews illustrated that, by conducting a devising process that was in fact exploring devising processes, all five of us gained a greater understanding and self-awareness of our own practice. As noted earlier, Meg articulated this clearly in her interview and called it ‘practicing practice.’ She said:

I found it extremely useful in this process to be talking about practice, and practicing practice… our discussion and attempts to analyse, be curious and poke at things that were a bit weird and not often talked about, I think has been hugely beneficial and something I reflect on regularly as I go to make work now… When you have a consistent dialogue, it’s kind of like counselling, it’s giving you strategies and it is already kind of in your mind how you’re practicing, not just what it is that you are practicing. (Rollandi)

The creative component has enabled me to take this research project a step further. While the qualitative research on its own outlines some of the rich history of women devising in New Zealand and illustrates the current problems that we face, the practice as research offered the opportunity to explore this through the live experience of performance. By explicitly exploring the tension between history and oppression on stage and within a real devising process, we were able to practically investigate the issues cited by my primary research respondents with multiple collaborators and several different audiences. This practice as research demonstrated that by valuing emotion, acknowledging intersectionality, and adopting a clear framework like Empathetic Partnership, a devising
process in New Zealand can be more emotionally intelligent. By adopting some of these concepts, not only could devising processes be more ethical, but the work that is produced could be of higher quality. For example, we knew that Jean Betts’ advice to stand in the middle of the rehearsal room and scream, as recounted by Jo Randerson, was not a literal suggestion. Betts’ is recommending that within a devising process, practitioners need to allow emotion to be visible. My collaborators and I embedded this idea within our process and then used it to create a powerful piece of devised theatre. The end of the final creative showing made this explicit by deliberately leaving the audience alone with this emotion. Consequently, through this practical research, we did not just theorise or suggest change within our industry, we embodied it.

Figure 76: Image from Creative Showing Three Discussion, photograph by Maja Zonjic (Researcher’s own collection).
Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the past four years, while I have been conducting this research, the world around us has changed dramatically. The political climate is turbulent, with many cultures experiencing divisive rifts. Over these four years I have seen women rising to the forefront. With campaigns like #MeToo and Time’s Up, the worldwide protest of the Women’s March on January 21st, 2017, and Time Magazine’s 2017 Person of the Year being “The Silence Breakers,” which recognised the voices that launched the movements against sexual harassment, women and feminist issues are currently very visible. Just last week, at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2018, 82 women walked the red carpet with linked arms and then stood on the steps of the Palais des Festivals and faced the crowd. They represented the 82 films by female directors that have premiered at Cannes over its 71-year history, compared to the 1,645 films directed by men. These campaigns and political protests within artistic industries illustrate an explosion of feminism into the mainstream. Certainly, within my lifetime, I have never witnessed movements like these. This is feminism for a modern and intersectional world that is working to highlight diversity and support those voices marginalised in the past.

This resurgence of women has also been reflected in New Zealand theatre and there has been an increase of work that is led by women. In 2017, several of our mainstage theatres, including Auckland Theatre Company and Silo Theatre, commissioned new work or staged productions led by women that explored feminist issues. The WTF! Women’s
The Theatre Festival\textsuperscript{66} will take place again at Circa Theatre in Wellington later in 2018. The 2017 STAB Commission at BATS Theatre was a new feminist work called \textit{Body Double} created by Eleanor Bishop and Julia Croft with Karin McCracken. Drawing on a range of reference points, from Tolstoy’s \textit{Anna Karenina} to saccharine romantic comedy, \textit{The Notebook}, \textit{Body Double} explored the complexities and multiplicities of female desire and sex by enacting autobiographical memories and fantasies; tearing down the way female desire is portrayed in the media. Not only was \textit{Body Double} awarded Production of the Year at the 2017 Wellington Theatre Awards, it was then re-presented with Silo Theatre at the Auckland Arts Festival in 2018. It was noteworthy that, at the 2017 Wellington Theatre Awards all the nominees for Director of the Year were women. Perhaps we are currently in a moment of real change. How can we keep this momentum building and how do we ensure that another generation of devising women are not lost in history?

My research into women in devised theatre in New Zealand began in 2010 with my Honours dissertation. I returned to this research in 2014, when I began this thesis, and with this chapter, I have now come to an ending of sorts. However, just as no theatre work is ever complete, I believe that research too is always evolving. It will continue to grow with new theories, new practitioners, and new pieces of devised theatre. Nevertheless, endings are necessary to evaluate where we are now, while looking back to where we were, and forward to where we could be. In this thesis I have made visible some of the rich history of women creating devised theatre in New Zealand. Then, using qualitative methods, such as key informant interviews and an online questionnaire, I investigated what the current issues are for women in devising processes. This tension between our history and the oppression of women was explicitly explored through six months of autoethnographic practice as research. The result of this practice was three different creative showings with invited audiences, in an attempt to spark a conversation in the

\textsuperscript{66} WTF! Women’s Theatre Festival is a celebration of women in theatre hosted by Circa Theatre. The 2018 festival features four plays, one devised work, one developmental season, two play readings, and a series of workshops, all showcasing women playwrights, directors, designers, actors, dancers and musicians.
New Zealand theatre industry. In this chapter, I will present the key findings of this thesis and make some recommendations for further research.

6.1 KEY FINDINGS

The best and worst thing about creating something from scratch is the uncertainty that you’ll actually come up with anything at all to present. It’s risky and that is a massive challenge to contend with. To be able to let the unknown guide you. I think that it’s interesting to see that many female theatre practitioners are drawn to contemporary theatre devising/making as a way to express, observe, mirror and challenge their position in the world. I think that choosing to make in a situation that lends itself to egalitarian values while embracing uncertainty and risk is a volatile political position to take, and I am fascinated to see that women are largely unafraid of that position.

(Nisha Madhan, personal interview, 2017)

This quote from Nisha Madhan encapsulates so much of the research that I have conducted and presented in this thesis. Devising is risky; being comfortable with uncertainty and allowing the unknown to guide you is, as Elaine Aston asserts, “an exciting challenge and a frightening way to practice theatre” (Aston Feminist Theatre 142). Despite this fear, like Madhan, many feminist theatre scholars have drawn connections between women and collaborative theatre making practices such as devising. Syssoyeva and Proudfit went so far as to say that, “The history of modern theatre is a history of collaborative methods and the history of collaborative methods is a women’s history” (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 5). The egalitarian values, multiplicity of voice, and the non-hierarchical structures of devising have always aligned with feminist principles. It cannot be a coincidence that the majority of key texts about devising have been written by women. In my collaborator interview with Isobel MacKinnon she said, “The process of ‘writing’ privileges a certain set of skills which are not the only set of skills required to be a storyteller” (MacKinnon). Furthering this, a script writing process privileges one
perspective, one voice, and in the history of theatre that privileged voice has been predominantly white and male. Devising practices remove the barrier of requiring a text and provide an opportunity to create a platform that supports diverse voices and artists who are necessary to the conversation.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown multiple examples of women in New Zealand who choose to create theatre from this “volatile political position,” practitioners who embrace the unknown and embed their devising process with feminist politics (Madhan). This research has championed their voices, and this is reflected in the structure of the thesis by my highlighting different interviewees and case studies within each chapter. This thesis examines in depth for the first-time, women’s contributions to devised theatre in New Zealand. It was important to me therefore, that the voices and words of my interviewees were emphasised throughout.

In Chapter Two I made visible some of the genealogy of women devising in New Zealand by discussing the relevant literature and presenting the case studies of Madeline McNamara and Kerryn Palmer and their respective devised works Demeter’s Dark Ride (2005) and Sniper (2004). This chapter takes the first step towards uncovering the rich history of women devising in New Zealand by discussing these two leading women and their ambitious work. In Chapter Three I presented the case study of MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand (2010). This was a turning point for the theatre community in Wellington, as a younger generation of devisors came together to discover, for themselves, what their modern feminist theatre could look like. They consciously chose not to research the feminist devised theatre of New Zealand’s past, because they wanted to create something new that spoke to their current experience. However, if MINGE Collective had possessed the history and knowledge from my case studies of Madeline McNamara and Kerryn Palmer, with insights such as; their models of collaborative feminist leadership and their use of radical empathy, the process for MINGE may have been less fraught. My involvement within MINGE encouraged me to pursue this research and since 2010, I have witnessed a steady resurgence in feminist devised
theatre work in New Zealand, which has paralleled a rise in feminism among younger women in general. The case study of MINGE sat alongside the analysis of my questionnaire and interviews to illustrate that many of the issues that MINGE Collective experienced, such as, an oppression of voice and devising processes full of toxic conflict, are still affecting women in devising years later.

Following this discussion, I presented three different case studies as modern exemplars of women practitioners who embed their devising process with a feminist politic. The co-existing voices within Chapter Four of Julie Nolan from Red Leap, Julia Croft, and Nina Nawalowalo from The Conch, illustrate the essential contribution of devising women to New Zealand’s theatre ecology. As discussed in Chapter Four, they are leading examples of intersectional feminist devising. Their processes are self-aware and empathetic, and their work explores important intersections of class, gender, ethnicity and race. The practice of these women highlights post-structural ideas of power, with all of them sharing their knowledge and sharing power to give women agency. Nolan, Croft, and Nawalowalo, all offer different feminist strategies that can be employed within a devising process, to create a space that is more emotionally intelligent and ethical. Without documentation of this work, it is difficult for our industry to create any kind of progress. Processes are forgotten, devised works are lost, and younger practitioners continually feel that they must build from the ground up. In this scenario, our industry becomes trapped in a “dreary cycle” as Donkin and Clement write in Upstaging Big Daddy, and “distorted representations lie unchallenged” (Donkin and Clement 2). By interviewing these women and writing about their work, I have made a significant and original contribution, creating a new field of research for New Zealand theatre studies and importantly, documenting these processes for the first time.

The primary question of this study contended with the idea that, despite a strong history of feminist devising in New Zealand, women are still often having negative experiences in devising processes. Through the qualitative research, I gathered insights and devising methods from my interviewees, and collected examples of difficult processes from the
questionnaire respondents. I then practically explored those ideas in my creative component to investigate how women’s experience in devised theatre processes in New Zealand could be improved. I discovered that a devising process that focuses on repurposing emotion, that acknowledges intersectionality, and embraces doubt, vulnerability, an empathetic partnership and a shared feminist leadership style, could indeed have a positive effect on women’s experiences. However, even with the luxury of time and the vast scope of a practice as research devising process, this was still difficult to achieve given the ephemeral and often undefined nature of devising itself; not to mention the existing power structures and gender dynamics that bleed into the rehearsal room from the outside world or become internalised by practitioners. I believe that a significant part of the issue here, is how intangible some aspects of devising processes are. In my collaborator interview with Isobel MacKinnon she described it thus:

The nature of devising is let’s start out with something, it’s not much but it’s a hunch. Half the time you don’t even know what it’s fucking called, you don’t have a title, let alone a script. So, you’re just constantly flinging yourself into the unknown. You’re taking away a lot of those scaffolds, that neat framework to work in and then constantly reinventing your process depending on who is in the room, which also constantly changes. There’s just so many unknowns. (MacKinnon)

Devising is often inherently seen as an equal and democratic way of making theatre. However, I argue that the process itself is not a utopia of theatre making, particularly because every practitioner’s process is different. Oftentimes in devising, far too much emphasis is placed on “trusting the process,” but a devising process is not a tangible thing that we can trust, there are too many variables between processes. So, instead we need to trust the practitioners who are in the devising room. A striking revelation from the questionnaire responses was that while the participants could easily recount all the so-called benefits of devising, such as: egalitarian values, multiplicity of voice and non-hierarchical structures, when they were asked to recount their negative experiences, many of them wrote about processes that were full of oppression, voices being silenced and hidden hierarchies dominating the creative space. There was a contradiction present here
between what the practitioners believed devising was supposed to be like, and how they actually felt in devising processes. As discussed in Chapter One, Heddon and Milling also deconstruct the mythic status of devised theatre in their text *Devising Performance: A Critical History*. Likewise, Jackie Smart writes in her chapter “The Feeling of Devising,” that the positive or utopian qualities of devising “can also be sources of confusion and distress” (Smart 102). I have extended this existing scholarship by placing it within a previously unstudied New Zealand context. I have combined literature about feminist devising with primary data from devising practitioners and investigated this within the practical space of an actual devising process. While some key texts on devising include case studies, as a practitioner, I wanted to push this research beyond the theoretical, past observation and discussion. By exploring these ideas through performance and inviting an audience, this research made a direct impact on a section of the Wellington theatre community. As a result of this performance there were practitioners in that Third Creative Showing audience, both women and men, who were reflecting on their own processes, their behaviour and practice. This impact, as I discussed in the previous chapter, is a key purpose of conducting practice as research. Using the empathy generator of performance, I was able to communicate this research to its intended audience and create impact.

As discussed in Chapter Five, throughout the practice as research component of my thesis, my collaborators and I investigated how women’s experiences in devising processes could be improved by exploring different feminist methodologies. Using all the collected research, we attempted to embody a potential change by experimenting inside an actual devising process. This research has proven that toxic devising environments caused by unbalanced power dynamics are a common experience in New Zealand. While this was the hypothesis that sparked my research, previously I had felt alone in this assumption, but I discovered that my collaborators and interviewees felt the same way. Consequently, the practice as research was cathartic and by using an autoethnographic approach, I was able to recognise the empirical value of our own voices and experiences. While my collaborators and I all identify as women and this informs our perspective on gendered behaviour, we were careful not to discuss the research using a gender binary, instead.
focusing on the terms masculine and feminine behaviours and acknowledging that they exist on a spectrum. While I recognize that many feminist theorists would assert that “behaviour should have no gender,” stereotypically gendered traits are still entrenched within our patriarchal society (Hoffman and Borders 48). During the practice as research we discovered that unbalanced power dynamics stemming from stereotypically masculine traits such as “arrogant,” “competitive,” and “dominant,” were more likely to create negative devising experiences. The findings from this research suggest that, to counter these toxic undercurrents, devising processes need to have even more clarity around communication, leadership structures and process frameworks. Practitioners are also much more vulnerable within a devising process as they are likely to be offering up their own life experiences and stories as material, whereas a playscript, in a more traditional theatre process, provides a clear dramaturgical structure and a mediator between character and performer. Therefore, emotion and empathy need to be embraced within a devising process and not suppressed. While these ideas are important for any creative process, the uncertainty and intangible nature of devising means that they are even more crucial in a collaborative process.

One of the key discoveries from the practice as research, was that by using all the qualitative data and Shari J. Stenberg’s chapter on repurposing emotion from her text Repurposing Composition: Feminist Interventions for a Neoliberal Age (2015), we were able to create a devising process where emotion was valued as opposed to being something that needs to be controlled. According to Stenberg, “feminist scholars argue for a reconception of emotion as a dominant cultural category that shapes the way we experience ourselves and the world” (Stenberg 48). Repurposing emotion and embracing it changed the culture of our process and meant that we were able to see vulnerability and doubt as strengths rather than weaknesses. We found this to be essential when working in a process with so many unknowns. In her collaborator interview Isobel MacKinnon reiterated this and said, “I think it is good and honest and emotionally intelligent to be anxious and insecure in the face of that [the unknown]. If not a pleasant experience, I think the inverse of it would be to go from insecurity to anxiety, which magically calcifies into ego and unwarranted
arrogance” (MacKinnon). In *Theatre and Feeling*, Erin Hurley writes that, “We attend the theatre to feel *more*, even if it doesn’t make us feel *better*; we go to have our emotional life acknowledged and patterned, managed into coherent storylines, and exposed in all its tumult (or its banality)” (Hurley 77). Audiences expect theatre to be a “realm of active emotion,” therefore, as practitioners, it would be counterintuitive to suppress emotion in a rehearsal room (Hurley xiv).

Another key discovery was found in the application of the primary care practice model of Empathetic Partnership to a devising process. We found we were able to embed our process with radical empathy and compassionate honesty. While not designed for theatre making, the six key elements of this model (Reflection, Environment, Language, Knowledge, Partnership, Empathy), as discussed in Chapters One and Five, can work together to create a devising process framework that is emotionally intelligent and emotionally ethical. Additionally, Flemmer et al. state that Empathetic Partnership was “influenced by the concepts of New Zealand nursing’s cultural safety,” meaning that this framework sits within intersectional feminist theory (Flemmer et al. 545). Cultural safety encourages nursing practitioners to, “recognize and understand the inherent patient-provider power imbalance and to recognize and honor the patient’s culture(s)” (Flemmer et al 546). Using cultural safety within a devising process enables practitioners to identify the existing intersections within a collective and acknowledge the inherent privilege associated with some of them. As I discussed in Chapter Five, our Empathetic Partnership framework did slip towards the end of our process as the pressure of time and need for a product took over. This meant that we stopped listening and partially ignored the emotion and anxiety that was present, because the fear of not producing something drove us into action. However, by taking so much care at the beginning of our process to establish the elements of Empathetic Partnership, we were able to address this conflict with honesty and empathy. Flemmer et al. conclude by stating that, “Using the Empathetic Partnership framework in practice provides the opportunity of inclusion, acceptance, and the development of partnerships between clients and NPs” (Flemmer et al. 550). I argue that this framework is not just applicable to primary care practice and
would in fact be useful in many collaborative environments, including that of devised theatre.

These two key discoveries enabled my collaborators and I to create a process that felt starkly different to any other devising process that we had previously experienced. While it was not without problems or setbacks, the culture that we built in that room over six months was full of empathy and a compassionate honesty. This enabled us to build trust easily, look after one another, resolve conflict, and ensure that no one’s voice was being silenced. However, I do not want to give the impression that simply by valuing emotion and using Empathetic Partnership, that a devising process will be perfect. It requires a huge amount of self-awareness, knowledge of our own devising history, and constant practice to change the way we view and participate within collaborative processes. Throughout the creative research my collaborators and I tried to embody this change, and if this research achieves anything I hope that it may inspire other devising practitioners to do the same. Overall, the thesis demonstrates that the lack of knowledge about our own devising theatre history, and the scarcity of documentation in our industry means that it is difficult for practitioners to learn from one another, to progress the conversation, and to create devised theatre spaces that are free from oppression.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis has demonstrated that women working in New Zealand theatre are underrepresented in our history and discourse, especially within devised theatre where they have made a considerable contribution. I was driven to write about women devising because that was my experience as a practitioner and I believed that, if we had more knowledge and documentation about the history of women devising in New Zealand, that it would help practitioners today. I hope that this thesis is just the beginning and that it has the potential to lead to future research.
This project became more ambitious after analysing the questionnaire data and discovering how many women were having negative experiences in devising processes. I moved beyond simply conducting a historiography of women devising in New Zealand. I wanted this research to be active, to make a difference. Consequently, this thesis is not a complete history of women in devised theatre in New Zealand, rather, it is the first contribution to this emerging field. An important step towards future research, would be a more comprehensive investigation into the history of devising in New Zealand. As I have discussed, New Zealand is distinctive as a remote, borderless and colonised nation, meaning that devising methods and influences have to travel here and are then adapted. Theatre in New Zealand is unique and often referred to as hybrid or syncretic theatre, which is defined by Christopher Balme as “theatrical products which result from the interplay between the Western theatrico-dramatic tradition and the indigenous performance forms of a postcolonial culture” (Balme 180). Our Pacific multiculturalism with Māori, Pasifika and Western influences, means that New Zealand devising has distinctive qualities making it worthy of further study, and relevant to international debates about devising.

Another key thread of future research that I recommend be undertaken is around gender in New Zealand theatre, specifically in non-traditional ways of making. A study to investigate gender representation, similar to the one conducted by The Guardian that I discussed in Chapter Three, would be beneficial for practitioners, producing partners and funding bodies. Having more solid data regarding where our industry sits in terms of gender representation would enable theatres and organisations to set achievable goals to reach equality in our industry. There have been a small number of studies investigating women playwrights in our theatres, such as; Playmarket’s study of what was being performed in major producing theatres between 2011-2015, Colleen Cleary’s 1993 MA thesis, “Women Writing for Theatre in New Zealand in the 1980s,” Susan Dunlop’s 2002 MA thesis, “The Role of Women in the Culture and Context of a Developing New Zealand Theatre 1920-1950,” and Hannah McKie’s PhD thesis from 2014, “A "theatre of unease: Three stage plays and a critical survey of women's playwriting in New Zealand between
1920 and 2013.” However, any new research needs to go beyond this playwright focus and recognise alternative theatre making practices which are widespread within the New Zealand theatre industry.

My final recommendation is that not only does the documentation of New Zealand theatre need to improve, but as an industry, we also need to work towards a more knowledgeable discourse about New Zealand theatre and gender. My recommendation is the creation of a not-for-profit organisation, modelled on WIFT NZ: Women in Film and Television Inc, that would focus on research and education about theatre and gender and offer professional development and support for women in New Zealand theatre. This could be achieved through the existing Magdalena Aotearoa, which links with the worldwide Magdalena Project and has in the past, done much of this work. However, Magdalena Aotearoa would need significantly more funding and support from Creative New Zealand and from major producing theatres and practitioners all over New Zealand. With this additional support, the organisation could grow and modernise and create a more accessible conversation regarding theatre and gender. Another step towards growing this documentation and discourse could be for an organisation such as Playmarket to publish a companion booklet to their existing *Group-devised work: The Rights of Co-Writers, Devisers, Co-Creators, Actor/Writers & co*. This additional booklet on gender in the rehearsal room, could include some of my own key findings along with methods and advice on how to run feminist collaborative spaces that avoid unhealthy and unproductive power dynamics. Theatre is already an ephemeral artform, without more documentation and discourse as I have suggested, the work of women in devising could become lost to the annals of history.

### 6.3 EPILOGUE

It is my hope that this research will be valuable to theatre practitioners as well as scholars, or indeed anyone who has experienced a collaborative process where they were not
listened to or validated. The issues addressed in this thesis are not just endemic to devising rooms. The women who responded to my questionnaire and interviews spoke about having their voices ignored, feeling doubtful and feeling like they did not belong. These problems are however everywhere, in offices, schools, government, in the media, and meeting rooms all over the country. By studying what happens in the collaborative environment of a devising room, perhaps this could influence wider society. It is difficult to overcome these problems and I personally have battled them throughout this research project. However, I think if we can embrace doubt and vulnerability as positive feminine forces, if we can be conscious of each other and how we are practicing using radical empathy and compassionate honesty, then we can create collaborative devising spaces that are free from oppression, spaces where everyone will be seen and heard.

Let the statues crumble.
You have always been the place.

You are a woman who can build it yourself.
You were born to build.

Extract from *The Type* by Sarah Kay


Croft, Julia. Personal interview. 24 October 2017.


MacAndrew, Ruby. “Wellington theatre director Nina Nawalowalo scoops top prize at

MacKinnon, Isobel. Personal interview. 2 May 2018.

Madhan, Nisha. Personal interview. 23 October 2017.


McCracken, Karin. Personal interview. 31 May 2017.


McNamara, Fiona. Personal interview. 21 April 2015.

McNamara, Madeline. Personal interview. 6 July 2015.


Nolan, Julie. Personal interview. 16 August 2015.


O’Loughlin, Claire. Personal interview. 11 April 2015.

Palmer, Kerryn. Personal interview. 22 April 2015.


Perry, Mia. “Devising theatre and consenting bodies in the classroom.” *Cartographies of*


Randerson, Jo. Personal interview. 7 May 2015.


Reid, Stella. Personal interview. 9 November 2017.


Routledge, 2002.

Schirle, Joan. “Potholes in the Road to Devising.” Theatre Topics, vol. 15, no.1, 2005, pp. 91-102.


Te Wiki, Trae. Personal interview. 18 May 2017.


*University of Cambridge.* “Study finds that genes play a role in empathy.” 12 Mar. 2018.


Warrier, Varun, Roberto Toro, & Bhismadev Chakrabarti. “Genome-wide analyses of self-reported empathy: correlations with autism, schizophrenia, and anorexia nervosa.” *Translational Psychiatry*, vol. 8, no. 25, 2018. <www.nature.com/articles/s41398-017-0082-6>


Yonge, Jane. Personal interview. 6 August 2017.

Young, Christine. “Feminist Pedagogy at Play in the University Rehearsal Room.”
APPENDIX A: ETHICS REQUIREMENTS
DEVISING WOMEN: WOMEN IN DEVEISED THEATRE IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Information Sheet for Questionnaire Participants

You are invited to participate in a questionnaire for “Devising Women: Women in Devised Theatre in New Zealand in the 21st Century.” Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate and thank you for considering this project.

What is the aim of this project?
This project is being undertaken in order to complete a Master of Arts by Thesis degree in Theatre at Victoria University of Wellington. This thesis will investigate the methods and dramaturgical models of our women practitioners currently working in devised theatre in New Zealand and explore the reasons why there are fewer female driven devised productions. This research will employ specific productions and companies since the year 2000 as case studies, along with a questionnaire survey of practitioners and audiences, and interviews with local and international companies.

What types of participants are being sought?
This study aims to survey those involved in the New Zealand theatre industry, specifically those involved in devised theatre in order to gain their perspectives on gender and theatre.

What will participants be asked to do?
In this survey, you will be asked to complete questions about your own background and level of experience in the theatre and questions about how gender operates within devised theatre. It will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?
While filling out the questionnaire you may choose to withdraw by not completing it and closing the browser window. Once you have submitted your answers to this questionnaire however, you will not be able to withdraw from the project.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. All questions are completely anonymous; no personal information is requested or expected. Access to the data compiled
from the questionnaire survey will be limited to the student researcher and the supervisor of the project. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential. The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned above will be able to gain access to it. At the completion of the project all the data will be destroyed. The results may be published and will be available within Victoria University of Wellington. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

This project has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington’s Human Ethics Committee.

If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact:

Hannah Banks  
PhD Student Researcher  

Dr. Lori Leigh  
Supervisor

A/Prof David O’Donnell  
Supervisor

lori.leigh@vuw.ac.nz  
david.odonnell@vuw.ac.nz

027 368 4481
DEVISING WOMEN: WOMEN IN DEvised THEATRE IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE 21st CENTURY

Information Sheet for Audience Participants

You are invited to participate in a survey and discussion for “Devising Women: Women in Devised Theatre in New Zealand in the 21st Century” after viewing the performance and participating in the workshop as part of the PhD’s Creative Component. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate and thank you for considering this project.

What is the aim of this project?

This project is being undertaken in order to complete a Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre at Victoria University of Wellington. This research examines women’s roles in devised theatre, and why their work is seldom written about in the New Zealand theatre industry and academia. I aim to develop a new field of research by investigating the impact that women theatre practitioners have had on devised theatre in New Zealand and to simultaneously develop a new model for feminist devising in New Zealand in the 21st Century. This research will be conducted through interviews, surveys and case studies. I will also include a creative component consisting of a performance and workshop, where I will research how feminist methodologies can inform the devising process in the rehearsal room and in front of an audience.

What types of participants are being sought?

This survey aims to question the audiences who see the performance and participate in the workshop.

What will participants be asked to do?

In this survey, you will be asked to complete questions about your own background and level of experience in the theatre and questions about the presentation that you have seen and participated in. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Following this there will also be a group discussion that will be audio recorded.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

While filling out the survey you may choose to withdraw by not completing it and not handing it in to the student researcher. Once you have submitted your answers, you will not
be able to withdraw from the project. If you do not wish to participate in the post-presentation discussion, you are most welcome to leave before this begins.

**What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. All questions are completely anonymous; no personal information is requested or expected. Participants’ names will not be included in the recorded audio to keep this discussion as anonymous as possible. Access to the data compiled from the questionnaire survey will be limited to the student researcher and the supervisors of the project. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned above will be able to gain access to it. At the completion of the project all the data will be destroyed. The results may be published and will be available within Victoria University of Wellington. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

**If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact:**

Hannah Banks  
*PhD Student Researcher*  
hannah.banks@vuw.ac.nz  
(04) 463 6899

Dr. Lori Leigh  
*Supervisor*  
lori.leigh@vuw.ac.nz  
(04) 463 6712

A/Prof David O’Donnell  
*Supervisor*  
david.odonnell@vuw.ac.nz  
(04) 463 6828

**Human Ethics Committee information**

This project has been approved by Victoria University of Wellington’s Human Ethics Committee. The Ethics Approval reference number for this project is: 0000023294.

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convener: Associate Professor Susan Corbett.  
Email susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 5480.
You are invited to participate in interviews for "Devising Women: Women in Devised Theatre in New Zealand in the 21st Century." Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate and thank you for considering this project.

**What is the aim of this project?**
This project is being undertaken in order to complete a Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre at Victoria University of Wellington. This research examines women’s roles in devised theatre, and why their work is seldom written about in the New Zealand theatre industry and academia. I aim to develop a new field of research by investigating the impact that women theatre practitioners have had on devised theatre in New Zealand and to simultaneously develop a new model for feminist devising in New Zealand in the 21st Century. This research will be conducted through interviews, surveys and case studies. I will also include a creative component consisting of a performance and workshop, where I will research how feminist methodologies can inform the devising process in the rehearsal room and in front of an audience.

**What types of participants are being sought?**
Interviews will be sought from key participants from the selected case studies and other high profile members of the devising community in New Zealand’s theatre industry. I will also be interviewing my fellow devisors who are involved in the Creative Component.

**What will participants be asked to do?**
As a key informant, you would be invited to participate in an interview exploring aspects of the research objectives identified above. You would have a chance to freely offer your comments and opinions on issues you see as relevant to this study. The interview can be conducted at a pre-agreed time and location of your choice. It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately half an hour to one hour of your time, and it will be taped and transcribed. With your express permission your transcript will then be used as provocation and material to create a performance and workshop to fulfil the creative component of this PhD project.

If you wish your name to remain confidential in the published results, this project will give you that option. For example you may choose to use a pseudonym or only be referred to by
role or association with an organisation rather than by name. Confidentiality will be attempted to be maintained throughout the development, presentation and publishing of the research but you may be able to be identified by the projects you have been involved with.

Can the participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?
You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time up until the 1st August 2016.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?
You will be asked questions to express your views exploring aspects of the research. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been precisely determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. If the line of questioning develops in a way that you do not feel comfortable with you are reminded that you have the right to decline to answer any particular questions and you may also withdraw from the interview at any stage.

Access to the data from key informant interviews will be strictly limited to the student researcher, her fellow devisors for the creative component, and the supervisors of the project. Participants will receive a transcript of their interview for their review. Any quotations used in either the finished written thesis or the creative component will be from this transcript and will only be used with your permission.

You will be invited to attend all the development showings of the creative component before the final presentation to ensure that you are comfortable with the way this work has been presented. At the completion of the project all the raw data will be destroyed. The results may be published/recorded and will be available within Victoria University of Wellington. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

If you have questions at any time about the interview or the procedures, you may contact:

Hannah Banks  
PhD Student Researcher  
hannah.banks@vuw.ac.nz  
(04) 463 6899

Dr. Lori Leigh  
Supervisor  
lori.leigh@vuw.ac.nz  
(04) 463 6712

A/Prof David O’Donnell  
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Email susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 5480.
DEVISING WOMEN: WOMEN IN DEVISED THEATRE IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Consent Form for Interview Participants

You are invited to participate in interviews for "Devising Women: Women in Devised Theatre in New Zealand in the 21st Century." Please read this consent form carefully before deciding whether or not to participate and thank you for considering this project.

Procedures
If you agree to participate in this research, I will conduct an interview with you at a time and location of your choice. The interview will involve questions relating to the research and possible projects that you may have been involved with. It should last about 30-60 mins. With your permission, I will record and take notes during the interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide. If you choose not to be recorded, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being recorded but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or if you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

With your express permission your transcript will then be used as provocation and material to create a performance and workshop to fulfill the creative component of this PhD project.

Confidentiality
Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names will not be used unless you give explicit permission for this below.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will keep any physical copies of the transcript in a locked filing cabinet and any digital copies will be password protected.

When the research is completed, all recordings and notes from the interviews will be destroyed.

Rights
Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. Participants will receive a transcript of their interview for their review by the 1st September. Any quotations used in either the finished written thesis or the creative component will be from this transcript and will only be used with your permission. You are then free to withdraw from the project up until the 30th September 2016.
If you have questions at any time about the interview or the procedures, you may contact:

Hannah Banks  
PhD Student Researcher  
hannah.banks@vuw.ac.nz  
(04) 463 6899

Dr. Lori Leigh  
Supervisor  
lori.leigh@vuw.ac.nz  
(04) 463 6712

A/Prof David O’Donnell  
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(04) 463 6828

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If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convener: Associate Professor Susan Corbett.

Email susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz or telephone +64-4-463 5480.

CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below.

_________________________________________________  ______________________
Participant’s Name (please print)  Date

If you agree to allow your name or other identifying information to be included in all final written reports and publications resulting from this research, please sign and date below.

_________________________________________________  ______________________
Participant’s Signature  Date

If you agree to allow your name or other identifying information to be included in all final creative presentations and performances resulting from this research, please sign and date below.

_________________________________________________  ______________________
Participant’s Signature  Date
APPENDIX B: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This project involved a flexible and open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which were asked were not precisely determined in advance but depended on the way in which the interview developed. However, I went into each interview with the same base questions. These were a combination of more general questions about devising and specific questions about the case study.

- What is your definition of “devising” or “devised theatre”?
- Why do you practice devising as a creative process? What drew you to it, or how did you discover it? Do you feel any particular reason for pursuing or choosing it in favour of “traditional” approaches?
- Do you feel like devising in general has any significant benefits or limitations?
- How did/does devising challenge you or push you out of your comfort zone?
- Do you think contemporary devising in New Zealand could be an opportunity for women’s self-representation or a feminist strategy in the current theatre climate?
- Can you remember the initial ideas behind this production? What made you want to make this work?
- Can you describe what your devising process on this production was like?
- What was the most powerful or memorable part of this process?
- What was the hardest or most stressful part of the process?
- What did you take away from this process and want to bring to future projects?
- Can you describe the dramaturgical model for this production? Do you think it followed any kind of feminist dramaturgy? Or made a feminist statement?
- How was this production received? Do you think the production achieved what it set out to do?
APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY
1. How many years have you been involved in some way in the New Zealand theatre industry?
   a) Less than a year
   b) 1-3 years
   c) 4-7 years
   d) 8-10 years
   e) 10-15 years
   f) 15-20 years
   g) 20+ years

2. What gender do you identify with?
   a) Female
   b) Male
   c) Prefer not to answer

3. What title best describes you? (tick as many that apply)
   a) Performer
   b) Director
   c) Writer
   d) Designer
   e) Technician
   f) Producer
   g) Stage Manager
   h) Reviewer
   i) Audience Member
   j) Venue/Theatre Management

4. If you are involved in making theatre, are you generally more involved in scripted or devised theatre work?
   a) Scripted
   b) Devised
   c) Even amount of both
   d) Unsure

5. What is your highest level of qualification?
   a) NCEA Level 3 or School leaving qualification
   b) Undergraduate Degree
   c) PGDip
   d) HONS
   e) MA
d) PHD  
e) Other (Please specify)

6. Do you think there are balanced numbers representing both genders onstage (characters, performers etc.) in the New Zealand theatre industry?  
a) Yes  
b) No  
c) Unsure

7. If you answered No to the previous question, why do you think that is?

8. Do you think there are balanced numbers representing both genders offstage (producers, directors, playwrights, reviewers, artistic directors of companies etc.) in the New Zealand theatre industry?  
a) Yes  
b) No  
c) Unsure

9. If you answered No to the previous question, why do you think that is?

10. Throughout your theatrical career approximately how many male directors have you had direct you for a devised project?  
a) 0-2  
b) 3-5  
c) 6-8  
d) 8 +  
e) N/A (not applicable)

11. Throughout your theatrical career approximately how many female directors have you had direct you for a devised project?  
a) 0-2  
b) 3-5  
c) 6-8  
d) 8 +  
e) N/A (not applicable)

The following questions ask about your experience of devising and your views of how gender may or may not affect your devising work. You are invited to give examples from your own experience when answering these questions.

12. What draws you to devising as a way of working?

13. Do you think that your gender has presented particular CHALLENGES or DIFFICULTIES in relation to your devising work? Please tell us in what way.
14. Do you think that your gender has presented particular OPPORTUNITIES or ADVANTAGES in relation to your devising work? Please tell us in what way.

15. This survey is investigating the extent to which contemporary devising in New Zealand could be an opportunity for women’s self-representation or a feminist strategy in the current theatre climate. Please could you give us your views on this question?
THIRD CREATIVE SHOWING ONLINE AUDIENCE SURVEY

1. Age: ____________________________

2. Gender: __________________________

3. How many years have you been involved in the New Zealand theatre industry?
   a) I’m not involved
   b) Less than a year
   c) 1-3 years
   d) 4-7 years
   e) 8-10 years
   f) 10-15 years
   g) 15-20 years
   h) 20 + years

4. What title best describes you? (tick as many that apply)
   a) Actor
   b) Director
   c) Writer
   d) Designer
   e) Producer
   f) Stage Manager
   g) Reviewer
   h) Audience Member
   i) Student
   j) Academic

5. If you are involved in making theatre, are you generally more involved in scripted or devised theatre work?
   a) Scripted
   b) Devised
   c) Even amount of both
   d) Unsure

6. What is your highest level of qualification?
   a) NCEA Level 3 or School leaving qualification
   b) Undergraduate Degree
   c) PGDip
   c) HONS
c) MA
d) PHD
e) Other (Please specify)

7. What was revealed to you through the gender roles that you saw portrayed throughout the piece?

8. Did you notice and can you describe any moments where the portrayed gender roles fell into stereotype?

9. Can you identify and explain anything you saw in the performance that felt or looked different to other devised works that you have seen?

10. Did you learn anything new that you may be able to apply to your process? If you did, what was it and how/why will it be useful to you?

11. Can you identify anything from this workshop that was different to other processes that you may have been involved with? How was it different?
APPENDIX D: LIST OF KEY NEW ZEALAND THEATRE TERMS/PROMENIES/PLACES

Basement Theatre – Established in 2008, Basement is Auckland’s home for emerging artists. It is a charitable trust and full of original New Zealand work with world premiere’s making up half of its programme.

BATS Theatre – A not-for-profit performance venue established in 1989 in Wellington. It was renovated in 2014 and now has three performance spaces. The majority of productions staged there are New Zealand works.

Circa Theatre – Major producing theatre established in 1976, Circa Theatre is a professional theatre in Wellington. The Circa Council curates an annual season of work in its two performance spaces.

Court Theatre – Major professional producing theatre in Christchurch, established in 1971.

Creative New Zealand – The main government funding body for arts in New Zealand. Formerly known as The Arts Council.

Downstage Theatre – Downstage Theatre which was the longest running theatre in New Zealand was established in Wellington in 1964. It closed in 2013 due to a lack of adequate and stable funding.

Hannah Playhouse – The theatre building that housed Downstage and is still available as a venue for hire.

hui – (noun) gathering, meeting, assembly, seminar, conference.

kaupapa Māori - Māori approach, Māori topic, Māori customary practice, Māori institution, Māori agenda, Māori principles, Māori ideology - a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society.

mahī – (noun) work, job, employment, trade (work), practice, occupation, activity, exercise, operation, function.

Māori – (modifier) native, indigenous, fresh (of water), belonging to Aotearoa/New Zealand, freely, without restraint, without ceremony, clear, intelligible.

mana – (noun) prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object.

Pākehā – New Zealander of European descent - probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
Silo Theatre – Established in 1997, Silo Theatre is a leading producer of contemporary work in New Zealand and curates annual seasons of work.

STAB Commission – STAB originated in 1995 from BATS Theatre’s desire to initiate a commission that allowed theatre artists to experiment in a supportive environment. For the past few years, with the awesome support of Creative New Zealand, BATS has been able to offer:
- One major STAB commission of between $50,000 and $65,000
- One STAB LAB commission of between $10,000 – $15,000

Taki Rua – Established in 1983, Taki Rua produce, commission and develop theatre with a distinctively Māori voice.

The Depot Theatre - (later renamed Taki Rua) opened in Wellington in 1983 with the aim of producing solely New Zealand Work.

The Treaty of Waitangi – New Zealand’s founding document. It takes its name from the place where it was first signed on 6th February 1840. The treaty is an agreement, in Māori and English, that was made between the British Crown and about 540 Māori chiefs.

The Wellington Theatre Awards – Formerly known as the Chapman Tripp Theatre Awards they are an annual awards ceremony celebrating theatre in Wellington New Zealand. They were established in 1992, and since 2015 they have been called The Wellington Theatre Awards.

tino rangatiratanga – (noun) self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy. The idea of tino rangatiratanga is that Māori are in charge of their land and resources and have authority and independence over their affairs. This was guaranteed to them under article two of The Treaty of Waitangi.

wāhine – (modifier) female, women, feminine.

whakamā – (verb) to be ashamed, shy, bashful, embarrassed.

whakapapa – (noun) genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent

whakawhanaungatanga – (noun) process of establishing relationships, relating well to others.

whatungarongaro – (verb) to disappear
APPENDIX E: LIST OF INTERVIEWEE DEFINITIONS OF DEVISED THEATRE
LIST OF INTERVIEWEE DEFINITIONS OF DEvised THEATRE

I began every interview by asking my interviewees: How do you define devised theatre? This appendix is the collection of every definition that they gave me. I have included them in the thesis here to demonstrate the variability and complexity of devising in New Zealand.

_Eleanor Bishop_
Obviously, there are many definitions. For me it usually refers to a process of making performance which doesn’t begin with a written play. It could end in a written play, or still heavily be led by a text-based process but it is a process that doesn’t start with a written play.

_Julia Croft_
Devised theatre is a disruption in some ways – I mean disruption already labels it but whatever – a disruption of established theatrical hierarchies. Where even if there is a writer in the room, my understanding of devised theatre is that the authorship is shared between a variety of practitioners. I’ve worked with performers, a director, a writer and a sound designer, but their responsibilities are not limited to those roles. Rather there’s a sense of the authorship of the work being shared. I mean in the utopia, it’s shared evenly between those people. I guess there’s a thing of writing or authoring through means other than just text, sharing the modes of communication through text but also through body and through image, projection or sound or whatever. The content, the “narrative,” that narrative is being held in other ways than just words. And it’s a sense of it being built in real time, rather than someone sitting in a room and writing and then giving it to someone. And rather than something is created and then 6 months later, or a year later, or 400 years later, it ends up in a rehearsal room, rather the content is being built. And I think all those elements that are telling the story, the bodies, the image, the text and sound and whatever, they’re all happening simultaneously. In a perfect world. So, all those elements of theatre, they need each other.

_Isobel MacKinnon_
My definition of devised theatre is a process of generating performance work that does not begin with the written word, or that does not begin with a script. It’s a process of generating a script or a score that happens with artists in the rehearsal room rather than
with a writer at a computer. I use devising as a creative process because it feels like using the tools of the thing that I’m hunting for. If I was to sit at a computer and write down hypothetical ideas about what a couple of actors might do in relationship to each other, it just seems very odd to me, when what you can do is get the performers and put them together and see what they do. And you can instantly see what is compelling and fascinating and what isn’t. And then you go with the fascinating compelling stuff. For me devising is working with the tools of performance, which are people, live bodies in a space, then using that in order to generate performance. So, devising, or making, the way that I make work, allows either me to speak from my own ground that I stand on through my politic and my identity. Or use my making practice as a platform to support voices that are more necessary to the conversation, artists that don’t necessarily tend towards that script centric process.

**Nisha Madhan**

I’m starting to be suspicious of the word devising. I feel like it suffers from a general attitude towards it. Something like, if it’s devised it mustn’t be very good. I think devising is exactly the same as writing. I don’t know why the author has so much reverence. Devising is co-authorship. The only difference I can see is that if something is devised it’s often not written down in the tradition of a script. But that doesn’t mean that a devised show can’t be written exactly like script - so why is there such a divide between scripted theatre and devised theatre. I don’t get it. It’s all the same to me.

**Karin McCracken**

My definition of devising would be a collaborative process to make theatre in which the theatre is created without a foundational text, or maybe it is a foundational text but it’s without a script. And the process is highly collaborative.

**Fiona McNamara**

I think of devised theatre as being distinct from theatre that has a writer. Although they’re not mutually exclusive, obviously you can have a writer in a devised process, I would think of devised theatre that happens, that is created in the rehearsal room physically and on the room floor, rather than written on a piece of paper by a writer in a room. But I think there is often some mixing of those two.

**Madeline McNamara**

I guess it’s maybe a director, a leader or something, coming to a group of people with an idea that you are pretty fired up about, or researched, or interested and curious about. It’s a series of ways of approaching that and then bringing that to a group of collaborators that you love or whose work that you love, and a lot of different areas, cross-disciplinary
areas, and working to engage them with your vision and bring them into a working relationship. That you then collectively experiment with, explore, develop and then ultimately create something that is the sum of all those parts.

**Nina Nawalowalo**
I think devising is constructing and making one’s own story in whatever form and putting it into a theatrical context to communicate that with an audience. From my perspective I work very collaboratively, and I draw into the room different artists, actors, designers and so forth, and we go on a journey that’s collaborative from the beginning to do with how one creates a story in that sense. I love the full creative team to be a part of that from the very beginning. I think ways of storytelling are so broad, but I mean devising as in taking a theme or a story and then going on a creative process and having an outcome where you place that in front of an audience.

**Julie Nolan**
I define it as creating things from things and ideas that work towards a finished product like a physical script, as opposed to starting with a script. I tend to define it a little bit about what it’s not. We don’t start with a script, we start with ideas, themes, people in the space, and from there we generate the work, we find the goal to then create the piece and the work. In a nutshell I would say it’s making stuff up really. As opposed to beginning with a definite thing.

**Claire O’Loughlin**
It’s very collaborative in terms of creation together, except that collaboration only goes so far. There’s also heaps of shaping and dependence on your company’s pre-established working process and structure, and how you do that is unique to your company I guess. Maybe after a certain point one person takes over and becomes a more traditional idea of ‘director’ and shapes the whole thing. I feel that devising requires heaps of diligence and heaps of memory. You have to remember everything, and that is exhausting. You create something playfully and, in the moment, and then you think “oh that was great” and you want to do it again, but if you’re not used to the process, so often it’s gone. But the more you do it, the more you actually figure out how to remember, and develop a self-reflective mind. You begin to be able to watch yourself and process what you’re doing as you’re doing it.

**Kerryn Palmer**
It’s a contentious thing isn’t it? For me devising is all about the collaboration. It’s all about getting a group together to make a work and everyone has equal part in how that work comes about. It’s not the traditional written by a writer, directed and then acted by actors.
who don’t have any input into it. It’s a collaboration between the technical elements and the actors and director, and also the writer. And it’s starting from something that isn’t a piece of written text already, so it’s starting from an idea, or a piece of music, or a picture. And a lot of people are involved in that beginning process. That’s kind of what devised is for me.

**Jo Randerson**

I think that in a way all theatre is devised because all theatre is about creating something where there was not previously something. But there seems to have been, as what happens with history and humanity, as with certain precedents get build up and come to be accepted, so the main model that we have followed is that the script is what is known at the beginning of the process and then you could say that everything else is devised off the script. People devise the costumes, people devise the lighting and sound off that one known entity. But in a way, writers devise the script, it just ended up in a different format. But people seem to see devised theatre as anything that doesn’t start from a script, even though a script may well be an end point.

**Stella Reid**

I would define devising as simply more than one writer. That’s pretty loose, but I’ve had the opportunity to work on [a production] which is definitely written down, but there’s more than one writer. And although it was a very different process in terms of devising, I was working with a bunch of white men who really like to have a really strong offer and it’s about politics, so they have a lot of facts before they enter the room, but it was definitely still devised. So that’s what I reckon, more than one writer. When friends of mine don’t understand what devised theatre is, I tell them that it’s like how nine people wrote “Drunk In Love.” And so many people are like, ‘Oh Beyonce doesn’t write her own songs!’ But like no, it just takes a huge collaboration to write a song that fucking good.

**Sophie Roberts**

I’ve had various relationships to that word [devising] and it’s become a word that really annoys me. I guess because I feel like the more I work, the more I feel like it’s all kind of the same thing. And maybe that’s because I started out doing more devising so it’s the basis of my practice, but it feels like I apply the same process whether it’s scripted or not scripted. It’s always a process of invention, it’s just that sometimes you’ve got more clues than others. And I think because I treat scripts sort of like a blank– like I tend to ignore stage directions and stuff like that anyway. So, I don’t know how I would define devised work. I guess I would define it as work authored in collaboration.
**Meg Rollandi**
I would say that devising for me is the process of creating a performance, and that’s maybe a broad understanding or definition in itself of what performance is or could be. Traditional theatre performance, or dance work or some kind of performance art. Where it’s based on working with other people together in a room looking at ideas, perhaps a range of found texts, rather than just working straight from a script.

**Trae Te Wiki**
I guess it’s like an open space where everyone is collaborating. There’s no specific role attached, well unless you have that conversation that there are. It’s quite a fluid model I suppose. Based on provocations or bigger ideas in my experience anyway, and then really connected to your own personal experience.

**Jane Yonge**
Devised theatre is work that is imagined and created by a group of collaborators.
APPENDIX F: SCRIPTS OF CREATIVE SHOWINGS
CREATIVE SHOWING TWO PERFORMANCE SCRIPT

As the audience enters there is already chalk on the floor. Our contract/agreement/promise with each other is written around the outside of the space. Inside on the left are all of our visual representations of devising processes. During the performance we organically add to the floor with chalk to reflect live on the performance process.

Layered voices

We begin with a live body on stage (HB). They start reciting Aston’s “Finding a voice” which continues throughout this segment.

A recorded voice over the PA system begins. Someone speaking a survey response.

A second performer (KM) enters and starts to use a loop pedal or some other recording device. They record themselves saying something which then gets repeated and built upon. Umms and errs, confused sentences.

We sit with just this for a bit.

A second voice is added through the PA system. More survey responses, this time their voice might sound altered, higher pitch or different speed.

A third performer (IM) enters and chooses to write with chalk rather than speak.

A third voice is added through the PA system.

We sit with just this for a bit.

A fourth performer (TTW) enters with a microphone and speaks survey responses.

A fourth voice is added through the PA system.

Everyone starts to build.

Heaps of voices now coming through the PA, they are distorted and strange.

Voices build to a cacophony and then cuts out suddenly.

There could be a moment here to reflect and write on the floor.

Jane Game 2.0

KM and IM step out from the sides like full on game show hosts. They are super kiwi/australian bloke types with gender neutral names…
IM: Hi! I’m Alex and this is my co-host Sam!

KM: Gidday guys!

KM & IM: Welcome to The Role Is Right!

KM & IM throw either bags, boxes of props and costumes or they slide costume racks out at HB and TTW. HB and TTW put on each costume over top of the previous ones until they are covered in the weight of these shitty female roles. At first HB and TTW are really trying to play these roles and do them justice.

KM: First up we have Holly from Con!

TTW runs forward putting on a crop top and sunglasses.

KM: Holly is young and attractive. A femme fatale. She “complicates” the relationship between the male characters when she arrives on the scene.

TTW looks a little uncomfortable at that last description.

IM: Kerryn Bell from Death and the Dreamlife of Elephants!

HB runs forward putting on grey jacket and carrying a satchel.

IM: Kerryn is 20 years old, a student at university. She is floated as a possible love interest for the lead male character but then downgraded to just being his friend.

HB looks a little uncomfortable at that last description.

KM: Louise from Paper Sky!

TTW runs forward putting on overalls.

KM: Louise is the girl next door. She’s a kooky manic pixie dream girl and the love interest for the main male character.

IM: Moira from Foreskin’s Lament!

HB runs forward putting on an office dress, glasses and carrying a handbag. HB and TTW start trying to gently fight back from now.

IM: Moira is a lawyer. She’s elegant and 25-30. She is in Act II only.

HB: She doesn’t get to be in Act I?

IM: No, women don’t play rugby. Moira arrives at the party and argues with the men. She basically tells them that they’re all terrible. She fights with her boyfriend and then leaves.

KM: Susan from Sydney Bridge Upside Down!

TTW runs forward putting on a cardigan, carrying a camera and lipstick.
KM: Susan is a nubile girl next door.

*TTW looks disgusted at “nubile” but starts putting on lipstick.*

KM: She is the object of desire for the main male character and she watches the action through a camera.

TTW: Does she get to be a part of the action?

KM: Not really.

*TTW reluctantly takes a photo.*

IM: *Beryl from Glide Time!*

*HB runs forward putting on a cardigan and carrying a mug.*

IM: Beryl is early to mid 30s. Stout but not unattractive, and preferably with an ample bosom.

HB: Woah what? Where did you get that from?

IM: That is literally her description in the published playscript.

*HB reluctantly motions to TTW to get her to throw her something to stuff her top with.*

IM: Beryl is quite intelligent but not very educated or informed, having been stuck at home looking after her old mother. Content to accept the job day by day.

KM: *The actress in An Awfully Big Adventure!*

*TTW runs forward with excitement putting on war helmet and holding a stick.*

KM: This part is an ensemble role and plays many supporting characters in several different storylines.

TTW: Does she get to play one of the heroes?

KM: No, because she’s a girl!

IM: *Pat from Foreskin’s Lament!*

*HB runs forward putting on a green coat and hat.*

IM: Pat is 30ish. A bit simple.

HB: She’s just naïve.

IM: She asks inane questions –

HB: She’s inquisitive –

IM: Is onstage for 2 ½ pages and then leaves.
HB: Ugh fine.

KM: Caroline from Sydney Bridge Upside Down!

TTW runs forward putting on a sexy dress and heels.

KM: Caroline is a cousin of the main male character. She is seductive in dress and manner and causes her cousin to have a sexual awakening. The kind of woman mothers of sons take an instant dislike to.

TTW: Oh yuck, where is that from?

KM: It’s a combination of how all the reviewers described her.

IM: Simon’s Girlfriend in All Your Wants and Needs Fulfilled forever!

HB really doesn’t know what to grab for this one. Ends up getting a scarf and runs forward.

IM: (Consulting notes) Oh no sorry, she’s played by a mannequin. Never mind!

HB is appalled.

KM: Ruth in Trees Beneath the Lake!

TTW runs forward putting on a smart jacket, glasses and carrying legal papers.

KM: Ruth is a young rookie lawyer. Her competence is undermined by her nervousness –

TTW: She’s still competent!

KM: In the climax of the play, her client’s son tries to sexually assault her and then tries to kill himself. Ruth is creepily kind of blamed for this.

TTW: (Spluttering incoherence.)

IM: Simon’s Mother in All Your Wants and Needs Fulfilled forever!

HB runs forward putting on dishwashing gloves.

IM: Oh no, we don’t need you actually. Just the gloves is fine.

HB takes gloves off and throws them on the floor.

HB: This is shit.

KM and IM sensing that this is not looking good. Scrabbling through notes to find another one.

KM: Ah yes! Here we go! Zina from Krishnan’s Dairy.

TTW starts to rush forward.

IM: Nope nope! That’s a solo show for a male actor.

HB and TTW look a bit hopeless.

IM: Ummm, oh yeah, what about The Rhyme of the Modern Mariner?
KM: *(consulting notes)* Well no, it’s not ideal, I mean sure there’s 4 women in it but one of them is playing a stereotypical dead wife and the other 3 play nameless women getting hit on in a bar in the first scene, and then for the rest of the show they play dudes!

IM: Oh god.

KM: What about *An Unseasonable Fall of Snow*?

IM: Nah there’s only guys in that.

*Beat.*

IM: *Intricate Art of Actually Caring*?

KM: Just dudes.

*This list starts to build. They stop being questions and just start being statements. Doesn’t matter if they overlap.*

IM: *Flipside*?

KM: *Coaltown Blues*?

IM: *Lovelock’s Dream Run*?

KM: *The Underarm*?

IM: *For Your Future Guidance*

KM: *The Brave. The Blackening*

IM: *The Daylight Atheist. The Henchman*

KM: *The Men’s Room*

IM: *The Tutor*

KM: *The Viagra Monologues*

IM: *Strange Resting Places*

KM: *Shuriken. War Hero*

IM: *Backstage With The Quigleys*

KM: *The Bookbinder*

IM: *Beautiful Losers*

KM: *Drinking Games*

IM: *French Toast*

KM: *Fun Shy. Stir Crazy. Strata*

IM: *The 73rd Day*

KM: *Michael James Manaia*
IM: The Legend of Hector
KM: War Hero
IM: Blowing It
KM: Basement
IM: Kikia Te Poa
KM: The Ballad of Jimmy Costello
IM: The Book of Fame
KM: I, George Nepia
IM: The Guru of Chai
KM: The Ocean Star
IM: Me and Robert McKee
KM: Lullaby Jock
IM: The Cape. The Quiz
KM: The Seige
IM: Once On Chunuk Bair
KM: Come On Black
IM: Niu Sila
KM: You Gotta Be Joking
IM: End of the Golden Weather

*Pause.*

*A Woman's Lament*

HB: I suppose we really ought to be doing this “right”: not isolating the characters, not shading the writers. Sure, we are ripping on plays about our “national identity” But just you wait till we have had our say. Ask the lads, the boys, they get all the action here, the ladies in Foreskin’s Lament are literally asked to bring a tear, and then they disappear. God forbid the men cry, there isn’t room for emotion in these stereotypes.
TTW: “I was born of the same mother as you – all!”
   Oh great another mention,
   someone’s girlfriend, mother, sister, daughter –
   always property, never living on our terms, always serving.
   But as long as they wax lyrical about nostalgic winter mornings,
   dewy green fields, earnest childhoods and parents on the sidelines,
   scrums and rucks and tackles,
   our golden beaches and doomed road trips,
   how to win, how to lose,
   then we can all relate right?
   Everyone in this country had the same life right?
IM: Yes we know the lore. Yes we know the catechism.
   But just because you acknowledge it,
   doesn’t mean you’re not also reinforcing it.
   Maybe your character laments at the nation.
   Or has a monologue about how they don’t actually care anymore.
   It doesn’t matter. Do you think it really makes a difference?
   You can be as disillusioned as you like,
   your main character can question and can challenge,
   but these “nation defining” plays are still so often about rugby
   with male characters for days.

KM: We know this type now.
   We see the “Kiwi Bloke” in harsh cold daylight.
   The sheen is all gone.
   Everyone now needs to belong.
   The zeitgeist is shifting.
   Revolt. Revolt.
   We are rebelling.
   We are dancing.
   There’s another revolution coming.
   You can feel it in the air – ground’s moving,
   Temper’s shaking.
   But Big Daddy is prowling,
   He’s in our theatres, he’s in our heads.
   Change might seem impossible,
   The establishment just won’t shift.
   But we are nasty and bloody and sick of this shit.
   So rise up and speak.
   Don’t be driven away.
Find your voice and use it.
We have the ability.
So create the opportunity.
Write it.
Say it.
Make it.

HB: This new dance can be done.
We’re hanging up those old boots – what do we want to do?
Kicking for touch – what do we want to say?
Chucking in it – who do we want to be?
We can get out from under these metaphors.
These tired cliches and stereotypes.
We don’t have to hack it anymore.
We don’t have to play that game.
We don’t have to play that game.
Or anymore wear those one dimensional masks.
There’s more here now than just asking, “Whaddarya?”
It’s not just about what you are.
It’s about who you are.
Well?
What do you want to do?
What do you want to say?
Who do we want to be?

Pause. Then snap into Question-gate

Question-gate – Rehearsal under a microscope

Set up space and exercise. Explain where it came from and why we’re doing it. Mention that it went really well last time.

Get all audience members to bring their chairs inside the space.

Run exercise once through normal with the following questions, Trae with her made up answers, general gist of them is written here. Karin also occasionally interacts or adds things. We all react as we did, any movements or actions relating to our inner thoughts, we keep and repeat each time.

KM: What’s the worst thing you have ever said to anybody else?
TTW: When you’re in an argument, so you lose your filter… you end up saying
something personal, not relevant to the argument.

KM: Who is your favourite person to talk to? Why?
TTW: It depends how I’m feeling… I’ve got this one friend I see every couple of months,
we have good chats.
KM: What’s their name…?

KM: What happens to your voice when you get upset?
TTW: I lose it, and the voice that comes out is unrecognisable

KM: What your favourite word?
TTW: Mum.
Then we repeat the whole thing three more times.
The second time, Hannah and Issy speak their inner monologue at the same time while Trae
continues to answer the questions.
The third time, Trae speaks her inner monologue instead of answering the questions, everything
else is exactly the same.
The fourth time, Karin speaks her inner monologue instead of asking the questions, everything
else is exactly the same.

We pause after the last question. Say something.
Give the audience chalk as well and everyone writes on the floor.
Hold that space and move into discussion.
CREATIVE SHOWING THREE PERFORMANCE SCRIPT

Layered voices 1.0

We begin with a live body on stage (HB). They start reciting Aston’s “Finding a voice” which continues throughout this segment. The voices slowly layer/stagger on top of each other.

We sit with just this for a bit.

A second performer (KM) enters and starts to use a loop pedal or some other recording device. They record themselves saying something which then gets repeated and built upon. Umms and errs, confused sentences. She tells the “Don’t touch my head” story.

We sit with just this for a bit.

A recorded voice over the PA system begins. Someone speaking a survey response. This builds throughout.

We sit with just this for a bit.

A third performer (TTW) enters and tells the “Pregnant woman” story.

We sit with just this for a bit.

A fourth performer (IM) enters with a microphone. She tells the Jean Betts story about the scream space.

“I mean that sounds just so familiar to me, working in male processes and not even realising what’s going on and not knowing what that growing frustration is. Certainly not being confident enough to voice it, and your peers, you know from that experience of sitting quietly and being ignored, thinking that’s fine, and it’s not even a gender issue and everyone is listening to each other and it will be an equal process, and then realising that it isn’t. And you see people coming out of those, and women can hit a real stronger patch I think in their 30s and 40s, realising they are really awesome. I remember Jean Betts saying that about making... yeah she was like, “When we were in a really male process that was supposed to be, like a very misogynist script, but everyone said, we’re gonna cross cast everybody, don’t worry!” And then it was just, hey surprise surprise, all the men played the male roles just because they were better. (But anyway, Jean was like, go and stand in the middle of the room and scream. If they’re not listening to you, actually scream until they do.” – this last sentence happens on its own.)

Everyone starts to build.

Voices build to a cacophony and then cuts out suddenly.
IM: But anyway, Jean was like, go and stand in the middle of the room and scream. If they’re not listening to you, actually scream until they do.

**IM draws “The Scream Circle” on the ground in chalk.**

Snap into discussion mode.

HB gets on the loop pedal mic. She holds the academic space.

IM, KM, TTW and MR object to the impossibilities and hold their own opinions.

**HB reads from Heddon and Milling pp. 4-5.**

HB: “Devising is variously: a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between art and life; the erasure of the gap between spectator and performer; a distrust of words; the embodiment of the death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge for spectators; an expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental; non-literary.”

Alison Oddey says the “…natural relationship between women and devised theatre in the 1970s” arose out of an environment “…which encouraged women to find voice together through the collective, democratic process of devising” (119).

Elaine Aston says “…devising is especially important to women who are marginalised by dominant culture and theatre and therefore have most to gain from ‘authoring’ their own scripts” (143).

Alison Andrews says “I think [devising] appeals to women as a creative way of working – we are perhaps more naturally co-operative and instinctively collective in practice. It is potentially a way of working which has ideological affiliations with feminism. (qtd. Oddey 122).

- But HB, in the survey responses, heaps of women had terrible experiences in devising rooms.

HB: Well that’s true, but when I asked what draws them to devising, they all talked about the opportunity to present works with multiple voices, and the chance to author their own scripts.
- But in a different question the responses also talk about all the challenges about devising, and how no one listened to them and their voices were shut down.

- And if devising really is a Utopia for women why are there still so many terrible depictions of women in devised theatre in NZ?

HB: There are heaps of good examples though! There are heaps of people in this very room who create amazing roles for women all the time!

- That’s true. But what about, for example… Rhyme of the Modern Mariner.
- Not Psycho.
- Sydney Bridge Upside Down.
- All Your Wants and Needs Fulfilled Forever.
- Paper Sky.

- We can’t just rip on these plays and their representation of women. We saw the product, but we don’t know what it was like in those rehearsal rooms. We don’t know anything about their process.

- We can’t just judge something on product, we need to explore the process.

HB: I have an example.

HB comes out from behind the mic. KM takes her place. HB puts on the jacket. We move into a more theatrical set up.

KM: In 2009 the STAB commission at BATS Theatre was Death and the Dreamlife of Elephants, devised by a slightly isolated dog. Elephants follows Julian Gallo a young man, trapped in a mediocre life of involuntary solitude. It is a noir tale of urban existence that slowly unites around the quest for, and questions surrounding, a particular carved elephant figurine. Hannah Banks played Kerryn Bell. Kerryn is 20 years old, a student at university. She is floated as a possible love interest for the main male character Julian, but then she is downgraded to just being his friend.

HB argues back. Everyone pushes her to explain how this character came to be. Why is she uncomfortable with it now, why didn’t see do anything at the time. HB explains that she was young and inexperienced and didn’t feel like she had any power in the room. But only realised this years later.
HB discards her jacket. Someone brings her the wireless mic.

**Research audio (Live mic)**

IM: INTERVIEW NUMBER 4 – 7th May 2015

“A more feminine way of viewing something is to be doubtful about it, and the negative side of that to be anxious about it. But the positive side of that is to be curious and investigatory of the richness beneath that. So for example, I often find that male makers just hold a very authoritative presence in the room, you know, “That scene does not work. You are not performing well. I know what the singular truth is.” And I don’t see things like that as a maker. I see a myriad of factors that affect things and I don’t like to be the sole holder of the truth or the vision.”

**Interview/Date**

TTW and KM.

Two chairs and a table. They sit in profile.

**Audio – “Perfect Body” phone conversation.**

IM at Loop mic and HB wireless mic performing the phone convo.

Quick. IM is strong and stands up for herself.

**Trading Insults**

IM as director, TTW and KM as actors.

Someone goes too far. Scene snaps out.

**Audio – “Actor crush on actress”**

IM stands centre stage and reads the messages from a piece of paper.

**Don’t touch my head stupid man**

KM as director. IM as Tim. HB as Katherine.
Research audio (Live mic)

TTW reads the Aston “body/voice” quote using the wireless mic.

TTW: Women are often afraid of speaking out. Of using their voice. Even a vocal confident woman is often acting confidence. She performs with a confidence that does not allow the voice to come from inside the body. Historically women have been driven away from their voices, have been socially conditioned into silence, or have been told that they must speak quietly. We are taught not to shriek or be shrill. We are taught not to express anger.

Audio – “What if you were all naked?”

We react live.

Over the sound system we hear a man’s voice.

Man: Ok guys, so that scene was really good, I think it’s working. But I’ve just got an idea I want to try. So what if... What if you were all naked in this scene? Yeah? Let’s try it!

We all start to react. Perhaps some of us start to remove an item of clothing.

IM: Can we maybe talk about it?

“I’m the director! Hello?”

IM as the reviewer. HB as Imogen (director). TTW as Jack (Producer).

Shorter answers. Lots of context. HB has to fight to be heard.

Layered Voices 2.0 is added on to the previous scene that is playing.

Live voices continuing the scene.

KM gets on Loop pedal.

Voices through Sound system.

Builds and builds until HB breaks into the scream circle and screams.

We all communicate with each other and each take turns in screaming. It is not earnest. We are trying to make the noise stop by screaming. We are trying to use it as a solution. It doesn’t work.

When we’re not screaming we keep holding the spaces that we were holding in the previous scene.
We remain open, if the audience looks like they want to be involved, we can invite them with gentle gesture to come into the circle and scream.

Once the sound is at the level of cacophony, KM turns the loop pedal off, the PA system at this point will be really loud and sound like a swarm of bees.

HB, KM, TTW and IM all exit.

The sound keeps playing for 30sec-1min. Then MR turns it off.
APPENDIX G: DIGITAL RECORDINGS OF CREATIVE SHOWINGS
APPENDIX H: PRODUCTION CAST AND CREW LISTS
FOR ALL CASE STUDIES
PRODUCTION CAST AND CREW LISTS FOR ALL CASE STUDIES

This appendix contains the full cast and crew details for each case study discussed in this thesis. These lists are records of the original productions and do not include subsequent performances and/or touring casts.

**Sniper (2004)**

**STAB Production at BATS Theatre, performed at the Starlight Ballroom on Willis St**

Salesi Le’ota ................................................................. Devisor/Performer
Ciara Mulholland ............................................................. Devisor/Performer
Amy Tarleton ................................................................. Devisor/Performer
Daniel Musgrove ............................................................. Devisor/Performer
Rupert Reynolds-MacLean ................................................. Devisor/Performer
Shannon Small ............................................................... Devisor/Performer
Jean Sergent ................................................................. Devisor/Performer
Lachlan Pierard ............................................................... Devisor/Performer
Rohan Spicer ................................................................. Devisor/Performer

BATS Theatre ............................................................... Executive Producer
Jacqueline Coats .............................................................. Producer
Kerryn Palmer ............................................................... Director and Set Design
Maia Whittet ............................................................... Lighting Design and Operation
Jane Pierard ................................................................. Composer and Musician
Ed David ................................................................. Multimedia
Rosie Roberts ............................................................... Production/Stage Manager
Alana Spragg ............................................................... Publicist
John Hodgkins ............................................................... Set Builder
Iain Cooper ............................................................... Set Builder
Patrick Geddes ............................................................... Set Builder

**Demeter’s Dark Ride (2005)**

**STAB Production at BATS Theatre**

Imagined and led by Madeline McNamara
Spatial Conception and Dressings by Lisa Maule

Thebis Mutane assisted by Jeff Henderson ................................ Vibrational Sensationalist
Lisa Maule...........................................................................................................Darkness Design
Janet Dunn..............................................................Costumier and Sensory Enhancements
Carlos Wedde.................................................................Puppeteer and Properties
Hannah Davies..............................................................Moving Image Magician
Pedro Ilgenfritz..............................................................Directing Assistant
Annie Ferris..............................................................Design Assistant and the Miller
Stuart Shepherd..............................................................Kineticist
Sally Rodwell..............................................................Masquer

The Troupe – in order of Disappearance:
David McNamara.........................................................Mr Fenessey, Street Musician
Barry Lakeman..............................................................Sticks the Dealer
Carlos Wedde.................................................................Claustrophobus D'Ottis
Pedro Ilgenfritz..............................................................Hades
Kilda Northcott..............................................................Demeter
Pipi Ayesha Evans.............................................................Baubo
Sally Rodwell..............................................................The Aleuromancer
Janet Dunn..............................................................Doctor Nnud
Carlos Wedde.................................................................Count Beauchamps
Thebis Mutante..............................................................Thebis Mutante
Madeline McNamara....................................................Madame Honora D'Ott
Jessica Sutherland..............................................................Delphi, Head Guide
Jenny O'Connor.............................................................Photographic Evidence

Torch-bearing Ride Guides: Majorie McKee, Jo Randerson, Bronwyn Bent, Thomas La Hood, Naomi Singer, Noel Meek, Rhys Latton, Ruby Brunton, Lisa Maule, Annie Miller Ferris, Diane Spodarek, Dale Ferris.

The Troupe – Invisibles
The Duchess, Helen Varley Jamieson..............................................................Impressario
Rivetting Rosie Roberts..............................................................Production Manager
Miss Emma Carter............................................................Puffery, Production Assistant
Miss Erin Shepherd..............................................................Stage Manager
Tree Harris..............................................................Seamstress
Alasdair Watson..............................................................Technical Operator
Rosie Roberts..............................................................Technical Operator
Donna Demente...............................................................Poster Artiste
Juliet Novena Sorrell..............................................................Thaumaturgical Society Artiste
MINGE: A Celebration and Interrogation of Womanhood in New Zealand (2010)

Created by MINGE Collective at BATS Theatre

Erin Banks..............................................Performer and Set Design
Eleanor Bishop........................................Performer and Dramaturg
Ally Garrett.............................................Performer, Online Publicity and Minge-A-Zine Co-Ordinator
Rose Guise.............................................Performer
Rachel Marlow........................................Performer and Lighting Design
Helenyi Pratley........................................Performer
Jean Sergent...........................................Performer and Vocal Wrangler
Hannah Smith.........................................Performer, Set Design and Vocal Wrangler
Stephanie Cairns.....................................Performer and Musician
Helen O’Rourke.......................................Performer and Musician
Fiona McNamara.....................................Director
Hannah Banks........................................Producer
Rachel Lenart........................................Production Manager and Publicist
Ellen Walsh..............................................Stage Manager
Eddie Fraser............................................Lighting Operator
Josephine Hall.......................................Costume and Website Design
Brigid Costello.......................................Choreography
Vanessa Fowler Kendall........................Photography, Graphic Design and Foyer Display
Claire O’Loughlin.....................................Opening Night Event and Foyer Display
Kimberley Berends................................Minge-A-Zine Designer and Illustrator
Jem Yoskioka........................................Minge-A-Zine Designer and Illustrator
Porcelaintoy (Elizabeth Judd and Emile De la Rey)..........Opening Night Musicians

“A Rousing Chorus” composed by Charlotte Bradley, arranged by Stephanie Cairns and Helen O’Rourke. ”Why did you leave me?” composed by Heleyni Pratley, arranged by Stephanie Cairns and Helen O’Rourke. “Food Calypso” and “The Lesbian Song” composed by Stephanie Cairns and Helen O’Rourke.

Other Minges involved throughout the process:
Charlotte Bradley, Lucy O’Brien, Phyllisophia Jason-Smith, Lori Leigh, Sylvie Thomson, Beatrix Coles, Millie and Maggie.

The Arrival (2009)
Red Leap Theatre as part of the Auckland Arts Festival at The Civic

Jarod Rawiri.............................................Original devising cast
Alison Bruce..........................................Original devising cast
Ella Becroft............................................Original devising cast
Tama Jarman.................................................................Original devising cast
Jared Turner............................................................Original devising cast
Justin Haiu...............................................................Original devising cast
Tahi Mapp - Borren......................................................Original devising cast
Kate Parker...............................................................Original devising cast
Chris Graham...........................................................Original devising cast
Sally Stockwell..........................................................Original devising cast

Shaun Tan.................................................................Inspiration
Kate Parker...............................................................Concept and Imagery Design
Julie Nolan.................................................................Direction

John Verryt...............................................................Set Design
Andrew McMillan.....................................................Composition and Sound Design
Jeremy Fern.............................................................Lighting Design
Elizabeth Whiting......................................................Costume Design
Kate Parker...............................................................Imagery Construction
Simon Coleman.........................................................Imagery Construction
Jessika Verryt............................................................Imagery Construction

*Paper Sky* (2011)

**Red Leap Theatre as part of the Auckland Arts Festival at The Mercury Theatre**

Emmett Skilton........................................................Original devising cast
Julia Croft...............................................................Original devising cast
Veronica Brady........................................................Original devising cast
Alison Bruce...........................................................Original devising cast
Justin Haiu...............................................................Original devising cast

Kate Parker...............................................................Direction
Julie Nolan.................................................................Direction

John Verryt...............................................................Set Design
Elizabeth Whiting......................................................Costume Design
Jeremy Fern.............................................................Lighting Design
Andrew McMillan.....................................................Sound design, Composition and Musical Direction
Claire Cowan............................................................Composition

Kate Parker...............................................................Imagery Design and Construction

John Verryt...............................................................Imagery Design and Construction
Rachel Hilliar..............................................................Imagery Construction
Ben Anderson..............................................................Imagery Construction
Stages of Change – Voices Against Violence
Solomon Islands 2013/14 and Fiji 2016/17

The Conch – in partnership with the European Union, British Council, British High Commission Honiara, Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association

Devised with the Women’s Theatre Company of the Solomon Islands

Nina Nawalowalo………………………………………………………………Artistic Director
Tom McCrory…………………………………………………………………...Artistic Director
Ennie Bakale…………………………………………………………………..Actor
Edna Belo……………………………………………………………………..Actor
June Bofata…………………………………………………………………….Actor
Siniva Galutia………………………………………………………………….Actor
Rhianwen Gatu………………………………………………………………Actor
Gloria Konare………………………………………………………………..Actor
Sue Manila……………………………………………………………………Actor
Rhona Marita………………………………………………………………Actor
Janet Nowae………………………………………………………………….Actor
Innedy Sese…………………………………………………………………Actor
Daisy Osoniu………………………………………………………………..Actor
Grace Tiba…………………………………………………………………..Actor
Ingrid Leary…………………………………………………………………..Director of British Council New Zealand
Monalisa Urquhart…………………………………………………………..Project Manager
Lanieta Leo………………………………………………………………….Project Co-ordinator
Michael Salini………………………………………………………………Solomon Islands Planned Parenthood Association
Faanati Mamea………………………………………………………………Photography

In 2016, The Conch partnered again with the EU and British Council to bring this important work to Fiji. While there they worked at the Oceania Centre, kindly hosted by Peter Espiritu.

Dust Pilgrim (2015)

Red Leap Theatre, devised by the company, performed at Q Loft

Ella Becroft…………………………………………………………………..Performer
Alison Bruce……………………………………………………………….Performer
Thomas Eason………………………………………………………………Performer
Kate Parker………………………………………………………………….Direction
Julie Nolan………………………………………………………………….Direction
Poppy Serano………………………………………………………………Set Design
Andrew Foster………………………………………………………………………...Set Mentor
Charlie Baptist……………………………………………………………………..Costume Design
Rachel Marlow…………………………………………………………………..Lighting Design
Thomas Press……………………………………………………………………...Sound Composition and Design

Rachel Hilliar……………………………………………………………………...Imagery Construction
Kate Parker…………………………………………………………………………Imagery Construction
Paolo Rotondo……………………………………………………………………..Dramaturgical Advisor
Swami Yogamani……………………………………………………………………Yoga and Meditation

Rob Mokoraka……………………………………………………………………...Development Cast
Ella Becroft…………………………………………………………………………Development Cast
Thomas Eason…………………………………………………………………….Development Cast

If there's not Dancing at the Revolution, I'm Not Coming (2015)
Basement Theatre
Julia Croft………………………………………………………………………..Creator/Performer
Virginia Frankovich……………………………………………………………………..Director
Calvin Hudson………………………………………………………………………Lighting Design
Lydia Zanetti (Zanetti Productions)…………………………………………………..Producer

Power Ballad (2017)
Basement Theatre
Julia Croft………………………………………………………………………..Creator/Performer
Nisha Madhan……………………………………………………………………..Creator/Director
Calvin Hudson………………………………………………………………………Lighting Design
Kate Prior…………………………………………………………………………..Dramaturg
Lydia Zanetti (Zanetti Productions)…………………………………………………..Producer
Every day starts with the tick of a clock.
All escapes start with the click of a lock!
If you’re stuck in your story and want to get out
You don’t have to cry, you don’t have to shout!

’Cause if you’re little you can do a lot, you
Mustn’t let a little thing like, ‘little’ stop you
If you sit around and let them get on top, you
Won’t change a thing!

Just because you find that life’s not fair it
Doesn’t mean that you just have to grin and bear it!
If you always take it on the chin and wear it
You might as well be saying
You think that it’s okay
And that’s not right!
And if it’s not right!
You have to put it right!

But nobody else is gonna put it right for me
Nobody but me is gonna change my story
Sometimes you have to be a little bit naughty.

Extract from “Naughty” from Matilda The Musical by Tim Minchin
We rise and fall and light from dying embers,
remembrances that hope and love last longer
And love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love
cannot be killed or swept aside…

Now fill the world with music, love and pride.

Extract from *Love is Love* Sonnet by Lin-Manuel Miranda
This thesis was made possible thanks to coffee, wine, cat cuddles with Gusto, regular running, and listening to One Direction.