

The Rebellious Mirror

Before and after 1984:

Community-based theatre in Aotearoa

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Kia ora, Malo, Fa'afetai.

Abstract

In this thesis I outline the contribution Community-based theatre has made to New Zealand theatre. This involves a defining of theatre production as a material practice. Community-based theatre was a tendency from the 1930s, a promise of the left theatre movement and, I argue, was being searched for as a form of practice by the avant-garde, experimental practitioners of the 1970s. At the same time, early Māori theatre began as a Community-based practice before moving into the mainstream.

With the arrival of neo-liberalism to Aotearoa in 1984, community groups and Community-based theatre could become official providers within the political system. This led to a flowering of practices, which I describe, together with the tensions that arise from being a part of that system. However, neo-liberalism introduced managerial practices into state contracting and patronage policy, which effectively denied this flowering the sustenance deserved. At the same time, these policies commodified mainstream theatre production.

In conclusion, I argue that in the current situation of global crisis, Community-based theatre practice has a continuing role to play in giving voice to the multitude and by being a practice of the Common.

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Introduction

The Rebellious Mirror

Before and after 1984:

Community-based theatre in Aotearoa

“We have gathered to speak and to know one another” (Marcos 83).¹

In 1973, I met in a scout hall with a group of young actors. They had been involved in Wellington’s elderly Unity Theatre and were keen to do something different. I had seen a play devised through improvisation by a youth theatre group in the UK and been impressed with the energy and immediacy of the performance, so we decided to work through improvisation and to devise a piece based on memories of our childhood and early adolescence. At subsequent rehearsals we pooled stories, the actors improvised these scenes and it was relatively simple to choose those that had theatrical life. I then put the scenes into sequence and added transitions. Our improvisations were structured through each actor having a sequence of intentions to play. Many of us had taken third form Latin and chanted *amo, amas, amat, amamus...* so we called ourselves, as a joke, Amamus Theatre group. The play, I rode my horse down the road, was critical of the perceived conservatism of the communities in which we had been raised. There was no set required, the one essential item being a divan style bed, symbolising the child and adolescent’s personal space. It was first performed late night at Downstage, Wellington’s professional theatre,² and later

¹ Marcos is an assumed name for the urban intellectual who has become spokesperson for the Zapatista Liberation Movement in Chiapas, Mexico. He always wears a ski mask for public appearances so that his identity remains a secret.

² I rode my horse down the road, (Amamus Theatre Group, late night Downstage, April 16-18, 1971).

toured New Zealand as part of a repertory of our work. Performances took place then under the umbrella of the mainstream and within buildings that clearly signalled their theatrical purpose (R. Williams “Sociology of Culture” 132-133). Horse, as we referred to it, was a slight piece, but had the innocence and energy of youth and was about ordinary New Zealanders. We used our collective experiences as content and improvisation as a means of production, rather than being under the thrall of an absent writer. The play is mentioned in New Zealand theatre histories (e.g. Thomson 83).

Thirty six years later, a few weeks before Easter, the cast of Rain, Love and Coalsmoke³ assembled in the St John Ambulance Hall in Blackball, a small ex-mining village on the West Coast and even more distant from the urban centers of mainstream theatre than the scout hall. The cast consisted of myself as writer, director and actor, my partner, a midwife who has acted in previous Community-based theatre productions, two professional colleagues from Rotorua who had been contracted to assist with the production, plus four local people: a forestry worker, a polytech tutor, a meter reader, and a school leaver. The professionals were being paid, the rest were having their travel costs reimbursed. The funding had come from a variety of sources, only one of which was an arts fund. An application to Creative New Zealand, the main arts funding body, had been turned down. Yet in the same round, I, as an individual artist, was awarded a grant to participate in an encounter with a famous experimental theatre director in Poland.

We had three weeks to rehearse three, linked, one-act plays for an evening of workers’ culture which would be a key part of a weekend commemorating the centenary of a strike which took place in Blackball, and which was the catalyst for the

³ Paul Maunder, Rain, Love and Coalsmoke, (Regent Theatre, Greymouth, March 22, 2008). Script available at www.blackballmuseum.org.nz/resource/stories, 12/6/09.

formation of the national union movement. There was therefore, a social and political purpose to this project, as well as an aesthetic one.

The audience would be a mix of locals, unionists from around the country, Labour Party stalwarts, government ministers, and relatives of the strikers. Few of them would have regular attendance of mainstream theatre productions as part of their life-style. Some would never have attended such a production.

The organising of the weekend was a big task for this small community. I had lived there for five years and was asked to co-ordinate the committee, which was made up of representatives of local community groups, local unions and the local branch of the Labour Party. My role was both that of insider and outsider, for I knew the differing cultural expectations of the locals and the visitors. I had written the three plays, snapshots of key moments in local history during my time living in the village and drawn on oral history interviews I had conducted, casual reminiscence and labour history. The three plays were set on, and in front of, the veranda typically attached to the front of a miner's cottage. The veranda remains a mediating space between the public and the private, a boundary which is constantly transgressed.

Normally, this sort of production would take place in a community setting, but I had chosen to present the plays in the Regent Theatre in Greymouth, partly because there was no local venue big enough, but as well, on this occasion, to dignify workers' culture with the theatrical trappings of the mainstream. This decision put greater pressure on the production, for we had to meet the technical expectations that go with those theatrical trappings, and perform in a large theatre space.

Rehearsals went smoothly, apart from the inevitable strain, because of work commitments, of getting everyone in the same place at the same time. The school leaver was a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and, as the performance

was taking place during Easter, had to balance two competing claims of solidarity: one to her church and family, the other to this union-inspired event. Another of the local actors had difficulty with the playing of a key role, needing to move past habitual emotional-intellectual patterns which were deeply embedded. This of course is the task of actor training and here had to be accomplished quickly, while remaining sensitive to the personal boundaries of the person concerned.

The event, and the theatrical presentation, attracted three hundred people. The disparate people, drawn together to this village, merged with the locals into a temporary community. The audience for the play, knowledgeable about, and committed to the material, were ready to be critical, but when convinced of the theatrical team's own commitment, embraced the performance, with the local cast receiving much praise and achieving a new standing in the community. Nationally, within the union movement, the event has been seen as establishing a cutting edge for the celebration of workers' culture. The village is thus proud of its achievement and the newly achieved unity of purpose is being used to prepare a strategy for the community's development.

The play received a review in the local paper, but passed unnoticed by the official theatre culture. Yet it was, as a theatre event, much more complex than I rode my horse down the road. It had direct links to a variety of communities, and celebrated a key historical moment and a segment of the working class (miners) and their contribution to NZ, both industrially and politically. It dealt with contradictions of socialism in the twenties and thirties, and the move into the counter culture when the mine closed. It brought ordinary people into the theatre process, and aesthetically it was complex, involving agit prop, story telling, ritual and realistic drama. Apart from this thesis, it will go unnoticed in terms of histories of NZ theatre. It will be

silenced, as is most Community-based theatre activity. Talking House's 1998 production of Stuart, for example, played a hundred performances in diverse venues throughout the Otago region and received one NZ review⁴ and a review in an Australian travel magazine. And this is not unique to New Zealand. Other writers protest about this syndrome, for example, Kuftinec (1) and Cohen-Cruz (174); and Van Erving (246) finds that even post-colonial studies ignores the local. And this silencing is as much a silencing of a production process as it is a silencing of the plays resulting from that process.

This thesis is about my own journey between these plays and these processes; a journey which took me from a youthful, devised theatre to a mature avant-garde art theatre and the contradictions involved as such a theatre competes in the marketplace; to a searching of sources of community, a search which necessarily involved a dialogue with tangatawhenua,⁵ to the accepting of a Community-based process which involves a handing over to a community grouping of both the means of production and the mediation that the creating of an art work offers for the creators (R. Williams "Sociology of Culture" 24). This journey has not been straightforward, encountering resistances both within myself as artist and in the wider society. These resistances are an important part of the story. The New Zealand theatre scene is village-like in its smallness, and this personal account is necessarily interwoven with the journeys of colleagues, both Māori and Pākehā, with whom I have often collaborated. In fact, as I write, I am often confused as to whether to use 'I' or 'we'. Who actually decided to do this rather than that? When collective processes are operating, there is no easy answer.

⁴ By ex Talking House member, David O'Donnell, in *Theatre News* V.5 No 4.

⁵ The indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand, literally, 'people of the land'.

At the theoretical heart of this work is the Marxist-derived view that the making of the art object is a material process involving design, resources, labour and distribution, and that the study of the relationships in this material process is of primary importance. Community-based theatre is then a production process (described in detail in Chapter One), which, I argue, was a tendency during the 1930s in New Zealand, became a goal of the avant-garde in the 1970s and is now a realised process worthy of consideration by practitioners and patrons. This thesis, following on from the work of Barrowman and Edmond, argues an alternative view of the history of New Zealand theatre, one which differs from the mainstream history, which is focused on a production process in which the playwright is the primary producer of the product, with the rest of the theatre processes being predominantly processes of packaging for, and distribution to, the marketplace.

Why 1984? The material production of theatre takes place in a milieu of production processes called the economy. Faced with a diminishing of profit in the 1970s, as over production occurred because of post war Europe, Japan, South Korea and then China coming on stream as modern economies, capitalism adopted profit raising techniques of globalised production (making things where labour was cheapest), financialisation (the speculating in investment rather than production), and the opening up of government and local services to the private sector and to market forces. These techniques, and the associated ideology of neo-liberalism, were fully introduced into New Zealand by the Lange-led Labour Government, elected in 1984. The restructuring was continued by the National government of the 1990s, and took place with such haste and with such extremity that NZ economic historian, Jane Kelsey, considers it to have been a revolution.

However, neo-liberalism, despite its individualistic and anti-collectivist stance, throws up a contradiction: as the state is restructured and distanced from the provision of services, some of its functions can be taken over by community organisations, who then become an essential part of the new social, economic, political and cultural order. This sets up tensions and negotiations between the neo-liberal state and the community sector which are ongoing. Community thus becomes a potential site of resistance, and as I argue in the last chapter, a site of increasing importance in the current age of transition. It is appropriate then, that the title and the quotes for each chapter have been taken from the writings of sub comandante Marcos, spokesperson for the Mayan people of Chiapas, Mexico. Marcos is the example par excellence, of a skilled, educated, outsider-facilitator working with a community in a ‘best practice’ manner, in this case putting his life on the line.⁶ And it could be seen that the Zapatista revolution is very much a theatrical one. But that would be another story. Sufficient to say that Marcos speaks with a prophetic clarity.

Community, is of course, a problematic term, and according to sociologists, Colin Bell and Howard Newby, “a satisfactory definition of it in sociological terms appears as remote as ever” (21). According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary it can denote joint ownership, identity or character, fellowship, an organisation, people living in a locality, or people sharing a religion or profession.⁷ It is then, both a material thing and a quality. There is, in the common use of the word, for example, in the term community radio, an agreed perception of smallness of scale.

Bell and Newby write that, within sociological analysis, there is historical development in attempting to define the shape and texture of community, caused by

⁶ See Chapter One for description of best practice.

⁷ Defn’s 1,2,3,4,5.

changes in the overall social structure. In the nineteenth century, for example, the community, as exemplified by the village, or, at most, the small town, was seen to exist in opposition to the newly arrived industrial society and its derivative, the city, typified by “competition and conflict, utility and contractual relationships” (22). According to this analysis, community is a place “in which people have some, if not complete, solidary relations”. That is, people share values and a way of life. This results in “a personalising of issues, events and explanations because they become associated with familiar names and characters” (24). This personalising, which is a key characteristic of community, exists alongside other frameworks of analysis, such as class. For example, I know the house in which I live in Blackball was built by a miner called Andy Coyle. There is a photograph of him in The Working Men’s Club. When I renovate, I know the nails I am pulling out were brought home from the mine by Andy, where they were used to put up the support timbers. Whereas, in Wellington, I lived in several different rented flats and houses, most of which were investment properties. As far as I knew, none of these places had a story attached to them. The rental, the position and the quality of the accommodation were all that mattered. These two contrasting paradigms were given the descriptors, *Gemeinschaft* (the rural) and *Gesellschaft* (the urban), by German sociologist, Frederick Tonnies and these terms have gained widespread recognition (25).

The ecological school of sociologists argue, as well, for the influence of the physical nature of a place of residence on the character of a community. For instance, where I live on the West Coast, the isolation and often extreme weather continues to

create a closeness within small communities originally built to house a workforce brought there to exploit the natural resources of coal, gold and timber.⁸

Community therefore resonates in the realm of feelings and attitudes.

Anthropologist, Victor Turner, investigated the way in which close tribal societies, accommodated, via ritual, the significant changes which take place during a person's life. Birth, marriage and death are obvious examples of such changes, but in particular he investigated the rite of passage from child to adult, for the adult takes on the responsibility of preserving the status quo. He writes that, during these rites of passage, "the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states" ("Ritual to Theatre" 24). They are severely tested, but also given special freedoms, even sacred power in order to move to their new status within the status quo. Turner calls this state *liminality* (a state in which thresholds can be crossed). It is ambiguous, in limbo, free, and people 'play' with the elements of the familiar and defamiliarize them. In this state, the relationship of *communitas* exists, which he defines as the "direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities" (46). The relationship of *communitas* is egalitarian, and represents, "the desire for a total, unmediated relationship between person and person, a relationship which nevertheless does not submerge one in the other but safeguards their uniqueness in the very act of realizing their commonness" (274). Achieving this relationship has often been the goal of modern, countercultural movements. But, once the ritual was over, people returned to the status quo. *Geimenschaft* communities were, and remain, in essence, conservative.

⁸ See K. A. Sampson and C. G. Goodrich, 2008. "Making Place: Identity construction and

But in modern society, with mass ownership of motor vehicles, information technology and globalisation, these traditional characteristics of community begin to drastically weaken as urban relationships penetrate the remotest of areas. There is a danger of community and its quality of personalising issues, events and places becoming redundant and there being a general succumbing to urban contractual relationships. One sociological response has been to treat *organisations* as communities, organisations being defined as social arrangements for achieving desired goals. Organisations include a wide range of social groups, and can embody both *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* relationships, as they can operate both nationally and locally (Bell and Newby 36). A play centre is run by a co-operative of local parents but will also be a legal entity with aims and objectives and audited accounts and belong to a national body which sets organisational requirements. At a moment of crisis or celebration, a relationship of *communitas* might exist, usually locally, even sometimes, nationally, which re-energises the organisation. Individuals therefore operate within a range of communities as signified by such organisations. For example, a young married person might work for a hospital (locally based but meeting national criteria), belong to a union (national with local branches), be involved in play centre and school (both locally run but part of national organisations), be a member of a single issue organisation such as Greenpeace (national and international), and participate in the local residents association (locally oriented). In this way, community remains a viable paradigm.

But with increasing globalisation and the digitization of communication, Bell and Newby write that another proposal is to investigate *social systems* or *networks*.

Networks, unlike organisations, tend to be centre-less, non hierarchical, and with diffuse boundaries in terms of who is in and out of the social system. Membership can often be accomplished, or dropped, with the click of the computer mouse. Proof of identity is often not required. According to family, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, schooling, work, interests, politics, even fantasies, people exist in a variety of social systems or networks, some of which are local, some regional, some national, and some, increasingly, international (52). There is a different texture to belonging, with the relationship being more subjective, without necessarily involving actual physical encounter. Or physical encounter is much more of an event. In this way, the concept of community is held onto, even given the technological advances of the 21st century, through a drastic re-framing.

A recent project, Kia ora Gaza,⁹ which involved sending a New Zealand contingent to join a convoy of aid for Gaza, is a good example of this phenomenon. After the violent prevention by Israel of aid ships reaching Gaza earlier this year, there has been gathering international momentum to overthrow the blockade of the Palestinian territory. A group in Auckland decided to send a New Zealand contingent to join one of these aid convoys. A charitable trust was formed and fund raising began, using digital networks. The subject of Palestine being dear to my heart, I joined others in contributing, and sufficient money was raised to send a team plus aid. For those people, I am sure, *Gemeinschaft* relationships began to form, amongst themselves, with members of other national contingents, and finally, as they reached Gaza, with local Palestinians. Their stories were reported digitally to the network of contributors, and, quite unaware of one another, we may well have subjectively, as we

⁹ See www.kiaoragaza.org.nz, 1/11/10.

each read of the convoy passing through to Gaza, experienced a moment of *communitas*.

The above structural evolution, created significantly by technological change, has, over the last three decades been mediated by movements centred on identity politics, movements which have both changed existing communities, organisations and networks, but also created new communities, organisations and networks centred around particular identities. The trade union movement is one I am familiar with, and most unions, including the central body, the NZ Council of Trade Unions, have moved from being singular committee or council structures with a president and secretary, to having as well, a Māori committee (runanga), a Women's committee, a Pacific Island committee (Komiti Pasifika) and a grouping representing different sexual identifications (OutAtWork). The NZCTU has as well, a Māori Vice President and is aware of the need for gender balance. But the overarching principle of solidarity, that there needs to be a unified workers' voice when it comes to negotiating wages and conditions and establishing a political voice for working people, means there has never been formed a Women's Union or a Māori Union.

However, in other areas, and theatre is one of them, as well as extending existing structures, often through equal employment opportunity type campaigns (for example, pushing for women writers, directors and actors),¹⁰ these movements have established separate communities, organisations and networks, which have complex relations with the existing structures and with the changes that have occurred and

¹⁰ Actor, Dulcie Smart described the beginnings of the movement as follows: "At the beginning of 1982 I went to a seminar on Women in Theatre at The Royal Shakespeare Company in London. It was a revelation to me. For the first time I understood that so many of the difficulties I faced as a woman in the theatre were shared by every other woman working in the theatre. I came back to NZ fired up." This led to a Women's Seminar set up under Actors' Equity which analysed parts for women, media coverage and so on. Sue Dunlop, Research papers relating to women's theatre. Turnbull Library. MS-Papers-8894-03.

which are ongoing within those structures. While in this thesis I explore Māori theatre, which in my view began as a Community-based practice, was drawn into the mainstream and continues to be predominantly based there, but in which elements of the movement have pulled back to a Community-based practice, I do not attempt to analyse the complex journey of NZ feminist theatre over this time, as it is a large task and one not to be undertaken by a male writer.

Finally, in tracking the moving target of community, it is necessary to note that with post-modernism there has evolved the view in some circles, that any belonging is a possible oppression and that the death of community is right and proper. Stephen K. White writes,

In the post-modern, notions of the common good are frequently viewed, paradoxically, as potentially coercive. Anything that smacks of collectivism, whether in the ‘traditions’ of conservative thinking or in the ‘communes’ of left-wing Utopias, is treated with suspicion, so that sometimes even the slightest hint of ‘community’ becomes a disease of the imagination, a nostalgic hankering after a shared sense of the human that never actually existed. (125-126)

This paranoia is reinforced by the way the feeling of belonging to a community has been, and continues to be, manipulated to disguise nationalist, xenophobic, racist or sexist agendas. The Aryanism of the Nazis is a classic case, ethnic cleansing wherever it occurs another, religion - fuelled sexism and homophobia further instances. As portrayed by the media, community is often posited as the location of and the justification for the prejudice, whereas, in reality, other agendas are more often providing the real energy.

Accordingly, this complex story of post-modernism and identity politics, which in the view of writer, Alain Badiou (qtd. in Santner 10-11), has also been the story of ever deeper market penetration by late capitalism, is not the story of this thesis. I am, instead, telling another story, that of individual theatre practitioners' movements towards, and then practice of, Community-based theatre in Aotearoa, with the beliefs and values of a particular community, and they can be greatly varied within a community grouping, as a factor within any project, often something which a project grapples with, whether by seeking change or by honouring them. These values are revealed through story and testimony, via forums, via the offering of associations, in a creative process that mirrors in many ways the creative process of the individual artist. Once again, the values of the professional facilitators are both present and suspended, inside and outside, in complex dialogue with the people they are working with. Often the search for form is a part of this dialogue. This, for me, goes some way to resolving the dilemma, put most succinctly by English writer, Baz Kershaw, that the liberation involved in destabilising community, leaving the individual free to construct him or herself, also produces an acute anxiety that can only be resolved through belonging to a collective structure ("Brecht to Baudrillard" 6-17).

And this, in turn, for me, mirrors the reality of society. For despite the above ambivalence, sometimes growing to paranoia, toward community, most people in a developed society like New Zealand, will operate, in varying degrees, intentionally, in all three of the paradigms outlined above. They will experience *Gemeinschaft* relations with grandparents perhaps, or elderly neighbours who have lived in an area for a long time, or through a marae-based event; they may experience the feeling of *communitas* during an intense moment of industrial action or through a cultural event; they will be a member of a variety of organisations; and belong to a variety of

networks. The balance of belonging will alter at different life stages. There will be a large degree of intentionality to all belonging with significant exceptions, for example, prisoners do not intend to be in prison, yet can be seen as a community once there. And there have always been those of a reclusive nature who wish to participate in society as little as possible.

As well, it must be noted that the concept of community continues to evolve. Recently, Etienne Wenger, a researcher into apprenticeship learning, has used the term, *Community of practice* to characterise groups, “formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour”. He writes that this concept can cover a broad range of social groups, from tribes learning to survive to a group of engineers working on similar problems. Community therefore continues to exist as a viable, if problematic concept, which covers a broad range of possibilities. The current ideologies surrounding the role of communities in the wider society will be examined in Chapter Two.

But the above quote from White, raises a further problematic, that of the term post-modern, the using of which has been unavoidable. Post-modern, as a descriptor, can precisely refer to an aesthetic system, but it has come to be used more loosely, as in the quote, to refer to the post USSR, globalised period we now live in, characterised by the denial of the meta-narrative and the acceptance of there being a multiplicity of points of view in any social situation. This leads to a writer like Negri, for example, referring to a post-marxist, post-modern society (29). It is in this sense that I use the term.

Finally, I acknowledge that in an increasingly globalised world, as people move rapidly between countries and community status, for example, from campesino in a rural Mexican village to illegal migrant worker in California, there is the issue of

identity itself, not in the post-modern sense of choosing to construct an identity, but rather in having confusion thrust upon one. In the Community-based theatre process this can become an issue within the partner community, even an issue threatening that community, for that confusion can be exploited by a range of antagonistic forces, from gangs to commercial culture. There is therefore, in my experience, a case for introducing an individual process, which enables some creative sorting of identity issues, as a precursor to community participation. For example, a student of mine had a Tongan father she had never had contact with, a Māori mother with long standing addiction problems, and a Welsh step-father who had been the most stable influence in her childhood. Yet she was ideologically identifying as Māori and influenced by tino rangatiratanga¹¹ agendas. There was, predictably, confusion at a deep level. In this sort of situation I have found some of the structures devised by the Polish theatre researcher, Jerzy Grotowski, in his para-theatrical period, of value in enabling a playing with, and structuring of, identity at a deep level. This is not surprising given Grotowski's original aesthetic framework (my encounter with which I describe in detail in Chapter Two), which involved confronting past collective cultural representations with a cynical modern individualism. Within the Community-based theatre production process these monastic exercises are of value to the professional Community-based theatre worker as well, for whom the dialogue with a variety of communities, mediates, even changes, in turn, his or her own structure of identity. In this sense I will see my encounter with Grotowski's methodology as an essential part of the journey toward community and that there is a current role for that methodology to play at the site of the local.¹²

¹¹ Maori sovereignty.

¹² See p195 for discussion of this issue.

Focusing on Community-based theatre as a production process means that I am marginalising what may seem an obvious framework for this thesis: the proposition, as described by Schechner (1988, 2002) and Dolan, that the theatre performance creates a temporary community, energized by the feeling of *communitas*. It would be foolish to deny that the Community-based theatre project creates such a community, sometimes a temporary community within an existing community, and that the feeling of *communitas* is often strongly felt. But this framework, as it covers the broad range of theatre performances, moving out into the more generalized realm of performance, would have provided a clumsy tool with which to trace the particular production process which I am intent on identifying. However, once the production process, and the range of work it reveals is identified, studies of specific projects from within the above framework would be worthwhile.

A further theoretical framework which may have tempted, that of post-colonialism, once again ranges across all production processes. But, as is pointed out by van Erven (246), work produced from within this framework can too often focus on the diasporic individual achiever who has graduated to the minority world power centre, ignoring the grass roots, majority world collective cultural activity. Nevertheless, Community-based theatre does facilitate a diversity of cultural voices and this framework as well, once the field itself is identified, could fruitfully host analysis of specific projects.

Who is this thesis for? There are in fact, two purposes: firstly that it will register in some small way in NZ theatre literature, and secondly, that it will be a resource and an advocacy tool for those entering the field. But this presents some problems in terms of writing, for my impulse is to use, wherever possible, the

methodology that I use when working with a community: to listen non-judgementally to stories - stories being the central production tool of Community-based theatre. These stories then accumulate and suggest a suitable form for their telling. In other words a dramaturgical process is added: is forum theatre or pantomime the most useful form for this content? In the same way, apart from the overarching framework provided by Raymond Williams, the stories in this thesis suggest or confirm elements of theory, rather than elements of theory framing and therefore prejudging the stories. Furthermore, the aim is to not unnecessarily problematise and to not make things so dense that a lay person finds it unreadable. Let me affirm then that I am not primarily telling a theoretical story, of interest only to the academy. On the other hand this should not be a memoir or a collage of descriptions of work, for these ultimately fail to satisfy. I will be, therefore, walking something of a tightrope.

In terms of structure, I will initially investigate how the equally resonant concept of theatre is added to the above definitions of community to produce the central concept of the thesis: Community-based theatre. Once again, variety is the result, and the answers are located over time and in place, so that it is useful to gather a story telling circle and to listen to a variety of journeys, and to extract some methodological definitions that assist us in building a picture of what, for US writer, Cohen-Cruz (whose work I discuss more fully in Chapter One), is a field of practice which calls on a rich genealogy of movements, including the avant-garde, left-wing theatre, the counter culture, ritual and popular culture.

Having established what will remain a moving target, I begin the historical task of reframing. I examine the official history of New Zealand theatre with the aim of finding an alternative history. I dream a little with regard to the first theatrical

productions which grew into an industry. I look closely at the amateur movement which began in the Depression, then at the left-wing cultural movement of the 1930s and 1940s and the contradictions that it threw up in terms of audience and relationship with that audience, contradictions that, I will argue, might have been resolved through Community-based theatre practice.

I then turn to the 1970s and Murray Edmond's account of the experimental theatre flowering that took place in New Zealand during that decade, a flowering which he sees vying with the mainstream for audience and even for funding. Edmond writes within a framework of the avant-garde and its confrontation of the art form, which in turn issues a metaphoric challenge to the social fabric. While accepting his descriptions of the technical journeys (what took place in the rehearsal room and on stage), I will reframe the account by seeing a key issue for practitioners (and I was one), being the seeking of an audience outside of 'the theatre crowd' (those who regularly go to the theatre in the urban centres). We were critical of the mainstream literary theatre because we didn't like what took place there, who went there and the relationships that were formed (or lack of them). As well, we slowly became aware of the contradictions of settler cultural nationalism and the limitations of the theatre group as a community of practice. I argue that we were in fact, seeking a different social and political role, embarking on a journey toward Community-based practice that turned into a complex pilgrimage. My own story and my interpretation of it will provide a body of evidence, but I will bring in other stories, for Māori Theatre was beginning at this time.

The 1980s and 1990s involved the transition to neo-liberalism and the blossoming of a service role for the community. This presented opportunities for Community-based theatre practice. I present case studies of a cross section of these

practices, noting the sheer volume and diversity of work that has often been ignored by the mainstream and how, via theatre, complex social relations are established with the wider community. The recording of these practices is in itself of value. But in order to move past the merely descriptive, I place each study within a framework of best practice as provided by Cohen-Cruz (96-97). As well, I assess the ideological role of the practice, using the analysis of possible roles played by community providers under neo-liberalism as provided by Defilippis, Fisher and Shragge (678-681). In every case, funding, especially of infrastructure, has been an issue.

Accordingly, I turn to the policy trajectory of the main funder, the national arts council, during the period spanned. From the Community-based structure of the 1970s, managerialism influences restructured the Council in the 1990s in order to marginalise the community sector. But currently, a community focus has returned, as the Creative Industries concept has led to mainstream theatre practice becoming increasingly commodified and market driven. Māori, and then the diasporic Pacific Island artists, have played a crucial and ambivalent role in these struggles for position. As well, the teaching of drama, which provides an initial ideological introduction to the field for young people, has been significantly influenced by the neo-liberal regime.

Finally, from this account of ongoing contestation will come some assessment of the current state of play and the positions of a new generation of theatre workers. This assessment requires the introduction of recent post-marxist analysis of late capitalism. I will argue that neo-liberalism has led to a choice for theatre workers, a choice between working in a mainstream theatre practice more clearly than ever centered in market-based, commodity relations; or of working in Community-based

theatre practice which, in contrast, is part of the multiple struggles for the Common in the time of transition that we now inhabit.

In terms of theoretical frameworks, Raymond Williams' interpretation of the processes of culture provides a meta-framework. In his major work, the Sociology of Culture, he sees culture being defined by the idealists as an informing spirit. But for the materialists, culture is a production process and part of the whole social order. For Williams, this latter approach, which I will adopt:

... requires, as we shall see, new kinds of social analysis of specifically cultural institutions and formations, and the exploration of actual relations between these and, on the one hand, the material means of cultural production and, on the other hand, actual cultural forms. (14)

This involves in turn, analysing social conditions of art, social material in art forms and social relations in art works (22-24). A key concept is Ideology, which, in his view, is both the conscious beliefs of a ruling class, but also:

the characteristic *world view or general perspective* of a class or other social group which will include formal and conscious beliefs but also less conscious, less formulated attitudes, habits and feelings, or even unconscious assumptions, bearings and commitments. (26)

It is in this latter sense that I use the term 'post-modern', as a world view or general perspective, and more generally, this definition of ideology is of critical importance in this thesis.

Williams draws an essential difference between Institutions and Formations. 'Cultural producers', those who make art, have related in a variety of ways to social *institutions*; but they have also variously, either been organised or organised

themselves in a variety of ways, thus creating *formations* of cultural producers within a society (35).

With regard to the former relationship, he covers the historical line from instituted artists such as bards, who were recognised as part of the central social organisation itself, to the artist under the wing of a patron in varying degrees, including that of the patron providing protection and early support, to commercial and public sponsorship. He details some of the contradictions of the public (via the state) acting as a patron, in particular the tendency to fund art for an already privileged sector of society from general taxpayer funds, and the attempts to disguise this contradiction through arms length institutions such as arts councils and peer assessment panels.

When it comes to the artist's relationship to the market, once again there are a variety of possibilities: from the artisanal, where the artist as "independent producer offers his own work for direct sale" (45); to the post artisanal, where the artist "sells his work to a distributive intermediary" (e.g. a gallery); to market professionals such as writers, who retain copyright, even though the work is published and marketed by publishers; to the corporate professional, who is commissioned to undertake pre-conceived work - the state of affairs generally existing in television and film (54). Within this framework, Community-based theatre is determinedly pre-market and Community-based theatre workers are closest to the medieval phenomenon of a specialized group devoted to art within a monastic order.

In terms of internal relationships between artists, he covers the more formal Academies and Professional Societies, but also the less formal Movements, Schools and Groups, some of which can be international, e.g. the avant-garde, seeing often a class formation at work. Much of the story of this thesis revolves around informal,

internal relationships between key players, but as well, more formally, the avant-garde movement has been influential. Finally, in this country, there has never been a *formation* of Community-based theatre makers of any significance.

Williams' concept of the aesthetic, which is often the basis of the rejection of Community-based theatre, is of particular importance. He sees the aesthetic as an observable general tendency (however deeply complicated by historical and cultural diversity) to distinguish and to value kinds of work which meet no immediate and manifest need, of any every day practical kind, and which are at least not necessarily taken as evidence of some metaphysical or non-human dimension of reality. Indeed this is so clear that I sometimes wonder why so much effort usually goes into trying to prove it. Such work can serve societal purposes, of the deepest kind: not as food, or as shelter, or as tools, but as 'recognitions' (both new and confirming marks) of people and kinds of people in places and kinds of place, and indeed often as more than this, as 'recognitions' of a physical species in a practically shared physical universe, with its marvelously diverse interaction of senses, forces, potential. (128-129)

Williams goes on to point out that this deep human interest in recognition is practised over a wide range of forms, from collective to individual, overlaps and interacts with other kinds of practice (for example, religious practices), but can never be reduced to these other practices.

With Community-based theatre often being scorned as non-art, or at best, amateur art, I welcome Williams' judgement that the defining of what is and what is not 'art', is a part of the social organisation of that society. He concludes that, "the distinctions are not eternal verities, or supra-historical categories, but actual elements of a kind of social organisation" (130). This analysis, I believe, justifies the task of

this thesis, which is to gain Community-based theatre, a process of theatre making absolutely focused on presenting kinds of people in kinds of places, a more secure place on the cultural radar.

For Williams, the fact that something is 'art' is often signalled by it taking place in a certain sort of building e.g. a gallery or theatre. Community-based theatre practice, by deliberately confusing this signalling, can be punished. Yet this has a democratising social purpose.

Finally, Williams writes of the reproduction of forms, separating form into generalised modes capable of infinite reproduction (the narrative mode, the lyrical mode and so on); narrower genre which can be subject to social characteristics, for example, romance failed to survive into the bourgeois epoch; and types within these genre e.g. bourgeois drama, the realist novel... (194-206). Community-based theatre will often use the narrower genre in a subversive fashion.

Walter Benjamin remains relevant, as a touchstone, with his insistence that for an art work to move outside the frame of bourgeois culture, both the content and the means and mode of production must change (86). With Community-based theatre, the means and mode of production are both handed over, not necessarily to the proletariat (in Benjamin's day the privileged agents of change), but to the community involved. And that community can have a range of political positions. A fascist or racist Community-based theatre project is in fact theoretically possible, and would present the Community-based theatre worker with an obvious ethical dilemma. But, as an issue, this is one which, under neo-liberalism, will tend to be situated more in the conservative versus progressive range of responses to the community's role.

This logically leads to writers on that community role and the primary theoretical framework is provided by the article by Defilippis, Fisher and Shragge, as

it unravels the possible roles of community organisations in current society and finds a progressive position.

Among the writers on Community Theatre, Jan Cohen-Cruz and Baz Kershaw are most referred to, and for New Zealand theatre history, Barrowman and Edmond are central to this thesis. Community-based theatre has a genealogical connection to ritual and Victor Turner's, Richard Schechner's, and Jerzy Grotowski's investigations of the ritual roots of theatre provide useful conceptual touchstones.

For the final chapter, I turn to the work of the post-marxists, led by French philosopher, Alain Badiou, and their radical rewriting of the framework of struggle in terms of a post-modern society of the multitude faced with the unified, imperial structure of late capitalism.

Other than my own work, much of the content for this thesis is provided by interviews with those who have had significant involvement in Community-based theatre in New Zealand: Clare Adams, James Ashcroft, Susan Battye, James Beaumont, Murray Edmond, Peter Falkenberg, Rori Hapipi (Rowley Habib), Tony McCaffrey, Sally Markham, Jim Moriarty, Elizabeth O'Connor, Simon O'Connor, David O'Donnell, Brian Potiki, Sam Scott, Justine Simey-Barton, Heather Timms and Jill Walker. The Art2 group in Auckland have conducted useful advocacy work, with Sandi Morrison and Philip Clarke, who served on Arts Council Boards, providing insider information. Arts Council officer, John McDavitt and those involved in the writing of the drama curriculum for secondary schools have also been interviewed. And then, government departments produce policy documents and indeed acts of parliament, which have been analysed. For the saga of the neo-liberal revolution in New Zealand, Jane Kelsey and Brian Easton are the key writers, with Kelsey's two books covering most thoroughly, the period in question.

In summary, in this thesis I want to situate Community-based theatre as a disciplined practice, trace its historical roots in Aotearoa and see it as playing a crucial role in generating a diversity of social voices, a role both supported and subverted by neo-liberalism. But in its survival it offers a new generation of theatre workers, disenchanted with an increasingly commodified world disorder, a viable cultural role. On a more personal level, this thesis gives me the opportunity to step back and reconsider my own work, and that of colleagues, and with their involvement and participation, to place our work within this wider context.

I began this introduction by looking at two plays I have directed, separated by a span of some forty years. The title of the first, I rode my horse down the road implied, unwittingly, a journey away from 1950s provincial suburbia, away from that single divan bed placed on the margins of mainstream theatre. The journey, accompanied by many valued colleagues, has led to this new, yet old practice, symbolised, in my case, by the veranda of the miner's cottage. It has also enabled a return of sorts, to my original community, to play a still critical, but more informed role.

Chapter One

Certainly a tendency:

a definition leading to an alternative view of early NZ theatre history

“We are here to say we are here. And when we say, ‘we are here’ we also name the other” (Marcos 158).

This chapter defines Community-based theatre and looks at New Zealand theatre prior to 1984 from a Community-based theatre perspective. I will argue that a relatively coherent history can be presented through this perspective and that there has been a constant tendency toward this perspective, a tendency that has been denied by the mainstream. For in handing over the means of production to ‘the people’ in the form of community groupings, Community-based theatre is radical. However, this argument involves re-interpreting past events from a current knowledge of form and practice which did not exist, or was not known about, as those events were taking place. This in turn can lead to the problem of meta-narrative, a pre-determined story the writer is uncovering. To avoid this, I argue, along with US writer, Jan Cohen-Cruz (17), that there is a family line of Community-based theatre tendencies and practice, with a generation having its own identity, but passing on characteristics to a next generation, who live the inheritance according to their specific social and economic framework. The family tree includes ritualised performative activity found in indigenous cultures, amateur theatre, left wing theatre, popular theatre, the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the avant-garde strand of modernism, settler cultural nationalism, and local, post-colonial cultural developments. The family tree is local, national and international. I will examine these genealogical strands in detail at appropriate historical moments.

What is 'Community-based theatre'? The term is used by US practitioners to distinguish the field from what UK writers have traditionally called 'Community Theatre'. The US writers believe the latter term leads to confusion with the local amateur group and the professional, regional theatre – both of which can call themselves 'Community Theatres', but whose agendas are very different. The professional, regional theatre, despite being an organisational community, chooses content according to local market forces. The amateur theatre, once again an organisational community, is often providing for its members a cultural experience which is absent locally: a Broadway experience, or a bohemian experience. We share this confusion, so despite an Australasian tendency to use the UK nomenclature, I will use the US term, for it also contains within it, a methodological prescription.

But there are other names for the activity. Applied Drama, Social Theatre, Theatre for Development, Theatre in Education, Popular Theatre, Forum Theatre, and Legislative Theatre are all encountered. There can be attempts to separate out *drama*, as a broad range of performance, from *theatre*, an activity focused on performance on stage of scripted work. In education networks there is the need to distinguish *Theatre* in Education, which involves visiting professional groups, from *Drama* in Education, which involves drama (or theatre) as a subject in the school curriculum. It is then, a diverse and sometimes confusing field, varying in practice from country to country, and from situation to situation, reflecting in Raymond Williams's terms, a variety of social conditions, social material and social relations. The UK movement, greatly influenced by the counter-culture, was particularly strong in the 1960s and 1970s before having its funding cut by Margaret Thatcher. But some groups survived, with the Welfare State International group having considerable influence on some New Zealand practitioners. In Australia, Community-based theatre flourished as part of an

arts council Community Arts initiative driven by the need to face issues arising from a multi-cultural population. In the US the movement has similarly grappled with the cultural melting pot syndrome. In the developing world, Community-based theatre is often used as an educational tool, at times pushing into the harder space of liberation politics. The Filipino group, PETA¹³, had some influence on the early Māori movement. But no matter where they take place and no matter what sort of material they might be exploring, performances will seldom be for the market. In fact, Community-based theatre is very much pre-market as a form of production and requires patronage, but a very disinterested patronage, for it cannot be owned by the patron. In terms of the professionals involved, they are operating in a very early period, probably most closely mirroring those sections of religious orders that devoted themselves to artistic production (Williams “Sociology of Culture” 32).

The practice can be simply described. Australian writer, Richard Fotheringham gives us a down-to-earth description which most practitioners would find acceptable, for practitioners are not overly interested in the theoretical dilemmas:

... ‘the community’ is a particular sub-group of people who are assumed to have interests in common. The community is defined by geography (the inhabitants of a small mining town, a rural area, a suburb with a recognizable identity); by work experiences (railway workers, miners, chicken factory workers); by institutionalization (a secondary school, a welfare centre); or by organization (a migrant center, a youth center, a disabled people’s group, a trade union action group, a pensioners’ club). This community approaches, or is approached by, a group of professional theatre workers. Together the community and the artists devise a performance project with the intention, not

¹³ Philippine Educational Theatre Association.

only of entertaining, but also of saying something about the community's life experiences, memories of the past, and hopes and fears for the future. The theatre professionals contribute their skills in co-ordination, artistic direction, writing, design, and sometimes acting, with a major input on as many levels as possible from the amateur community participants, who may be re-enacting key moments in their lives; celebrating or criticising local events, personalities and people; expressing their attitudes to life. The resulting play or theatrical event is something which other members of the same community can watch, while the subject matter encourages them to respond differently from someone watching it simply as theatre. (20)

In unpacking this description, in some ways, the task of this thesis, community immediately becomes less of a moving target, in that theatre requires real people, in a real place, at the same time. It is also vital to emphasise the central engine of this practice, that is, the role of professional theatre workers, usually, but not always, from outside the community, working with the community group and contributing a variety of skills. Then there is the complexity of who those professionals might be, their motivation and their training, and the question of how they approach or are approached, and how they then negotiate with a community? Who does the professional initially deal with, and to what extent do they represent the community? Does the official body of an organisation (the management committee) speak for the community? Usually, yes. Sometimes, no. As occurred with the Tokelauan project described in Chapter Three, sometimes a group of activists from within a community will be the group with whom the professional works, and their aim is to challenge the wider community. To what extent does the Presbyterian Synod of Otago, who, we shall later see, commissioned projects from Talking House, represent the wider

community? Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu Trust had to negotiate with the prison authorities in order to gain access to a community of prisoners. A workplace can be a particularly difficult site to access, with both management and union operating as gatekeepers. But working through this issue is an important part of the research, with the professional looking for those with a desire for the project. This desire, this energy (the energy behind the Brazilian, Augusto Boal's, concept of the SpectACTOR) and the same energy that makes the playwright want to write about a subject, is crucial to a project's success (Boal "Theatre of the Oppressed" 122).

Again, how is the community content gathered and in what sort of framework is it presented? Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed methodology is focused on eliciting issues from the community group involved, and through a theatrical process of game playing and problem solving, placing these issues in a wider social framework of causality, thus rehearsing the struggle for social change in the real world. But, in other instances, a celebratory form, such as that provided by the art and music focused, UK-based group, Welfare State International, may more closely approximate the community desire. Furthermore, a community watching itself perform, is, in my experience, a more complex act, or at least, a very different act, than the audience consumption of commodity theatre. Finally, there is the vexed question of outcomes: whether a community performing and watching itself perform is sufficient, for cultural democracy requires a multitude of different voices, or whether, as for Boal, there is a need to change society in some way. So, a theoretical base is approached.

As Community-based theatre has become a global 'field' of work,¹⁴ this theoretical base has significantly evolved. US writer, Jan Cohen-Cruz in her 2005 study of Community-based performance in the United States, traces the roots of the

movement there, which grew from the 1960s counter cultural questioning of the status quo, from the saga of the Civil Rights movement, from the often turbulent establishing of the basic rights of citizenship of newly arrived migrant groups, but which also extend down into the soil of Native American ritual. She notes the growing fluidity of identity and its impact on community, leaving it at times little more than a temporary coalition focused on an issue (101), touches on the problems of assessment of projects which must encompass the doing, as well as the ‘how it is done’ of mainstream theatre criticism, and notes the relevance of some key funders, funding bodies which leave the New Zealand reader exceedingly envious, for example, Rockefeller Foundation’s PACT (Partnerships Affirming Community Transformation) Grant Scheme (57-58). She finds, interestingly, that the movement in the US can be faith-based in a secular idealism, that is, “participants can have a committed belief in a vision with no guarantee it can come to pass” (85).

Cohen-Cruz identifies story telling as a key methodology in the gathering of content from a community:

Tales about what is personally meaningful are available to everyone and thus are in tune with the democratic underpinnings of the field. (129)

She also deals with some of the issues that arise when the stories involve personal trauma. And she finds that there are frequently used performance structures, to give form to content gathered from the community:

- i. collectively grounded popular forms,
- ii. oft-adapted literary texts,
- iii. and original compositions shaped by the core participating artists’ particular creative process. (153)

¹⁴ Oxford English Dictionary: field, 2. Ground on which battle is fought; 4. Large stretch, expanse.

The concept of the popular is a crucial yet contentious concept and she quotes Williams, interviewed by Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, for whom it involves:

- i. Other to high or learned art.
- ii. Popular as folk culture i.e. carrying on a cultural tradition without the specific marking of an individual artist.
- iii. Addressed to a large number of people and “well-liked by the many”.
- iv. Oppositional: “That which represents a certain kind of interest of experience, as versus the modes of an established culture or as versus a power”.
- v. “A very active world of everyday conversation and exchange. This includes jokes, and everyday gossip.” (83)

Of course, other than the requirement to be oppositional, ‘popular’ commercial culture can threaten to fit this definition, and to counter this threat, she turns to Boal who writes:

The conventional belief is that Popular Theatre must be close to circus, whether as text or performance... We believe, on the contrary, that the most important characteristic of the theatre that addresses itself to the people must be its permanent clarity, its ability to reach the spectator - appealing to his intelligence and sensitivity – without circumlocution or mystification.

(“Theatre of the Oppressed” 72)

In my own work, I find this characteristic a touchstone. For, at the same time as commercial culture increasingly gathers the mass audience, the hold of that culture on individual members of its mass audience is superficial, and people remain open to appeals to “intelligence and sensitivity”.

But, most relevant to the trajectory of this thesis, Cohen-Cruz puts forward principles of engagement, characteristics of the process, and required outcomes which I will henceforth use as a definition of best practice:

- (i) **Communal context:** the artists' craft and vision are at the service of a specific group desire.
- (ii) **Reciprocity:** the relationship between community-based artists and participants is mutually nourishing. Participants receive the satisfaction of translating ideas into forms, critical distance, public visibility and respect; artists are stretched by learning what people know and feel through the authority of their experience. The work is jointly owned and provides an asset for the community.
- (iii) **Hyphenation:** The work is aesthetic and entertaining, but has a further purpose, such as education, community building or therapy.
- (iv) The work involves an **Active Culture**, based on principles of inclusivity and diversity - all people have artistic potential, and frequently get more out of making art than through observing it. (91-97)

These principles of best practice, for me, have the virtue of simplicity, yet, as we shall see in Chapter Three, are not biblical commandments, but a means of negotiating the inevitable complexities which arise from their application, complexities which were immediately suggested by Fotheringham's practical description. How is *the group desire* determined? What if it is to mimic some aspect of commercial culture? Is that acceptable or should it be negotiated? For a sexual abuse victim, *critical distance*,

public visibility and respect are very charged concepts. Who defines *the further purpose* of a project and in what terms? The principles do however, serve to provide some boundaries around the field, boundaries which are constantly threatened, particularly by the practice of group devised performance, where often, the group of practitioners will tend to represent a wider community of the like minded, or will work on topics which are of issue within the wider community. Here, as well, the mode of production, whether performances exclusively taking place in the conventional theatre, or in community venues, and the extent to which market forces operate, is of relevance.

In summary, while it could be argued that my use of these principles as a major analytical framework throughout this thesis is simplistic, a banal checklist of boxes to be ticked or crossed, the same criticism could be levelled at, for example, the framework of human rights, or, locally, the Charter of the Green Party, involving principles of sustainability, reversability, consensus and social justice.¹⁵ In my view, such frameworks, if they lead to discussion of the theoretical and experiential components of variance, allow one to remain centred on the subject at hand, rather than being diverted along theoretical and experiential labrynth.

Finally, before reviewing the history of New Zealand theatre prior to 1984, there is a central problem posed, per se, by my operating within a framework of theatre studies, that is, the rescuing of the theatre event, which Schechner describes as beginning with the arrival of the spectators and ending with their leaving (“Performance Studies” 205) - and which, in the case of Community-based theatre must broaden to include the selection of the community, the selection of topic and the process of making, and even, afterward, possible follow up work in the community - from oblivion by turning it into words, and then analysing that which has been

restored to life. Immediately, issues arise which a Community-based theatre process has attempted to circumvent. Williams notes the essential alienation that the written word brought to the cultural experience, for with it, accessibility was confined to the literate, and immediately, issues of class, education, capital intensive production and market forces entered the scene (“Sociology of Culture” 91-92). If a script upon which the theatre event is based is available, with the variations of availability from published to archive storage, life is made easier for the writer. Yet this immediately favours literary theatre, a theatre form focused on the illustration of the absent writer’s vision and appealing to literate people. Often, in my own work, coherent scripts were prepared at the last minute for the lighting person to be able to follow the performance. The restoration task is assisted by reviews, but theatre reviews appear mainly in major urban newspapers or literary magazines. Regional newspapers seldom have on their staff ‘reputable’ critics. So there is an urban bias to what is considered important. Archive material is also of value, but smaller groups operating on small budgets and reliant on volunteer labour will seldom have an archivist, whereas larger institutions with paid staff will maintain resource material as a form of cultural capital, which will translate into reputation and be useful support material for funding applications. With Amamus, we had an enthusiastic archivist as a group member (Jonathan Dennis), so records were kept. Accordingly, that period is the most written about. If a theatre event is described in a published book, it will tend to enter the official canon. So an academic bias is created, favouring once more, the literate. A cultural activity that is, in its nature, accessible to all, becomes, via the written record, a preserve of the literate and the educated.

Finally, I am not so much interested in the process of restoration of

¹⁵ See www.greens.org.nz/charter, accessed 2/2/10.

performances as in the process of discovering the existence, or absence, of a process of production, or a tendency toward this process, and then, when it does exist, in the diversity that the process produces, a multiplicity rather than the singularity of ‘fine art’ (there is only one Mona Lisa). All these factors make me realize that this task of reframing NZ theatre history is a negotiation on the ideological plane (Williams “Sociology of Culture” 29). Accordingly, the following analysis is both about content and ideology in NZ theatre, but even more, about the real processes by which that content and that ideology are produced. And by writing this thesis, I am entering a content and perhaps, in something of a contradiction, through writing, placing a different ideology within the dominant ideological sphere as represented by the academy.

There are a number of published accounts of New Zealand Theatre history (Downes, Thomson, Smythe), one period study (Barrowman) and one particularly relevant thesis (Edmond). Other than Barrowman and Edmond, the agreed, ‘official’ story, can be summarized, up to 1970, as follows:

Theatre arrived in New Zealand with the first settlers, the first public performance taking place in 1841.¹⁶ With the goldrush of the 1860s, the market expanded and actor-managed companies set up in the main centres in adapted, or purpose-built theatres. As transportation improved, these companies were supplanted by multi-national touring companies, mainly based in Australia. J. C. Williamson was the major entrepreneur. Stars were created and the productions were profitable enough to allow lavish costuming, scenery and special effects. Throughout the above period

¹⁶ The Lawyer Outwitted, arranged by Professor of Elocution, David Osborne, Auckland. For a description of this event see Downes (10-11).

the theatrical content was English or American. But from the early 20th century, movie theatres began to bite into the live theatre market, which became virtually extinct with the arrival of the sound film in the late 1920s.

This, together with the Depression, shifted theatrical focus to the local amateur play-reading come theatre group. These groups sprang up throughout the country and formed a national federation, which ran festivals, provided a library of plays and ran summer schools to increase the skill base. The plays produced tended to be the West End comedy or repertory fare. But with the nationalist cultural urge of the 1930s and again in the 1950s, the search for local material began, with playwright competitions regularly held. However there was little success in this search for local content. With the first and second Labour Governments establishing national cultural institutions during the 1940s, there was interest in a national professional theatre. The privately funded New Zealand Players Company toured the country during the 1950s, collaborating with the amateur theatre groups, but proved economically unsustainable. As well, the Auckland based Community Arts Service toured professionally directed plays to the regions.

Meanwhile, the search for the home-grown play continued, but the complacent post war audience of the 1950s was indifferent, even hostile, to the critical mirror that the playwright held up to society, and, as Thomson reports, “the urban amateur dramatic societies which took an interest in the social and political problems of the modern world looked rather to European and American playwrights” (28). Bruce Mason wrote The Pohutakawa Tree (1957), later to become a classic, but could not obtain production, so turned instead to a one man piece, End of the Golden Weather (1959), which he toured throughout the country, often playing in community venues.

Meanwhile, the pressure built for both a professional theatre and for local

product. Nola Millar, an activist in the amateur theatre network, promoted New Zealand plays. Radio drama and then television, created employment for actors, and in 1964, a group of young Wellingtonians established Downstage, New Zealand's first professional theatre. Guided by the newly established Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, this grew from a bohemian affair into the model for a network of professional regional theatres. This network provided the theatrical infrastructure which finally allowed local playwrights to learn their craft, and assistance to this end was provided by the establishment of Playmarket, which offered script assessment and agency services. Nevertheless, audiences remained ambivalent to the local product until Joseph Musaphia and Roger Hall provided the light-weight satiric comedy and farce which the middle-aged, middle-class theatre going audiences found acceptable. Thomson writes:

Hall provided a range of characters and chose unexciting situations readily recognized by his predominantly middle-class and middle-aged audiences. It is remarkable how little happens in these plays and how often the worst is only reported, not presented. (89)

But with Greg McGee's Foreskin's Lament,¹⁷ New Zealand theatre came of age, for here was a play set in the heart of the national institution of rugby, holding up a critical mirror to that institution, and proving popular.

But already, as Māori and feminist tendencies arrived on the scene, the regional theatre, production house network was fragmenting. With CIRCA Theatre, established by a group of actors disenchanted with Downstage, the co-operative production model appeared, with actors accepting whatever the box office produced, as opposed to the production house-as-employer paying a guaranteed wage. This

model was to gain in strength, creating a theatre field which was diverse, but often operating in a semi-professional status.

In this history there are a number of mystifications. Firstly, it largely ignores the theatrical aspects of the indigenous culture, mentioned briefly by a visiting American actor in 1864:

I saw a party of them [Māori] act in a play that had been written to show off their sports and ceremonies, and in one of the scenes where they were tracking an enemy the grace and earnestness with which they moved were surprising.

(Downes 59)

Martyn Sanderson, whose original vision for Downstage included the breaking down of the barrier between stage and audience, realised, twenty five years after the establishment of the theatre, “that a model for my vision existed all along – the marae” (Edmond 51). In my own experience, the pōwhiri, with its defined starting (the karanga) and ending (the hongiri), and its elements of dialogue, is situated, like much Community-based theatre, between ritual and theatre. Rangimoana Taylor stated in an interview:

I remember looking at *Lear* and thinking this guy is doing whai-korero. “Blow winds and crack your cheeks,” and I thought this is a real whai-korero, to the death. This is a challenge to the winds... (Maufort and O’Donnell 209-218)

In a talk given at the 2008 ADSA Conference in Dunedin, he added the narration of whakapapa, telling where one is from; the singing of waiata connecting one to the gods, mountains, rivers, and seas; and the haka as a story telling dance, as further theatrical elements of Māori culture.¹⁸ Only with the beginnings of Māori theatre

¹⁷ First Downstage production: July-August, 1985.

¹⁸ Personal notes.

would this genealogical link to the local Community-based theatre model be acknowledged.

The second mystification is that in this official history, there is an equating of theatre with the written, authored, play-text. It is a history, especially for Thomson, of the search for a local literary theatre, showing some impatience as to why theatre lagged behind the other literary forms.

A third mystification is the lack of interest in acting technique past the level of Hamlet's advice to the players, given that the 20th century saw significant theatre developments based around the craft of acting and the relationship to audience. Even with the advent of professional theatre there is, in Smythe's book for example, a singular mention of a directorial experiment with improvisation. That is all. The acting space remains that of the courtesan. Jerzy Grotowski writes:

The actor is a man who works in public with his body, offering it publicly. If this body restricts itself to demonstrating what it is – something that any average person can do - if it is exploited for money and to win the favour of the audience, then the art of acting borders on prostitution... The word "actress" and "courtesan" were once synonymous. Today they are separated by a somewhat clearer line, not through any change in the actor's world but because society has changed. Today it is the difference between the respectable woman and the courtesan which has become blurred. ("Poor Theatre" 33)

If this metaphor is expanded, the playwright's task is to write the script and the action for the courtesan. This is not an easy task, which perhaps explains the time lag in creating playwrights. It explains as well, the assumed characteristics of professionalism in these histories: the taking of payment, a certain grace and well

spoken charm, but as well, the need for a satisfactory set, costumes and lighting – essential ingredients of the good house.

To further elaborate this mystification, it is, from the start, a house for the respectable, for the actual, or aspiring, middle class. And when the house expects public funding, the tension increases. It also explains the need to widen the services of the successful house to provide drink and food. It is useful, then, in order to move outside these mystifications, to examine the received history, from the analytic framework provided by Williams, and to then further interrogate from a Community-based theatre paradigm.

If I take those first theatrical performances in Auckland, it is clear that Professor of Elocution, Mr D. Osborne, filled the role of artisan and offered his product directly to the market of 1500 settlers who lived in the town. Yet immediately, patronage was required, in the form of protection, for the governor had to grant permission, and by the second event, that fact is displayed most prominently on the newspaper advertisement. There was, as well, a rapid move away from providing public bar entertainment for a popular audience to serving the needs of the more respectable citizens. This move required the establishing of a makeshift theatre in the back room of the hotel, thus removing the event from the community venue of the public bar. The programme consisted of a melodrama, followed by a Musical Melange, beginning with Rule Britannia and ending with God Save the Queen (Downes 10-12). Unfortunately, setting the precedent for Auckland theatre, the initiative proved unsustainable and the story moves to Wellington, for its first theatrical event: two melodramas, once again played in a converted back room of a hotel and produced by James Merriott. But in Wellington, the class issue became more pressing. The artisan depended on the respectable middle class as his market, or

at least required middle class behaviour, so that the working class, tending to be rowdy and interventionist, had to learn the discipline of being a theatre audience.

Peter Downes writes:

Nothing was more guaranteed to put an end to theatrical enterprise than hooliganism in the pit. Even a hint of bad behaviour, especially on the opening night of a season, could give the theatre a reputation for coarseness and the fashionable element would stay firmly away for all time. To witness, let alone be part of unrefined behaviour in a place of amusement - which was always suspect anyway - was to commit one of the great social sins. (13)

Downes explains that the new working class formed by the industrial revolution was hungry for amusement and had begun to swarm into the theatres, much to the annoyance of the upper classes who regarded the theatre as their own exclusive property. But we learn that despite initial success in attracting the respectable audience, and the erection of the first purpose built theatre, Marriott's venture proved as well, unsustainable.

What sort of communities were these early settler towns? They were certainly not rural villages with close *Gemeinschaft* relations – they hadn't been here long enough for the stories to gather. Nor were they cities focused on industrial labour and contractual relations, even though these did exist. They were probably closer to social organisations, formed in order to achieve a desired goal: getting on in the new country. Yet as well, they would be linked to networks that were often international, of having family 'at home', or business interests that were necessarily international. There is also, in the migrant, a strong sense of independence, of fighting against the re-establishing of the oppressive community back home, this usually expressed as an egalitarian urge. While the founders of the New Zealand Company wanted to

reproduce the English class system, Samuel Parnell's immediate request for an eight hour working day questioned that agenda. In summary, these towns were made up of migrants opting to come to the colony in order to better their economic lives and to be more socially mobile.

By applying Cohen-Cruz's principles of *Communal Context*, *Reciprocity*, *Hyphenation* and *Active Culture*¹⁹ to this early emanation, further points can be made. First of all, there was a sense of the Community-based theatre model, with two people schooled in the craft - a Professor of Elocution in Auckland and Marriott (actor, singer, playwright, poet, scene painter, violinist, dancer, manager...) in Wellington, working with people from the community (Downes 2). However, in terms of the *Communal Context*, the plays were not based on the community's experience. Instead, they were plays from 'home', and the entertainment was serving the purpose of transporting the culture from home, with all its mystifications, to the new environment, rather than in any way, dealing with the new circumstances. The *hyphenation* then, the other agenda, was the reassurance that the dream of making New Zealand an England of the south was possible. There was, to an extent, an *active culture* in that amateur performers were used, but one can assume, a mimicking of the courtesan took place, rather than a performance based on the telling of one's own truth. And hovering over events was the absolute absence of Māori, the indigenous people, the community of this land. This was a settler cultural event, and New Zealand theatre would continue to be a settler theatre through the period under review.

But, within this analytic framework, it is useful to pause and dream a little. If, in 1842 there had been a Community-based theatre group operating in Aotearoa who sought out the settlers and asked for personal stories, stories which would have

involved oppression - Irish potato famines, the removal of Scottish peasants from the land, stories of redundant English farm labourers and so on – stories which would have told of the anxiety of moving to an alien land with the dream of establishing a better life, and encountering people seen as strange and savage. Imagine a performance based on these stories, witnessed by the settlers and the tangatawhenua. Imagine the next show, based on Māori stories of reaction to these people, of appreciation of their technology, of the spiritual differences, of hopes of working together, framed by their own stories of migration and of belonging to this place, such a show witnessed by the settlers and by tangatawhenua. From there could well have developed a commedia dell'arte episode made up of stories of the interaction between the two peoples and the misunderstandings that inevitably occurred, now healed by laughter. Of course, such a dream sidesteps the actual production of the form and the skilled artists capable of facilitation. However, it is worthwhile noting that such production would have been more possible within the culture of the tangatawhenua than within the culture of the settler. Finally, I point out, that the sorts of dialogues suggested began to take place in Treaty of Waitangi workshops of recent years.

Back to the story. The locally based actor-manager company came and went over the next decades, driven by the same energy and sabotaged by the same market problems, but in the 1880s the transnational company, able to source and control international theatrical product, entered the market, destroying local production. The product range was diverse, from Gilbert and Sullivan light opera, musical comedy, vaudeville, comedians, jugglers and human oddities, to minstrel shows and child entertainers. Middle class respectability was stretched to embrace the can-can and

¹⁹ See p32.

virtually nude, live, classical statues (Thomson 130-157). Theatre provided that which, in later years, would become the realm of first movies, then television.

It is useful then, to distinguish this category of mass entertainment from popular culture, for mass entertainment meets some of the facets of William's definition (see p31). It is other to high or learned art. It is addressed to a large number of people and well-liked by the many. It can be part of a very active world or everyday conversation and exchange, including jokes and everyday gossip. However, it is not a folk culture that is carrying on a cultural tradition without the specific marking of an individual artist, nor is it oppositional to the mode of the established culture and power. In fact, with its star system and its imperial sweep, it is the populist, mirror- image of the empire, so that it is useful to recall Boal's demand of the popular, the need for permanent clarity, the need to reach the spectator – appealing to intelligence and sensitivity ("Theatre of the Oppressed" 72). Mass entertainment is designed to control. In Boal's words, "the ruling class strive to take permanent hold of the theatre and use it as tool of domination" (ix).

Analysing this mass culture from the point of view of Cohen-Cruz's principles, there is market penetration of *Communal Context* so that the agenda is based on a range of desires as commodity; *Reciprocity* is replaced by the fantasies of star worship; the additional purpose, or *Hyphenation*, is both producer profit and ideological domination; and *Active Culture* is replaced by a subservient, passive audience. In fact, in this period of high empire, the French writer, Guy Debord's 'Society of the Spectacle', a society in which extravagant cultural events consume excess capital, can be glimpsed. It is a society where "all that once was directly lived has become mere representation" (12). To take one example from this period: in minstrel shows, the songs of Afro-American slaves (songs generated by an impulse to

culturally survive intolerable conditions), were performed by Europeans who were blacked up to resemble slaves. These artists were contracted to a transnational corporation and sang to white colonists determined to ignore their own subjugation of an indigenous people. With these shows travelling throughout the Pacific and to the UK, it begins to be a world where “images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream” (12).

It is with small regret then, to watch, in the first years of the 20th century, the audience for this field of cultural production being colonised by the new technological form of the moving picture. Combined with the crisis of capitalism known as the Great Depression, this created a theatrical vacuum, the filling of which provided for the first time in New Zealand settler culture, features of Community-based theatre.

John Thomson writes:

The onset of the Depression induced a sense of increased social isolation and, throwing people back upon their own resources, further encouraged a remarkable flourishing of amateur theatrical groups. These included a significant number of people who expressed a need to examine the nature of their society and the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of its members through the writing and production of plays. (15)

Thomson goes on to note that these societies grew from play-reading groups which, like the earlier amateur acting societies, had long been a part of town life, but which now were actively seeking explanation of the crisis in which they found themselves. These groups federated in 1932 to form a New Zealand branch of the British Drama League (BDL), which then ran festivals, provided facilitators to give expert advice,

established a library of plays, and ran annual residential schools for actors and directors. Peter Harcourt, in his history of New Zealand Theatre, writes:

It soon became apparent that the BDL met a need in the community and in the lives of individuals. Cofounder Amy Kane reflected that because it started in the worst years of the Depression, it seemed to develop as a social welfare movement. Amateur drama groups brought isolated people together in rural areas (some traveled up to forty miles on poor country road to take part) while in the cities the popularity of play-reading groups (twelve in Wellington) showed that there too was a niche to be filled in social life. (70-71)

He quotes Laurie Swindell of Napier, an actress, director and adjudicator, who suggested community drama should get a social welfare grant for its therapeutic value:

I've seen this from absolute experience, the change in people who've come in all mixed up, often very insecure people, who are a bit down or in trouble.

And then the theatre process begins to operate:

You see them coming together, individuals each wanting to do their own thing the best, and they start coming together with disciplined responsibility – because theatre is disciplined – and you finally get them working with an entirely different attitude. (71)

There were however, problems of content and of technique. These groups, mirroring the British based repertory theatre, were stuck with proscenium arch, literary theatre and the drawing room comedy popular with the English middle classes. A search began for local writers and competitions were held. Interest was high, the 1932 competition receiving over seventy entries. But a New Zealand setting was not

required, and judges observed that often the plays set in England were better written because models were at hand. However, Thomson writes that:

Whether or not these playwrights set their plays in New Zealand, overseas or, as one critic added, in flats or drawing rooms which could be anywhere, they were inevitably conscious that they were writing for local actors and local audience. (13)

He adds that while technically the plays might be lacking, and while often the writers could not write directly about local topics, this was compensated for by the sense of direct social engagement with local communities.

When writers did write local content, a common theme was the search for a spiritual home in this country: for example, a farmer's wife brooding over the utilitarian farming landscape and longing for the cultural life of London or Paris, but trapped by her love for a hard working husband. There was as well, a beginning interest in social issues and the world of work, and even a venture into expressionism (15-18). What we had here, was in essence, a Community-based theatre, with *Communal Context*, *Hyphenation* and an *Active Culture*, but one lacking the facilitation skills necessary to generate local content and to then theatrically embed that content.

It is useful to reflect on those skills, and their sophistication: of enabling story telling, of then choosing the theatre form, perhaps embodying the content in a classic play frame, or a popular theatre format, or devising a theatre form specific to the content. Without the skills of the professional Community-based theatre practitioner, the amateur movement, so promisingly generated from stressful social conditions, remained a movement trapped by literary theatre. Instead, it provided a grassroots source of energy for the development of mainstream theatre, providing both personnel

and infra-structural support for the New Zealand Players in the 1950s, and providing audiences for the regional theatres in the 1970s.

But within this movement was an even more promising development in terms of subverting the received history, a development which involved New Zealand artists and intellectuals exploring a major genealogical arm of Community-based theatre: working class or left-wing theatre. Inspired by the Russian revolution, the crisis of capitalism and the rise of fascism, Western intellectuals and artists in the 1920s and 1930s were attracted to the socialist struggle. For a start it offered the possibility of political commitment within their vocation, for instead of serving the middle class they could serve the working class or 'the people', becoming part of the vanguard struggling toward a rational, socially just, collectivised society. They shared the view of this thesis: that cultural production is a material production, and therefore subject to social and economic forces. For German cultural writer, Walter Benjamin, the creating of a socialist artwork involved not only changing the content by reflecting the aspirations and realities of the working class, but a revolutionising of the means of production, so that they were owned by the working class. It also involved altering the mechanics of the art form so that the work was accessible to the working class. The German playwright and theoretician, Bertolt Brecht, colleague of Benjamin, demanded a conscious spectator, who critically watched the way economic and social forces moulded individual action. Brecht used titles, songs and back projection, techniques of alienation, in order to stop the spectator emotionally empathizing.²⁰

²⁰ Augusto Boal (1979), following Brecht, has most thoroughly critiqued the Western tradition of Aristotelian theatre, the central content of which involves a tragic hero, who, because of a character flaw, suffers death or great loss. The passive spectator, feeling pity and fear, experiences a moment of emotional catharsis which then enables him to return to his daily oppressive life. For Boal, middle class

The Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci, writing during this same period, further developed the socialist framework through his concept of hegemony. In a modern society, with mass education and mass media, capitalism rules largely through cultural mechanisms, by establishing, on a daily basis, a web of consciousness (hegemony) which makes people consider the structure of society as inevitable and its values as ‘common sense’. In this genealogical framework, with its various manifestations, theatre (and of course, other art activity), becomes central to political struggle.

According to Rachel Barrowman, in her study of the period, a workers theatre movement blossomed in this country in the 1930s and 1940s. As well as being inspired by international influences, it was a response to the lack of a national culture (4). The cue was taken from British and US workers’ theatres, which had, in turn, been inspired by Soviet experiments in agitprop (especially the Blue Blouse movement of theatre groups), and by German expressionism (Meyerhold, Piscator and Brecht). These theatres rejected the proscenium arch and in accordance with Benjamin’s requirements, established alternative forms using cabaret, songs and expressive movement. They sought non-theatrical venues, and went to the people (21-22). There were sketches and one act play-scripts available and a full-length play based on a strike, Clifford Odet’s Waiting for Lefty, which was performed world-wide.

Barrowman notes that when the Auckland Workers Educational Association produced Waiting for Lefty in October 1936, there was a popular response which led to the formation of The Peoples’ Theatre, to which thirteen trade unions were affiliated (187). It’s constitution allowed, “for the ownership and control of the

organisation by the people of New Zealand (i.e. the workers, farmers, artisans, small shopkeepers, intellectuals, unemployed and professional men), on the broadest and most democratic mass-basis.”²¹ Behind this, and the co-operative book clubs and publishing ventures operating simultaneously, was a vision of a people’s culture. One of the leaders of the movement, Winston Rhodes, wrote:

I don’t want a world fit for the heroes of culture, I want a world where human creativeness in its humblest and most prosaic forms will be able to have some sort of chance. (qtd. Barrowman 25)

His hope was that these workers’ cultural organisations would also begin to produce a local culture, arising from local conditions, “uniting those who are capable of producing stories, articles or drawings dealing with New Zealand social themes” (qtd Barrowman 25). The influence of the movement spread. In Wellington, the University of Victoria’s annual Extravaganza became, under the influence of Ron Meek, notoriously political, before he moved to Hamilton where he started a further People’s Theatre. At the Wellington Teachers College, the drama club, under the direction of progressive educationalist, Walter Scott, produced Waiting for Lefty and the other classic of the left at this time, Auden’s The Ascent of F6. And then, in the early 1940s, once the USSR had joined the war effort, members of the Communist Party formed Unity Theatre, based on the London theatre of the same name, which had spawned groups throughout the UK. Once again, in New Zealand’s Unity, there was a democratic structure, co-operative working methods, emphasis on training ordinary people, discussions after performances and efforts to take plays to workers’ gatherings.

²¹ Peoples Theatre, Programme, *Waiting for Lefty*, Dec. 1936, Ephemera Collection: Theatre, 1930s Alexander Turnbull Library.

But despite the impressive work of this movement, contradictions appeared from the outset. Apart from some formalist choral pieces by poet, R.A.K. Mason, who was a key figure, there was a dearth of local material.²² Despite the holding of competitions, the worker playwrights failed to appear. The second, even more serious problem, was the lack of response from the working class. Unions quickly dropped out of the People's Theatre, and those individuals who continued to be involved tended to be educated, progressive, middle class professionals. When these theatres did survive, and as we have seen, Unity Theatre in Wellington had a long life, they gradually turned to providing contemporary progressive drama for an educated, politically aware membership and audience (Barrowman 219-220). As Ron Meek wrote: "It is a stark and unfortunate fact that the working class as a whole, speaking generally, is not interested in drama, at least it has been our experience here."²³ Barrowman notes that the labour movement as a whole did not actively support a working class culture. If they had, it might have helped provide the popular audience that Mason and Rhodes envisaged (227).

Looking at the movement from the point of view of the Community-based theatre framework, I note its continuing reliance on the writer and the hope that writers will appear from the ranks of the workers. It remains a literary-based theatre vision, facing the problem of accessibility that writing entails (Williams "Sociology of Culture" 91-92). What it required in order to generate local material was the trained facilitator gathering local stories. Boal has developed sophisticated means of gathering and analysing local working class material through participants forming a sculpture or a still life of an issue, for stories alone can simply reproduce

²² Mason's commitment to the cause is seen in NZ literary history as leading to the death of 'the poet'.

mystification. And he has notably extended popular theatre forms which directly involve the audience in the ongoing creation and analysis of local material. Forum theatre, in which a story of oppression is played, then replayed, with the audience suggesting different paths for the actors to follow in order to solve the oppression, is, in my experience, particularly useful.²⁴ It is important to note then, that the way out of the impasse the movement faced was not through the development of writers.

In terms of *Community Context*, that the artist's craft and vision should be at the service of a specific group desire, the movement certainly wanted to be of service, but the group desire was an ideological construct, imposed from without, of an abstract working class with an abstract mission. This problem bedevilled communist-inspired activism. It is both an ideological and a technical issue, and is only solved by acknowledging community, that one is working with a specific group of workers in specific social conditions. Gramsci, realizing this problem, formulated his idea of Workers Councils. I have discussed above the technical possibilities of then generating the specific group need.

This problem spills over to the issue of *Reciprocity* and the need for equal dialogue. *Reciprocity* for the worker, lies in the possibility of the performance of ordered, locally-generated material; for the artist it lies in meeting the artistic challenge of gaining acceptance from workers and embodying the specific local content. The movement met the criteria of *Hyphenation*, that there was a greater purpose than an aesthetic one, and it had as its goal, an *Active Democratic Culture*. This was its most lasting contribution, for in promoting this goal, it exposed the competing ideologies behind state patronage of the arts. Barrowman notes that the

²³ Meek to H. Martin, quoted in Martin to McClymont, 22 Aug. 1964. Unity Theatre Records, Alexander Turnbull Library. Acc 80/1: box 3.

First and Second Labour Governments established public radio, the National Orchestra, a National Film Unit and a National Library Service. They also established a Literary Fund and by the late 1940s were giving out grants to cultural organisations and travel bursaries to individuals. Between 1947 and 1949, a state funded national theatre was publicly discussed. The proposal never came to fruition, but the debate is of interest. Barrowman writes that it involved a number of people who were active in the left theatre movement, and it centred upon discussion around the concept of a popular culture.

The Auckland Drama Council saw the role of a national theatre as one of encouraging popular cultural awareness and activity. It advocated a decentralised, locally-controlled organisation which would cater to a wide, popular audience. Its argument was advanced in opposition to the model of a centralised, government initiated and controlled, professional theatre, as proposed by the recently-formed New Zealand Drama Council. (223-224)

A submission by A.J.C. Fisher, one of the advocates for a locally based workers' culture stated:

We are frankly doubtful of culture being dispensed from above by Government officials and educational bodies like Adult Education. We believe in the slow growth of culture IN and FROM the people. We believe in a people culturing, not being cultured. We have more faith in the DOINGS of a small amateur group in the black-blocks, in its ultimate cultural effects IN the people, than the effect of an occasional visit from some company of great actors. We believe in PARTICIPATION. (qtd. Barrowman 225)

²⁴ See Games for actors and non-actors.

In the middle of the last century, he thus clearly defined the conflict between the concept of a local, grass roots 'democratic culture', a concept which frames the Community-based theatre and the Community Arts movements, and the concept of a national come internationalist, elitist, urban-centred, middle-class culture of excellence, which should occasionally service the regions and the working class in the interests of 'cultural democracy'. The conflict continues to this day.

The official history of early NZ theatre begins then to assume the character of an ideological construct that is contentious. And an even more serious challenge to the official story occurred in the 1970s, a challenge that has been documented by Auckland theatre practitioner and academic, Murray Edmond. This challenge, either failed, as is argued by Edmond, or in the view of this writer, led to the Community-based developments of the 1980s and 1990s.

Chapter Two

From the avant-garde to the community: a personal journey, shared with colleagues

“You can see we are who we are so we can stop being who we are to become the you
who we are”(Marcos 104).

i. Edmond’s thesis.

I turn to the most comprehensive dissident voice in terms of the received history, that of Murray Edmond, who, beginning with his thesis, Old Comrades of the Future: A history of Experimental theatre in New Zealand, 1962-1982, a thesis which surprisingly, has never been published in book form, continues to argue that a body of theatre driven by counter-cultural, avant-garde and nationalist impulses flourished for a time on the New Zealand scene, even challenged the establishment theatre for hegemony, before being defeated by a combination of external forces and local funding policies. He further argues that the establishment of the first professional theatre, Downstage, was driven by these impulses, and that the transition of that theatre to a literary-based regional theatre was a key cultural shift, partly driven by the state patron of the time, who by denying the experimental companies patronage, effectively policed the cultural direction.

While there is much in Edmond’s view that I agree with, and while it is unnecessary to retell the detailed history of the period he covers, I wish to examine the theoretical framework that he uses, to resituate the narrative of my own involvement (and that of key colleagues), and to look at the period from the Community-based theatre perspective. In doing so, I find that the exploration of the avant-garde tendency, rather than coming to a dead end, as is argued by Edmond, led

to a searching for community relationship, and that this influenced, and was influenced by, the arrival and early development of Māori theatre. I will trace the complexity of this search in my own particular case, before describing, in the following chapter, the fully-fledged Community-based practices of the 1990s and thereafter.

The first driver of the NZ experimental theatre movement was the Counter-Culture. The ideology of the Counter-Culture was not so much a formal set of beliefs, but, because of its diversity and anti-authoritarianism, fits more easily Williams' description of "a *characteristic world-view or general perspective*", and "less conscious, less formulated attitudes, habits and feelings, or even unconscious assumptions, bearings and commitments" ("Sociology of Culture" 26). This world view was often couched in negative terms: anti-war, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-consumer, anti-establishment, anti-police, anti-state, anti-puritan, anti-US. But as the English writer, Baz Kershaw, in his study of alternative theatre in the UK notes, the movement was pro-community, a term which was adopted by:

a wide range of grass-roots cultural groups; and that can be read as a matrix for a general dissatisfaction with the society of crisis. The term was used extensively to cover buildings (community centres), services (community medicine), movements (community arts), and art forms (community theatre). Such usages always suggested a nexus of localized, positive, cohesive and caring qualities; all as an alternative to the angst and anomie produced by 'society'. ("Politics of Performance" 134-135)

There were attempts to intuitively articulate the framework of a new society. The Scottish alternative theatre director, John McGrath, writes of the year 1968 and:

... the importance of the thinking around that whole time, the excitement of that whole complex set of attitudes to life which that para-revolutionary situation threw up was incredible – the thinking about ordinary life, the freshness of the approach, the urgency and beauty of the ideas was amazing. (McGrath “Bad Night in Bootle” 43)

Kershaw uses the term, ‘alternative theatre’ rather than ‘experimental’ and argues that:

Its social base was part of an entirely new twentieth century phenomenon – a series of counter cultures, equivalent in their radical reappraisal of society to the nineteenth century Romantics, and based (as romanticism was) in a new generational awareness. However, because of improved communication systems and increased international access to ideas and styles, the successive counter cultures formed a mass movement which impinged on all aspects of Western society as a cultural alternative, or more accurately, a range of cultural alternatives. (7)

Furthermore, in his view, a full-blown counter culture involves a whole generation which, in a period of rapid social change separates them from previous generations (37). Theatre became a popular tool for the counter-cultural movement and in the UK its Community Theatre strand was robust, both in terms of theory and practice. It is useful to share Kershaw’s overview, in order to enable comparison with developments in New Zealand during the period under examination.

Firstly, many of the groups saw themselves as ‘cultural catalysts’. Their shows were “predicated on the possible *usefulness* of theatre to particular communities. By tailor-making performances for known audiences those companies hoped to change those audience in some way, however marginally” (3). The aesthetics

of their performances “were shaped by the culture of their audience’s community” (5). This leads to Kershaw’s central proposition, that a performance is an ideological transaction between a company of performers and the community of their audience, and that out of this transaction, can come some shared need for change (16). Kershaw analyses this transaction, arguing that the theatre act involves *rhetorical conventions*, an implicit agreement that the actors will be allowed to conjure up a fictitious world; and *authenticating conventions*, which are the speech habits, manners, settings etc shown as the world of the play. With the community performance, these authenticating conventions are of crucial importance, for if they reflect the community of the audience, content that is outside the systematically imposed hegemonic limits of that audience, can be accepted.

The movement was also attracted to the communal concepts of anthropologist, Victor Turner, in particular the concepts of *liminality* and *communitas* previously outlined. Crossing thresholds, existing outside normal societal patterns and achieving that unmediated one to one directness of relationship was the impulse behind many ‘happenings’ and ‘festivals’ and the alternative theatre performance could be seen in these terms. Indeed the ultimate aim could be expressed as “the sense of being alive and wholly present to one another”. This led to interest in carnival and its “disruptive anarchy” (Kershaw 73) which is relevant to the NZ story.

But finally, and this is of considerable importance, Kershaw traces the stages that, in the UK, the movement went through:

- (1). Sub cultures/avant garde;
- (2) Counter culture - growing variety of audience.
- (3) Consolidation - making inroads into institutions and social groupings beyond itself.
- (4) Starts to become a series of specialist practices.
- Move to industrial sector.
- (5) Series of interest groups in industrial sector,

some working for highly specific constituencies, others aiming to appeal to a range of markets. No longer oppositional. (88-89)

According to Edmond (18), the second impulse behind New Zealand experimental theatre was that of the avant-garde, or rather the replaying of the avant-garde impulse of the 1920s, an impulse it is useful to immediately note, that lies at the beginning of Kershaw's continuum. Edmond spends some time defining this impulse. Firstly, it was internationalist and groups here were influenced by individual theorists and groups from elsewhere, for example, Samuel Beckett, Bread and Puppet, Robert Wilson, and most significantly, Jacques Lecoq and Jerzy Grotowski. Edmond notes that one characteristic of the avant-garde was to attack the institution of art itself. He quotes Jochen Schulte-Sasse, who wrote, "Their effort [the avant-garde artists] was not to isolate themselves, but to reintegrate themselves and their art into life" (in Burger 41). Edmond goes on to state that:

...experimental work consciously undermines the institutional theatre's definition of what performance is, where it should take place, who it is for, who should perform it and so on; in other words, experimental theatre sets out to confront the carefully constructed idea of art as an institution with an autonomous existence. (17)

This involved attacking the prevalent playwright-based, literary theatre, which was seen as hierarchical and authoritarian. He quotes Jacques Derrida, who wrote in a study of the avant-garde victim/hero of the 1920s, Antonin Artaud:

The stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition, comports the following elements: an author-creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the

time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter *represent* him as concerns what is called the content of his thoughts. (10)

This representation is carried out slavishly by the director and actors who faithfully follow the designs of the master.

Instead, the avant-garde theatre emphasised the live encounter between actor and audience, an encounter which could be celebratory, communal, carnivalesque, or, as in the theatre imagined by Artaud, involve a removal of mask and a return to the mythic. *Communitas* was an ideal the avant-garde shared with the counter-culture. In a later essay on this period, Edmond quotes Grotowski's essentialist summary: "theatre is an act carried out *here and now* in the actors' organisms." (Edmond in Maufort and O'Donnell 45-67)

But there are other versions of the avant-garde to which it is useful to refer. Williams, always precise, writes of the original movement that it was typically, metropolitan, that the majority of the contributing artists were immigrants to the metropolis, and that the styles developed were distanced from their home cultures and that the consciousness and practice involved were increasingly relevant to "a social order itself developing in the directions of metropolitan and international significance beyond the nation state and its provinces" ("Sociology of Culture" 83-84). The NZ movement stood this model on its head, for it involved locals returning from the metropolis and bringing to the provinces internationally derived forms, particularly those of Le Coq and Grotowski, and using them locally for a nationalist purpose.

But there has been of late, a genealogical claiming of the avant-garde by Community-based theatre scholars. Cohen-Cruz argues that though the avant-garde is described as fundamentally individualistic, she is supported by other writers (e.g. Adams and Goldbard 1990) in hypothesizing that such a characterization is

specific to a historical moment. Accordingly, “a more accurate description of the role of an avant-garde in the arts might be that it seeks to change the idea and function of art itself, to posit a new relationship between the artist and the institutions of society”. For Cohen-Cruz then, “These suppositions may lead us to see that an avant-garde does indeed flourish at this moment as community-based art” (31). Cohen-Cruz further notes that:

Like community-based performance today, the avant-garde depended on participation of non-artists, expanded the venues where art took place, put more attention on imagery than words, and conceptualized a philosophical as well as aesthetic role for art in society. While not all avant-garde movements were popular in the sense of attracting other than an arts-related crowd, some of their discoveries have influenced seminal community-based artists over the past twenty five years. (33)

There is a seamlessness then, between the counter-cultural, the avant-garde, and the community-based, with the proviso that, in the view of Nick Kaye, because avant-garde artists were focused on an “autonomous aesthetic sphere”, mainstream modernist culture always caught them up and incorporated the experiments into dominant ideologies. While they were anti-institutional, they were trapped by ‘art’ (21). This argument is central to explaining my own journey through this period.

The final impulse, according to Edmond, was nationalist. The first wave of settler cultural nationalism in New Zealand, “had failed to produce anything for the theatre when compared with writing or poetry or music” (“Old Comrades” 3). Accordingly, rather than rebelling against an institutional theatre that did not fully exist here – other than in an amateur way – the impulse was to make a unique, local theatre. The groups worked through collective devising processes where all members

were creators, wanted to break down traditional boundaries between actor and audience, and were often focused on defining themselves as New Zealanders. Edmond finally suggests that “each grouping performed themselves to their society” (25).

In summary, this theatre movement was created by people who felt part of the international counter-cultural challenge to mainstream post-war capitalist society, who were part of an international avant-garde movement attacking traditional theatre on both technical and ideological levels, and who wished to create a local theatre which was vibrant and indigenous. Edmond then proceeds to trace the story of the early Downstage, and the histories of four of the groups involved: Theatre Action, Amamus, Living Theatre and Red Mole, and sees the movement as slowly dying in the late 1970s, a death which, while locally influenced by state funding policy, was in fact an international phenomenon as identity politics movements and neo-liberalism defeated the sixties experiment.

I can best review (and challenge) his thesis along the lines previously stated, that there was in fact, central to this movement, a searching for new relationships between the artist and the community, and this involved both technical experiments, but also grew out of the nationalist scrutiny. I will re-situate aspects of the story he tells from a personal point of view, for I was founder and director of Amamus, and continued working through the 1980s, and can accept 1984 as an approximate turning point, both in terms of ideology and practice. As well, this personal story reveals the resistances to Community-based theatre practice that existed, and which continue to exist, both for the individual and from within ‘the theatre crowd’.

However, this brings back the initial meta-narrative problem, this time on a more personal level. For as well as telling the story, I am reviewing another’s story, and I am part of the story being told, as Edmond was part of the story being told, and I

want to tell the story with the consciousness gained from having lived the story, and which, indeed, continues to expand as I tell this story, yet, within the story, back then, I was working with a different consciousness. How do I avoid the dishonest re-interpretation, the dishonest rewrite? I believe it is necessary to be open in terms of all the influences, as perceived from this distance, and to deal with these formally, rather than as sub text.

ii. A personal account of the Amamus years

According to Victor Turner (“From Ritual to Theatre” 114)), the liminoid role appears in societies when sufficient surplus is created to allow the artist, scientist or inventor, those who play with existing forms, or develop new forms and possibilities, to be supported. The liminoid space is also present, more widely, in leisure time activities. The liminoid evolves from the liminal role found in more primitive societies, a role which is temporarily inhabited by those in transition, before the mechanical solidary of everyday communal life resumes; whereas the liminoid role is ongoing and the participation in either the role, or the witnessing of work resulting from the role, is voluntary. For Turner, this voluntarism is crucial, and any attempt to subvert this, socially destructive.

Why was I attracted to playing a liminoid role in theatre? Why not be a carpenter like my adopted father? I believe the only honest answer is found by applying a psycho-analytic-come-existential framework. I was born, the last of six children, into a family in a state of disintegration. As a baby, I spent time alone with my birth mother, who was suffering from melancholia, plus time where I was looked after by my future adopted parents. Eventually, my mother was committed to a mental hospital where she later died, and I was adopted into this working class family in a provincial town. I suppressed these early traumatic events by splitting them off from my ego.²⁵ As a child I was a classic ‘schiz kid’, well behaved, emotionally neutral, pattern orientated, and bright.²⁶ With the hormonal changes of adolescence, this began to unravel and I discovered the emotional intensity of theatre, albeit it in amateur form. It was a way of being with people different from the felt aridness of the

²⁵ See for example, Melanie Klein, Contributions to Psycho-analysis, 1921-1945. London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1948.

nuclear family of the 1950s. At university, when I directed for the first time, I realised I could create these relationships, be at the centre of them. This explains, for me, my initial attraction to the aesthetic space, where “so deep a human interest in the renewed and renewable means of recognition, self recognition and identity, can be practised...” (Williams “Sociology of Culture” 128). Williams also writes about social relations in art works and proposes the idea of mediation, which refers to “an indirectness of relation between experience and its composition”, either through projection, the discovery of an “objective correlative”, or the “crystallizing” of crises in “direct images and forms of art” (24). Theatre could provide that mediation and enable me to deal with a variety of alienations: my mother’s as introjected, my own as adoptee, plus the normal alienations of adolescence. But there was a further alienation: the fact that I had been brought up in a working class family meant I was not ‘at home’ in a theatre which was normatively, the preserve of the middle class.

At drama school in Sydney, I learnt something of Stanislavski and Brecht, as well as the technical skills involved in working in a mainstream professional theatre. Afterward, as a newly married teacher in a migrant suburb, I intuitively facilitated a couple of what came close to Community-based theatre productions with some of the young people. But the petit-bourgeois life that my wife, Denise and I found ourselves living, was uncomfortable. The dinner parties of fellow teachers could have, if I had been a Roger Hall-type playwright, been source material for lightly satiric comedy and would have proven popular, for these people would provide a mainstream audience. But that aesthetic experience would not have provided the mediation for what was driving me.

²⁶ See R.D. Laing, The Divided Self. Middlesex: Pelican, 1965.

Attending Film School in London in 1968 was a profound experience. The range of multinational students allowed me to measure my ability and I could drop the false Kiwi humility. It brought me into contact with the intellectual rigour and disciplined artistic processes of Eastern Europeans – and their political complexity. And there was counter-cultural London with its anarchic tendencies, reinforced by events in Czechoslovakia, Vietnam and the Paris student revolt. I watched Olivier outplayed by a method actor, saw the Bread and Puppet Theatre, was amazed by the quality of BBC2 drama productions – Ken Loach’s Cathy Come Home and the formal experiments of David Mercer - and was struck by the energy of the devised and improvised performances of the National Youth Theatre Company. None of this was ideologically formalised, simply taken in as “attitudes” and “feelings”, or “a general perspective” (Williams 26). But it resulted as well, psycho-analytically, in a first articulation of the split off material, and this fed a somewhat manic creative energy for the next period.

We could have stayed in the UK, or gone back to Australia, but the promise of a job at the National Film Unit brought us to New Zealand and Denise was accepted for the first student intake of the new New Zealand Drama School run by Nola Miller. After a year back ‘home’, Amamus formed, a group made up of young Unity actors and two of the drama school students. We were a disparate lot ²⁷, but to be part of a group was a counter-cultural drive. Using the National Youth Theatre as a model, we began devising a play about childhood, the description of which begins the

²⁷ Jeff Rowe was from a working class Christchurch family, Marion Lawrence was a farmer’s daughter from Ekatahuna, Anne England a suburban wife of a car dealer husband, Olwen Taylor worked for the government, Jonathan Dennis was the student son of Kelburn professionals, Michael Bajko the son of Polish emigrants, Darien Takle the daughter of Auckland business people, Denise, Sydney working class.

introduction to this thesis. The reactions to I rode my horse down the road²⁸ are detailed in Edmond's thesis. Generally, people liked the energy and the rawness. It was New Zealand. It was almost a community show in that we were representative of provincial kids who had moved to the city in search of something else. We were, as Edmond suggests, performing ourselves (25).

With the depression piece, The Wall St Banks in London have closed,²⁹ the inspiration came from my adopted father. His generation had been formed by those years. We interviewed people who had lived through the depression, looked at newspapers, improvised scenes suggested by the material, selected, ordered and devised transitions. I introduced a more Brechtian approach by having scene titles and songs. Once again it was local, it was rough, it was us. The New Zealand Players Drama Quartet toured secondary schools with the piece. But there had been no formal dialogue between us as a generation and my adopted father's generation. No, if you like, *reciprocity* - to use Cohen-Cruz's term. It remained an entertainment, with some unformed, socialist-inspired judgement of capitalism as sub text.

But with '51,³⁰ we had to approach the formal relations set up in a Community-based theatre production, for there was the union to satisfy, or at least the officials of the union, and a group of people who had been active in the lockout, in particular Rona Bailey and George Godard. We were portraying their experience and they would be in the audience, judging that portrayal. We retained our devising method, but this time we recorded an improvised run through, transcribed it and I

²⁸ First performed, Downstage Theatre, April 16-25, 1971, then at Victoria University, Wellington Teachers College, Four Seasons Theatre, Wanganui, Harlequin Theatre, Masterton, Grafton Road Arts Centre, and Central Theatre, Auckland; subsequently as part of national tour in 1973.

²⁹ First performed, Downstage Theatre, 24-26 September, 1971, then at Masterton Arts Centre, Rata St School, Naenae, Wellington Teachers' College, Harry Squires Memorial Hostel, Four Seasons, Wanganui and part of 1973 tour.

tidied up the dialogue. This could be shown to our ‘community partners’. The actors then ‘sort of learnt’ the ‘script’. The group had grown by now. John Anderson, a teacher, and Sam Neill, who worked at the Film Unit, had joined, Janie Thompson sang and Tony Backhouse wrote the music. There were back projections and all in all, it was a more sophisticated production. It was also more articulate politically and satisfied the possible critics. It proved popular and we were invited to perform quite widely, at the Teachers College, the Public Service Association Conference, at the Students Arts Festival and so on. All this work was done on an unpaid basis.

Once we performed the piece at a local arts festival in Lower Hutt. A union delegate came along and afterward he studied the departing audience, made up of local little theatre people, and asked me, ‘Where are the workers?’ He was right of course. The play remained captured by the conventional theatre scene. It remained an entertainment. For the first time, but still at an intuitive level, I was faced with Benjamin’s demands to revolutionise the whole mode of production. It is not enough to simply say the right thing.

As we went on a tour hosted by the Drama Federation,³¹ with a programme of plays which included ’51, and while playing to the local little theatre crowd in a variety of towns, that comment continued to challenge. For this tour I had to act in ’51, and the feeling of routine as I gave the same political speech night after night, and the growing emptiness of what we were doing bothered me. This had become a commodity. Nor was it providing mediation at the psychological level. The projection of my own experience onto this material had ceased to occur, nor did it crystallize

³⁰ First performed, Unity Theatre, Wellington, 26-30 July, 1972, then at Central Theatre, Auckland, Wellington Teachers’ College, Victoria University and part of 1973 tour.

³¹ The tour took us to Titahi Bay, Christchurch, Otaki, Palmerston North, Te Kuiti, Taumaranui, Hawera, New Plymouth, Marton, Wanganui, Wellington, Blenheim, Nelson, Granity and Westport.

directly any personal material, or provide a correlative.³² At this point of time, we had not heard of Augusto Boal, who may have spoken to us about these issues,³³ and the UK Community theatre models were not talked of or written about in New Zealand. Nor had I read about them in London. The silencing of process is effective.

Up to this point, in terms of Edmond's three impulses driving the experimental movement, there were elements of the counter-cultural in our work in that we operated as a group, in that we devised our plays collectively, in that we performed in a variety of venues and in that we were anti-establishment politically. We were certainly nationalist in searching for the local, and we were avant-garde in being critical of the conventional theatre experience and in not being dependent on the absent writer. But from this distance, it was the rebellion of the adolescent. In this regard, Theatre Action were exemplary and stimulating. Here were people with rigorous technique and a similarly deep search for identity, but with a post-modern touch. The enduring image for me of Once Upon a Planet is that of a French mime artist playing a character very like my brother in law. One of the dullest men on earth was transformed.

And then I picked up a copy of Grotowski's manifesto, Toward a Poor Theatre and was immediately attracted to the ideas expressed. It was as if someone were articulating my own, deep impulses:

The assumption seems to be that "experimental" work is tangential (toying with some "new" technique each time) and tributary. The result is supposed to be a contribution to modern staging - scenography using current sculptural or electronic ideas, contemporary music, actors independently projecting

³² See p64.

³³ His books were first translated into English in 1979.

clownish or cabaret stereotypes. I know that scene: I used to be part of it. Our Theatre Laboratory productions are going in another direction. In the first place, we are trying to avoid eclecticism, trying to resist thinking of theatre as a composite of disciplines. We are seeking to define what is distinctively theatre, what separates this activity from other categories of performance and spectacle. (15)

At a psycho-analytic level, the idea of taking off the mask (23), was an exact prescription of need. The rigour of the experiment was intellectually satisfying and the idea of training in a disciplined way, a relief. I suspect the fact that this impulse came from a marginal country like Poland, rather than from a major centre, meant there was a cultural fit as well. There are similarities between New Zealand and Poland, despite very different histories.

There are two aspects to Grotowski's work - one technical, in terms of actor training, the other aesthetic in terms of composing works. While they are not separate, it is useful to describe our work from within these categories. In his article Remembering the Remembering Body: "Autonomous Theatre" in New Zealand (Maufort and O'Donnell eds. "Performing Aotearoa"), Murray Edmond, revisiting his thesis, narrows his focus to Theatre Action and Amamus. He finds our grappling with Grotowski's ideas very Kiwi, auto-didact in nature, in the tradition of the No 8 fencing wire fix-it-all, rather than a true learning from the master. I find this an odd judgement. Does it mean one can no longer study Stanislavski? That is absurd. So how to do so other than to read his writings and try out the ideas, to begin one's own research journey? Even when the master is still alive, he will be at a different stage than the disciple. As we studied Grotowski's ideas regarding theatre performance, he

was leaving theatre performance behind. The point is not the quick workshop with the guru, but the daily work, which forms one's own journey.

The aim of the precise exercise system, both physical and vocal, is the awakening of the actor to his subjective impulses and the expression of these impulses without blockages. These impulses cover the range of emotional memory, to relationships with the natural world, to the discovery of old sources of human energy. The process is not one of accumulation but one of 'via negativa', a stripping away (17). And this can only be achieved through discipline, not through sentimental, counter-cultural notions of personal freedom or groupiness. Through rigorous daily training, the actor is awakened to his or her own processes and becomes genuinely creative. Of course, we were not professionals, so ours was a part-time exploration, but we began to make our own discoveries on an individual level.

The next, major technical issue, is how to translate the springboard of the training into performance? The tool is that of the physical and vocal 'score'. In rehearsal, the actor generates from emotional memory the physical and vocal signs which are the 'objective' record of those subjective impulses, much as musical notation is an objective record of the subjective impulses of the composer. In performance, by inhabiting that score in good faith, the subjective impulses will be recalled. The exemplars are the great Asian theatres of Noh, Kabuki, Kathakali and the Chinese Opera, where the score of a role is passed on generation to generation. But such a set theatre form never existed in Europe, so in these individualist times, the actor must generate from emotional memory the equivalent of the classical sign.

It took us some years to work through this framework. Initially, in Pictures,³⁴ the extremes of psychosis and war pushed ordinary naturalistic acting to the edges, which gave that production its intensity. The novel origin and the content of settler isolation gave Strangers³⁵ its elongated mimetic quality. It was only with Gallipoli,³⁶ where we had a set text early on, and after we'd seen Grotowski's last production, Apocalypsis cum figuris,³⁷ that we could tackle this technical issue in a coherent way. The actors produced physically, in the form of a continuous narrative of signs, the emotional memory generated by the part.³⁸ This narrative of signs produced spontaneously the vocal score, the whole giving the original production a dreamlike intensity.

But after seeing performances of Noh and Kabuki in 1975, I realised the signs should be a summary of a unit's subtext. We therefore moved to a system involving a section of text spoken with vocal score, physically flowering into a physical sign which expressed the excess of sub text. This produced a more mature performance and was more demanding for the actor. That remained our technique.

At the heart of Grotowski's work was a searching for the origin, before the Tower of Babel, and we experienced a few moments like that. The most extraordinary was the day when, after some months of conducting the voice training in a very formal manner, we improvised and experienced a genetic memory of being Paleolithic. We could never recapture the feeling, for now we 'knew'. Performing

³⁴ First performed, Unity Theatre 1-5, 7 and 10-12 August, 1973.

³⁵ First performed, Unity Theatre, Dec 7-9, 1973.

³⁶ First performed, Unity Theatre, September 13-29, 1974.

³⁷ Sydney, 9-12 May, 1974.

³⁸ Emotional memory is of course, a very complex concept, different for everyone and essentially unable to be articulated in a formal way, that is, not able to be 'thought' but often discovered 'physically'. But a role will suddenly, unexpectedly, tap into some central life narrative.

Oedipus³⁹ we were in touch with some ritual space where natural elements were involved. On tour, when we were full-time, we would enter a space where the masked passers-by on a city street seemed surreal and Grotowski's notion of the 'meeting' or the 'holyday' (holiday) could be understood.

When we started holding workshops we began to tackle the problem of how to pass on what we had learnt, difficult when it does require the daily grind over a period of time. But there were moments of encounter: the Vietnam vet who wept while performing the yoga-based exercises, the paraplegic who, through the exercises, gained use of his legs, and there was always the personally-derived knowledge of their benefit for the person of a schizophrenic makeup. Grotowski talks about 'our kind' and the work was most attractive to the spiritual seeker, those of mystical inclination.

The aesthetic model that Grotowski put forward was equally profound, although he made it clear that this was culturally mediated:

We are bound, consciously or unconsciously, to be influenced by the traditions, science and art, even by the superstitions and presentiments peculiar to the civilisation which has moulded us, just as we breathe the air of the particular continent which has given us life. All this influences our undertaking, though sometimes we may deny it. (24)

He proposed that the theatre, unique because of the live encounter between actor and spectator, should take as its content, "representations collective", the myths, the "complex model with an independent existence in the psychology of social groups, inspiring group behaviour and tendencies" (22). In the past, theatre (ritual) liberated the spiritual energy of the tribe by profaning or transcending the representation

³⁹ First performed, Maidment Little Theatre, Auckland, 7-11 September, 1977.

collective. The sacred story was made material, which awakened the actor and spectator to his personal truth. This concept, of course, recalls Victor Turner's *communitas*.⁴⁰ But today, things are very different. Grotowski wrote:

As social groupings are less and less defined by religion, traditional mythic forms are in flux, disappearing and being reincarnated. The spectators are more and more individuated in their relation to the myth as corporate truth or group model, and belief is often a matter of intellectual conviction. (23)

Accordingly, we must confront the myth with our individualised experience:

We can attempt to incarnate myth, putting on its ill fitting skin to perceive the relativity of our problems, their connection to the “roots” and the relativity of the “roots” in the light of today's experience. (23)

As well, “even with the loss of a ‘common sky’ of belief and the loss of impregnable boundaries, the perceptivity of the human organism remains” (23).

As we set about exploring the possibilities of this aesthetic model, we were faced with the problem of finding our “representation collective”. As Pākehā, what were our myths? Our first attempt, Pictures, was more of an acting exercise, to see what happened if we tried to remove the mask by exploring the relationship between psychosis and the Vietnam war.

We set about researching the aesthetic model more formally with the production of Strangers, based on Patrick White's novel, Tree of Man. The settler experience of breaking in the land and establishing farms was a common action, but it had generated little literature. As well, it was primarily a physical experience. And confront it on what basis? Instead we produced a ritualisation of the novel's material, apart from adding on a Ngati Porou story telling of the coming of Kapene Kuki. For in

⁴⁰ See p9.

adapting White's story to New Zealand, we had to acknowledge the Māori presence. Retrospectively our blinkered vision of the cultural task was extraordinary, and it was not through lack of contact with Māori. At university, I had flatted for two years with Wi Kuki Kaa and other Māori students and I had a Māori sister in law. But our nationalist search remained at this stage, determinedly Pākehā.

Gallipoli was however, much closer to a Pākehā myth. Every Anzac Day it was celebrated as our "representation collective" in terms of nationhood. The military campaign had taken place in mythical country, with Greece across the strait and Trojan battles having been fought in the vicinity. It was also a nationalist battle for the Turks. The letters home from Kiwi soldiers, many of them farmers' sons, were steadfastly naive, filled with love for mother and country. This time I wrote the script. Much of the settler experience of Tree of Man could be incorporated, plus the family relations which we had explored in improvised productions. It became then a summary of content so far, and because we were not searching for the play's content in rehearsal, we could devote the time to developing the performance method as described. The backlit calico screen square in which the audience sat and the actors played, became a surrounding horizon, a diffuse permeable boundary between world and play. The result was then "a collision with roots," and struck a chord with local audiences, but not universally. A poor theatre performance has the intensity of ritual and often some audience members are unwilling to enter that space. Grotowski was aware that this was theatre for an elite:

...but for an elite which is not determined by the social background or financial situation of the spectator, nor even education. The worker who has never had any secondary education can undergo this creative process of self-search, whereas the university professor may be dead, permanently formed,

moulded into the terrible rigidity of a corpse. This must be made clear from the beginning. We are not concerned with just any audience, but a special one.

(40)

This work, as Edmond points out, inevitably constituted an attack on mainstream theatre, which had its many defenders. But with the films we had made, which had found a popular television audience, we were sufficiently reputable to gain funding to take the play to a festival in Wroclaw, Grotowski's base, then to tour Poland.

The experience was an important one, firstly because of the central place of theatre in Polish life.⁴¹ Secondly, when attending mainstream Polish theatre, dense with effects and gimmicks, I saw that Grotowski's call for poverty was a reaction to his indigenous theatre culture. And thirdly, I had to acknowledge that our quest for national cultural identity was somewhat naive in the face of the Polish experience of continuing conquest and oppression, which had included playing host to the Nazi death camps. The groups at the festival, and European artists more generally, were still obsessed by the fascist blossoming, ending in WWII and the horror of the camps.

When we returned home to a Muldoon-led New Zealand, we felt the need to explore this obsession, to examine it from the viewpoint of our own naivety, to invert the aesthetic model by confronting a cynical, European "representation collective" with our own innocence. Thus was born Valita.

Edmond's account of this period of our work is very influenced by Jonathan Dennis and he considers the last period of Amamus's work, one of decline. The sustainability of a theatre group is a complex issue. When I asked Grotowski at his seminar in Wellington what he would do if his actors were killed in a plane crash, it

⁴¹ When I returned to Wroclaw in 2007, even with the political changes, the city, which is the size of Wellington, still supported sixteen theatres.

was not to be provocative. For the wisdom, the learning, the experience, the theatrical form and content of a theatre group is carried in the bodies of its members. It is not about scripts and buildings. And after our venture to Poland, which marked five years of work, there were changes. Personal relationships had dissolved and new ones formed. Jonathan had finished his degree and needed work and John Anderson began a career as a television director. Fiona Lindsay, a Geordie migrant met on a workshop, had come to Poland with us and now Anna Campion joined. There was a move away from the original grouping of young Kiwis from the sticks with a common background. Economically as well, there were changes. I had left the Film Unit and now earned a living through freelance television work, often directing a soap opera. There was a need to move past our amateur status and to find sources of income.

Denise and I had witnessed the interactive work of the Cockpit Theatre in Education Company in London and we set up similar projects for local school children.⁴² The vision was to have a paid group of core members working on this progressive type of TIE project (a specialist Community-based practice), in order to subsidise the research-based poor theatre work. But despite good feedback from schools, we were unable to receive significant funding. By then, as Edmond notes, the QEII Arts Council were putting their money into the regional theatres and denying the experimental strand patronage.

Devising Valita⁴³ was a painful process. In terms of content, it was an immersion in horror. And how to find the “representation collective” of these events? We started with ourselves. What had we experienced which could be called ‘fascist’? I had sessions with each of the group members, making notes as they remembered

⁴² Differences, 1976 took place over a school day, explored prejudice and was attended by twelve different schools. The Aftermath of Hamlet, 1977 was attended by a similar number.

often childhood incidents of persecution, especially at school or in other institutional settings. These notes were turned into prose poems. John Anderson and I improvised an encounter between a Pole and a Kiwi, which would begin the play, and we knew the bulk of the story would be enacted by the ghosts of a Nazi and a Jew, provoked by a Nietzschean figure, played by the Pole. Once a montage had been constructed, I searched through various poets: T.S.Eliot, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and Janet Frame in particular, and placed their words into our improvisations. Suddenly the piece had an edge, which proved razor sharp as we realized that Hitler had merely applied the processes of colonisation to Europe. It had all happened here, and was continuing. It was the story of the founding of our nation. The account of the coming of Kapene Kuki (Captain Cook), with which we ended the play, became now, a central commentary. When the Māori actor, Jim Moriarty joined the group and played the Jew, this resonance was personified. Valita, as well as embodying an extreme content, produced the most extreme staging innovation, the action taking place on the top surface of a large celtic cross/coffin, around which the audience sat.

For the third piece of what was to become the trilogy, Song of a Kiwi,⁴⁴ we chose Oedipus, portrayed as a story of technological guilt, which at present, with climate change, would be even more charged. The calico screen once again surrounded, and with light provided by a large central candle, the performance was accompanied by a shadow play. Now Jim was the mate in Gallipoi, the Jew in Valita and the servant/messenger in Oedipus. Valita was pared down and on our final tour,

⁴³ First performed, Unity Theatre 28-31 July, 1976.

⁴⁴ First performed, Maidment Little Theatre, 7-11 Sept, 1977; then at NZ Players Hall, Wellington, Manawatu Art Gallery, Maidment Theatre, Concert Chamber, Wellington and Dunedin and Christchurch, 1978.

our work had reached maturity. Howard McNaughton, after witnessing a performance in The Great Hall of the Christchurch Arts Centre, wrote in The Christchurch Press:

Amamus is the only genuine avant garde within the New Zealand theatre, it is the only survivor of the various group theatres that emerged in the early seventies. As the group's artistic stature has grown, so have its pre-occupations expanded, so that the vigorously hard-edged social documentations of a few years ago have dissolved into a shatteringly stark myth theatre which embraces a multiplicity of archetypes.

He continued:

We find a highly disciplined ensemble exploring the expressivity of the body and of vocal colour through the violent collocation of typical material; often, blurring devices are deliberately introduced to block the normal audience impulse towards discovering precise, crystallised solutions to a source of dramatic anxiety.

Finally, he stated that:

One can scarcely overstate the importance of Amamus to the New Zealand theatre, or the maturity, confidence and sense of purpose that pervades this work. All audiences will find it fascinating, in terms of national identity, of theatre technique, or myth treatment, and of physical presentation. (September, 1978)

When I visited the Grotowski Institute recently and looked at archival video of Grotowski's group at work, including glimpses of early training sessions and a segment of Faustus, I believe that on this tour we were working at about the Faustus level of skill.

But at the same time, we were aware of a diminishing audience. A key contradiction faced by the avant-garde theatre group is that, while being a small community of practice, the particular practice of theatre (unlike say, a pistol shooting club) produces a performance which, unless, like Grotowski, you give up performance for an audience and establish a monastic practice, necessarily enters the market place of theatre product. Yet the avant-garde group is attacking the ordinary relations of market-based theatre and therefore the consumers of such. This inevitably narrows the audience within 'the theatre crowd'. The group must then try and garner an audience from those outside this grouping, and students (and young people more generally) often supply such an audience. With Gallipoli we had been in touch with that audience, but now it was the age of punk. The brief 'spirit of the sixties' experienced in the Kirk years had well vanished. Instead, the individualistic, self-centred culture of late capitalism had begun to flower. And we were getting older. If we had achieved support for a TIE programme, that would have given us a community base, but that had not been forthcoming. As well, Māori theatre had begun to challenge. Through Jim we had connections with Te Ika a Māui's production, Death of the Land. I went on tour with them and acted in the radio version. It was a theatre group very much in contact with its community.

Measuring our work by Cohen-Cruz's principles we were not in reciprocal dialogue with a community, the *hyphenation* was spiritual and in terms of *active culture* we were elitist. As we rehearsed in the old NZ Players Building, badly in need of renovation, a curious circle of NZ theatre history had closed. But Grotowski provided a profound technical framework and his aesthetic model, when applied to this country, had revealed the lie behind Pākehā cultural nationalism. Grotowski had gone into the cloisters where he searched for essentialist impulses generated before

the Tower of Babel. We needed to go to the Tower of Babel and find a place within the Multitude. We therefore set out on what proved to be an uneasy and often confused journey, taking us into political theatre and then into bicultural exploration, before finally accepting the model of Community-based theatre. Of course the 'we' is an issue, for 'I' provided the continuity on the journey, joined for different lengths of time by a wide cross-section of people, some professional, some amateur, all of them, for a time, pilgrims.

iii. Similar problems

During this period of New Zealand theatre, the avant-garde groups played a liminoid role, experimenting, searching, defining identity, discovering new models. As we have seen from the above, the problem then thrown up, was not so much one of giving in to a sense of failure, but one of how to place that role in the wider community and how to fund the playing of the role. The different experimental groups all had to tackle this problem, which was contained in the initial avant-garde agenda. Jochen Schulte-Sasse writes:

We should come to see that avant-garde artists were attacking the institution of art. Their effort was not to isolate themselves, but to reintegrate themselves and their art into life. (Burger 41)

The Le Coq trained mime group, Theatre Action initially played to the same audiences as Amamus: student bodies and mainstream theatre goers – undermining the mainstream theatre’s definition of performance. They were so successful for a period, that negotiations began for them to have a permanent residency at Downstage and there was a plan for a TV show. But as Edmond points out, as they became embedded in the New Zealand setting, there was “a growing emphasis on direct contact with the community, with theatre as a means to an end rather than an end in itself”(119). In other words, they wanted to put their art into life. They mounted a Grand Masked March at the Students’ Arts Festival, undertook a prison tour in 1973, and negotiated a contract with the Wellington City Council to take part in the Wellington Festival. This included a street procession and a performance, but also facilitating the making of masks by members of the community for the procession (122). When they moved to Martinborough in the Wairarapa, Batten wrote, “We want

to get out among the people; the people who would never dream of coming to something as intimidating as a proper theatre” (139), and their work became focused on the populist figure of the ragged clown. But the work failed to meet the requirements of a Community – based theatre practice. The community did not create the context, there was limited *reciprocity*, and the *hyphenation*, the extra agenda, belonged to the group rather than the community. There was certainly however, the desire for an *active culture*. There was also, in my reading, a problem with Kershaw’s authenticating conventions, that use of local language and custom to enable an audience to accept a wider content than is normal. The clown is not a part of local language and custom and this for me, remains a problem with commedia dell’arte influenced work in the NZ context.

Infrastructural funding was a recurring problem for Theatre Action, for during this period, the mainstream writer-based theatre gained access to significant state subsidy, with the urban middle class consumer being the beneficiary. Batten eventually moved to Sydney to set up a specialist practice in psychodrama, which does fit each of Cohen-Cruz’s principles. It is also relevant to acknowledge how Le Coq, with whom Batten trained, and Le Coq’s disciple, Gaulier, have, in later years, provided a methodology for a range of Community-based practices, for example, Tony McCaffrey’s work with Different Light and Sam Scott’s youth work for Massive. In this way, Theatre Action became an influential ancestor of Community-based work in this country.

The Living Theatre Troupe, based more firmly within a homegrown expressionism, but with strong US influences, clearly sought out a community audience on their summer tours of holiday resorts, playing to campsite and beach audiences. Edmond writes that, “The idea was to invade and infect the existing society

with a theatricality which would be both celebratory and disruptive” (234). They also mounted street theatre against the Vietnam war, “to bring drama back to where it belongs – with the people” (Shadbolt 67). One piece involved actors dressed as Vietnam peasants throwing themselves in front of a parade of troops returning from Vietnam. Theatre in Education shows however, proved problematic, with director, Ken Rea, realising that the teenage audience was not understanding their camping up of material.⁴⁵ Their theatre work thus ranged from the political to the scandalous and was very influenced by the counter-cultural movement. But while the group attempted to change the relationship of theatre and audience, and while their impulse was to go to the community as part of that change, their practice never investigated that relationship with any rigour.

Murray Edmond, who was involved with both Living Theatre and Theatre Action, and who lived these tensions, set up in the early 1980s a more overtly Community-based theatre group, Town and Country Players, the first of its kind in New Zealand. He writes in his thesis:

We wanted to take shows and workshops into the countryside, to schools and country halls, to be billeted with people, to set up a kind of cross-cultural contact with theatre as means more than an end. The life of the country, its divisions as much as its unlikely coherencies, attracted us. (4-5)

This tendency, the searching for Tonne’s *Gemeinschaft* relations which had drawn Theatre Action to Martinborough and Amamus to a house near Foxton with the idea of living there, was as well, the idea behind the sixties commune and Prime Minister, Norman Kirk’s *ohu* scheme in the early seventies. But upon interviewing Edmond for

⁴⁵ Ken Rea, letter to Cathy Wylie, 17 Sept, 1972. In Murray Edmond’s possession.

this thesis, the setting up of Town and Country Players was, in fact, more opportunist, rather than an attempt to resolve issues emanating from the avant-garde experience.

iv. Town and Country Players: the first attempt at Community-based theatre

By the end of the seventies, unemployment had grown and the Muldoon Government brought in a Pre Employment Programme (P.E.P.) which was sufficiently generous to pay a minimum wage, employ a supervisor per group and provide equipment. It was not long before Councils, artists, actors and musicians saw the possibilities inherent in the scheme. For example, in Auckland, a body called Art Work, which operated under the umbrella of the City Council, employed close to three hundred artists of every type in community settings over the period the scheme was in place.⁴⁶ When I interviewed Edmond, he recounted that initially, in Wellington, “you couldn’t sign up to the scheme as a poet or an actor, but if you went along and signed up as a swimming pool attendant they’d put you on their books”. He’d been running some mask workshops, so had some people with characters, and using the scheme, they did a show in city parks over the summer. But then they received an invitation from Dana Glendinning (now a prominent Green Party member) to perform in Tukurumuri, a small town in the Wairarapa. Glendinning ran an organisation called rural activists.

She said it would be good if you set up something which connected town and country. They won’t agree with you, but there are eccentric people in the countryside and we don’t get a return for our cultural dollar. You can go into country halls and perform and I’ll get you billeted on farms and I’m interested in the talk that takes place after the show.

Edmond describes himself as “half director, half supervisor” of the group. They went to Tukurumuri and performed “a type of conservation show” called The Birds. He recalls that there were some competent actors in the group and “some genuinely dole

people, struggling to get to work in the morning”. They took the show to Christchurch and Dunedin, “got off at the railway stations, performed on the ferry. It was romantic and nostalgic Norman Kirk stuff”.

Edmond then formed a legal business structure, and thus, in 1980, Town and Country Players was born. Initially the company of four performers, with Mary Paul as manager were subsidised by the PEP scheme, but over the first year they moved off the scheme, surviving on fees, Arts Council grants and some sponsorship. They went to rural school and communities, would hold workshops for adults and children, and do, in Edmond’s words, “a Dorothy Heathcote thing” for small schools. At night they performed a variety show. It began with a play called, You can’t be brave until you’ve been afraid, which featured Edmond’s clown and which was mainly for children, but with “some good jokes for the adults”. There followed some skits based on the folk song, Coming Through the Rye, which portrayed different meetings between people. The night finished with a performance of Chekov’s one-act play, The Bear. In Edmond’s view, “It was a nice show. Something for everyone”. That set the pattern. Often it was difficult to find the time to generate new work, but Joy Cowley kindly gave the group free access to her children’s stories. Toward the end of the group’s life, Edmond wrote an anti-nuclear show called Treasure Island which was, for him, the best piece the group created. There were in this show, two parts for local adults to play and parts for five children from the local school. The company would send the scripts ahead of their arrival, rehearse the community players in the morning and go on at night. He also remembers Carolyn Burn’s 1984 version of Objection Overruled, a show about sexual abuse, being very interesting and “just possible to perform in provincial and rural communities”.

⁴⁶ See <http://www.art-newzealand.com/Issues21to30/artwork.htm>, accessed 11/4/2009.

Edmond was absent from the group in 1983, when he took up a writer's residency at Canterbury University, went back to it in 1984, but was then invited to set up what was to be a short-lived Community Theatre project at Mercury Theatre in Auckland. But 1984 felt like a seminal year, in which he remembers a specific day which gave portent of things to come.

The arts council had a crisis meeting about the future of theatre. I was the rep for small touring companies. Everyone was there. The first guy to speak was from Treasury. He walked in and very quickly told us the future. Absolutely accurate. We all fell about laughing. No one listened. At morning tea I met Mervyn Thompson. The first words he said were, 'I'm not a rapist.' I gave my paper and afterward I said, 'I'm presently unemployed. This is my job application.' Jonathan Hardy stood up and said, 'I'll give you a job.' I took it.

We got out of the meeting and there were police cars everywhere. Ernie Abbot [the caretaker at the Trades Hall union centre] had just been blown to pieces.

Town and Country Players survived until 1985, with changing personnel (by the end, Annie Ruth, current Director of Toi Whakaari, the National Drama School, was director) and have to be seen as the first formal Community-based theatre group in New Zealand. Before that, there were simply tendencies 'to go to the community'. Edmond remembers New Zealand society being very divided and potentially violent at the time. It was, after all, the period which saw the 1981 Springbok Tour protests. In his view the original agenda of taking town to country remained at the heart of their work and "we did do some bridging things".

It is worthwhile to analyse this impulse, past it being a romantic *Gemeinschaft* tendency. For a start the agenda was in fact set by an individual activist/patron who lived in the country and for whom country people weren't getting cultural value for

their taxpayer dollar. She wasn't interested in either herself or the community setting the aesthetic agenda, but left it to the group. She felt in fact, that rural people were cut off and needed exposure to other things. In this sense, culture remained an urban emanation, something she knew about, but which her community lacked. Instead, she was interested in the dialogue that might take place in rural homes after the show, perhaps something she felt personally in need of.

But for Edmond, this dialogue never really happened. The farmers were wealthy compared to the performers, and, for them, a typical cultural night out involved going to the city, eating at a restaurant, then to Downstage, then to a strip club. There was then, in his memory of the time, never a discussion of the show. Edmond also reports being frustrated at the actors' unwillingness to accommodate rural mores. Ralf Johnson is famous in the New Zealand theatre community for never wearing shoes. "I'd say to Ralf, just put on some shoes. Why not? He wore his Halt All Racist Tours (HART) badge into one farm". Another actor started to talk to a high school class about her vivid sexual life, before a teacher stopped her. There was a male violinist who wore red tights without knickers. So there proved to be limited dialogue between bohemian performer and a rural land owning class. The group tried to perform an anti-tour piece Edmond had written called Games People Play in Gisborne, but, "nobody came. The lines had been drawn. It was agit prop, impossible to do as a community show". Edmond remembers going to a meeting with the Chairwoman of the Waipukurau Little Theatre to talk about a possible workshop. Dressed in a pink trouser suit, she quickly made him aware that the local theatre was in fact, a social club, and they weren't interested in learning anything. "I slunk away". In terms then of Town and Country Players' aesthetic practice, it was in many ways a

continuation of the avant-garde, anti-establishment impulse. “It wasn’t what Downstage were doing”.

When I went through Cohen-Cruz’s checklist for Community-based theatre with Edmond, he realised that the work of the group met only one of the criteria, that of *active culture*, for they tried to put locals on stage whenever possible. But *the performers craft and vision* had not been *at the service of a specific group desire*, *reciprocity* was envisaged at the after show social level, and the *hyphenation* or additional purpose was also the after show dialogue, which proved stilted, and the bringing of urban culture to the country. He spoke of the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA) who based their work on Boal, visiting Aotearoa and showing what could be done. But the actual doing of it proved more difficult. In fact, quite possibly, the practice of Town and Country Players was inevitable, given that they were visiting rural areas, staying with well off farmers and needing to perform a certain number of TIE shows in a week to earn sufficient income. As well, they had a policy of only being away from Wellington for three days at a time. They were flying in and out of these communities. There is no criticism implied here. These were simply the material realities in which they existed.

It is interesting, to pause for a moment and compare the work of the US group Cornerstone, who also worked in rural areas for a lengthy period. They lived in the community in order to adapt, rehearse and perform a relevant classic from the European Theatre tradition: Hamlet, or Three Sisters or Oedipus... These became, in Grotowski's term, the 'representations collective' being confronted. By doing so the community began to enact itself, in terms of who took part and the parts they played. Sonja Kuflinec, the US scholar who has both studied the group and participated in their work writes:

Cornerstone residencies illuminate the challenge of enacting “community,” demonstrating that members of a geographically defined community do not necessarily share the same values. As well as revealing value differences, Cornerstone residencies also illustrate the multiplicity inherent in defining identity through community. A resident of Maine can simultaneously live in the Eastport area, belong to the Passamaquoddy Indian tribe, identify as homosexual, and act in a Cornerstone production. (9)

I would suggest that rural communities in NZ are similarly complex. Cornerstone also played with the contradictory meanings of culture. Kuflinec notes:

By the mid-twentieth century *culture* had come to suggest both popular forms of expression that identified a social group and works of high art. (10)

By transposing a classic, generally seen as belonging to ‘high art’, into a community setting, making of it a popular form, the split is neatly healed. She sees the possibility of a Community-based theatre performance tracing its own historiography. She lists possible affinities:

with pageantry, little theaters, workers theaters, grassroots, identity-based and social protest performances. These all emphasize the integration and expression of the “local”, variously defined as regional, class based or ethnically specific. Performances highlight social and aesthetic representations that embody, enact, and mythologize community. (19)

There is often a history of performance in NZ rural communities. As well, a project will embody power relationships relevant both to it, and to the local community, in an ongoing sense. Kuflinec notes

how relationships among groups and institutions impact on the meanings and assessment of community-based theater. Thus a Cornerstone production of

Hamlet with residents of Marmath, North Dakota, funded by the state's humanities council, in co-operation with the town mayor, enacts a different set of power relations than El Teatro Campesino's *actos* developed with the Chicano farmworkers' union. (11)

All this adds up to a sophisticated practice, taking into account, class, ethnicity, local theatre history and traditions, and cultural paradigms. In comparison, Town and Country Players were finding their way. And the ability to research and develop one's practice is dependent on funding, of which there was never enough. Edmond and his group were living on low incomes, little better than the dole, and incomes which effectively dried up when they were not touring, so the writing and rehearsal of new material was always problematic. While it was fun at first, when small children came along, it was no longer a viable lifestyle. I also suspect that Edmond remains, at centre, and like many of the performers, a bohemian poet with a personal vision, in rebellion against a provincial, suburban childhood. He remembers going down town and seeing street theatre on the corner and saying to himself, 'I want to do that.' He worked for the Half Moon Theatre in London in 1974, work that was influential in his setting up Town and Country Players. It was a working class theatre in a then working class area (the East End). But he had the feeling that many of the locals laughed at them. They looked on theatre as "something up West and they wanted girls and dancing and glamour. They didn't want grotty ex-synagogue with heavy politics". This discomfort remained (and remains). Nevertheless, it was a brave and laudatory first, formal attempt at Community-based theatre in this country, and considerably ahead of its time.

v. The early Māori theatre

During this same period, a Māori Theatre movement was born, with initially a strong community impulse and with many interconnections with the Pākehā avant-garde. The story is a complex one, not yet written, so I base this account on personal interviews with three key participants: Rowley Habib (Rori Hapipi), Brian Potiki and Jim Moriarty, the latter two continuing to work in Community-based theatre to this day.

In the late 1960s a Māori Theatre Trust had been set up, born from the success of the 1965 NZ Opera Company's production of Porgy and Bess which had featured a Māori cast that included Inia Te Wiata and Don Selwyn. The Trust's shows were directed by Pākehā theatre practitioners, Dick Johnstone or Dick Campion (former director of the NZ Players) and always oscillated between the concert party and the play proper. As a schoolboy, Moriarty was involved in some of these productions. The writer, Rowley Habib, had been at Teachers College with Don Selwyn and, impressed by his acting ability, had followed his career. According to Habib, Selwyn "was a dynamic actor – Marlon Brando sort of thing". Habib would go and see Selwyn perform in Wellington amateur theatre group, Ngaio Revue Players' productions, and tried to persuade him to take up directing. Selwyn was also heavily involved in the Māori Theatre Trust. But for Habib, the Theatre Trust shows began to get too elaborate, and the dream of conquering the world with a song and dance ethnic spectacle led, in the mid seventies, to the Trust becoming bankrupt. This coincided with the Land March of 1975, which, Moriarty recalls, signalled "the Renaissance of all things Māori". Our third protagonist, Brian Potiki, was at university and directed for Māori Language Day that year, a production of Te Raukura: the feathers of the

albatross, a play by Harry Dansey based on the sacking of Parihaka. The performance took place at Ngati Poneke marae. Habib picks up the story:

There was a lot of talk about tino rangatiratanga. The feeling was that we needed to pull ourselves up by our own bootlaces. I saw things happening in a lot of areas. I thought theatre was an area where we didn't have a voice. Don was the obvious person, but his fingers had been burnt. I waited for somebody, those guys who had been involved in the Trust, but no one did anything, so I said to myself, 'Habib, there's a gap here.' And that's how I started up Te Ika a Māui Players. I didn't know what to do, but I knew not to go big. At that time Brian himself was strong that there should be a Māori theatre. I said to him, 'Work with local people, keep it small.' I put the idea to Jim. I didn't know him well, just from television.

Habib had already written material for the play which was to become Death of the Land. The idea came from reading the transcript of a Māori Land Court case, in which the contrast between the Pākehā judge with his legal talk and the Māori family with their story of the land was obvious. It was a classic *Gesellschaft* versus *Gemeinschaft* framework.

The group expanded as Tungia Baker, Keri Kaa, Roma Potiki, Mani Morgan and Bruce Stewart became involved. They rehearsed initially at the Amamus base in the old NZ Players building, then in an art gallery in Cuba Street. Habib continues:

We floundered along. I don't think we had a rehearsal where everyone was there. Brian suggested the character of Rongo. A lot of the play was collaborative, but eventually I had to write it down. We first put it on at the Newtown Community Centre, then it was with you [a double bill with the

Amamus production of Oedipus] at Unity Theatre.⁴⁷ Bruce Mason gave it a write up and then people started inviting us. We put it on in Hastings, Hamilton, the Māori Writers and Artists Hui. We put it on in Paul Reeves' lounge in Auckland. We broke a lot of new ground. We were the first group to perform in a meeting house. We all just sat amongst the people then started the play.

Within the framework of this thesis, Death of the Land was a Community-based theatre production. In terms of Cohen-Cruz's checklist, *the artist's craft and vision* rather than formally *being at the service of a specific group desire*, simply embodied a widespread desire for tino rangatiratanga within Māori communities. Different communities then entered into a partnership in terms of performance and subsequent discussion. The *reciprocity* paradigm worked through a similar elision. There was certainly a *hyphenation*, that of education and advocacy, and a strong *active culture* with some trained and some untrained people involved. It is interesting to note that only when they performed at an official theatre was a review forthcoming, but that single review led to many community invitations. Jim Moriarty takes up the story:

We were random, but we had purpose. There were fundamental things going on in that middle to late seventies period. Your stuff [Amamus], it talked to you hard. On the other side, the Māori practitioners were doing it as well. Hone Kaa got us to do it [Death of the Land] in his church. We didn't do it much in conventional theatres. They were in a different mode of practice. All the theatre I was in had the ritual stuff. If you got a pōwhiri⁴⁸ that was okay. In

⁴⁷ 30 Nov – 4 Dec, 1977.

⁴⁸ Formal welcome.

some places the pōwhiri went on longer than the show. There was increasing consciousness around Māori telling their own stories.

It is useful to remember Cohen-Cruz's insistence of story telling being at the heart of the Community-based theatre process. In this case, Māori were telling a typical story of fundamental economic and cultural loss.

I helped out the group on one occasion when they were booked to perform at Waikato University in Hamilton and they needed someone to play the judge. We travelled up in a van, picking up a Pākehā hitchhiker on the way, a hurt sort of young man who was embraced by the theatre group and stayed with us for the whole weekend. We slept marae-style at the Māori lecturer's house and for me it was a recall of the feeling of whanaungatanga⁴⁹ I had first experienced when flatting with Māori students at university. For Amamus, faced with the isolation of an increasingly monastic practice, this, at this stage subconscious challenge, was important for the journey toward Community-based theatre.

But Te Ika a Māui Players were quickly picked up by the mainstream. There was a radio production of Death of the Land, followed by a TV version. Habib comments with regard to the latter, "I never saw it. Must have been on in the afternoon. That was a hard case". Further television commissions for Habib followed: The Gathering, based on an urban tangi, created controversy when an actor 'played' a corpse, and finally, a play about activists called, The Protestors was produced. In terms of theatre work, the group moved into the venues, mainly The Depot, Downstage's studio theatre. Habib recalls that,

We did a few other things: Rawiri Paratene's play, Saturday Morning. Bloody good play. Did some poetry readings. Jim [Moriarty] and I hotch-potched

some of my writings together. Rangimoana Taylor directed it at The Depot.

Cobbled another one from my writings: Nga Morehu. Jim directed that. Then I got the Menton⁵⁰ in 1984.

Quite quickly then, this Community-based theatre impulse became transformed into an 'off-Broadway', writer-based theatre which by the mid 1980s, became Taki Rua Theatre, Moriarty explains:

Then we had to go into the venues. The power brokers controlled the funding. They weren't going to fund these lefties, this radical theatre group. So I went into Taki Rua, a formal place where Māori could have their say and attract mainstream funding. I was painting houses, doing a bit of psych nursing. I had a mortgage to pay. The eighties then, became a mixture of doing that stuff with Rowley and having to work mainstream.

In Williams' terms, the patron had set up the mainstream theatres as intermediaries which signalled theatre worthy of patronage, the patronage then making these theatres viable market players - a sophisticated method of controlling this new movement.

The community impulse however, resurfaced in the North, where Brian Potiki and Roma Potiki were living in Auckland. With Peter Turei they tried to form a company called Tangata Māori, but that never got off the ground. However, they had the idea of taking a performance to The Pacific Islands Arts Festival in Papua New Guinea. They had seen a fifteen minute skit called Maranga Mai (Stand up), which had been created by members of the Otago Waitangi Action Committee, some of whose members belonged to He Taua, the Black Panther influenced Māori activist

⁴⁹ The culture of the extended family.

⁵⁰ Katherine Mansfield Writer's Residency in Menton, France.

group. Brian and Roma moved to Mangataipa, a marae near Kohukohu in the Hokianga. An activist matriarch, Dune Oneroa, and her daughter, Huhana, lived at the marae, which was to become a centre for activist issues through the next two decades. The Potikis, joined by Jackie Davidson, Liz Marsden, Buffy Pihema, and locals, took the Maranga Mai 'skit', stretched it to sixty minutes and added music. According to Potiki, "Hori Chapman's music made the play". Potiki continues:

It was campaign theatre centred on land issues, language issues. About the Māori Land Movement: the hikoi⁵¹, Bastion Point⁵², Raglan⁵³, the He Taua incident.⁵⁴ We told these stories in skit form. The songs transformed it.

When the Māori Youth Worker in Otara, the South Auckland low-income area with many Māori and Polynesian residents, wanted school students to see the play, the Minister of Education intervened and stopped it being performed in schools. The group then performed it outside school fences. The resulting media scandal provided good publicity and they were invited to perform at a hui on a West Auckland marae, attended by up and coming leaders, Pita Sharples and John Tamihere. Potiki recalls:

They had a kapahaka group, then us. They needed us to make the change for them, to add a new element from speechifying and kapahaka. It was a new form of story telling.

Liz Marsden and Roma Potiki then set up a tour of the play, using Māori community groups as hosts, especially the Kotahitanga network. The performers were all living on the dole and chipping in for petrol money. Tama Iti arranged a performance at Kawerau marae, and they played marae in Tokoroa and Gisborne. When they

⁵¹ The Land March of 1975.

⁵² Māori land near Auckland City taken by the Government for housing and occupied by local hapu.

⁵³ Maori land taken during WW11 by the Government for an airfield, but not returned to Maori, but given to a local golf club, subject of lengthy campaign.

performed in Wellington, some Samoan students, including Samson Samasoni and Ete Etuati, came along and were inspired to form their own group, Le Matou. Māori MP, Tirikatene Sullivan invited the group to the parliamentary Beehive Theatre. At the end of the performance, a Black Panther influenced activist smashed a beer bottle against the back wall. More scandal resulted.

The Potikis returned to Mangataipa, which was fast becoming an important South Pacific activist centre. Huhana Oneroa had been elected to the local District Council, was involved in the Unemployed Workers Rights Movement (Te Roopu Rawakore), and now took on a new take⁵⁵: a nuclear free Pacific. Potiki comments:

She'd been on the Pacific Peacemaker voyage, was now part of the anti nuclear Polynesian network. So we developed another play, No Ordinary Sun. Skit based, plus songs. We had a guy who could juggle fish. Mangataipa became the base for a lot of anti nuclear activists from around the world. People from the Philippines came. PETA⁵⁶ came over through that link. Suddenly, Mangataipa was becoming international and very Green.

They took No Ordinary Sun on the road, went to marae, performed for a Māori community in Tauranga who had a problem with the Council, and were hosted by Māori -based work groups. They also performed for the Māori Writers and Artists Conference of 1983.

After the Conference we had the concert. But the Concert eventually became a major part of the Conference. We got to kick it off.

⁵⁴ A group of pakeha Auckland University engineering students performed a mock haka which became subject of controversy.

⁵⁵ Agenda or campaign.

⁵⁶ Philippine Educational Theatre Association, an Augusto Boal influenced theatre association. www.petatheater.com, 10/12/10

This period ended with Potiki and his new partner, Jill Walker, moving to Wellington to work on Theatre of the Eighth Day's Te Tutakitanga I Te Puna. From there, they spent a brief period with Milton Hohaia at Parihaka working with at-risk junior gang members, developing an anti tour play, Biko, which could be performed on the street or in a community setting, before moving to their present base near Rotorua.

The work detailed above was, like that of Te Ika a Māui Players, Community-based theatre, with this time there also being the benefit of a home community (Mangataipa), to support the practitioners, with a veritable swirl of influences, local, national and international, to provide *communal context*. There was definitely a *hyphenation*, that of education and campaigning, and *reciprocity* as communities invited the group to give a performance to form the basis of discussion. And once again, an *active culture* was present, as a mix of experienced and inexperienced players took the stage (Cohen-Cruz 91-97). It was pre-market, in terms of its material production, with the dole providing a basic income, and koha⁵⁷ and manaakitanga⁵⁸ providing accommodation and travel costs. In some ways the Mangataipa-based group embodied more effectively the commedia dell'arte, travelling player type aspirations of the Living Theatre or Town and Country Players, for here there was a greater willingness for the radical Black Consciousness type message or the nuclear free Pacific message to be heard when the *authenticating conventions* based on marae protocol were in place (Kershaw "Politics of Performance" 16-26). As I have noted, Kershaw sees this as the key to Community-based theatre being able to insert new content into a community's consciousness.

⁵⁷ Gift or donation.

⁵⁸ Hospitality.

This model of a group of actors and musicians, with maybe a writer, belonging themselves to a community and picking up a strong community impulse, getting together to devise a performance, has been an important tendency in this country's theatre development. But the secondary tendency is for this energy to be quite quickly captured by the mainstream institution. For the path to a mature Community-based practice is apt to constitute a lengthy pilgrimage. For me, that was certainly the case, yet there was always an underlying logic. I finish this chapter by giving an account of this journey, as a means of examining, and hopefully dissolving some of the personal and aesthetic barriers to this field of work, barriers which, in the view of current Australian born practitioner, Heather Timms, are stronger in Aotearoa than in many other countries (Personal Interview).

vi. A long march

In 1979, the directing of a feature film, Sons for the Return Home, involved me entering the culture industry, as defined by Theodor Adorno (3), where exchange relations penetrate at a deep level. Sons for the Return Home, with its theme of two young people from different races trying to achieve mutuality but being sabotaged by cultural and class determinations, was a doubtful market product. Some of the dialogue was in Samoan and therefore subtitled, there were no car chases or murders and the humour was gentle. Its one saleable item was the exotic location. Nevertheless, it did well at the box office in New Zealand and was distributed widely in Europe; but it failed to attract interest in the major US market. Twenty years later it would have fitted into the genre of world cinema and suited multiplex release.

Yet, at the same time as immersing me in exchange relations, the subject matter involved portraying the still-traditional village communities of Western Samoa, where a subsistence economy had not yet succumbed to the market. It was an important cultural experience to observe, and be drawn into, one of these *Gemeinschaft* communities. Afterward, I moved briefly to Thatcher's UK, where neo-liberalism was beginning to establish itself, before returning to New Zealand to live in the Holloway Road urban community, which was a mix of depression-generation elderly people and alternative young people wishing to forge a new community praxis. This community was without an economic base, but centered on life-style and the waging of a campaign to remove a state designation, which would have seen the area bulldozed into playing fields. But certainly, at times, *Gemeinschaft* relations existed amongst the members.

I also found myself in the midst of a period of activism directed against Prime Minister, Robert Muldoon's authoritarian government, an activism which blossomed

in the 1981 Springbok Tour protests, which saw many New Zealanders undertake direct action. Finally, as I sought new relations for the theatre process, I explored in more coherent fashion, Marxist aesthetic theory. The study I undertook was very much that of an autodidact, but I concluded that there were two schools of thought. One school, to which Marx himself belonged, saw art as a determined part of the superstructure, but that the accomplished work of art, no matter what the politics or class of the creator, achieved within the work the relations of mutuality that Communism envisaged for society. The second school, arising post Lenin and post Russian Revolution, saw art as playing an active revolutionary role, both through portraying the struggles of the vanguard working class, and through transforming the means and mode of art production. This latter point, as previously noted, has been argued most succinctly by Walter Benjamin in his essay, The Author as Producer (in “Reflections”). I now began exploring a working class content and sought a mode of production which could embody that content.

Accordingly, the theatre group opened up, accepting all comers interested in a project. This meant there were differing skill levels and we were moving toward accepting Cohen-Cruz’s *Active Culture*. We returned to a collective devising process, but a more sophisticated, Grotowski-inspired one, than that used for early Amamus pieces. Rather than primarily improvising scenes suggested by research material, group members could bring personal associations: an image, a song, a gesture, a poem... In this way we escaped the linear, realist form. There was a stronger suggestion of *Communal Context*, with members of the group being associated with the community I was living in. Nevertheless, I suggested the area of research. As well, through the Tour protests, I became formally involved politically for the first time, when I joined the Workers Communist League, a Marxist faction which had mainly

intellectuals for its membership, and which advocated a libertarian, post-1968 socialism, while retaining the Leninist organizing model. Many of the members had moved from university to working class jobs and entered union struggles at the shop-floor level. There was also a small cell of cultural workers. I was thus introduced to campaigning and organizing processes and a range of organisations outside of the art sphere.

The theatre group, now called Theatre of the Eighth Day⁵⁹, embarked on a trilogy of political pieces, each of which began from a question:

- (i) What is politics?
- (ii) What is political action?
- (iii) What is to be done - now?

The first question produced an expressionist piece called Everyman.⁶⁰ It loosely called our attention, in a global world order based on inequality and exchange relations, to a coming judgement. The second play was heavily influenced by the Springbok Tour protests and adapted Euripides Electra to a neo-colonial African setting, framed by the local protest movement. We performed it outside in an amphitheatre we constructed using the Valita rostrum, in the hills above Holloway Road.⁶¹ In adapting a classic to a community context, it was therefore, something akin to the work of the US Community-based theatre group, Cornerstone. David Carnegie, reviewing the piece for ACT magazine, described it as “not so much theatre, much less drama, as a ritual invitation to thought and action”⁶² The tour also involved a first street theatre

⁵⁹ This change of names was inspired by the Polish group of the same name, and the idea of the eighth day being the day when new things happen.

⁶⁰ Everyman, Theatre of the Eighth Day, Performed at the Wellington City Art Gallery, June 9-13, 1980. Script available from Playmarket.

⁶¹ Electra, Theatre of the Eighth Day, Performed at the Holloway Road Amphitheatre, Feb 24-28, 1982. Script available from Playmarket.

⁶² ACT, Aug 1982.

exercise. Acting through a megaphone seemed a little one dimensional, yet the immediacy of contact and the escaping of theatre venues, advertising and ticketing, was attractive. But above all, the sense of occupying the streets, which are normally owned by the establishment, brought a powerful feeling of liberation.

The third play, the research for which involved questioning a range of people with regard to their class, whether they had experienced freedom in their lives, a precis of their life history and so on – a rough Marxist research – produced interesting material. But there was no obvious underlying narrative other than the singular Marxist story of redemption through revolution, so I chose to tell my own birth family story within this framework. As an epilogue to the play, each of the actors performed a short political ethnodrama, a sharing of their determinations, to which the audience were very responsive. With State of Play,⁶³ by using titles, musicians and having two screens on which to project backdrops, we could tell a personal story and include the social and economic determinations affecting the characters. It was a home-grown Brechtian theatre, and we had the sense of belonging to, and creating within, a social movement. But around this time, the Workers Communist League fell apart, under attack from identity politics movements. The connectedness to the wider community provided by this world view proved therefore, very vulnerable.

However, through these three experiments, we had forged a devised theatre form which could portray the personal and the political in a dialectical fashion. There was however, no traditional-culture heart to call upon, for example, the Scottish Ceilidh which was used by John McGrath, or commedia dell'arte for Dario Fo. This need for some emotional centre attracted us to the story of the poet, James K. Baxter,

⁶³ State of Play, by Paul Maunder and Theatre of the Eighth Day, The Depot, November 16-21, 1982. Script available from Playmarket.

who had ended up the tormented, counter-cultural critic of capitalist NZ society, and who had turned to both Catholicism and Māori culture. Because of the body of poems he had produced, and through conducting interviews with family and people who had been with him at Jerusalem, a script could be assembled in a more conventional way. But Baxter led us back inside the mainstream theatre, performing in Downstage's studio theatre to 'the theatre crowd'.⁶⁴ However, the open door casting policy remained.

There was now a logical revisiting of the story of colonisation and the determined destruction of the indigenous community of this country. When Brian and Roma Potiki joined the group, we turned to the coming of the first missionary to Aotearoa, Thomas Kendall and were ready to try and cross theatrically the divide of colonisation that Amamus had come up against. When I prepared a summary of the material for the group I predicted that

The play will be written from a present day consciousness, taking into account the current political and cultural debate within and between the two cultures; and will investigate the current radical concept of Māori Sovereignty.

It will need a form somewhere between Marlowe and Brecht, with a touch of melodrama. Who/what is the villain? Lucifer? Mephistopheles? Capital?⁶⁵

A group of talented people formed for the production. Brian Potiki and Roma Potiki had been involved in Death of the Land and Maranga Mai, and were both poets, Karlite Rangihau (Tuhoe), daughter of well known Māori scholar, John Rangihau, was a native speaker and secure in her cultural knowledge of pre- Pākehā times, and Stephanie Turner and Michael (Wiremu) Grace were two younger Māori. In the

⁶⁴ Hemi, by Theatre of the Eighth Day, Depot Theatre, Sept 17-30, 1983, script available from Playmarket.

Pākehā contingent, there were two actors from Amamus, John Anderson and Malcolm Yockney (who was also competent in Te Reo Māori), and Tony Burton, a professional actor.

We used the process of associations for several weeks until a form was revealed and I wrote a scenario from which we could improvise. We were determined that it be a bilingual production, so a complex task of scripting then began, with actors developing their own dialogue, using, where appropriate, as much Te Reo Māori as possible, but keeping sufficient English to enable a non- Māori speaking audience to follow the action. The following extract indicates the result:

HONGI (*speaking to his warriors*): Kei te maumahara koutou ki nga tipuna. Kua hinga ki te po, moe mai, moe mai, moe mai koutou i to koutou moengaroa, hui whakamuri nga whakaaro ki te reinga, ki te rarohenga, ki paerau. Anei te iwi o Nga Puhi i ahu mai i tenei whenua. Te iwi kaha ki te kai-upoko. Kaha nei tatou ke te patu tangata. E ngarua ana te whenua. E ara ra koutou. Ka haere tatou ki te patu tangata. Utu! Utu! Me haere tatou ki te pakanga. With the Pākehā weapon we will make slaves of all. Kei a tatou te maua te ihi, te wehi.⁶⁶

The form was simple. The play took place within a meeting house, formed by the Gallipoli screen, the enclosing horizon now given new context. The audience was called into the house to find the key characters frozen against the walls. A contemporary young Māori woman, investigating these historical events, called up the dead before taking a role herself. Accordingly, the story was played out as a finding of whakapapa, a claiming of her past.

⁶⁵ Personal papers.

An important moment in rehearsal occurred when Karlite Rangihau insisted that we go to her home marae at Ruatahuna and rehearse there for a period. At Ruatahuna, the culture has been preserved and it became an immersion in a traditional way of life. It meant as well, that the Tuhoe community embraced the project. It occurred subsequently with each of the bicultural plays and was, of course, the wrong way around in terms of Cohen-Cruz's demand for *Communal Context*, that is, that the community sets the agenda for the actors. Instead, we had set the agenda, and now the community, seeing it as important to them, embraced it, making sure it was spiritually sound, and in doing so, began a dialogue which, in a non formal way, involved *Reciprocity*, another of Cohen-Cruz's checkpoints.

Te Tutakitanga I Te Puna, (Encounter at Te Puna), first performed at The Depot in August, 1984, was sufficiently well received for the Arts Council to subsidise a tour the following year, a tour which took us outside conventional theatres to play community centres and marae, including visits to Tūrangawaewae and Parihaka. Taking a play to a marae becomes an immersion in *Active Culture*. After the pōwhiri, one stays there, now part of the community, and briefly becomes part of the day to day life. It becomes as well a training in the indigenous community's cultural forms, and involved accepting the validity of story telling as performance. So I learned a central tool of Community-based theatre and the ability of that tool to frame history.⁶⁷

We also experienced, at moments, the texture of popular culture. Certainly when we performed at Tūrangawaewae, where a great many people had assembled for

⁶⁶ Extract from Te Tutakitanga I Te Puna (Encounter at Te Puna), Conceived by Paul Maunder and Theatre of the Eighth Day, 1984. Script available from Playmarket.

⁶⁷ See p16

a tangi, the performance seemed to meet Williams' prescription,⁶⁸ whereas at Parihaka, that marae where Pākehā oppression remained a primary focus, the performance felt more like a ritual. Thus, the complex possibilities of performer-audience relations in a community context were revealed. This spilled over into the area of audience feedback. After a performance on a marae, it is entirely customary for mihi⁶⁹ to take place, in all their variety, from comment on the performance to the telling of stories which have been suggested by the play. So, while the concept of Community-based theatre was not yet consciously present, a training in the form was taking place.

But then we encountered a contradiction, which centred on the problem of ownership of stories. When we performed in South Auckland, at an urban marae with a Nga Puhi connection, the Māori members of the cast became uneasy, for this was a Nga Puhi story we were telling and we had not sought permission. No one complained, but the matter of intellectual copyright was suddenly brought to my notice. In European terms we were portraying a historical event, and history is not owned by anyone. Yet when it came to the Māori characters portrayed, they were ancestors of Nga Puhi and therefore sacred to the tribe. This was to become a vexed issue for the next two productions.

Ngati Pākehā, the next project in this series of bicultural plays, focused on the Taranaki land wars which climaxed in the sacking of Parihaka. It was the story of the brutal establishing of Pākehā hegemony. After extensive research, we used an old man story-teller as the main character, telling the story to his modern-day whanau. The audience sat nearby, an extension of the whanau, with events from the story being

⁶⁸ See p31.

⁶⁹ Speeches.

enacted on the stage behind as the Pākehā slowly invaded the whanau's story-telling space and eventually destroyed it. The two theatrical spaces symbolised then, the two cultures in conflict. The old man ended the play by revealing that he was the product of the rape of a Parihaka woman by a Pākehā soldier. In that sense, the whanau carried the Pākehā violence within their genes. The cast that I managed to assemble, and it was a collective economically with small promise of financial reward, was varied in terms of skill and experience. Malcolm Yockney, who had worked with me in each production from Amamus days, played the old man, and with his knowledge of Te Reo Māori, could help write his part. Jim Moriarty returned, and two other professional actors volunteered their services. Bruce Stewart and his daughter Leith and a Tainui elder, Tokoroa Waikato, who eventually became co-writer, joined the cast, plus a range of other amateurs, some of whom had worked on Theatre of the Eighth Day projects. But as well, there were a group of 'at-risk' young Māori who had never acted before. Rehearsal proved difficult, exacerbated by the problem of getting a large cast together in one place at one time. The professionals often had other commitments, and others were not used to having to be reliable. Then there were the demands of a bilingual production for Māori with no Te Reo. But once again the project was suddenly embraced by Māori secure in their culture, this time by a group of Tokoroa's Tainui people living in Wellington. They felt an ownership of the piece because of the Pai Marire spirituality at the centre of it.⁷⁰ They took over the young Māori cast, taught them waiata and poi, and we began to hold rehearsals at Bruce Stewart's Tapu Te Ranga Marae, Bruce also having Tainui whakapapa. Thus, the *Community Context* established itself. The therapeutic value of theatre for culturally

⁷⁰ Pai Marire being the religion of the Taranaki prophet, Te Ua Haumene, which Te Puea's people returned to, during WW1.

deprived young Māori people, which Jim Moriarty has explored extensively in later years, also became obvious.

Having become aware of the copyright issue, I attempted to gain permission to tell this story from the Parihaka hapū. I had a sympathetic contact there, but it proved difficult to gain a response. Eventually, after discussing the problem with Tokoroa, who had done much of the translation work, we decided to distance the piece, to call the prophet, Te Whiti and Parihaka by other names. In this way, we were acknowledging that the piece was a fiction. The play was well received, but the story constitutes one of the darker periods of New Zealand history.⁷¹ It is our fascist moment, and like the death camps for the Europeans, has needed to be revisited often before it can be healed. An Auckland season of Ngati Pākehā was planned, but the demands of assembling the large cast again proved too difficult and the production had remained within the mainstream theatre.

This project then, in terms of Cohen-Cruz's check list of best practice, acquired a *Communal Context*; there was *Reciprocity* between the amateur and professional participants and a community group; there was a sense of *Hyphenation* (of purposes other than an aesthetic one); and the broad range of cast met many of the *Active Culture* requirement - and anticipated some of the complexities that the requirement creates. We were another step closer to embracing Community-based theatre.

The next, logical step in this bicultural trilogy of plays was to look at Māori survival and fightback. The life of Te Puea Herangi was an obvious subject and our relations with Tainui, established through Ngati Pākehā, meant we could overcome

⁷¹ Ngati Pakeha, by Paul Maunder, Tokoroa Waikato and Theatre of the Eighth Day, The Depot, 1985. Script available from Playmarket.

the copyright issue by working more formally with those who ‘owned’ the story. Malcolm Yockney and I began to attend the weekly meetings of Waikato Ki Roto o Poneke,⁷² the association of the Tainui people in Wellington, which provided insights into the life of an urban tribal group and the wide range of needs they are trying to meet. We were privileged to sit in on the learning of the sacred part of the whakapapa recital, which took place in a room centrally lit by candles and which was very ‘poor theatre’ in atmosphere. But there was no formal group of theatre participants as yet, and we needed their Queen’s permission for the project, so paradoxically, now that a formal relationship had been established with the community, it was necessary to write a script (as in literary theatre), rather than using a devising process. But there was Michael King’s book on Te Puea⁷³ and Pei Te Hurinui Jones’s work⁷⁴, plus we could interview elders.

Te Puea’s life covered several decades and in order to continue to tell both cultures’ story, it was necessary to isolate the essential narrative of each over the time period involved, and to then interweave them. For, by now, the two cultures had separated; a sort of apartheid was in place. So, Te Puea, originally a good-time girl with Pākehā lovers, was called to serve the tribe. She became a pacifist during WW1, nursed her people through the 1918 influenza epidemic, then established, with the help of her family of orphans and with money raised through her concert parties, the marae at Ngaruawahia, thus fulfilling her ancestor’s prophecy. Afterward, in partnership with Apirana Ngata, she built tribal farms on idle land, eventually becoming a leading figure in Polynesia. The Pākehā story, compared to this epic of

⁷² See www.waikato-ki-roto-poneke.com, 10/12/10.

⁷³ Michael King, *Te Puea: a life*. (Auckland: Reed, 2003).

⁷⁴ Pei Te Hurinui Jones, *King Potatua: an account of the life of Potatau Te Wherowhere, the first Maori King*. (Wellington: Polynesian Society, 1960).

nurturing, was one of violence: two world wars and an economic depression. The playscript, KoTe Kimihanga, was accepted by the Queen, Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu and her Council, but it involved a large cast and the Wellington roopu were busy people, mainly with working class jobs involving long hours. We managed to mount a very moving rehearsed play reading, after which a Pai Marire ceremony took place to lay Te Puea's spirit to rest, but there remained a problem in terms of mounting a full performance of the piece. Jim Moriarty, who was exploring his Theatre Marae concept at Taki Rua, then expressed to me the view that Pākehā should no longer be concerning themselves with Māori content and that it was for his group to undertake this performance. I had no objection and handed over the script. With some sadness, I realised that this searching for community via Māori, had become parasitic.

Of course, the contradiction all along, was that the idea for the sequence of plays had come from me, not from the community group, so that the *Communal Context* proposition was flawed. In retrospect, in this latter case, it would have been worthwhile to have explored some of the issues facing the Roopu, for example, the task of tracking down 'lost' people with Tainui whakapapa and registering them to the tribe; or their coping with the increasing burden of welfare work. I was still, in fact, trapped in my own creative agenda (the artist with a vision). Community-based theatre means giving this up and taking instruction from the community group.

At this moment, as this project foundered, I picked up a book on theatre in Africa,⁷⁵ to realise, as I read, that my exploration of various production frameworks and processes and continually encountering contradiction in terms of establishing a

satisfactory role, was shared by African theatre workers. The book finished with a short article on Popular Theatre, a Boal influenced movement found in the majority world, in which communities based their theatre making around issues impacting on the community rather than continuing the colonial cultural practices. I was then fortunate enough to gain a Commonwealth Foundation Grant to visit Zimbabwe and study Popular Theatre practice in that country.

⁷⁵ Martin Banham, with Clive Wake. African theatre today. (London : Pitman, 1976).

vii. The turning point

Despite the problems caused by continuing European land ownership, the lack of women's rights, the fragmentation of families because of partners working in different localities, the high unemployment among young people, the difficulty of getting some cash to subsistence communities, and the constant military threat from South Africa, the political situation in Zimbabwe in 1987 was still promising. However, in the arts scene, the continuing white infrastructure of operatic societies, little theatres and galleries still attracted the majority of funding, despite a plethora of village and township theatre groups and an internationally acclaimed stone sculpture movement.

As I wrote in my report:

I learnt of the current struggle they are waging against the colonial theatre institutions (the local repertory etc) which is still alive and receiving most of the funding, even though predominantly white. Their morale is boosted by visits from English experts, Shakespeare groups etc. They perform English and American plays and musicals, and this is still considered to be theatre "culture"; in fact is being taken up by the Black petit bourgeois.⁷⁶

I spent time with a township theatre group, mainly unemployed young people and full of enthusiasm. But as well as enjoying my time with them, I learnt two things:

that Boal's practice was not being followed, but rather the group were mounting agit prop plays for a passive audience, in order to earn a little money for their families, who were often putting pressure on them to try and find a proper job;

⁷⁶ Paul Maunder, Report to Commonwealth Foundation, November, 1987. In personal papers.

and that basic theatre skills (stage grouping, dialogue pace, stillness), skills one assumes after long practice, remain relevant in such a situation. (“Report”) Ministry of Culture officials I talked with confirmed these findings. Popular Theatre practice, while based on Boal’s teachings, was easily side-tracked into other sorts of performance, and Boal’s methodology constitutes a sophisticated practice ideologically and aesthetically. Above all, perhaps, it requires a genuine political commitment.

When I arrived back to New Zealand, there was some stirring in the Popular Theatre or Community-based theatre area. Illusions.6, a progressive magazine for New Zealand Film, Theatre and Television, featured an article on the tour of Aotearoa by three cultural workers from the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA), the tour co-ordinated by Roma Potiki in association with Eugene van Erven (9-15). The aim was to consolidate a Māori theatre network. The tour started in Mangamuka-Mangataipa, where Maranga Mai originated, with a three day workshop with locals. PETA member, Dessa Quesada, explained the meeting points:

...the entry point is the shared oppressions or shared stories of the Filipinos and the Māori people. Much of that is attached to the question of land, land proprietorship, the feeling of alienation and the loss of cultural identity.

From there, the group spent three months travelling through New Zealand, with workshops attended by local people, with some professionals and teachers joining as well. It was in many ways a cultural exchange between the two peoples. According to Potiki, “...one of our main aims has been the consolidation of a Māori theatre network.” She noted that there has been a lack of recording and analysis of work in the past, so knowledge has simply disappeared. She saw the PETA processes being used in different ways, according to a group’s needs. When Russell Campbell asked

her about the sorts of theatrical forms that will emerge out of this exchange, she was equally inclusive:

I think each area is going to develop its own type of drama, due to its own needs. Some are more interested in mask and movement. Some want *a* play with *a* script and *a* director there at a set time. Some are more into story-telling. I think story-telling will be a key thing... but it's too early to tell.

Potiki emphasised the need for Māori control over Māori playmaking and proposed ambitious plans for the network, including a national hui of network members, major training workshops, a two month intensive training session for ten people in Manila, and a five year plan. Funding was applied for, but the application was unsuccessful and the network faded from the scene.

In the same edition of *Illusions*, I wrote an article, Thoughts on Popular Theatre, in which I reviewed my own journey to such a concept and my Zimbabwe findings, including a precise definition of methodology. I concluded that if a popular theatre were to take root in Aotearoa it would need a network of facilitators, the methodology would need to be taken to the state agencies, and groups involved would need to reject factionalism. I called one meeting of theatre practitioners to see if there was interest in the establishment of a Popular Theatre Centre, but it proved otherwise, with Pākehā practitioners firmly immersed in the mainstream theatre culture. The American community dance practitioner, Liz Lerman, describes the prejudice:

You are not a dancer if you teach dance in a senior center. You are a social worker. You are not a dancer if once a month you work with the rabbi in the synagogue. You are a liturgical something. In other words, the narrow definition of dance as art has led to a narrow practice. (qtd. in Cohen-Cruz 173)

As well, Wellington City was becoming largely a monoculture of professional people and a surrounding service industry, with working class people having shifted to the adjoining cities of the Hutt and Porirua.

The burgeoning Community Arts Movement in New Zealand seemed therefore a more promising framework for the change of direction I envisaged, and there was a body of work happening in the Hutt Valley led by a progressive arts worker, Pauline Harper. The Community Arts movement in the 1980s had grown from two impulses: one was the Queen Elizabeth Arts Council's setting up of Regional and Community Arts Councils and then seeding the employment of arts workers by local councils. The second was the high level of unemployment and the Labour Department work schemes that had evolved to meet the needs of the unemployed. As Town and Country Players initially found, it was possible for these schemes to have an arts focus.

Pauline Harper had visited London to look at possibilities and she told me in a recent interview that she had come back "a missionary, zealous about the possibilities of giving expression to marginalised groups." She set up work schemes for a band and for visual artists, "many of whom had been in prison, but they had skills and talents". She also began working with Housing NZ communities in Petone and Pomare, and with ethnic groups, in order to give them a voice.

The first project she asked me to facilitate was a Community-based theatre piece to celebrate the Petone Borough Council's centenary. It was an ironical celebration, for soon the Borough Council would be amalgamated into the larger Hutt City Council. The task was to create a piece of civic theatre⁷⁷ and involved a formal commission from the Borough Council. As well, there was something of UK

playwright, Ann Jellicoe's 'Community Play' philosophy in this project- with the writer invited to tell a community's story, and the community then enacting that story.⁷⁸ As the title, The Great Petone Survival Show, indicated, the theme was one of celebrating the survival of a diverse community. Pauline Harper, in her article on the project for Illusions.10 (1989), emphasised the cultural complexity of the process:

From the point of view both of a witness and of one who assisted with the co-ordination of theatre logistics and process, I experienced many moments which revealed ways of thinking more accurately about our world, and more specifically our community. These moments were both disturbing and moving. They made me see the folly of mono-culturalism and the necessity of a bi-cultural base within community structures. (34-36)

She noted that I had found an interesting attitudinal split between those who had been born in Petone and remained there (mainly Pākehā), and more recent arrivals (mainly Māori and Polynesian people returning to the area many years after the tangatawhenua had moved out). So, a dual perspective was necessary, to establish a common past for the place.

Petone's story was an interesting one, with the area being invaded by Te Atiawa in the early 19th century, then being the arrival place for the first wave of NZ Company settlers, then the site for Wellington's industry, which led to Māori and Pacific Island urban migration. Pauline Harper saw the play as having been a useful affirmation:

Amalgamation was staring everyone in the face. How could the community not lose out? People still had to feel we are Petone. And it highlighted the need

⁷⁷ See Kuflinec (2003), p19.

⁷⁸ See Ann Jellicoe. Community Plays: How to put them on. (London: Methuen, 1987).

for Community Boards. The play reminded people of their origins. (Personal Interview)

The piece was then, very much about bringing together divergent identities. As

Cohen-Cruz writes:

Over time, community-based performance has become less about homogeneous communities and more about different participants exploring a common concern together. (3)

But the piece, while having the additional purpose of celebration, and having an *active culture*, lacked in retrospect real dialogue in the process of devising, other than amongst cast members. The Theatre of the Eighth Day process still hung over it. It was a Council proposition, the script was based largely on library research, and the audience remained in a traditionally passive role. The conservative councillors always found the project outside their comfort zone as it was both politically left and determinedly bicultural. As well, the play, with its progressive form and values, was ahead of many of the audience and lacked the authenticating conventions which would allow them to make the leap. There was however, one of the school pieces, which became a genuine snapshot of Community-based theatre.

I asked the Tokelauan students at Sacred Heart Primary School to tell the story of migration from Tokelau. They were all New Zealand born children, with either parents or grandparents having migrated. Surprisingly, the students knew little of this story, so elders had to come and instruct them. A linking with elders took place and adult members of the community became very involved in the production, and thankful that the story was being passed on. Clayton's article quoted parent, Suzie Lemisio, talking about the change in attitude from children of the school:

They told me how they didn't realise just how different life was in the Tokelaus. They took it for granted that we all fitted into the New Zealand life-just like that. I feel there is more respect for our different ways, since the play. ("Illusions 10" 34-36)

But it was the next project, which saw me fully take the step into Community-based theatre. Pauline Harper asked me to work with the senior class and their teacher at Pomare School. This was a low income school in a state housing enclave, with most of the Māori or Pacific Island parents unemployed. There was as well, a gang presence. The school was pushing health issues, for the children had a high rate of hospitalisation, and wanted a performance for a local festival. As I took the students through a series of improvisations I picked up a sense of pollution rather than overt oppression. They were polluted by junk food, indifferent parenting and constant television and video watching. I therefore scripted a short forum theatre piece⁷⁹. The play is framed by a conversation between the family's Koro and Kuia⁸⁰ who take the 'joker' role. The children are at home after school, watching TV. Mum is worn out. Dad comes home, angry about the factory where he works closing down. Mum has been to the doctor and is pregnant again. As well, the rent's going up. She hasn't cooked any dinner because she's felt too depressed. Dad gives the kids some money to go to the local shop to get something to eat. The owner of the dairy charges high prices and the kids come home with lollies and a pie. The parents go to the pub to drown their sorrows, leaving the children at home. Koro and Kuia pick up the story, complaining about what has happened to their moko in the city, who have never tasted

⁷⁹ Invented by Augusto Boal, forum theatre involves the telling of a story of oppression, then repeating the story with the audience suggesting to the actors ways of avoiding the cycle.

⁸⁰ Grandfather and Grandmother.

the kaimoana,⁸¹ or the kai Rongo ma Tāne.⁸² Instead they've become “the cordial drinking kid”, and “the potato chip eating tuatara, eyes on the TV” or “the fast food addict” or “the glue sniffing sweetheart of mine” who has died.⁸³ The Kuia then challenges the audience:

Now I want you all to listen and listen good. It's time to get these things right. We're gonna do the play again and you're gonna help me. Right? If you don't like something you stop them. Put it right. (*to cast*) Hope!⁸⁴

These were pre-adolescent children and as we prepared to perform outdoors at the gala day, using the Gallipoli screen to now mark out a performance area, a place for 'play' in the community, I wondered how well they would cope with the forum side of things - the need to change one's performance according to audience direction. My anxiety was unfounded. The students, with their street wisdom, coped admirably with the audience's interventions and the parents entered into the role of SpectACTOR with enthusiasm. Pauline Harper wrote in her newspaper column:

Saturday, October 1, was gala day at The Glade, Pomare. The day shone and the neighbourhood gathered to buy trinkets, plants, ethnic food and second hand clothes. They fired darts at distant balloons, rode on a merry-go-round, heaved with fellow locals in a tug o' war.

But alongside this light hearted frivolity is a group of people in Pomare intent on waging another war, one which is voicing concern about being healthy. As we sat together on the grass within the confines of an instant intimate theatre created by metres of calico stretched to trees and poles - watching these deadly

⁸¹ Sea food.

⁸² Food from the bush.

⁸³ Paul Maunder. You are what you eat, in Plays from the Community, (Petone: Pou Mahi a Iwi, 1999). Available from Playmarket.

⁸⁴ Hope = get ready.

in earnest kids; hearing them; learning from them; knowing they understood their story, some of the most moving moments happened I have ever seen in a children's play.⁸⁵

We then toured the play, accompanied by a support group of parents, to other schools in the area.

With this production, I had, after a long journey, come to Community-based theatre proper. The process of making had been deeply embedded in this community. There were counter-cultural elements as it confronted consumerism. The performance called on the indigenous forms of greeting, story telling and farewell. There were elements of ritual in that it constituted an event outside the norm, taking people into unfamiliar spaces. It had roots in the left in that people were called upon to confront 'the system' and to rehearse social change. It was popular culture and had, as Harper recognised, the seriousness Boal demands of the popular. And finally, it was 'art', recognising and giving form to 'a kind of people in a kind of place'. It involved a giving up of theatre establishment notice – reviews, articles etc. Even more importantly, it involved a difficult recasting of the artist's role, a relinquishing of a personal creative agenda. That is, it required a handing over of the creative process and its ability to indirectly deal with real life experience through projection, finding an objective correlative or to crystallize the traumatic, to the community. This had been a long march, for to give up that mediation on a personal level, is very difficult and explains the reluctance of many artists to do so. At a deep level, it is why they make art. Yet the new role, in giving that primary generative task to a community group, is a sophisticated one, in its demand for both craft and vision. Pauline Harper comments:

⁸⁵ Pauline Harper. Play targets local issues, Contact, October, 1989.

There's no doubt that's what makes community arts as interesting as it is. It does require people with exceptional skills. (Personal Interview)

In summary, I have argued that the avant garde push in the early 1970s, while challenging conventional theatre relations in both production and presentation, remained captured by the mainstream theatre and revealed the need to forge relationships with a more diverse audience. For Theatre Action this involved a journey to a specialist practice, that of psycho drama, which involves the exploration of individual issues within a group setting, far removed from the mainstream theatre building. For myself and Amamus, the Poor Theatre encounter beneath the social mask led to an isolated position on the margins of mainstream theatre, from where a searching for the community relationship began. This involved an exploration of socialist theatre routes, an exploration of bicultural theatre and the indigenous relationship, finally, a move to Community-based theatre proper. For Murray Edmond and Town and Country Players, an initial venture into community theatre took place with some success and some failure, born of an incomplete model of practice. Meanwhile Māori theatre forged a voice via devising grass roots campaigning stories of injustice and taking them directly to community venues. However, that impulse was diverted into mainstream capture.

But this complex time of searching had mainly taken place in the social democracy that had existed in New Zealand since 1935. Quite suddenly, this framework of governance was overturned and an era of radical change began, to which I now turn, for it established a new context for Community-based theatre practice. I then give an overview of Community-based theatre practice in the 1990s and the first decade of the new century, and its relationships to these changes.

Chapter Three

Maturity:

Neo-liberalism and a cross section of community-based theatre practices

“Each one has his own field, his own planting, but we all have the same village, although sometimes we speak different languages and wear different clothes.”
(Marcos 86)

In the years between the election of the Labour government of 1984 and the election of the Labour government of 1999, New Zealand underwent a neo-liberal revolution, initially called Rogernomics (after the Labour Minister of Finance, Roger Douglas), then Ruthenasia (after Ruth Richardson, the Minister of Finance in the National government of the 1990s). Commentators note the extremity of the structural changes that took place. For example, Jane Kelsey writes:

The New Zealand experiment – the pursuit of free market principles that began in 1984 – exposed a remote country of 3.8 million people to the full impact of market forces. The theoretical template on which it was based treated the country’s colonial history and the contemporary reality of its political life as irrelevant. (“Reclaiming the Future” 4)

And in a later book she comments:

The structural adjustment programme begun in 1984 was as doctrinaire as any imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions on indebted countries in the South.
(“At the Crossroads” 37)

In this chapter I outline the changes that occurred in this revolution and then argue that this resulted in a society where community assumed an official, institutional role. Accordingly, one would expect a flowering of Community-based theatre activity and I will review, by creating a story telling circle based on interviews, a cross-section of this

activity. However, once the community, and Community-based theatre, began to fulfil an official role within neo-liberal society, it experienced the contradictions of that role. In this chapter, these contradictions will be shown surfacing at the grass-roots. In the following chapter, I will investigate the playing out of these contradictions at the institutional and policy levels.

Brian Easton provides an analysis of the economic difficulties that led to the opportunity to push through the neo-liberal economic programme. He writes that:

The development of a high-technology pastoral export strategy lifted New Zealand to one of the highest standards of living in the world through most of the twentieth century. (3)

However, he notes that the economy suffered from “the two standard defects of commodity exporting: price volatility and vulnerability to competition from others” (3). Successive governments insulated the economy from these fluctuations by giving producer boards access to Reserve Bank funds, which enabled a balancing out of agricultural producers’ income between good and bad years. Governments also managed the balance of payments through a policy of import substitution, developing a local manufacturing sector and imposing tariffs and import controls in order to protect the sector from outside competition. Internally, it licensed production and controlled prices for locally manufactured goods. In the 1970s, when the traditional UK market moved into the European Union, a crisis was temporarily averted through diversification into horticulture and forestry, by adding value to traditional meat and dairy products, and by developing tourism and fishing. However, this strategy, in an increasingly globalised and competitive world, led to inflation, a succession of severe fiscal deficits, and a growing complexity of regulations. In Easton’s view, government began to suffer from “sclerosis”. He notes as well, that “an increasingly sophisticated

population were not always able to obtain the consumer goods and services they desired” (6). In the early 1980s, under an increasingly unpopular Prime Minister, Robert Muldoon, wage and price controls were introduced in a desperate bid to prop up the traditional system.

Meanwhile, incoming Minister of Finance, Roger Douglas, Treasury staff and Business Roundtable members, had been influenced by the Chicago School of Economists led by Milton Friedman, who advocated:

- i. a maximum (negative) freedom of choice and action for consumers, producers and entrepreneurs,
- ii. a minimum tax, welfare, and interventionist state, and
- iii. a stable rule-bound institutional framework, including the monetary regime.

(Easton 92)

Kelsey describes how, by using a blitzgreig approach, the new Labour government:

lifted exchange controls, deregulated the financial markets and floated the dollar. Price stability was made the Reserve Bank’s sole objective. Foreign investment rules were relaxed, and state assets (notably telecommunications, forests and the Post Office Savings Bank) were sold to foreign companies.

Domestic subsidies were withdrawn and domestic markets deregulated. Tariffs were reduced, and other trade protections removed. Internationally, the Labour government pursued a vigorous free trade position. (“Reclaiming the Future”

9-11)

When a reformed National Party came to power in 1990, unions were in turn attacked, benefits were cut, more central and local government assets sold offshore, and public and social services contracted out. These changes were embodied in law, thus providing the legislative framework, through The Commerce Act (1986), The

Investment Act (1986), the State-Owned Enterprises Act (1986), The State Sector Act (1988), The Public Finance Act (1989), The Reserve Bank Act (1989), The Employment Contracts Act (1991), and The Fiscal Responsibility Act (1994).

Kelsey describes how these policies caused widespread social disruption. Unemployment topped one hundred thousand, many urban and rural communities were shattered as industries closed, and services and small businesses disappeared or were reduced. There was considerable wealth re-distribution to the better off, who flaunted an extravagant life-style. One in five New Zealanders and one third of the country's children were, by the mid-1990s, living in poverty (366). Māori and Pacific Island citizens were hardest hit, and the personal income of all New Zealand adults declined by 13.4 per cent during this period (369). As well, the quality of jobs deteriorated for many people, with a growing casualisation of the work force.

These changes were a local response to an international crisis of capitalism. According to economist, Walden Bello (34-35), the post World War II golden age saw the reconstruction of Germany and Japan and the rapid growth of industrialisation in economies such as Brazil, Taiwan and South Korea. This added tremendous new productive capacity, increased global competition and reduced corporate profitability. As well, continuing social inequality limited the growth of purchasing power and resulted in overproduction. There were three tools used to meet this crisis. The first, neo-liberal restructuring, attempted to invigorate capital accumulation by removing traditional restraints and redistributing income upwards. The second response lay in globalisation: by rapidly integrating pre-capitalist or semi-capitalist areas into the global market access was gained to cheap labour, new markets, new sources of raw materials and new areas for infra-structural investment. This however, while temporarily shoring up profits, further increased production, especially when China

entered the arena. The third response Bello calls, “financialization”. Because of low profit return from agriculture and industry, investors began investing in the financial sector itself, resulting in a disconnect between a stagnant real economy and a hyperactive financial economy. This created a series of bubbles followed by crashes, the most notable being the share market crash of 1987, the technology stock bubble then crash of the late 1990s, and the current real estate based global recession.

It is obvious that events in New Zealand mirrored these responses, with little originality being shown. Bruce Jesson writes:

The power of globalisation is magnified in New Zealand by our own lack of national identity, and in this respect we are quite a strange little country. Most countries still have cultures they wish to protect, and their national idiosyncrasies, and still maintain some political and economic barriers against the outside world. New Zealand doesn't, and that in a sense is our own national idiosyncrasy. (“Only Their Purpose” 187)

However there were popular protest movements, especially during the 1990s. Brian Easton notes that the public outcry against the benefit cuts eventually led to a change in government policies (53). This protest, and others, also led to the introduction of an MMP proportional voting system and a return, in the early part of this century, to a less ideologically-driven governance.

But it is central to the argument of this thesis, to note that, as a neo-liberal society was created, the community sector began to assume an official role; one of the few contradictions in a highly ideologically ‘pure’ regime. For as community per se was globally attacked, and as this created problems of dislocation, it was, at the same time, called upon to provide answers to the problems being created. As Kelsey states, processes of privatisation, that is, the return to the market of activities that were once

run by the state, led to massive redundancies. The resulting poverty created severe issues for families and their communities: homelessness, overcrowding, undernourishment, budgeting difficulties, poor health, domestic violence, reduced educational opportunities and feelings of hopelessness, to name a few. As tariffs and other protections were removed, the consequent culling of the manufacturing sector led to closure of factories in regional towns and working class areas of major cities, and the need for work creation in order to stop such areas becoming ghettos. As well, globalisation caused constant restructuring of the food and wool processing industries. Old plants closed or were amalgamated, and new plants surfaced in different locations, with similar effects. If society were to maintain some semblance of decency, these issues had to be addressed. Furthermore, Treaty issues had come to the fore, and Māori were proportionally more disadvantaged by these changes than Pākehā. There was an argument to be made for culturally appropriate servicing. Similarly, Pacific Islanders were proportionally more disadvantaged and were becoming politically articulate. Finally, there had been a growth in the single parent household with most of these parents being women, and the feminist lobby spoke out on their behalf (“At the Crossroads” 121-135).

The second factor was the withdrawal of government, under the influence of the doctrine of ‘managerialism’, from direct provision of services. Denis Saint-Marten writes that there was:

a belief that governments had become too large and were consuming too many scarce resources from more productive pursuits in the private sector; that civil servants were too powerful, had too much discretion over policy decisions, and were not sufficiently responsive to political direction; that public services were inferior to those of the private sector because they lacked the incentive

and discipline of the market; and that the monopolistic position of the state in the delivery of public services limited the freedom of citizens and their capacities to make choices. (9)

The response was to impose commercial principles and to reform departmental management. Saint-Marten continues:

Executive operations were separated from policy work, with the former becoming controlled by Executive Agencies that would remain under arms-length political control but were free to operate under business-style regimes. (10)

Accordingly, Ministers would seek outcomes, while departments were paid to deliver outputs, which would achieve those outcomes. But these outputs could also be delivered by non-governmental organisations, which could be community-based and which would accordingly, reflect the growing diversity of society. This enabled community-based organisations to tender for the provision of services, or to seek funding for services they were already providing.

In my experience, during the period of the late 1980s and 1990s, the issues thrown up by the restructuring far outpaced state awareness of issues, let alone state provision of services. The community sector, during this period, was leading the response to crisis through manipulating whatever government resources it could tap into, plus using considerable voluntary input. But during the last years of the century, the situation and the relationships, changed. As community-based organisations entered into more formal contractual relationships with the neo-liberal state there were inevitably, strings attached.

It is here that the essay by DeFilippis, Fisher and Shragge unpacks the mix of possible roles and the ideologies behind these roles, of which community-based

organisations are seldom conscious, and it will be important to have this framework available when it comes to looking at Community-based theatre in New Zealand during this period. They write:

Paradoxically, at the very moment that communities are more burdened and constrained, they have also become increasingly salient and popular sites for responding to and struggling with the world they have been handed. This has led to a turn towards efforts at the community level in arenas and practices as far ranging as public school reform, crime prevention and social service delivery efforts, as well as efforts to democratise social, political and cultural practices. (674)

But, they warn, the withdrawal of the state from direct provision of services has not constituted a weakening of the state but, “a re-articulation of the roles and goals of the state” (674).

They report that there has been a range of theoretical responses to this paradox. A conservative, neo-communitarianism position has eliminated previous social action and conflict models of community activism. It has instead, focused on concepts such as social capital, asset building, public engagement and building partnerships with the private sector. Neo-communitarians emphasise connectedness, trust and co-operation and offer civil society as an alternative to both state and the market, for the community is where values are instilled and traditions preserved.

However, the authors criticise this position as being a romantic return to Tonnie’s concept of *Gemeinschaft*: the community as a site where solidary relations are intact, as opposed to the city - but now, even more extremely, as opposed to a globalised world. They find that neo-communitarians pay little attention to macro issues, the external world that communities have been handed, and the economic,

political and social decisions which are made outside the community. Instead, community relations are glorified as the social ‘glue’, which will solve social problems and renew democracy. Community becomes then, a good unto itself, a form of social capital. For the authors, this leads to an emphasis on the internal processes of community as the way to solve social problems, without challenging the causes of those conditions. It refuses to allow justified community resentment against injustice to motivate community action, and leads to quietism. It also makes outside service provision less important and lets the state off the hook. Furthermore, it assumes that communal work is voluntary, and places a burden upon women, who traditionally perform such work. As well, it ignores the current realities of the workplace, where very often women are working in casualised jobs with unpredictable hours. Finally, they criticise this internal focus as occurring at the very moment that “economic globalisation and neo-liberal responses to it alter the globe, encouraging a race to the bottom which puts greatest pressure on communities of poor people now asked to shoulder the burden of economic globalization and corporate strategies and tactics” (678). As Shragge had previously written:

The concept of capacity-building and related processes of community development are not the problem, it is the context in which they are practised that is the key. (123)

This criticism of the neo-communitarianism model has been extended by the neo-Marxists who make the point that for neo-liberal states, “competitiveness and innovation become more important than full employment and planning” (Defilippis et al. 679). Community-based organisations are, for example, used to run workfare programmes designed to push people into work, regardless of the conditions of the work, thus enabling a supply of casualised, on-call labour. Furthermore, community-

based organisations are used by the state to provide services at a lower cost and with greater flexibility than the state could itself provide. Structurally, community-based groups, as sub-contractors of the neoliberal state, have lost their autonomy and no longer define or serve the needs of their community.

However, Defilippis, Fisher and Shragge see this view as in turn being overly pessimistic, for there are many community-based organisations who are aware of having both a collaborative and conflictual role with the state, calling on older traditions of oppositional organising to foster the latter role.

They note that a further school of critics, writing from within identity politics frameworks, as we have seen, believe the very idea of community is oppressive to individuals, and that community groupings are particularly prone to “intolerance, exclusiveness and maybe even forms of racism, sexism and xenophobia” (681). The authors, while sharing this school’s concerns, reject its views as being politically disempowering. It is their belief that when a society constructs unequal power relations, it oppresses groups and collective action is required to combat that oppression. And within this action, diversity can still be recognised.

Defillipis, Fisher and Shragge argue instead that the challenge is to anchor capital in communities, and in my view this includes ‘cultural capital’. In order to do this they believe communities need to be strengthened in two ways: they have to have the capacity to exercise meaningful governance over economic fortunes, and there have to be more egalitarian and inclusive politics and policies at a local level. For this to happen, it is necessary to have government programmes which *support* community practices rather than the community *servicing* government programmes. In this way the state’s role is redefined by the community sector. This point will be essential to consider when I come to discuss arts funding.

In summary, the authors argue for self-directed, local, economic development and an expanded democratic practice, a participatory democracy, which requires direct negotiation between community representatives and the state, outside the formal political structures. This requires however, the creation of a sympathetic state, and would ultimately lead to a restructuring of society. This programme of action presents, for me, a reconstituted radical vision for the current times, which is examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

They conclude with a definition of best practice in community-based organising:

- (i) awareness of economic globalisation and contemporary neo-liberal responses to it;
- (ii) the importance of not deresponsibilising the state while at the same time understanding the threat of state and corporate incorporation; and
- (iii) the need to develop community-based initiatives that both challenge and link to efforts beyond the local community. (685)

The above provides then, the political checklist for Community-based theatre projects, with the proviso that theatre projects will take place less as economic initiatives, than as efforts to build a local cultural practice.

As argued above, there was now, within the economic system, a demand for community-based work, but such work would be ideologically constrained and contested. The mainstream arts patrons' (whether state or private) response to this situation will be dealt with in the following chapter. In the rest of this chapter I will undertake case studies of Community-based theatre work in New Zealand, unpacking this work in terms of the above theoretical social framework, but also in terms of Community-based theatre theory. These case studies, in the absence of written

records, are based on interviews I conducted, and involve description of the practitioner's background and motivation, the community they work(ed) with, the process followed, the patronage involved and the ideological expectation of the patron(s). It is then, a continuation of the Community-based history of NZ theatre, and will see a continuum of experiment and practice. Once again, I argue that the use of this framework of best practice is not simplistic, nor judgmental, but simply a means of unpacking theoretical and experiential complexities. While this overview could be seen as a mere providing of snapshots, it is, in my view, absolutely vital to begin to make the diversity of Community-based theatre practice in this country, during this period, visible. This is the first task. Then, a more intense analysis may begin.

Jim Moriarty and Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu ⁸⁶

While the work of Te Rakau has involved many facilitators, including Susan Battye, Alan Scott and Helen Pearse-Otene, Jim Moriarty has always led the take ⁸⁷ and he has been a central figure in Māori theatre since the 1970s. As part of the research for this thesis, I spent a week with Moriarty and his current team at their premises above a windscreen replacement business in Newtown, Wellington, where each day, the current students work and eat. During this time I conducted a series of interviews, the first with Moriarty himself, who began by describing his childhood influences:

I was brought up on a marae, mate. I was on the float doing the haka with the other snotty-nosed Māori kids. The whole performance thing was second nature. My old man was Norwegian-Irish, a great piano player. In those days of the old valve radio, the whanau ⁸⁸ created its own entertainment.

He went on to state that story telling, at the heart of Community-based theatre, was part of everyday life:

Coming from that Māori culture, with its oral history, I was told stories by my cousins, aunts, uncles, older brothers and sisters, from day one. So, I told stories. It was always connected to whole of life performances. It wasn't just entertainment for its own sake. You did the haka ⁸⁹ because it was a way of welcoming manuhiri. ⁹⁰ You did a waiata ⁹¹ because it was a way of serving

⁸⁶ The blossoming fruit tree of our sacred grove.

⁸⁷ Agenda

⁸⁸ Extended family

⁸⁹ Dance of challenge

⁹⁰ Guests

⁹¹ song

the speeches that honoured life experiences. Hui ⁹², it doesn't matter what it was for, these rituals of encounter that surrounded it were always connected to whole of life experiences. They weren't just art for art's sake.

In this statement he encompasses most of Cohen-Cruz's checklist for Community-based theatre: *communal context, hyphenation and active culture* (96-97). *Reciprocity* will be added when he becomes an experienced theatre practitioner. As I noted in Chapter Two, as a youth, Moriarty was involved with the Māori Theatre Trust, he acted in the soap opera Close to Home, was involved in Death of the Land, and worked with both Amamus and Theatre of the Eighth Day. During this period he married and had to support a family, so trained as a psychiatric nurse, and this would become an important influence on his Community-based work. After Death of the Land and the TV programmes that followed, Māori theatre in Wellington, through the creating of Taki Rua Theatre in 1986, was mainstreamed. Moriarty was heavily involved, but became disenchanted:

I was a programme director [at Taki Rua] for a time, but it was a version of the same old thing. Here was Taki Rua, which had a Māori kaupapa thing happening, but it was still whities running it. Downstage was going through one of its death rattle phases. I said, this [Taki Rua] is a great little venue but we're marginalised. At the level of operating inside mainstream practice with its business models et cetera, there weren't a lot of Māori there. I said, Let's go and occupy Downstage Theatre, take it over. I think it would've been great. Imagine that place with carvings all around it. But they all ran for cover. So I said, I'm going to do my own thing. What was happening was the second wave of colonization. There was so-called over supply, so Taki Rua became a

⁹² meeting

production company, and what I've seen over the years is they're reduced to the position of saying, Can I put a show on in your theatre?

He rejected this concept of Māori piggybacking on the mainstream Pākehā -run theatres, and in 1990, created Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu Trust, in order “to do my own thing with like-minded people”. That thing was, “to create our own stand alone venture”. Leading up to this, he had challenged the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts programmers to include some Māori content. He received a positive response and in the 1989 Festival presented a theatre marae programme which included dance and story telling. He then set up a touring circuit for Te Rakau shows. In her study of the group, Meg Williams writes:

In the early 1990s, the group began touring theatrical performances in schools throughout the country, as well as on marae, in theatres, and the international arena. (5)

This was still mainstream theatre, with a big Theatre in Education component, but one which stood on its own feet and which was not dependent on Pākehā -controlled theatre venues. It shared the Māori economic drive for tino rangatiratanga⁹³ in this period, and Te Rakau and Moriarty have continued to do some mainstream projects. Moriarty remembers:

The numbers were there. We were playing between three and five thousand people a week. We would play at Christchurch Boys High one day, the next at a little school in the sticks. We'd always expect a pōwhiri.⁹⁴ Some places we'd get bagpipes. It didn't matter. What it always created was a special pitch

⁹³ Maori sovereignty.

⁹⁴ Formal greeting.

of listening, because some sort of ritual had happened before a show. All of our work had to be relevant to the audience. Always a love story.

He began to hold workshops in schools, which would point the way to the future dominant direction. Meg Williams writes:

Additionally, drawing on theatre of the oppressed, Te Rakau provided half-day workshops with selected students identified as at-risk by schools. In this way, Te Rakau began using performance as a change-tool to break down the traditional lines between audience and performer. (5)

However, there was another venture which proved decisive in developing a fully-fledged Community-based theatre model. Te Rakau had been taking Christmas shows into prisons, and in 1996, Moriarty was asked by the manager of Arohata Women's Prison, near Wellington, if he could do something more substantial.

Moriarty takes up the story:

I said, Can I do a residency? And they bought into it. We ended up being in there for twelve weeks. It was quite an ordeal. I took the group in. It was process work. It was therapeutic and very theatrical. It was a devised piece, a bit like the work I did with you. We chatted first. I said to them, Here's an opportunity to tell your story.

Moriarty and Te Rakau were to specialise in these residencies over the next decade, so it is useful to outline in some detail the process that he evolved and the sources of that process. In terms of the latter, he told me that he'd been a victim of sexual abuse as a child and experienced marae justice. His parents had been "in the mental health game. They were healers. The house was always full of strays". He'd been brought up Catholic – "the empathy thing, social justice". And of course, the marae cultural rituals previously mentioned framed his work. But also the psychologist, Abraham

Maslow's defining of a hierarchy of human needs, learnt during Moriarty's training as a psychiatric nurse, was relevant (370-396). In addition, he took into the process the prophetic vision of Arabic writer, Khalil Gibran. Moriarty quoted to me from The Prophet: "Your children are not your children but the sons and daughters of the universe". Finally, there was for Moriarty, a genealogical link. A high proportion of the prisoners he worked with were Māori, and he saw past them, "back to Te Whiti's people imprisoned in the caves down Dunedin".⁹⁵ It was a heady mix.

The process that evolved through the residencies involved initially, Boal-type trust games, then a whakapapa⁹⁶ exercise during which participants exchanged life histories with a partner. The partner then introduced the other person to the group. Moriarty commented: "For vulnerable people it's one step away from self, so it's safe". Then they had to find a physical shape and a sound that symbolised that whakapapa. By putting couples together and each learning the others' shapes and sounds, a piece of physical theatre could be constructed. This sort of exercise can be found in Boal's Games for Actors and Non Actors, and Rainbow of Desire. But there is as well, a suggestion of Grotowski's ethnodrama concept, evolved in his para-theatrical period. Moriarty then worked with the group through ten provocations.

The first he called, The Promise: What were you entitled to when you were born (e.g. shelter, warmth, nurture, encouragement)? Participants would write an answer then act it out with a gesture, e.g. I deserved to be loved. As well, he would ask them to list the qualities they had inherited from parents, both good and not so good.

The second provocation he called, The Promise Broken: What did you actually

⁹⁵ After the invasion of Parihaka, many of those arrested were held in caves near Dunedin.

⁹⁶ Genealogy

receive? Participants would write, then physicalise what they'd written. As part of this exercise, participants had to write the first-hurt memory, then the worst-hurt memory, then the one that was still with them. They would then deliver/perform these. If the hurt was too raw, someone else might have to do this for a participant. The task was to give dignity and to offer it as a gift. Often these hurts would involve sexual abuse and violence. Here there are similarities with Grotowski's idea of the actor taking off the mask and offering his vulnerable self ("Poor Theatre" 34). When the eventual performance took place, there would be a transitional piece after this provocation, to allow a breathing space, based on a waiata a ringa⁹⁷ or haka or taiaha⁹⁸ exercise. These elements would be taught as a part of each day's work.

The next provocation centered on the question: What behaviours did you develop in order to survive (e.g. thieving, lying, violence, manipulation, addiction...)? Participants would write, then perform vignettes of these. According to Moriarty, there were always strong themes of abandonment and of maternal degradation.

The fourth provocation centred on the question: Where has this behaviour got you (in the case of the Arohata women, prison), or, where will it get you if you continue (in the case of young people)? They wrote once more and this exercise could also produce theatrical vignettes.

The final provocation focused on the questions: What do you want for the future? How will you achieve this? And what behaviour change is necessary? The answers would be expressed in dance, song or poem. Sometimes, Moriarty reports,

⁹⁷ Song with actions.

⁹⁸ Maori martial art.

there would be some spiritual sickness uncovered and a tohunga⁹⁹ would be brought in.

The material would be constructed into a script, rehearsed and performed to a public audience. In the case of people in prison, it would involve the audience coming to the prison. Moriarty commented:

The audience had to go through the gates to get into the prison, so they briefly experienced the environment. As well, there was close contact with the performers. It was a simple framework, but it worked and was pretty intense.

Often people would break down.

I saw the first show, Kia Maumahara, at Arohata Prison, and it had many elements of ritual, as defined by Victor Turner. There was the crossing over into a *liminal* space as we entered the prison, with the karanga¹⁰⁰ welcoming us. There was the feeling of *communitas* amongst the performers, who were undertaking a process of role shifting, radiating out into the audience, who were shocked out of a normal social role by the revealing of the abuse the performers had experienced. There was the use of waiata and haka as healing tools, the return to the present and a possible changed role, and a poroporoaki¹⁰¹ where the audience could comment, before crossing the threshold back to normal life. There were elements of charismatic religious conversion as well, the confessing of a sinful life and subsequent awakening to spiritual healing. Critics were invited and the performances received favourable mainstream reviews. Susan Budd, for example, wrote in her review of the third such performance:

Jim Moriarty's last two productions with women at Arohata Prison, Kia

Maumahara and Christmas Wish, were profoundly moving explorations of the

⁹⁹ Healer.

¹⁰⁰ Chanted greeting.

forces that drove them there and the transcendent power of the human spirit, not only to survive, but to conquer circumstances.¹⁰²

There has been a tendency for some (and I don't believe this view has ever hit print), to criticise the marketing of these performances to an often middle class audience, but I don't find this criticism particularly relevant. The shows were only on for a limited period so could scarcely become fashionable. I think instead, they attracted a certain 'kind of people', to use Grotowski's defining of his audience. As well, these performances were based around testimony and fit Cohen-Cruz's definition of 'survival art' ("Local Acts" 103). In such theatre, "the act of putting the traumatic incident into a narrative reaffirms the return to a safer and saner world where the self can heal". The audience's role is to "provide a safe place by at once listening emphatically to their travail and not stepping over the edge into identification" and "to represent a society where such experiences are not considered normal, thus helping to re-establish a moral universe" (144). The role of the audience, middle class or otherwise, was then, to provide that safe place.

The process proved popular with prison programme managers and, as well, youth residential centers requested the group's services. Moriarty reports that they went to every Children, Young Persons and their Families (CYFS) residential centre in the country. And then he began taking the process to tribal districts and working with the young people in the area. Delia Baskerville, who worked as a Pākehā member of the facilitating team in Northland, describes the process of recruitment in an essay she wrote as part of her teacher training:

¹⁰¹ Farewell.

¹⁰² Susan Budd, *The Dominion*, Dec 3, 1998.

On that first day when we arrived at the Morewa Town Hall to work, there were only five Nga Puhi youth present at the pōwhiri. Moriarty went looking for more youth to participate in this project. Day after day he visited schools all over Northland and walked the streets looking for potential clients. He explained the method that encourages marginalised youth to tell their stories, and identify their hurt and where it occurred in their lives. Moriarty invited youth to become immersed in devising and performing theatre for change. The word spread. Our whanau grew to ninety.

Interesting this. Presumably, Moriarty had established a contract of some sort with the Nga Puhi Iwi, but then had to head to the streets to find the community the organisation represented. In these projects, schools could forward suitable students, as could other community organisations. Te Rakau had, in essence, developed a specialist practice and Moriarty found “a huge market out there for process work”.

The scripts of the shows have a ritualistic sameness to them, as they were born from the provocations, in the same way as the Catholic mass has a necessary sameness. Watea (good for something)¹⁰³ was one of the more sophisticated pieces theatrically and dramaturgically, for the Arohata women involved, now released from prison and having worked on two previous performances, were experienced in the process, and joined by women members of Te Rakau. It became then a collective testimony to working class Māori (and one Pacific Island) women’s oppression, with a focus on sexual abuse.

OLIVIA: I hear the door shut tight. His footsteps tip toeing around my bed, he leans over and kisses me on the lips, his breathing is heavy. I freeze. I want to

¹⁰³ Watea, a theatre piece, 1998. Performed Dec 2-20, 1998 at Toi Whakaari, Wellington. Te Rakau archives.

open my eyes so he can see I'm awake, but I can't. He pulls the blankets back slowly, his breathing is getting heavier. He runs his hands up my little legs and pulls my nightie right up to my arms. Then he lies on top of me. (13)

The performance was in four parts: Freedom?; Seeds of imprisonment; The Past- we are not afraid to dig deep; The Archeology of Self; Survival – living with our demons; Today – this is me now. There was a prologue: Karanga Pōwhiri - a call from each of us to welcome you into our lives; and an epilogue in the form of a haka: Kia Maumahara (every second-cementing self). Memories and testimony inspired by the provocations were seamlessly shared by the group of women, who could also play a group oppressor.

The group are like a pack of rabid dogs in a feeding frenzy as they tear OLIVIA down and LYNDA crouches in her place. Suddenly she rears up, keeping the group at bay.

LYNDA (picking up a razor blade): Hate you dirty fucken' bitch! Slashes at the dogs. Cut away my stinking flesh. Slash. My breasts! Slash. Cut my dirty vagina away! Tearing movement upwards on self.

Pause. Tableau of bodies fallen, scattered, around LYNDA's feet as she slowly replaces the dislocated fragile ballerina image. (16-17)

The male violence was framed historically by the Vietnam war, which the New Zealand army participated in, with many Māori serving. This would be a theme Moriarty would return to in later work. The women then individually testify to the survival behaviour they adopted.

SHIRLEY: I got off on marijuana. I got off on little pink pills... On go my conning masks.

BERTA: 11 years old, hardly at home, running from the cops, scared of nothing, living under a bridge, sniffing lighter fluid, petrol, fly spray, anything to get wasted...

LANA: I'll drink with you, I'll smoke with you, hey, I've even slept with you. I'll be your controller, abuser, user, then spit you out.

LYNDA: I'm slutty and I don't care. Binge drink when things get tough and out I come... I scare men... I am Honey Pants. (25-27)

But the big sorrow lies in the fact that these women have had children and now grieve for their loss and carry a heavy guilt for their failure as parents.

JANA: God, I'll do anything, just give my baby back. I'll never sin again, just give back my baby. (28)

The behaviour change sequence is quickly accomplished with the ease of religious conversion:

SHIRL: Let it go, Shirl... it's love that changes people.

ROBERTA: Freedom to me means happiness and power to choose the right paths. I thank this process for giving me the strength to carry on.

WAI: I am creation, regeneration, continuation. Watea.

OLWEN: I will speak my voice and I will not be afraid. (29-30)

There is a belief that the drama process has been life-changing, that the performative act heals. The process becomes then, its own justification. And of course, this belief in testimony is an old one, behind tribal justice, the Catholic confessional, Communist criticism and self criticism, even featuring in reality TV programmes. Sometimes, feedback from participants was recorded:

Daniel: Through this process I think that slowly I'm learning to control my anger problem.

Shanell: I learnt how to not use drugs and how to make awesome friends.

Onewhero: It's better to work as a group than an individual.¹⁰⁴

The dramaturgy for the youth projects varied, for often a large cast had to be catered for. In Te Waka Toi O Ngati Toa, an iwi project, there are 18 scripted sections, with, for example, in the Play section, 3 plays per theme at ages 0-5/5-10/10-current age, the themes being Violence, Abandonment, Sexual abuse and Addiction. But then as well, the different geographic areas that the Ngati Toa tribe covers had to be catered for: South Island/Poneke, Central District, East Coast and West Coast (4-5). Rap, break dancing and beat boxing were used, as well as traditional Māori haka and waiata.

Purotu, the magic within (2000), a project with the Residents of the Northern Residential Centre, and with a much smaller cast, is in four parts, and has much more developed dialogue scenes, even tracking the group through their short lives in theatrical-type acts: for example, Abandonment, Age 1-5, has 7 pages of close dialogue. The resolution/conversion sequence is developed as individual songs or raps written by the group interspersed with waiata and haka. It is like a concert at the end of the play.¹⁰⁵ Te Ahika O Te Manatu Rangatahi (2001) was based in the South Island community of Kaikoura and is a much softer piece, for generally the participants seem less damaged. Their motivation for joining were those of participants joining any drama project:

Kara: I joined to build my confidence. I have gotten over my shyness and I am more confident at speaking in front of groups now and I have made heaps of friends.

¹⁰⁴ Te Waka Toi O Ngati Toa. Te Rakau, 2002. Te Rakau archives.

Trish: First of all I wanted time off school, but then it got primo and I had fun.

The people are cool and it was choice.¹⁰⁶

The hurts seem more normal: a father dying, getting lost, bullying, picking apple blossoms for a bouquet and getting into trouble, with a smattering of more serious incidents of domestic violence and sexual abuse. The content of the scenes seems to embody the more normal teenage angst around image, acceptance, the other sex, parents etc., found in the youth drama class improvisation, and the concert at the end assumes a greater feel good role.

This is the voice of Kaikoura-Rangatahi

This is the voice of the ones who wanna be free

This is the voice of the taiohi

These are the dreams for you and me. (29)

But it is perfectly logical for these pieces to reflect the process and the group of people involved, for they were all Community-based theatre pieces. If I apply Cohen-Cruz's checklist, the *Communal Context* (the artist's craft and vision at the service of a specific group desire) is perhaps contentious, for initially, the desire for a project came from Moriarty and some management impulse, whether it was institutional or iwi based. But once the group had assembled, which in the case of the iwi projects could take some legwork, then the group desire activated the process as outlined above. That process did mediate the story telling that might take place, focusing it on emotional hurt and the need for resolution. In terms of *reciprocity*, there is testimony that the facilitators and the participants were each getting something out

¹⁰⁵ Puroto, the magic within. A journey of awakening. A theatre presentation from the residents of the Northern Residential Centre, Performances Nov 25-30, Dec 1-9. Te Rakau Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Te Ahika O Te Manatu Rangatahi (*The Eternal Strength of our Youth*), performed for all schools in Kaikoura, Queen Mary Hospital, Hanmer, Cheviot High School, Amuri High School, Culverden and Queen Charlotte College, Picton., August, 2001. Te Rakau Archives.

of the encounter, and that it was a negotiated relationship. Facilitator, Jamie Amstad wrote:

Working for Te Rakau over the year has been a great learning curve. I love working with and in front of young people, to show them there are positive things in life, and that we can learn from each other. (“Puroto” 4)

Some actors who had been through drama school and worked in the mainstream, then chose to work with Te Rakau. Helen Pearce-Otene described to me her motivation:

For me personally, as a performer - I feel very alive when I'm working in this type of work, whereas, that's not to say mainstream performance is not valid, it's a wonderful career, but it doesn't feed me as much as this type of work does. One might go to a mainstream theatre production as part of a special night out, dinner, café, show... I haven't dwelled on anything afterwards. It's been a nice night out. I've enjoyed the craft, the lights, I look at things technically, don't get swallowed into the story. It's wonderful to be involved in this sort of work where I can feel the audience being swallowed into it.

Often there were apprentice facilitators. For example, Moriarty took some of the Kaikoura participants with him to the next iwi based project in Northland.

When it comes to both the process and performances, there was obviously a therapeutic agenda to supplement the aesthetic one. This was not art for art's sake. And it was this that seemed to inspire audiences, that testimony of loss and pain could produce an aesthetic experience:

What a great night last night! The group I was with- without exception- were truly amazed at the talent and moving performance by all concerned.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Email received from Karen Bain (Manager, WINZ Porirua), Te Waka Toi O Ngatitōa, Te Rakau archive.

Finally, this process met the requirements of *Active Culture*, that everyone has creative ability. When I asked Moriarty what the difference was between this work and mainstream theatre, he replied:

The curtains don't get drawn, the lights don't go down. This is theatre for life. I think the mainstream options are valid. They have their place, but not at the expense of this sort of theatre. Theatre marae is theatre as a whole of life practice.

But more recently the direction of Te Rakau has changed, as it has become a full time service provider for CYFS, offering a selected group of youth at risk (ten at any one time), fulltime care for a year. Current CEO, Aperira Hohepa-Smale explained to me:

We are a theatrical company that delivers social services. We operate under Section 396 as a contracted co-care provider. We're a partner with CYFS. We've recently acquired a contract with Ministry of Youth Development. All under MSD. It means we can transition our boys. We bring them in, stabilise them, assist them to get unstuck. Teach them new skills. We're a behaviour modification programme.

The reasons behind the change, from, in Kershaw's terms, "a specialist practice" to becoming immersed in "an industrial sector" and working for "a highly specific constituency" were complex ("Politics of Performance" 88-89). Economically, it gives assured annual funding for staff and infrastructure and it also means that Te Rakau can operate from a fixed geographic base, rather than being constantly on the road. Alan Scott, a University of Canterbury, College of Education lecturer who has worked with Te Rakau for a decade commented that a three month residency is a long time to spend away from home. Moriarty has a young family, with issues of schooling

and so on to be taken into account. But there were other motivations. According to Moriarty.

I started plucking some of these kids out [from the process projects] and putting them into the core group. I suddenly had all these people who had been awakened, who had passion, and that's where the genesis for the current format arose.

As well, it meant the theatre process could become a programme.

The whole engagement here is the process. The process used to be theatre. Now, being in the organisation is the process. We hit these kids with all sorts of tools. Some remedial reading and writing. Kapahaka stuff. Fa'a Samoa¹⁰⁸ stuff. And theatre skills. Learning a script. We'll do a play here then take it around. These kids are so far behind their peers who have had a good education and upbringing – so it's a matter of bringing them to a point where they can say, I can find a place to fit in which is safe.

It has meant, however, a move away from Community-based theatre, theater based on participants' own stories, to a performing of scripted plays. There have been two plays, so far, both written by Helen Pearse-Otene. She described the writing process:

For the last two, which have been historically based, I've gone off and researched and then talked to Jim and discussed the kauapapa we're working with - how can we relate that to the group so that they have ownership. Or it's about a kaupapa that has affected them in some way. For example, the 28th Māori Battalion show, part of getting them into the play is researching the battalion and how it affected Māoridom. Most of them that went to war were young, fourteen or so. Why they joined was to see the world, to escape from

the reality of life as Māori then. To stand up and be counted. Those are things that these young people can relate to.

She went on to describe the constraints:

Whenever I write Jim gives me the possible audience. The real structure for *The Battalion* had to fit into a typical 2 period school morning. With TIE [Theatre in Education] there has to be some sort of romance, lots of movement, quick interchange between scenes. Young people have to be entertained now. There were broad brushstrokes, with songs, some dance. A lot of movement on and off. We set it to a traverse. Really simple, suitcase theatre, minimal in terms of props. It was great for the actors, to give life to a stick- a bayonet, a taiaha...

The Battalion is an engaging piece of story telling theatre, framed by an approaching Māori battalion reunion, where an old man is stuck with two youth at risk, sent to help clean up the marae. This frames a series of flashbacks to the war and its troubling memories. The play successfully combines the two cultural paradigms. For Moriarty, the Māori youth he deals with are at war with society. There is then, this logical genealogical and experiential connection. The Battalion has been performed widely to school and community audiences and has more recently been taken by the group to Vanuatu for the celebration marking twenty years of existence of Wan Smal Bag, the renowned Community-based theatre group which has operated extensively through the South Pacific.

The second play, Ka Mate, Ka Ora, based on the Vietnam war deals with a family where the veteran has gone porangi.¹⁰⁹ The family is troubled, and the

¹⁰⁸ Samoan cultural practices.

¹⁰⁹ Mentally ill.

memories of the old man are interwoven with the ghost of Te Rauparaha. It seemed to me, a less easy piece, for the Vietnam war is a complex subject matter, and a variety of imperialisms are involved when it comes to Māori participation: settler, US, Chinese/communist... Yet performances last year attracted a range of veterans and their families needing to talk about the experience, and, as the war became increasingly contentious, the poor treatment of returning soldiers.

With these projects, there are shifts in terms of Cohen-Cruz's checklist. The *communal context* has become more general, rather than coming from a specific group desire. The *reciprocity* is centered more in the totality of group work in the programme, the *hyphenation* is to do with acquiring acting skills, the benefit of performance and of learning about one's history and culture. An *active culture* still prevails. But it is a step back from Community-based theatre proper.

But there is a further rationale in becoming a service provider, in that outcomes are more easily measurable and the group becomes more compliant with the managerial philosophy of the funder. CEO, Hohepa states:

Maybe we had to have more structure with bed-nights. It's very difficult to measure a testimony from an audit perspective. We'd have to film it. How can I justify that we have fulfilled our contract? Outcomes need to be tangible. Physical evidence needs to be produced. The outcomes we have to meet vary from rangatahi to rangatahi. Programme outcomes can involve counseling for alcohol abuse, learning new forms of communication, standing up in front of audiences. Each rangatahi comes here with a court plan or Family Group Plan plan, each one will have recommendations. We have a couple of boys with gender confusion issues. Our role is to build their resilience so they can make their own choice.

For Moriarty, there had become a problem with testimony-based work:

People have become de-sensitised. The world is over-exposed to hurt. Look at Reality TV. So when they hear a real story, they're numb to it. That's horrible.

Finally, Te Rakau has always had limited success with arts funding bodies, because of their 'amateur' status. Helen Pearse-Otene commented:

This type of work is not seen as professional theatre, and professional theatre is with professionally trained actors and technicians. We do not fit into that. If we get all that money what is the point of having a drama school? What's the point of having courses and tutors paid heaps of money to train and go to conferences and to teach students for three years, if there are then, these ratty little people just down the road from them, putting on this amazing work who haven't been through the same processes?

As well, she felt that funding would not be readily given to a group which was politically embarrassing:

Why would they give us money to produce work, or to get people to stand up and say their truth, which people can construe as a failure of the system. That's what these guys end up doing. So the powers that be say to us, You don't quite fit in to our funding streams. You don't have a professional ensemble. Apply to some community grants place.

There were therefore, many reasons for the new direction, but I did detect amongst the group, a certain sense of loss in this return to more conventional theatre performance. Alan Scott, for example, commented:

I liked the devised works, in terms of what they were trying to do politically, in terms of the audience. Getting back to the Brecht thing, you see that these kids aren't actors. All their gestures, their body language are of that

underclass. That comes out. The audience immediately understands that.

When you do a play, there's a different perspective. I think something has been lost but I can't put my finger on it.

In all this work, the overarching, formal intervention for Moriarty has been the theatre marae concept with which Te Rakau began, and which, since then, has taken several forms. The vision of turning a mainstream theatre into a marae type institution quickly faded. Instead, by framing performances with marae ritual: pōwhiri, whaikorero, poroporoaki and sometimes the feeding of manuhiri, the theatre event feels as if it is taking place on a marae, no matter what the reality of the venue is. As Moriarty stated, "it provokes a different pitch of listening". The framing became most transgressive in the prison performances. Were we to consider the prison a tūrangawaewae, a place to stand for the prisoners who were tangatawhenua of this place? And who had made them so? There is something of Grotowski's aesthetic at work here, a confrontation of a representation collective (traditional tribal culture, but also the hope embodied in a young child)) by a cynical individualised, modern reality. But the concept is resonant in most circumstances. For example, when a performance takes place at their current premises in a light industrial zone of the city, and the individualised audience assembles on the footpath, *Gesellschaft* relations are the norm. But as soon as the audience is called in, *Gemeinschaft* relations immediately begin to take over. The mainstream theatre however, a place which signals that theatre is taking place, is the most resistant to this resonance. Is it simply that it embodies other relations: foyer, box office, audience, stage, curtain, applause, commodity...? Finally, there is of course, the third possibility, of actually performing on a marae, in which case, the performers will be welcomed as manuhiri and marae ritual will occur as a matter of course. In this case, the term marae theatre is more appropriate. This has

been then, a formal intervention of great importance and while other groups have explored the same concept, for example, Te Ika a Māui, Maranga Mai, Theatre of the Eighth Day, and now, Taki Rua, play(ed) on marae, Te Rakau have been most committed to the theatre marae or marae theatre concept.

The task remains to assess the Community-based theatre work of Te Rakau, arguably the most significant body of work which has taken place in this country, within the cultural production and socio-political frameworks of this thesis: that culture is a material production and that neo-liberalism created opportunities for Community-based theatre, but ideological contradictions arise in the taking up of these opportunities.

The Theatre in Education ‘market’ operates mainly within the state funded educational sector, with performances and workshops taking place within the school institution. Students usually make a financial contribution, subsidised by the school from departmental budgets. A Te Rakau performance would be relevant to English (theatre studies), Māori, History, Social studies and Performing Arts departments. On occasion, Creative New Zealand funding contributed and an arms length Government funded community agency such as REAP (Rural Educational Assistance Programme) might also chip in. The prison projects were funded from within the programme budget, but with the youth work, because of the programme’s neat fit into the neo-communitarian model, a wide range of private-public funders could be tapped. For example, for Puroto, Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, Creative NZ, Winstone Aggregates, Smokefree Auahi Kore, Manukau City Council, Puoukaka-Ki-Te-Aakitai all contributed. As well, audiences paid to see the show, so there was a market component. For the Kaikoura project, Te Whare Putea Resource Centre, Safer

Community Council, Kaikoura Supermarkets, REAP, Blue FM, Work and Income NZ, Kaikoura Lions, Creative NZ, Kaikoura Winery, and the Kaikoura District Council, were all involved. For all this work there was a mix then, in Williams' terms, of market and state and private patron.

When I move to Defillipis, Fisher and Shragge's analysis, a performance provided for a school some cultural capital in terms of the content and performance of the play, but as well, through the welcoming of the group through a pōwhiri, a cultural opportunity. In terms of neo-communitarian ideology, a performance and a workshop with the youth at risk segment of the school population and the positive profiling of young Māori, would momentarily release some 'social glue' to help bind the school community together. There was, as well, in my observation, an immediate connection between young performers and an audience of peers. The content of, for example, The Battalion, gave some wider reading of the forces of globalisation impacting on Māori, with the youth at risk factor giving some hint of what Alan Scott, calls, "the dark face of capitalism". When performances generated by iwi-based youth at risk projects toured schools, this latter aspect was highlighted, sometimes generating a negative response. When I helped host one such tour on the West Coast of the South Island, a teacher felt that the content was too dark for her mainly well-off Pākehā students. Susan Battye, who coached the participant-facilitators in running the workshops, complained of having too little time to do this properly, so that workshops were sometimes, in her view, poorly run. But the sheer logistics of taking a large group of volatile young performers on the road were considerable. For economic reasons, most TIE groups are small and Te Rakau provided a welcome exception, providing a rare, large-cast experience. The difficulty with such interventions is that they are brief, one day at the most, so any long-term effect is difficult to assess. As well, they can excuse

a school from providing this sort of service, this sort of experience on a permanent basis - the box has been ticked. But Te Rakau did reach a large number of students nationally, and for a period, built up a following. But there began to be a 'seen that' point of view amongst some teachers, and as Moriarty commented, a desensitising in the face of the youth underclass testimony.

Despite pressure towards privatisation, prisons have remained a state provided service in New Zealand. Historically, until the 19th century, prisons were simply a place to confine people until corporal or capital punishment was administered. But under pressure from reformers (Jeremy Bentham in particular), imprisonment in itself became a part of the punishment. Prison was a place to do penance (hence penitentiary), in the form of silent reflection and labour. Penance evolved into the concept of rehabilitation, which continues to generate a variety of methodologies and strategies based on causality and behaviour modification. Thus, the 2008-2009 Annual Report of the New Zealand Department of Corrections ¹¹⁰ states that the department:

Provides rehabilitation programmes to help offenders address and resolve the causes of their offending and,

Provides reintegrative programmes and services to help offenders reintegrate back into society.

In order to do this, the department, as well as working with other government agencies such as Social Development, Police and Housing NZ, works with

the NZ Prisoner Aid and Rehabilitation Society and other community groups to contribute to a reduction of re-offending through the delivery of support and

¹¹⁰ Available at <http://www.corrections.govt.nz/news-and-publications/statutory-reports/annual-reports.html>, 10/12/10.

services to offenders (and their families/whanau) to address issues that if not addressed, may have a major impact upon their successful integration back into society.

Thus the state service reaches out to the community sector to help provide this side of its services. As well, with the recognition of the growing diversity of society under late capitalism, and given the high percentage of Māori prisoners (in 1997, 44% of male prisoners and 42% of female prisoners, when Māori numbered 12.5% of the total population), it is little surprise that Te Rakau's proposal for a prison project was welcomed.

But is it valid to call a group of prisoners, forced by the state to be there, a community? They are bound by the most blatant of contractual relations, a prison sentence, and daily life is governed by a further series of contracts as embodied by prison protocol. Yet, at the same time, in my own experience of such projects, prison life revolves around stories of past, present and future, and daily life is governed by sometimes intense social relations. There is then a sub culture of community relations (*Gemeinschaft*), sometimes gang related, always status-based. With any one of these projects, the temporary community that devised theatre produces amongst participants would begin to operate, and would in fact, be one of the strengths of the therapeutic process. This experience of, in Māori terms, whanaunatanga, would be a crucial accruing of individual 'cultural capital' and a vital application of 'social glue', for often these people have never had a sense of belonging.

In terms of Defillipis, Fisher and Shragge's model, the prison projects fit readily into the neo-communitarian model:

- Operating within a constrained context of social change
- Exploring the deficits and failings of individuals and families

- Endeavouring to mend a torn social fabric
- Developing participation and enabling people to take more control
- Building trust and co-operation between citizens (676-7)

For the institution itself, it provided cultural and social capital in the form of a public demonstration of its rehabilitation agenda for Māori inmates. The performances also enabled a rare community connectedness, as audiences entered the prison for the shows, and reviews appeared. When Te Rakau took the process to Youth Residential Centres and then to iwi areas, these positives resonated more widely, for now ‘youth at risk’ could be seen as positive members of their respective communities. Andy Wood, Northern Residential Centre Manager, wrote in the Puroto programme:

I also take this opportunity to thank you for coming to support our children and young people today as they give permission for all of us to see their very own magic within.

As well, projects brought fragmented community agencies together. Dean Lebourne, Kaikoura Safer Community Council Co-ordinator, wrote:

It was amazing to see school, marae, council and community agencies all working with one objective.

But, as Delippis, Fisher and Shragge point out, there is an element of romance and magical thinking within neo-communitarianism, as it squeezes out conflict models:

This concept masks structural divisions, blurs political sides and interests, and eliminates dissenting voices. (676)

The issue is not so much the positive impacts of the practices but the context in which they take place. Reading through the testimonies contained in the scripts, I was struck by the obvious fact that these people had been hurt by poor parenting. The question which is never asked is, What causes people to be poor parents? And of course, many

of these people are Māori. What then makes Māori more likely to be poor parents? How is it that the most potent *Gemeinschaft* community produces the extremes of alienation? It is a dangerous question, for poverty, for example, in itself, does not necessarily create a dysfunctional family culture. Many people who lived through the 1930s Depression remember it with fondness, as a time when families pulled together. Te Rakau, as an organisation, makes no analysis of this problem, but the occasional facilitator gave a rhetorical view. Meg Williams, for example, writes in the Purotu programme:

Some say crime has no relation to social economics, colonisation, alienation and loss of land, language and culture. The real crime is the failure to acknowledge that it has everything to do with it, or have the courage to do something about it. (4)

But, most generally, the comments are upbeat. Darleene Mohekey wrote, typically:

If you are willing to dig deep, find hurt and seek solution, all that is left to do is “spit and shine” the beautiful jewel we are left with. (4)

If in fact, we accept the causality of colonisation, how do we track that causality, for the plays do not venture into this territory? It was not part of the process, and it was not part of the participants' response to the process. When I brought this up with Alan Scott, who has worked as co-director on many projects, he made the following analysis:

The most single identifying aspect of these kids is that they are Māori. Poverty and Māori are linked. That poverty is the outcome of the capitalist structure. So what we get is the periodic booms and crises. In the depression Māori survived, just, by being in the country. After the war Māori come into the cities. They get a house, they have a job, they've got money. Then the boom

collapses and you're left in South Auckland without a job. Capitalism creates the ghetto, it creates the unemployed, it creates drug addiction. Once you've got that situation, schools a dumb place to be, you create gangs to manage this process, you inevitably produce an inward looking group. People in desperate situations turn in on themselves in terms of suicide and they turn in on themselves in terms of domestic violence.

As to a possible failure of Te Rakau to introduce a political analysis, to identify the linkage with colonisation and subsequent economic policy, Scott made the following comment:

Te Rakau theatre is not Brechtian theatre, but there are elements. One is detachment, of standing up and giving testimony, and standing apart from that experience. Distancing yourself. That was important to Brecht. To tell a story and to make judgements. I think also, of course it's political theatre. Just the fact that you're making theatre in prisons is political, that's different from asking is that a well made play in the Brechtian tradition. You can never tell how an audience is going to react. Sure, some Pākehā middle class are going to cry and say how awful, but you can't belittle those tears.

However, the lack of a political analysis in Te Rakau's work, despite beginning to make a historical link in plays such as The Battalion and Ka Mate, Ka Ora, leaves the Te Rakau process open to criticisms levelled at neo-communitarianism, that by, for example:

...focusing on the marginalized and excluded themselves – and not on the cause of inequality and marginalization – and by defining them as agents of their own survival, it mobilizes these groups toward their own (re) integration into the labor market (whether it's the low-wage sector, micro-enterprises or

into the social economy) where market productivity criteria replace the social rights and welfare state criteria that used to apply to them. (Mayer 125)

This has perhaps become exacerbated as the Trust has moved into becoming a CYFS service provider, providing a specialist service geared to behaviour modification.

Scott believes that because the Trust insists on the theatre company format, it remains safe, but with the reservation that

CYFS appreciates the outcome, how much they recognise the theatre process as the driver of that outcome is another matter. What CYFS are paying for is 24 hour care. They're not paying for the theatre side of it.

For me, what was interesting, when interviewing staff, was that many saw the benefit system as having created much of the anti-social behaviour they were dealing with.

They were therefore, possibly identifying a basic failure of liberal, social democracy.

Aperira Hohepa stated:

I can tell you the one thing that disturbs me is the benefit-fed mentality that CYFS breeds. Then the Independent Youth Benefit, then the DPB.

Statistically, my children come from homes where the state is the de facto parent...

Helen Pearse-Otene commented similarly:

The young people we work with are a microcosm of the expectation that everything should be handed out to them. I look at these guys and I hope that they are able to see that you do need to work, not just for money, but for yourself.

But there had been no analysis of what might replace it and still retain a social democracy.

The current service that Te Rakau provides also fits into the paradigm identified by neo-communitarianism critics, that the state has facilitated the development of community programs to achieve a lower cost provision (Defilippis et al 679). Jim Moriarty gave me the figures:

If CYFS were running this it'd be costing them \$600-700 a day [per student].

We get \$200 a day [per student]. My staff have to work 5 x 24 hour shifts.

That's ridiculous. Only because I really look after them do they survive... I know exactly where we fit in. They give us just enough to keep struggling.

The thing that keeps us here is our passion for theatre, for culture. CYFS is run by their accountants. They sit down and do the numbers. \$600,000 for an NGO. If it costs \$7 million for CYFS to run it? Obvious.

At the same time, Te Rakau is making steps towards anchoring capital within the community, both by providing work and facilities, and by continuing to create cultural capital at the community level through its projects. Their next big work is the history of the settlement of the south coast of Wellington, where they are based. Moriarty recognises that there are contradictions "all over the place" but ultimately he is faced with human need. As he talked he would give me quick backgrounds:

That boy there, his mother was prostituting him out to the gangs at the age of eleven. His Dad was shot dead in prison. That boy was dragged around shearing sheds. Didn't go to school. Did arson in revenge. That boy is going to start working in a restaurant. The other boy is going to go in the circus...

In the face of that, critical analysis has its limitations. Ultimately, one is required to unreservedly congratulate Moriarty and his group for what they have accomplished and for the profoundly important work they are continuing to do.

A broad engagement: Pou Mahi a Iwi - Cultural Work Centre Trust

I continued to work in Community-based theatre in the Hutt Valley area throughout the 1990s, with the work gradually reaching out to become a national practice. Early in the decade I established a studio base in the old Working Men's Club building in Petone, and in partnership with the local Polytechnic and a Training Opportunities (TOPS) provider, ran performing arts courses at the studio. These provided infrastructural funding, an income for myself, plus a supply of graduating students who had received some training and who wished to continue to work in the field. An incorporated society, Te Ohu Mahi a Iwi, The Cultural Workers Collective, was set up and evolved into a trust, Pou Mahi a Iwi, Cultural Work Centre Trust, to provide a legal umbrella. We continued to be closely associated with the local Community Arts Council and the national Community Artworkers' Network. We also developed links with another network, Street Art Aotearoa, which had activist and Filipino connections. On the course, students received training in theatre, contemporary dance, singing, Tikanga¹¹¹, and Pacific Island dance. Students were mainly of Māori or Pacific Island ethnicity and came from the extensive ranks of the unemployed. I was also involved in community development work in two housing estate areas in the city, Jackson Street Flats and Pomare, and after the benefit cuts of 1991, with the Poverty Action network. A small group of actors continued the Theatre of the Eighth Day devised experimental work process, performing a cycle of stories based on the Māui myths, an investigation of what it means to be Pākehā, and a study of the poet, William Blake. These pieces were performed at The Space (as the studio theatre came to be known), in Fringe Festivals and were toured in a limited fashion.

There were a variety of Community-based projects during this period, and for the purposes of this thesis, I will outline and analyse the following: the Tokelau project, the trade union projects, specialist practice projects with the local Sexual Health Centre and a psych survivors drop in centre, and projects with the Unemployed Workers Rights Centre in Auckland.

The Tokelauan project. I will examine this project in depth, for my work with this community took place over a decade, and in the mid nineties I assembled a report which included extracts from interviews with the group of participants.¹¹² This means there is evidence on which to base the analysis. This project also demonstrates, like the work of Te Rakau, the coherent development that can take place with Community-based theatre, as coherent as the development that can take place in the work of an individual playwright or director working in the mainstream. The following narrative moves from alternative theatre practice performed for mainstream theatre audiences in which a Tokelauan took part, to civic theatre in which Tokelauans were involved, to a youth theatre project which accidentally came to focus on the Tokelauan experience, to two major projects developed in partnership with the community.

Perhaps I need to provide some background. Tokelau consists of three coral atolls north of Samoa (a fourth atoll, 'bought' by an American family, is the subject of litigation). Each atoll supports a village of around five hundred people. After World War II, Tokelau became a New Zealand dependency, with Tokelauans thus having New Zealand citizenship. Each atoll has a Council and a Mayor, plus representation on a pan-atoll body which gives advice to the New Zealand government. The people

¹¹¹ Maori culture

¹¹² Paul Maunder, ed. Tokelau te Ata, pushing back the boundaries, a popular theatre project. (Pou Mahi a Iwi, Cultural Work Centre, 1996). Unpublished, in my personal papers. All quotations are from this source.

live a mainly subsistence life based on fishing and growing a limited range of food. During the 1960s, when overcrowding became a problem and hurricanes a regular occurrence, migration to New Zealand began. New Zealand communities are centered in Auckland, Taupo and the Hutt Valley, but dispersal is ongoing. There are around five thousand Tokelauans in New Zealand. They remain an unobtrusive presence yet inevitably, changes and tensions have developed.

I first became aware of Tokelau as a place and a culture when Falani Aukuso joined Theatre of the Eighth Day in the early 1980s, participating in State of Play and Hemi. At the end of State of Play, each actor performed a short monologue suggesting some essential determinations. Falani's piece made the audience aware of the extraordinary journey he had made, from a Tokelauan village to a NZ boarding school to university to his current role as teacher, and his beginning to enter an activist role - with its contradictions:

Now I am brown, articulate. I push people to be something I do not believe in.

I should care for extended family but I don't. I should be working in my country but I don't. Why not? And my sorrow remains absent. I believe things should change: a fairer distribution of wealth, people first, human needs.

Competitions a deadly thing...¹¹³

I became aware that as an illegitimate child in Tokelau he had not had an easy time. Shortly after, he did go to work in his country, becoming Director of Education in Tokelau, beginning to work to change this conservative culture. As Tagi group member Akepito Pasikale commented later:

¹¹³ Theatre of the Eighth Day, State of Play, a manifesto. The Depot, Nov 16-21, 1982. Script available from Playmarket.

What's driving Falani? I'd say his experience growing up in Tokelau. Being an outsider. Being poor.

And then, when The Great Petone Survival Show was devised, Falani's story was put into a broader perspective. I interviewed a parent, Huhana Lemisio, about the migration story, put the content into theatrical form, which she then translated into Tokelauan, adding suitable songs. She comments:

I realised that for some of the New Zealand-born Tokelauan children, it was the first time they'd heard our story; the first time they'd heard about the different way of life we'd led. They were asking lots of questions of me: What is Tokelau like? Why did you come here?

As families became immersed in New Zealand life, the parent's story was often not passed down.

But then, a year later, quite by accident, a session of youth drama classes pared down to two Tokelauan young men, brothers, who had recently arrived from Tokelau. After the official sessions had come to their scheduled conclusion, they seemed to want to continue. We did so and suddenly they opened up and talked freely about what it was like being unemployed. From their comments, I could write a forum theatre script. They performed the play for the Tokelauan community, plus the mayor and some local welfare officials.¹¹⁴ The forum provided intense discussion: Why is there unemployment? What possibilities were there for Tokelauans to provide their own business opportunities? Above all, it provided an opportunity to bring this issue, and the feelings surrounding it, out into the open. As Huhana comments:

¹¹⁴ Te Ohu Mahi a Iwi. The boy who says yes. Lower Hutt Activity Centre, 1990.

It was good to look deeply at the unemployment. You're thinking of your children – sad and worried for them. It's an issue we don't talk about, yet we need to talk about it.

We were, beginning to provide, in Williams' terms, 'recognitions' of 'a kind of people in a kind of place.' When Falani, now immersed once more in his culture, arrived back in New Zealand, we were able to fully flesh out these recognitions. He was interested in cultural development projects and with another activist, Tione Vulu, we took a video camera along to the bi-annual tournament and interviewed individuals and interest groups. The sessions with young people and women were vigorous, for they were usually denied a voice. What came through from the NZ-born was the need for accessible cultural information. They were tired of being marginalised because they were uncertain of the language and the customs, and they were bored with the routine diet of church, sports and *faitele* (action songs). Some oppositional voices began to come through, for example, Nive Vennings, married to a *palagi* (European):

Even though I maintain some of the beliefs, I don't belong to a particular religion anymore. The side of religion that concerns me is that people don't think for themselves. Their vision gets blocked off.

We decided on a drama project to be staged at the next tournament, which would examine the history of the Tokelau nation. This decision coincided with the publication of the first history of Tokelau,¹¹⁵ so there was good source material. A group with a balance between older and younger people was recruited, all of them of an activist inclination. We met once a fortnight and offered associations around a

question, e.g. What does it mean to be Tokelauan? What does it mean to be a Tokelauan in NZ? What does the mythology mean to you? Images of pre-palagi life? Images of the palagi world? Arrival in NZ? Life in NZ? In the material presented, there was always a tension between belonging to the *Gemeinschaft* community and satisfying individual needs. We then wrote up the images and had a scenario session and Tagi was born. We improvised our way through the scenario. I scripted some speeches and some scenes which they translated into Tokelauan. They chose a free, devised theatre form, moving between styles, with the actors consciously creating scenes. It was a similar creative engine to the early Amamus work. The play coded Tokelauan culture, beginning with each actor reciting his or her genealogy. It then looked at cultural paradoxes, before moving to the past, portraying the mythology, portraying warrior culture as patriarchal and colonising and village life as nurturing and female. It touched on traditional spirituality, then showed first contact, missionary arrival, slavery, political history leading to dependency, the journey to NZ, arrival, early days, the first Tokelauan born in NZ, social problems and potential breakdown, resurrection, and concluded with a song of identity. Tione Vulu insisted on drawing attention to sexual abuse in the social problem sequence. It was performed on a bare stage with the Gallipoli screen providing a backdrop, this time forming the horizon of a Pacific atoll.

For the members of the group the process was a positive experience. Akata Tala notes, “Everyone was equal. Everyone had a voice. It made us strong when we met criticism”. For Akepito Pasikale, “We were a separate group within the Toke community. We were people interested in looking at our culture critically”. For Nila

¹¹⁵ Matagi Tokelau. Translators, Anthony Hooper and Judith Huntsman. Apia, Western Samoa : (Office for Tokelau Affairs ; Suva, Fiji : Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific,

Lemisio, the youngest of the group, “It’s like the generation born here and the generation from there could meet without having a clash. I could feel okay about saying I was a New Zealand born Tokelauan. Before that I was confused”. For Heto Ahhi there was a discovering of a career: “This is what I’ve been looking for: theatre, acting. I’ve been on the streets, an alcoholic, sniffed glue. But this is the real buzz”. He was to go on to train at Toi Whakaari and become a professional actor.

The first performance of Tagi took place at Easter, 1992, in a church hall in Porirua. The response was stunning. Akepito Pasekali “was totally blown away by the large audience. I didn’t realise they’d be so involved, so caught up in it. It was a first I suppose – the setting, the time, the atmosphere. A lot of Tokelauan history is just hazy memories; but to see it, to have a picture painted, it brings these memories to the surface”. It provided, therefore, a moment of *communitas* for those present. There was, as well, a positive response from the women to the airing of the sexual abuse issue. Huhana Lemisio reports, “Some mothers came to thank me for saying those things. They said how strong I was”. And for Nila Lemisio, “Us young women, now we talk about the abuse issue. It’s out in the open”.

A further performance took place, but there was by now a reaction from the conservatives in the community, led by a priest, criticising Falani and Tione for suggesting that there was family breakdown and sexual abuse, and for ridiculing the church. Nive Vennings made the following comment about this reaction:

I realised the play had challenged the barriers in the community by its openness. It was good for the community to be challenged. Where do you stand? Who does the culture belong to? That was the key question raised. Is it the possession of the elders, or is it what I know, where I’m at?

This ‘social drama’¹¹⁶ was healed when some months later a performance was arranged for the visiting *Pulenuku* (mayor) of one of the atolls. Afterwards, the elders engaged in story telling which went on for some hours. That night, the play was accepted as one of the stories of the culture.

But then Falani and Tione proposed a new play, one which should deal with an issue facing Tokelauans in Tokelau, and to then tour Tokelau with the two plays. Falani had been given the task of moving Tokelau out of the dependency paradigm through the writing of a constitution, and he could use the plays as a consciousness-raising tool prior to undertaking the political journey. The tour was scheduled for the end of 1993, so we had a year to prepare. For many of the group the idea of returning home was emotionally laden, was in itself, a sort of ritual. Akepito hadn’t been home for twenty years. He was twelve when he left. For Akata, it was also twenty years since she’d been back. “Baby after baby, bringing up kids. Money - we could never manage it. I worked twelve hours a day for that year, to save the money to be able to take the children”.

An expanded group met to discuss the new play, which would be presented in a village setting. I suggested Boal’s forum theatre as a suitable form. Analysing the issues facing Tokelau produced a lengthy list: Preservation of culture versus development, lack of infrastructure, lack of mature leadership, the rights of women and young people, problem of external agenda (UN, multi-nationals, NZ...), environmental and technological problems (greenhouse effect, rubbish disposal), lack of consumer rights, the relationship between the home community and the NZ communities, health issues, brain drain, education valued but the educated not listened to, avoidance behaviour, an inability to deal with abstract concepts, dealing with

¹¹⁶ Victor Turner’s term for when a crisis is played out in a communal grouping.

outside cultural influences... There was a large group of women coming to these sessions and I asked them to caucus, for it seemed to me the greatest energy lay with the women's rights issue. Paula Sakaria, one of the newcomers, states:

And then the women got together. It was the first time I'd been involved with something like this. It enabled me to express what I feel as a woman.

Groups of women each came up with a scenario and I then wrote a story which combined the key elements. This became the plot for the forum theatre piece, Mafine:

A young woman called Tima, now at university in NZ, goes home for the holidays to see her parents. To the horror of her mother, she arrives wearing shorts. She is free spirited and talks freely to her male peers. At a family meeting her father announces that the family has decided Tima should stay in Tokelau to look after her parents. Her brother criticises her behaviour. She has picked up palagi ways. Tima rejects this agenda. She insists on completing her studies. She is not ready to come back. She has her own life to lead. Her family are horrified. A marriage proposal is made to the parents. They accept the proposal and this is announced to Tima. She is furious at being treated as a chattel. She flees the house to be accosted by the prospective husband who plays the traditional male. Tima pleads with her school teacher aunt to speak for her. The aunt pleads Tima's case at the next family meeting, but they will not listen. Tima is distraught. A male teacher listens to her story and gently questions her stand: What is her education for? The community needs people like her. Tima realises she would willingly marry a man such as this and stay in Tokelau. But Tima's father discovers the pair of them and beats up the young man. Tima is beside herself at such stupidity and decides to flee the atoll. As she is packing, the priest arrives and insists she stop this outlandish

behaviour and obey her parents. She gives in to this ultimate authority. The play ends with Tima dressed for the wedding and singing a lament for all women.

Then the forum would begin. Some scenes could be improvised, but some needed to be scripted. The cast did most of the writing.

When we came to rehearse the play, the emotional power that Paula brought to the role of Tima was astonishing. She would weep at every rehearsal. As she commented in the interview:

It was very personal for me. I had experienced something like Tima's story. When I was asked to play Tima I didn't feel I could. I didn't want to put myself in that position again. But after doing it I felt healed. Before, I hadn't talked about what had happened to me with anyone.

But there was a new problem, which the naturalism of the piece brought. Tokelau is a very polite culture and the family meetings, with everyone sitting quietly, thus masking the hierarchy of power, were hopelessly untheatrical. I asked the cast to express in gesture, in signs, their feelings, and they immediately created a Tokelauan 'classical' theatre form - like Noh or Kabuki. Finally there was the task of culturally embodying Boal's joker role, the one who provokes and leads the audience SpectACTORS¹¹⁷ into their task. Interestingly, Tione Vulu found a traditional role which matched.

There was some trepidation over taking Mafine home to Tokelau. Tagi was ultimately a celebration of the culture. There were wrong things happening but they were happening in New Zealand. In Mafine, the traditional culture was being criticised. Akepito commented:

We were trying to reshape the Tokelauan mind I suppose. It made me think about what had gone on before in my own life, especially my involvement with religion. I had to look at my own beliefs, realise that Christianity is a conservative force in Tokelau. I suppose I saw us as being like gospel messengers, but with a different sort of gospel.

We mounted two performances of the play locally. The forum worked and the cast felt re-assured. They had become the famous theater group by now, with a big reputation throughout the Tokelau diaspora. The organising of the tour was a big task, as with accompanying family there were thirty in the party. Pre-approval from elders had to be obtained, deals made with an airline, accommodation organised on the atolls where there are no hotels or guesthouses, and a Norwegian anthropologist asked permission to accompany the group and use the tour as part of her research. Falani wanted to show Tokelauans some of the theatre trappings, so I improvised a portable lighting system, based on aluminium oven trays. We had decided to perform both plays and to hold a Boal-based workshop on each atoll, so a final task was to train facilitators in workshop skills.

We flew to Apia where we performed Mafine to Tokelauans living there, local Samoans and the NZ administrator. In Akapito's view they were an educated, intellectual audience. For Akata,

I'd got used to the performing pride. So many coming up afterwards. This

Tokelau girl shaking my hand, 'Yes, we can do it,' she said to me.

This was to be one of the virtues of Mafine, for women to see the female cast members having the confidence to perform publicly, to be focused and assertive.

When we rehearsed TAGI in the island setting of Samoa, I realised it had become a

¹¹⁷ Boal's term for the active spectator.

different sort of play, a traditional story telling rather than an experimental theatre piece.

It is unnecessary to go into the complex history of our month working on the Tokelau atolls, with the multiple agendas that existed: the need to feed ourselves in a non-market economy, to negotiate permission to perform from the elders, to allow for the coming home agenda of the actors and their families and their meeting and socialising with extended family, our participation in the seasonal cultural life of the atolls, as well as performing and holding workshops. Nevertheless, a brief summary is useful.

On Atafu, the first atoll we visited, Tagi became a celebration of continuity. As each actor recited his or her genealogy, the audience applauded and in Akepito's words, "The audience spontaneously claimed the play. It belonged to them. Afterwards, when we talked to people, they talked about family history". Mafine provoked a series of statements from women in the village rather than a process of solving Tima's oppression, with the local woman principal being particularly outspoken. At the workshop, male drinking and domestic violence were the most pressing issues and a scenario writing exercise produced a narrative which we briefly rehearsed. Paula commented, "Some of the issues were ugly, eh? Worse than Mafine. We need more of this drama, to bring things out. People are too bound by custom. There are no individual rights". The principal was determined to establish a drama group and thanked us, "for bringing the good news".

Nukunono, the home atoll for most of the group members, seemed more sophisticated and consumer oriented. The plays were treated more as entertainment, but the workshop produced the most politically advanced material, with participants seeing the male drinking and violence arising from the lack of democracy, so that

powerlessness and frustration worked its way through the whole of society. This led to a scenario where the women went on strike. Pauline Harper had come on the trip and we began to discuss wider community art project possibilities on the atolls: a radio station, drama groups, a women's network linking women in New Zealand with women at home.

On the final atoll, Fakaofu, the forum part of Mafine was particularly strong, with two young women students, home for the holidays, making powerful contributions. Tima was speaking in real life. At the Fakaofu workshop, there were new issues: mixed religion marriages and the importing of violent videos. This led to a proposal to use alternative political avenues to that of the Council of Elders, by forming single-issue groups. Finally, Pauline and I met with the Women's Committee to discuss possible community art and culture projects and held a Boal workshop with their members. With these women, Boal's games immediately revealed the difficulty of co-operation that oppression produces, and the milieu that had given birth to the methodology.

Back in New Zealand, the group performed Mafine as part of the fringe festival, briefly entering the margins of mainstream theatre,¹¹⁸ but then dissolved, as people returned to their lives. The activist energy was now concentrated on achieving political change in Tokelau. Did the tour have any concrete effect? Nive reports, "In Fakaofu the police now have a woman in charge. Huhe is now women's advisor to the council in Nukunono. The seed that was taken there is growing". Akepito was more cautious: "You can't change centuries of custom in a couple of days. But the workshops will have a good effect". Further work continued with the Tokelauan community, including a video project and a tour of Tokelauan communities with a

puppet show in 1997, which included community art workshops, but the relocation of Falani and Tione to Tokelau, meant a diminishing of activist energy locally.

Trade union projects: As the neo-liberal revolution increased in intensity, with the benefit cuts creating widespread poverty and the Employment Contracts Act decimating the trade union movement, a grass roots fight back began, and one which was community-based. In 1994 we were approached by a group called Street Art Aotearoa. It had grown out of a Peoples Assembly held in September, 1993, a gathering which had brought together “people working for fundamental economic, political and social change from a grass roots base.”¹¹⁹ The Assembly, funded by the Methodist Church, had written and adopted The Peoples Charter, articulating a kaupapa which has now become normal amongst progressive political groups:

- acknowledging the Treaty of Waitangi as a fundamental framework,
- advocating consensus decision making at all levels of society,
- promoting fairness and equity rather than private profit,
- gender equality, trade union rights, free health care and education, affordable housing, quality work and environmental sustainability.

But there was a new appreciation of culture. “We commit ourselves to fostering cultural values which help empower people to transform society on a non-sexist, non-racist and non- hierarchical basis” and “to articulating the economic, cultural and political aspirations of our groups and networks”.¹²⁰ Those attending the assembly who were active in the cultural work field met for a workshop in February, 1994, and

¹¹⁸ Encounter at the Work Centre , Petone, 6th and 13th March, 1994 Wellington Fringe Festival.

¹¹⁹ The Peoples Charter, Building our own future. Peoples Assembly Project Aotearoa, 1993-1994. August, 1994. Copy in my possession.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

formed The Peoples Assembly Cultural Workers Network, which was subsequently simplified to Street Art Aotearoa. This workshop, “was attended by artists, performers, activists, church and community workers united by the desire to use creative activities to express our reality, to encourage our struggle and to organise for political action”.¹²¹ The announcement was signed by Lisa Beech, Sue Bradford and Rolando Olmedo. Lisa Beech, a violinist, had strong links with Filipino musicians and Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links, a network of unions who had adopted community level organising, often essential in majority world countries. Sue Bradford headed the Auckland Unemployment Workers Rights Centre, which was conducting a direct action campaign against the New Right onslaught. Rolando Olmedo was a Chilean exile who had been active in left wing theatre in Chile before the coup. For a start I could introduce Street Art to the Community Art and Cultural Workers Network and the two groups found they shared quite similar agendas, even though couched in different language. Our collaboration began more actively when both Lisa and Rolando moved to the Hutt Valley.

Lisa had been in contact with a group of locked out workers in the mill town of Milton, south of Dunedin. They had been the first group to try and negotiate a contract after the passage of the Employment Contracts Act in early 1992. This anti-union legislation removed the privileged status of unions, allowing anyone to bargain on behalf of workers, favoured individual agreements and removed union workplace-access rights. In the post ECA environment, the mill manager offered a contract in which there was a seven-day working week, no overtime, and total management control. He negotiated with individual workers behind the union’s back, threatened closure of the mill, and presented the workers with a take it or leave it contract just

¹²¹ Street Art Aotearoa, Newsletter No 1, June 1994. In my possession.

before Christmas, demanding it be signed early in the New Year, thus reducing any chance for discussion. A group of mainly middle-aged workers, most of whom had worked in the mill all their working lives, refused to sign and had been locked out. The majority of workers had quickly given in, returned to work, and thus become scabs.

The locked out workers had been picketing the plant, at first daily, and then weekly, for three years, and in the eyes of the wider union movement had become a symbol of resistance to an unjust law. Lisa suggested to them the idea of a play based on their experiences and they were keen, so we travelled down and conducted video interviews. They were ordinary small town people who had initially resisted from the simple belief that they had been treated unfairly. But as they had made contact with other workers throughout the region, this resistance had been politicised into a reading of the machinations of late capitalism. It was then, a matter of telling their story through dramatising four of their individual accounts, linked by songs and framed by a figure who told of similar but more extreme experiences from the majority world. The piece was performed in the round with the actors at either side of the circle. The first performance of Struggling through the nineties, the story of the Milton locked-out workers, took place in Milton in 1995, a town bitterly divided because of the dispute. Two of the scab workers turned up, thinking they could sit anonymously at the back, but were instead forced to sit in the circle, exposed to the other members of the audience. The atmosphere was electric. Afterwards, we mounted a short season in Dunedin, one performance taking place during the lunch break at a cheese factory.

As Fotheringham notes, performing their own story to a community is a very different act from performing to 'the theatre crowd'. The listening is more intense. There is no easy acceptance, not even an easy acceptance of the rhetorical

conventions (couched traditionally as the willing suspension of disbelief). Instead, the authenticating conventions are being judged. Do these people know about workers' lives? Are they committed to this content, or are they simply 'acting'? Skill is judged as a worker's skill is judged. He can work a lathe; she can play the violin. Acceptance suddenly comes, after proof has been offered, in the form of feeling embraced by the audience. It is as if the events portrayed are being taken into their way of life. It is very different, and for me, more satisfying, than foot stamping applause.

After returning to Wellington we tried to set up further factory performances but the task proved too complex, with shift work staggering lunch times, and performances requiring the permission of both the union organiser and site delegate, and management. As well, most union organisers were both stressed and uneducated in the use of cultural work. Nevertheless, Struggling through the nineties was performed on community occasions, for example, for the Workers Educational Associations (WEA) conference in 1995¹²², and in 1997 became part of the Auckland Unemployment Workers Rights national tour repertoire.

However, this connection with the union movement led to a further project when a Service and Food Workers Union organiser, Annie Collins, asked us to prepare a performance for a national conference of delegates. We discussed current issues facing the union before she put us in touch with a Samoan catering worker who told us her story of victimisation after the Container Terminal Cafeteria catering was contracted out to an Australian based multinational. We turned her story into a forum

¹²² Katherine Peet, President of WEA wrote to us: "It is a very poignant production. Having met some of the Milton workers I am aware how accurately you portrayed those characters. The linking of the issues arising from the Milton example of the effects of the Employment Contracts Act with the struggles of Tangata Whenua to regain and retain Tino Rangatiratanga and of workers in Asia and the Pacific made the production very appropriate to the challenge facing the WEA." 1 October, 1995. Letter in my possession.

theater piece and when performed at the delegates' conference, the forum was one of the most volatile I have ever experienced.

Eventually, we were able to help the NZ Council of Trade Unions write an art and culture policy, which reduced the marginality of such projects.

Unemployed Workers Rights Centre project: In November, 1995, Sue Bradford invited Rolando Olmedo and myself to take a theatre workshop with members of the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC). The Rights Centre, set up in 1983, “with the kaupapa of helping unemployed people and beneficiaries with their daily problems while at the same time working politically and educationally for our demand for Jobs and a Living Wage for All”, had spawned the Auckland Peoples Centre network, which provided, “a wide range of low cost, quality medical, dental, welfare and educational services to many thousands of low and no income people”.¹²³ The group had been involved in Te Roopu Awakore, the National Unemployment Workers Movement which had held a hikoi to parliament, and AUWRC now led direct action campaigns, for example, invading a conference of Asian bankers in Auckland. The police had violently ransacked their premises the year before, leading to long running court cases. In an era when the Labour Party had torn apart the welfare state and trade union leaders were occasionally switching sides or advocating partnership, AUWRC led the opposition, in an alliance with church and community groups.

They had had a street theatre group since the late 1980s and after the workshop, Sue Bradford suggested I facilitate the mounting of a play which would “show the events of the last 12 years from the viewpoint of unemployed people,

beneficiaries and low paid workers”. The play should “expose the myth of widespread economic recovery and contain the seeds of a people’s political response”.¹²⁴ This play would be taken on the road prior to the coming election of 1996.

The group AUWRC assembled for the first workshop session included two Marist brothers, Chris Skinner and Peter Healey, a theological student, Mark Dan, and AUWRC workers, Sue Bradford, Caroline Selwood and Cybele Lock. I asked for personal associations in terms of the current system, which produced images of the Business Round Table, of unemployed on the street, of shoes that don’t fit, of racism, of café culture, of disenfranchised elderly people, of expensive cars, marching girls, of suppressed violence... We then moved to personal belief systems and how those beliefs had developed. When asked for images of poverty, the group showed domestic violence and prostitution, humiliation at Income Support, and stressed families. We looked at the current political process and associations that it conjured up, before moving onto images of resistance, with Māori Sovereignty being an important framework.

Afterwards, I made the following notes: “A bit gut wrenching, victim oriented and provincial, yet this is also what it is about- the human being who will not be cloned into a transnational consumer, the peg that won’t fit because of ethnicity, or disability, or a sense of justice, or religious belief, or age, or imposed poverty, or a sense of belonging to something else - a rough beast heading toward Jerusalem”.¹²⁵ We developed the show, bringing Brian Potiki and two Pou Mahi a Iwi members,

¹²³ From publicity flier for first Telling The Other Story tour, in my personal papers.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Own notebook.

Elaine Liua and Ken Fuiamaono into the cast, during three more workshops, before I wrote a script.

The play began with each of the cast, as in the Tokelauan play, TAGI, reciting their ‘genealogy’, in this case the ancestral line which had led them to this political place. The New Right played by two masked punk rockers, Ron and Roger the Dodger, burst onto the scene, ‘singing’ the New Right jargon: “There’s a crisis a crisis/ There’s more than a crisis/ The whole country’s going broke/ We’re having to be decisive.”¹²⁶ Along the back was a large wall of newsprint on which the politicians daubed key neo-liberal slogans, and which occasionally, the people could graffiti. Scenes of closures and redundant workers followed, interleaved with songs. The Labour Government was returned for a second term and two monologues followed: Wi talked about all the courses he’d done, but never a job at the end of it; and a small businessman addressed his now redundant workers after the share market crash, which has meant he was not being paid for a crucial supply of goods. Ron knifed Roger who turned into Randy Ruth, now the new Minister of Finance. The scenes became more absurdist, with someone living in a graveyard, a Samoan woman talking about the lifelessness in her suburb and young women turning to prostitution after the benefit cuts. And even the middle class were falling into absurdity as debt mounted. A Māori warrior figure burst through the backdrop and delivered an assertive mihi, half wiro,¹²⁷ half haka, telling the Pākehā that they now knew how it feels to lose everything, to be fooled with false laws and injustice. But in such situations leaders arise, a new system is born. The group responded with short accounts of positive

¹²⁶ This and subsequent quotes from Telling the other story, Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre, in partnership with Pou Mahi a Iwi. Script in my possession. Performed at St John’s Church Hall, Whangarei, August 29th, 1996, Kohukohu Town Hall, 30th August, Te Aratu Trust, Rotorua, Freemans Bay Community Centre, Auckland, 7th September, Queen Elizabeth College, Palmerston North, 13th Sept, Town Hall, Masterton, 13th Sept, Newtown Community Centre, Wellington, 14th Sept.

things that had been happening. The New Right politicians were then put on trial, the charge "Manipulating the country's economic, political and cultural system to serve the greed of a small minority." Witnesses came forward and the audience, as well, were given the opportunity to make presentations. The prisoners were found guilty and expelled, before a discussion took place with the audience.

With the aid of a small Creative NZ grant we toured the play, which can be classed as a piece of popular culture, through the North Island, using the community sector to publicise and host performances. This was of course, reminiscent of Maranga Mai. It was vitally important, in my mind, for the piece not to become propaganda, especially with activists in the cast, who have a tendency to adopt a protest 'mask'. I wrote the following note to the cast a few performances into the tour:

When I talk about the craft of the performer, I am talking about the ability to call up in one's interiority the relevant thought/feelings and to express in word and gesture these thought/feelings. As we journey through the different communities what we are offering is a culture.¹²⁸

I was bringing to their attention the vital political function of subjectivity within cultural work, of being able to authenticate the political image using our own past emotional history. As well, there was a sense that part of our task was re-establishing a counter culture movement.

Before the tour, we had provided a street theatre piece for the Right's Centre led protests at the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation Leaders(APEC) meeting in Auckland. AUWRC demonstrations were radical affairs. Permission had seldom been asked of the police, and after the march had assembled, it would take off, invading the

¹²⁷ The challenge by a warrior at the beginning of the powhiri.

¹²⁸ Note to cast members, in my possession.

middle of the road, with police trying to contain it, not knowing where it was headed. Suddenly the march would stop with the marchers sitting down. This was an opportunity for street theatre, but the police would then begin arresting people, so the march would take off again. As a consequence we never performed the whole piece before the police stepped in. Further street theatre opportunities presented themselves and Pou Mahi a Iwi members formed a street theatre group for these occasions: the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) meeting in Auckland in 1997, a Social Forum Gathering and a Jobs for Justice Protest in Wellington. I became interested in theatricalising the whole demonstration rather than street theatre being a discreet segment.

A further Roadshow tour followed in winter, 1997, with Struggling through the Nineties and an environmental piece on genetic engineering, Goats and Gods, being added to the repertoire. The group played Whangarei, Hamilton, New Plymouth, Riverside Community, Westport, Blackball, Dunedin, Christchurch and Wellington. As part of the tour we offered a one-day workshop with community workers in each centre, facilitated by Sue and myself, using Boal sculpting techniques. The revealed need of community workers for this sort of opportunity led to the setting up of Kotare School of Social Change ¹²⁹, based on the Highlander model ¹³⁰ and my involvement in the setting of the training culture for the school.

Specialist services: During this period, we provided three specialist services. For the first, we entered a partnership with the Wellington Sexual Health Centre, to provide a play for tertiary students which would give a context for sexual health education.

¹²⁹ See www.kotare.org.nz

¹³⁰ See www.highlandercenter.org/

After the usual research and devising process, I wrote a forum theatre piece, The R16 Show, which intermittently toured around campuses for three years, providing much needed supplementary income for members of the Centre. The story encompassed binge drinking and a date rape and subsequent pregnancy, and the one night stand mentality. The other involved a project with the Tin Shed, a mental health consumer day facility. Once again, after research with the clients, a forum theatre piece evolved. As well, Ko Te Kimihanga¹³¹ was finally, widely performed as a Theatre in Education piece to Māori Colleges and tertiary institutes.

In terms of formal innovations, the use of story telling, with its ability to tell big stories with a few actors and the simplest of technical setups, proved increasingly useful. The traditional circle of listeners, symbolising a community, had now, however, to include some strangers; in the Milton case someone from the majority world, for, in a neo-liberal world, the stories overlapped, had a kinship, and this was important thematically. As well, the story telling space demands an active listener, for the listener must construct, with the teller, the theatricality of the story. It was no accident then, that we chose either forum theatre, popular theatre forms, or storytelling as the vehicle for our work in this period. However, a further, and more surprising technical move was the incorporating of some of Grotowski's paratheatrical work in the training of the students. As I wrote earlier, and explained in a presentation to The International Drama in Education Association Conference in Brisbane (IDEA '95),¹³² many of these students had identity issues because of ethnically complex families, a confusion made more acute by the childhood

¹³¹ See p103. The play was performed for Maori Colleges and Maori Studies students at Polytechs in Hawkes Bay and the Waikato.

¹³² Paul Maunder, Enabling Identity (Copy of text of workshop presentation in my papers), and published in Drama, Theatre, and Education in a Changing World. IDEA '95: Reflections in the River, (IDEA '95 Publications, NADIE, P.O. Box 163, Brisbane St., Queensland 4002, Australia).

experience. But as well, there was a felt spiritual need, in the sense that religious systems give order to experience, and in an increasingly random world, they had a need for order. Some of this need was met through their learning of tikanga Māori and its incorporation of karakia,¹³³ but there was, as well, a more acute need for some, which work in the Grotowski space seemed to meet (they seldom wanted to stay working in that space, but the discreet experience of it was important). And I was amazed at how quickly, and intuitively, they could compose an ethnodrama, for example, and how ‘holy’ the atmosphere became when they performed it for the other students, and sometimes for parents.¹³⁴

In terms of placing this work within the theoretical frameworks of this thesis, I note firstly, that it was not so much a specialist practice, as a broad practice influenced by the Community Cultural Development philosophy which the progressive community arts practitioners pursued.¹³⁵ This philosophy posited the central concept of cultural democracy: that the diverse range of communities each has the right to express their culture, for themselves, and in their own terms. This was seen to be in opposition to the fine art or court culture, which served mainly the urban middle class, but which justified state patronage by touring its product to regional areas, by attempting to expand its client base in the cities and sometimes, by making charitable offerings of the product to the underprivileged. This philosophy of cultural democracy

¹³³ Prayers

¹³⁴ See Lisa Wolford, Subjective Reflections on Objective Work, Grotowski in Irvine. (The Drama Review 35, no 1 (T129), Spring 1991) for a description of this space of work.

¹³⁵ “*Community cultural development* describes a way of working with the arts in communities. It is based on values which emphasise people doing things together which expand their awareness and understanding of the meanings life has for them, by making images and symbola which illuminate that meaning. It is people ‘telling their own stories’ and expressing their vision of themselves.” Report and Recommendations. A national Arts Council community arts policy. (Report of the Community Arts Working Party, June, 1994).

stretched back to the Left movement of the thirties and forties, which had argued the same view when an arts council was first suggested.¹³⁶ Through the sometimes intense debates that took place among the members of the network, this position became increasingly politicised as it took into account what I called then, ‘the ultra culture’, the multinational production of culture on which I will focus in the last chapter. But the philosophy meant we were prepared to work with any community that expressed an interest, unless it were racist, homophobic or fascist.

In terms of Williams’ framework, this work was generally pre-market, with market forces entering only briefly. For example, we charged school and tertiary institutions a fee for the performance of Ko Te Kimihanga and were paid a performance fee for The R16 Show by the Sexual Health Centre and we mounted an occasional public performance at which we usually adopted the custom of koha (donation), rather than setting a fixed price. I earned a subsistence living and the infrastructural costs of the centre were paid for by the courses. In this sense, there was a subsidising of the community work by the official education sector. The courses also provided access to partially trained students. Thereafter the work was mainly voluntary, with some state-paid wages for people employed on, for example, Taskforce Green schemes. We also received small project grants from Te Waka Toi, the Māori Arts Council and the Willi Fels fund. For the AUWRC tour, local community groups paid for advertising and halls, and sometimes a collection was taken up for our petrol, food and accommodation costs. In terms of the artist’s role, I would place us close to those sections of monastic orders that performed artistic work.

The problem was clearly one of sustainability, and when, in 1998, in a drive to make courses more employment oriented, government funding was cut for the

¹³⁶ See p54 of this thesis.

plethora of performing arts courses that had grown up around the country, we were immediately in crisis economically. We explored the possibility of setting up a work co-op to supplement income and entered negotiations with Riverside Community to see if it would be possible to move there, but Riverside was in need of skilled workers rather than labourers and the centre had to close. In this sense, our broad range of work was a weakness. As well, the community sector was having imposed on it by funding bodies, the new right management model. Inputs, goals, performance indicators, outcomes and outputs became the heart of grant applications. You had to determine the result of a project before it began, which was ideologically opposed to Community-based theatre processes. Generally then, it was the specialist service that survived into the new century, for the specialist service is automatically both disciplined and protected by the institution it is reliant upon.

A further issue was that of professional development and on going training in cultural and political development. My co-workers were from Māori and Pacific Island working class families, streetwise and talented. Could they become mature practitioners without going through university, followed by middle class arts training and practice, which had been my own rather long-winded journey? A tertiary training course in Community-based theatre or Applied Drama would have been perfect for these people.

During this period, I continued projects in the Theatre of the Eighth Day manner, involving students, partly to give them a broader theatre experience, particularly in the Poor Theatre space of working. Often as well, for these young people, the commercial culture, with its rags to riches promises, beckoned strongly. We were then, not a sustainable practice, unless the state as arts patron recognised us

as a client for whom they provided an annual grant. The reasons for that likelihood never eventuating are investigated in the next chapter.

When I turn to Cohen-Cruz's checklist for Community-based theatre, the task is easier. For all projects, except perhaps the Ko Te Kimihanga TIE tour¹³⁷, *the artist's craft and vision were at the service of a specific group desire*. There was a certain complexity of practice with regard to AUWRC's 'specific group desire'. They were a community group in themselves, but their vision was to represent a much more substantial local community. They were also major players in a national movement of like groups, and the aim of the cultural project was to serve this national grouping, who in turn 'represented' their local community of unemployed and beneficiaries. All we could do was to work specifically with their group desire. *Reciprocity* was present. For the professionals, projects provided the chance to learn about the experience and culture of the community group and the often rigorous challenge of finding a suitable creative form. For the communities, projects provided a chance to perform, to be acknowledged publicly and to distance and make objective their story. There was always *an agenda other than an aesthetic one*: educational and nation building in the case of the Tokelauans, training and education for the unions and The Sexual Health Centre, campaigning and education for AUWRC, therapy and its political context for The Tin Shed clients. Finally, there was always an *active culture*, with the community being involved in creating and performing.

In terms of Defilippis, Fisher and Shragge's analysis, after The Great Petone Survival Show, which could be seen as a neo-communitarian piece, with the chief intention being the providing of 'social glue', the work became increasingly aware,

¹³⁷ While the play was devised within a community group, the play was taken to Maori colleges and Maori courses at tertiary institutions as a pre-conceived show.

and critical of the global economic system. It also increasingly linked to efforts beyond the local community. In a paper to the 1994 Community Art Networkers Network, I proposed a definition of the role of the cultural worker as “a person living on a planet which is under threat, where working people and indigenous peoples are oppressed by multinational capital...”(the list continues)...and where “the dominant cultures play a key role in maintaining these oppressions”. In such a situation, “we, as cultural workers, can undertake the task of enabling communities to image their past, their present, their issues, their places, their joys, their contradictions”.¹³⁸ This imaging will form a cultural ‘capital’ at the local level. But by 1997, I was putting forward the possibility that even this agenda could become romanticised.

I’m talking here about expression of place, past, present, future, even issues, as reified stories or images, a little like nature programmes, justified sentimentally because they exist in some wider and ill-defined field of “goodness”.¹³⁹

I proposed the view that if we were not ‘telling the other story’, that is, the political story, we were in fact, telling the system’s story. This viewpoint fits perfectly with Defilippis, Fisher and Shragge’s position, but begs the question of how this task is to supported economically, which leads to their call for the grounding of capital locally and the forging of democratic relations in the controlling of that capital.

This period ended with my moving to the West Coast, to live in a small community which has a resonant activist working class history. Here I mount theatre events such as the one described in the introduction, in order to help the community

¹³⁸ Paul Maunder, The Cultural Worker, (in my papers).

¹³⁹ Pou Mahi a Iwi – Cultural Work Centre, Co-ordinator’s Annual Report, 1996-1997. (In my papers).

celebrate this past and for the activist movement more generally, to explore its current relevance.

Sam Scott and Youth Theatre

It is problematic to categorise 'youth' as a community, as problematic as to define 'adults' as a community, or 'women' as a community. Yet there is a held sense that youth are a separate grouping within society, with people from other age groups excluded. There is as well, a sense that youth exist in communities, bound by *Gemeinschaft*-type personal relations focused on stories about places and events. There are at least strong networks formed, some formal, most informal, for it is an age when contractual relations are denied, for example, there are age restrictions on gaining a drivers licence or the entering of financial contracts. It is a grouping within society where often community in its organisational form is imposed, or at least heavily mediated, by adults, for example when compulsorily attending educational institutions. Yet within such institutions, a duality will exist between the imposed relationships and the looser, unofficial relationships forged by the young people themselves. Young people will share with adults, ethnic, gender and class characteristics, yet will have their own view of these characteristics, which can become controversial in times of social change or in migrant families as the young more rapidly adopt host country customs. It is also a period of rapid change, with sub groupings determined by age. With modern media, youth provide niche markets for commercially produced culture, which in turn, becomes personalised and used to define changing community characteristics. It is a time when skills are being learnt and sports teams and art groupings made up of young people provide learning, socialising and temporary community building opportunities. As a temporary community or temporary communities, youth can be seen as having issues and stories which need to be told, to form 'recognitions' of 'a kind of people in a kind of

place'.¹⁴⁰ Much Theatre for Development Work in the majority world focuses on providing young people with a voice in elder controlled societies.¹⁴¹ Accordingly, with this volatile sector of society, there is considerable opportunity for Community-based theatre work.

Aucklander, Sam Scott has devoted her working life to facilitating theatre for young people, resulting in her present artistic directorship of Massive Theatre Company. She told me in a phone interview, that she was brought up in a theatrical family, her father and uncle both working as professional actors. At high school she joined the Auckland Youth Theatre, "meeting like minded people", and then, in 1979, she was a US exchange student, attending a school where dance and drama were taught. The town where she lived was close to New York so she could experience the theatre scene there and also participate in a two-week intensive workshop for young people. The US experience was important, "for there was little drama being taught in New Zealand schools at that time". Returning to university in NZ she studied drama with Mervyn Thompson and Murray Edmond and discovered that she had "a directing impulse". She was assistant director for the Northland Youth Theatre summer programme for four years before she directed her first show there. This programme provided an intensive experience for the students, working Monday to Saturday for six weeks, with an emphasis on devising and physical theatre in the end of course performances.

After moving around the country on residencies, Scott took over directorship of the Maidment Youth Theatre, which evolved into Massive Theatre Company. Her theatre approach has been influenced by Philippe Gaulier, collaborator of Jacque Le

¹⁴⁰ See p11.

Coq, and it is useful to briefly outline the nature of this influence and its appeal for young people. Gaulier, in describing his present course content, writes:

Why begin with the "Jeu"? Because "Jeu" - game and play - is the source of everything: of the pleasure and desire to be an actor. Playing in the theatre is the same as playing at running, jumping, fighting as people and animals do: playing cowboys, Indians, soldiers, doctors and with dolls.¹⁴²

His celebration of playing and of the joke and falseness of theatre, suits the stage of adolescence, as young people try things out, without wanting to be caught in any particular role:

Never should an actor playing a melancholy character be melancholy. On the contrary, while always showing his pleasure, he will at every moment indicate that none of this is for real and we will believe him precisely because none of this is for real. In the theatre, we don't believe what is true. We believe - in honour of our childhood no doubt - what is false, totally false.¹⁴³

He celebrates the bouffon, the outsider, with whom many adolescents emotionally empathise.

The bouffon is a crippled outcast, a lame person, a legless or one-armed cripple, a dwarf, a midget, a whore, a homosexual, a witch, a heretical priest, a madman.¹⁴⁴

He sees melodrama as “the theatre of theatres”, gets students to explore the neutral mask, in order to find themselves, before dealing with the clown, and his constant companion, Mr Flop, the one who messes up. But there is a seriousness to the play,

¹⁴¹ See, for example, Richard Boon and Jane Plastow, eds. Theatre and Empowerment, Community Drama on the World Stage. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁴² www.ecolephilippegaulier.com, 21/6/9.

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

and Gaulier uses, like Grotowski, the *via negativa*, rejecting an actor's offerings until the true impulse is discovered. And of course, it is a highly physicalised theatre, rather than text based – in many ways, a perfect vocabulary for Scott to facilitate young people's exploration of performance.

Why has she chosen to work with young people? It's not all young people. Scott "loves working with passionate, hungry young people." As Massive's producer, James Kyle Wilson, stated to me: "The thing that makes Massive different from other youth theatres or community theatres is the rigour and discipline of the work". Massive insists that its members, "work bloody hard, harder than you've ever worked before or thought possible, to create work of excellence". Scott's kaupapa is then, to create with young people "physical theatre with heart behind it", but "theatre which also explores ideas: the specific in the universal and vice versa". (Scott)

Massive operates currently at a variety of levels. Every school holidays the company runs free one-week workshop programmes for students who have self selected after a taster workshop. After having been through a workshop process, students can audition for devised theatre productions, "based on the personal experiences of those involved" (Wilson). In this sense, Massive shares the testimony agenda of Te Rakau, but this time, generally, the young people have not been marginalised by traumatic experiences. These productions are developed over the course of about a year. The most recent shows were gender specific. With The Girls Show (2008), the young women "wanted to tell stories about their relationships with their mothers, their friends and describe what it's like being a young woman in New Zealand today" (Scott). In the boys' show, Up Close Out Loud (2007), there was a coming of age theme. Both shows were composed from personal statements or short skits linked with energetic choreographed movement. Scott told me that these

movements come from exercises based on themes such as rolling, jumping, leaping, or from more specific emotion or idea based, physical improvisations. Recording rehearsal ideas is often challenging, with participants both devising a personal choreographic notation, or the group using video records. From the video of Up Close Out Loud, characterisation was limited and actors were generally playing themselves in situations like a 21st birthday party, or boys talking cars, or boys troubled by sexual anxiety. There was a definite flavour of neo-liberal goal setting: “challenge yourself- all your goals will be achieved”, and some exploring of ethnic problems: confused Pākehā or South Auckland-equals-trouble sort of thing. What came across very strongly was a vitality and a disciplined energy. The Girl’s Show followed a similar format, but had a framework of Māori ritual. The audience was a mix of friends and family plus an interested general public and the shows played in mainstream theatre venues. The overall form of these pieces reminded me of a high school disco, where the hall will be a sea of activity. A group of kids will coalesce for a moment to dance or talk, then move off to form a new grouping, dance for a moment, then onwards. This will be the pattern for the night, a constant exploration of possibility. Massive’s youth performances have this rhythm, but have, at the same time, a stringent technical discipline.

For Scott, outside of the school setting, youth are not a community. Massive is in fact the community for its members, attracting, in a phrase she shares with Grotowski, “our kind of people”, those attracted to the style of work and the impulses behind it. She says that Pacific Island and Māori young people particularly respond because the work is kinaesthetic rather than verbal. This has led to a separate Massive Ensemble based in South Auckland. As far as audiences are concerned, Scott believes that they get an opportunity to understand “the internal processes of young people”

and “what’s relevant to them”. In devising a show, she’s “constantly pushing the participants past the cliché, to get to what they really believe”. She doesn’t want to do shows about these young people in the context of their communities, especially for those living in South Auckland. She wants, instead, “to take them out of their world, to provoke different voices”, “to mix up our experiences and see what comes out”. In this sense the shows recognise, in Cohen-Cruz’s words, “the fluidity and multiplicity of identities” (4). Ultimately she’s “working with what happens in the rehearsal room”. This is often the liberal agenda, to introduce more middle class values into the ghetto situation, but Scott insists she is “a socialist at heart”. She wants “people to live healthily and to have the whanau experience”. It is important for her that the workshops are free and that the company runs some pay what you can performances. Interestingly enough, Scott’s view is shared by an Ethiopian Theatre for Development Project for street kids, where the director of the programme insisted on proper dance training for the participants over a three year period, before they began working on community issue-based projects (Boon and Plastow 125-153).

But there is a further string to Massive’s bow, for the company also mounts and tours professional productions, based on a commissioned work from a writer who is prepared to work closely with a company of paid actors, some of whom have come through the Massive youth work process. The company has, so far, mounted The Sons of Charlie Paora (2002) by British writer, Lennie James; 100 Cousins (2006), by Briar Grace Smith; and currently Whero’s New Net (2008) by Albert Belz, based on Witi Ihimaera’s book of short stories, The New Net Goes Fishing (1977). These shows have a South Auckland feel to them, exploring Māori and Pacific Island urban themes, and begin to have a global reach, with The Sons of Charlie Paora playing in the UK.

Looked at from Williams' framework, the company operates between patron and market, with a patronage bias. Its youth work sits easily with corporate patrons, for whom youth are a favourite cause,¹⁴⁵ and the Company's infrastructure costs (often difficult to fund) are met by the Auckland Savings Bank Community Trust. Project funding comes from a variety of trusts, the Auckland City Council and Creative NZ. With performances, there is a market, but with the length of development and the often large casts, the market return provides a limited portion of any budget.

In terms of Cohen-Cruz's checklist, if we accept the concept of the group of young people being both a community in themselves and representative of their communities, there is a *communal context*. But there is also a taking of these young people out of their communities, and in this the company is characteristic of Auckland, a multicultural melting pot fuelled by migrant energy - both to survive and to get on. There is *reciprocity*, of Pākehā, Sam Scott offering her methodology to a cultural mix of young people and learning of their experience in return. Yet there is also an authoritarianism to the methodology, distilling that experience in its own crucible rather than varying its form to the experience or the agenda. In terms of *hyphenation*, the agenda of the work is mainly an aesthetic one, but with a healthy multicultural promise attached (this is something we can achieve as a society), together with an educative function of explaining a societal grouping (young people) who can be seen as problematic. Certainly, an *active culture* prevails.

In terms of Defilippis, Fisher and Shragge's analysis, Massive's work takes place in a neo-communitarian framework of asset building, mainly for individuals from the community, with the performances being acts of social adhesion, tying

¹⁴⁵ For example, Fletcher Trust, Tindall Trust, J R McKenzie Trust.

together, through understanding, people from a variety of ethnic and class communities. To put it most romantically, building the whanau of the future. Accordingly, ideologically, the shows generally accept an individualistic view that people can achieve their goals with discipline, hard work and initiative. There is some 'capital' input necessary (Massive's contribution), as part of the trickle down, but no criticism of the system as such.

At the same time, when we add the work of the professional company, there is a sense of a theatre culture based far more in the working class communities of Auckland than that of the mainstream theatre companies. Massive can be lauded then, in creating a smart and what appears to be sustainable, Community-based (with some reservations) institution.

The community and the nation – Taki Rua

I was uncertain whether Taki Rua productions would see themselves as fitting into the Community-based theatre model, as publicly, their work seems to take place in the mainstream. But James Ashcroft, their artistic director, was keen for the company to be situated within the perspective, even though Taki Rua, as the officially recognised Māori theatre company, operates from a nationalist agenda.

Ashcroft (Nga Puhī), who trained at Victoria University, then at Toi Whakaari as an actor, told me that he had turned to producing because of frustration at the sameness of the mainstream work. He told me that he began to ask serious questions: “Who is it for? Is it just delivering a programme?” He had been influenced by Toi Whakaari director tutor, Christian Penny, and also spent time with the US-based Wooster Group. Four years ago, this frustration led him to taking up the Taki Rua position.

Taki Rua took over the Downstage studio theatre (The Depot) in the mid 1980s and transferred the enterprise to a larger but equally decrepit building at the back of Courtenay Place. The Māori name means two currents, for the new organisation was to provide a base for Māori theatre as well as to continue to accommodate Pākehā collectives. It always struggled for its audience share in an increasingly competitive Wellington market, and in my experience had an identity problem stemming from its bi-cultural agenda. A highlight each year was a season in Te Reo Māori¹⁴⁶ which involved a diverse range of community participants. Taki Rua gave up the theatre building in 1996 and the Māori current of Taki Rua became dominant. According to Ashcroft, “there were lots of reasons [for this change]. The main one was that the building was literally falling apart. The theatre was serving a gap in bringing

emerging and senior artists together, but Taki Rua has a national focus and a national audience”. When he described that focus I understood why he saw Taki Rua as a Community-based theatre, even though there are tensions within that kaupapa.

Taki Rua’s core work each year (and we never hear of this, for like all Community-based work, it takes place silently) is to tour a Te Reo Māori show to kohanga reo¹⁴⁷, kura kaupapa¹⁴⁸, marae and community centres, and also to the second language learners in universities. According to Ashcroft, this work enables “artists to work holistically in Te Reo Māori, to engage those audiences in Te Reo Māori and to use it as an advocacy for Te Reo Māori”. Taki Rua thus serves, on a national basis, the young community(s) of Māori speakers and learners. While a national agenda, this divides into geographic, iwi-based communities. Ashcroft commented, “This is often the only theatre the rural audiences get”. Their target audience is four to fourteen, but in reality they also play to older students and whanau. It would be good in fact, to have a programme of work to cater for the diversity of ages. They also hold workshops as part of their programme. The content of the shows, other than the fact that they are performed in Te Reo Māori, has been varied, but have usually centred on topical themes: “suicide, bullying, things like that”. It is classic Theatre in Education work, and in terms of Cohen-Cruz’s checklist, meets the requirements of Community-based theatre with some reservations, mainly through the bringing in of an agenda and a sketchy *reciprocity* between the parties owing to the short period of time spent in any one community. But this year, Taki Rua have taken steps to remedy this, with the creative team going to the Seatoun kura kaupapa in

¹⁴⁶ The Maori language.

¹⁴⁷ Pre school language nests.

¹⁴⁸ Schools where Maori is the language of instruction.

Wellington and developing the work with the students there. For Ashcroft, this is a new way of working:

In the past it's been writer focused: commission, rehearse, perform. But now we're recognising as well emerging Māori artists. Like the director, Ngapaki Emery, is doing a masters of direction at Toi Whakaari. So how does she want to work and how can we create something together?

This TIE work provides the core reason for the recurring funding of the theatre by Creative NZ and it is the only Community-based theatre company receiving infrastructural funding from the state patron.

The second layer of Taki Rua's work is what Ashcroft describes as "the mainstage seasons", that is, productions of plays by Māori playwrights at mainstream theatres. This can be difficult to arrange as theatres are often booked well in advance, but Taki Rua has a partnership relationship with Downstage and in the past has focused on festivals. But they have slowly developed a touring circuit, which includes Auckland, South Auckland, Taupo and Rotorua. This is the layer of work that, according to Ashcroft, "a lot of our trained artists are focused on". But there are tensions between working in English in mainstream theatre with its predominantly white, middle class clientele and their core Te Reo Māori work. Part of Ashcroft's task "is to try and bring these artists to understand the relations". One way of easing the tension is to adopt a more Community-based approach to the mainstage work so that the plays can play as well in community venues, particularly on marae and begin to incorporate more Te Reo Māori. Accordingly, Strange Resting Places, by Rob Mōkoraka and Paolo Ratundo,¹⁴⁹ which focuses on Māori and Italian soldiers' experiences of the battle of Monte Cassino, was specifically designed to bridge the

divide between mainstage theatres and community venues. In 2010, Taki Rua is bringing it back for a national marae tour, because “we want to have a continuing presence in terms of developing that audience”. It involves taking a ready-made product to the community, but the writing of the play involved research with East Coast WWII veterans. There is in that sense, a civic theatre element to the venture. But inevitably the company will continue to produce shows which require fully equipped theatres, such as Mark Twain and Me in Māoriland,¹⁵⁰ and here the task, especially in South Auckland, is to develop a Māori audience for mainstream theatre.

According to Ashcroft, Taki Rua are developing an ensemble approach to their work, trying to build a team who understand how the mainstage work relates to the marae tour work and to the Te Reo Māori, TIE work. Then, “people can be involved in all the strands in different roles”. But the internal tensions will no doubt continue, for Community-based theatre, as we know, is often greeted with silence by the mainstream infrastructure; and the career pull is in the other direction, and often to the digital media. Ashcroft wryly commented: “Māori TV is great, but it’s also one of the biggest thorns in our side because it’s so hungry – all the writers go there”.

When it comes to the *hyphenation* (additional purpose) of Taki Rua’s work, for Ashcroft the first purpose is to connect the past with the present and the future. “You can say that’s the centre of whakapapa”. And then there are, “the unanswered questions of our past. That can be very personal or very public. That’s always involved reflecting on the notion of who we are”. When you take a development like Māori television, the important thing is “that it’s being owned and led by Māori - for everyone. The Māori voice is big enough for the world”. It is worth unpacking this

¹⁴⁹ Premiered at The Auckland Festival of the Arts, 2007

¹⁵⁰ By David Geary, Wellington International Festival of The Arts, 2010.

response. Connecting the past with the present and the future is a *Gemeinschaft*-based agenda. The question then becomes, What stops that happening in any one instance? – a question I will deal with in the last chapter. And specifically, in relation to Taki Rua, the question becomes one of asking where Te Rakau’s young people fit in this scenario? The unanswered questions can be the skeletons in the closet of bourgeois family drama, or they can be intensely political, such as the role and reasons for collaboration at any one time, including the present. This is seen in Taki Rua’s problem of balancing their community work with the desire of many trained Māori theatre workers to market their work in the mainstream, where commodity relations rule. And then the ownership and leadership and “big enough for the world” comment. While the Māori aspiration to ground capital, including cultural capital, within their community(s) is uncontested; what are the relations of governance within the community(s)? And, ‘big enough for what sort of world?’ can be not only the unanswered but the unasked question, and one that Barrack Obama must be currently considering as the framework of identity politics proves unsustainable.

Obviously, Taki Rua are facing these questions internally and in their relationship with a complex audience base. If they grapple with them fully, they could well come up with a fresh model for New Zealand theatre, rather than repeat (albeit with greater poetry), the trodden path of Pākehā theatre.

Disabling contradictions – Tony McCaffrey and Elizabeth O’Connor

What happens when art practice, with its celebrating of skill, meets those who for physical or mental reasons, cannot acquire those skills? For example, what if people, even after undergoing rigorous training, don’t have an operatic voice? What of people who don’t have the classical ballet dancer’s physique? The fine arts are, in every sense, elitist. These questions become more extreme when the form itself becomes elitist. Can a wheelchair-bound person dance? Can someone who, because of mental disability, finds it extremely difficult to remember dialogue or the elements of a story in sequence, act in a play?

At the 2009 NZ National Arts Conference in Rotorua, Suzanne Cowan, a paraplegic member of the mixed ability dance company, Touch Compass,¹⁵¹ gave a relevant keynote address. She contrasted the classical dance body, “monumental and static, ignoring difference and disconnected from the world”, with the grotesque body, which is “open, protruding, secreting, and connected to the world”.¹⁵² Cowan uses her “grotesque body” to challenge and open up the classical body. She poses a technical challenge when she attends normal dance classes. She finds the teachers who have an eclectic approach, who have picked up exercises from a variety of sources, have no idea how to include her, whereas those who work at a deep level of principle have no problem. In her latest work she discards her wheelchair and uses her able-bodied partner to form a hybrid, making a subversive and humorous challenge to the classical paradigm.¹⁵³ By exacerbating her difference, she actively constructs her

¹⁵¹ www.touchcompass.org.nz, 20/10/10.

¹⁵² My notes.

¹⁵³ *Grotescchi*, premiered in The Touch Compass 2008 season of dance, Harmonious Oddity, at the Maidment Theatre in Auckland, 1st - 4th October.

own identity, proving that “we all have unique aspects”. For Cowan, a community of the disabled can be a contradiction, a ghetto, a place for the marginalised.

Dance, with its physicality, is an obvious questioner of disability. When I turn to theatre, the issues change. We have no expectation that the actor will twirl ten times standing on one toe. But we do expect him to remember his lines and to interact with the other characters, and for the cast to collectively tell a story, skills which can be problematic for people with a mental disability. In Christchurch, there are two contrasting practitioners of mixed ability theatre, and a discussion of their practices will reveal the contradictions that this field poses for the Community-based theatre paradigm.

Tony McCaffrey is an English born, Cambridge University graduate from a working class background.¹⁵⁴ In the UK he became involved in the alternative theatre scene and was influenced by the Le Coq/ Gaulier, non naturalistic tradition, working as well with the English company, Theatre du Complicite. He came to New Zealand for a holiday and stayed, teaching at the University of Canterbury and at The Court Theatre, before setting up A Different Light Theatre Company, to produce “theatre that is different”. This resulted in work with disenfranchised youth and producing cutting edge plays within the mainstream. He began teaching at the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology’s National Academy of Singing and Dramatic Art (NASDA) and in 2004 a student asked him to take some workshops at Hohepa, a residential community for people with intellectual disabilities run on Steiner

¹⁵⁴ The following information comes from an interview with Tony McCaffrey, 24th July, 2009, and A Different Light website: www.differentlight.org.nz

principles.¹⁵⁵ He had no experience in this area, but the workshops resulted in a group of A Different Light members focusing on people with intellectual disabilities.

McCaffrey brings an intellectual's analysis to the work and is aware of the possibility, past and present, of exploitation of the disabled. At a seminar he presented for the Theatre and Film Studies Department of the University of Canterbury,¹⁵⁶ he pointed out the past exploitation of the mentally disabled via freak shows and sideshows, ongoing sexual exploitation, the village idiot syndrome, the sentimentality and romanticism behind the charitable impulse (including exploitation by celebrities), the economic exploitation involved in low status jobs with low pay, the occasional self exploitation in becoming a media freak, and even his own possible exploitation in working and writing in this area, when the people he writes about will never participate intellectually.

The initial Hohepa workshop group of twenty people self selected down to a group of nine, all males, who wanted to work on a performance. McCaffrey told me that it has been difficult to attract females to the group - "maybe we have a male environment". But as well, "there is the problem with over solicitous parents and caregivers, fearful of sexual exploitation of females with disabilities". To compensate, McCaffrey brought in able female actors.

Since then, McCaffrey has directed the group in an annual show for The Body Festival, a Christchurch festival of dance and physical theatre, which features both amateur and professional performers.¹⁵⁷ These pieces, devised in negotiation with his group of mixed ability actors, have explored the ideas behind and the realities of disability. The devising was "based on my experience of the people I was working

¹⁵⁵ See <http://www.hohepa.com/>

¹⁵⁶ Sept 23, 2009.

with”. In many ways, he copied the agenda of the US group, Cornerstone, by adapting classics for the specific community he was working with. He based the first show around the Faustus legend and looked at ideas of angels and devils. “Talking to the people I was working with, they were either seen as angels or devils, but not as humans”. McCaffrey bases the concept for each show on his evolving knowledge of the group, and then the actors begin devising around that concept. It is a normal process for group work led by a creative director/dramaturg.

The next show was called Birds, loosely adapted from the book of poems, Conference of the Birds, by Persian writer Farid un-Din Attar, which centers on a mythical story of a journey of birds to find their king. In McCaffrey’s adaptation, one of the birds was too comfortable to leave his cage (of medication and parental support), while another performer explored his deep religious convictions. Then there was the partying bird and so on. In this piece, McCaffrey put in some scripted dialogue from Peter Brook’s play on the same theme.¹⁵⁸ It caused “tremendous difficulty as it required timing and reacting to the other person”. He reports that it is “a hell of a difficult whenever we approach conventional theatre practice”, but the rewards are quite good, with the performers pleased to achieve the dialogic, rather than being confined to the monologue. He told me that the disabled cast, “love the crap of theatre, lights around makeup mirrors, reviews, audience reaction and so on”. The audiences have been made up of friends, family and caregivers, with some general public. But increasingly, the disabled themselves have come.

For the next performance he used Dante’s Divine Comedy as a framework,

¹⁵⁷ See www.thebody.co.nz, 10/10/09.

¹⁵⁸ In 1970 Peter Brook adapted the book of poems, Conference of the Birds, by Persian writer Farid un-Din Attar into a play which toured rural Africa.

allowing the cast to explore notions of heaven and hell in their lives. For several of them, heaven was having a job, no matter how lowly. Hell was the prejudice of the red neck and political systems based on this prejudice. They used video in this production, showing scenes from the performers' daily lives as well as material from rehearsal. From there he took a passage from the French philosopher, Michael Foucault's study of society's treatment of madness¹⁵⁹ around which the group devised The Ship of Fools. Disabled people are sent into exile from their parish on board a ship. They call in at various ports but no one wants them. Eventually they land in an old fashioned asylum from which they are eventually released into the community with copious amounts of medication. McCaffrey sees the first three shows as normalising the disabled by providing a counter cultural critique of the monster image, but in Ship of Fools, a meta-narrative was constructed around society's treatment of the disabled. They took this performance to a conference of the disabled in Australia, which was "a great bonding experience for the cast". He remembers that "when they were filling in the immigration form they could write actor for occupation. A sweet moment".

But as the experience of the performers in the group grew, he became uncomfortable about the involvement of able actors, whose task was to mark sequences and do the cueing. In Frankenstein's Children, based around a mad scientist using genetic modification to create perfect bodies, he had only disabled people on stage. He structured the piece so that a sound track marked sections, and, in his words, "I still held the controls tightly". For the next show, he will introduce some of the writings and ideas of the performers. "We're looking at a story which is based around

¹⁵⁹ Michael Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason trans. by R. Howard, (London: Tavistock, 1965).

a group of disabled actors forming a theatre company called, We Are Not The Poor Dears. Within that we have individual stories about each of the performers”. But the script will still be subject to negotiation. “If I offer carte blanche to them as writers I’ll get Harry Potter, The Christmas Story and a lot of film stuff. A lot of their support system people will take them to conventional stuff, Snow White on Ice etc. An infantilising has taken place. They’re media saturated”. This is an essential part of the reciprocal relationship, that the community-based artist does not give up his own integrity.

The theatre group members have dreams of becoming self supporting, of becoming full time actors. Accordingly, McCaffrey is negotiating the setting up of a centre at CPIT to train facilitators, to pass on what he has learnt in terms of working with disabled people and to involve disabled people as facilitators. This would provide some opportunities for his actors. In the UK there is a directory of disabled actors, but he is wary of this mainstreaming. “Do we want to introduce these guys into normalised theatre practice?” he wonders, “or to try and make celebrities out of them, to get bigger and bigger posters, to do corporate gigs?” If it were possible for a mainstream option to be added, then the workshops would serve the purpose of discovering the talented disabled performer, in the same way that Massive offers a career pathway for young people.

In contrast to McCaffrey, Elizabeth O’Connor is a mainstream theatre practitioner, working all her life with text-based, realist plays. Elric Hooper was her mentor and she is closely associated with the Court Theatre as a director, dramaturg for new work, and actor. Yet, with her French/Irish/Scottish genealogy and her loyalty to New Zealand theatre, she has an instinct for the community project and her work

seamlessly crosses into the tradition of the amateur theatre movement which, as noted in Chapter 2, originated in the depression years. She told me that when, in 1995, she was asked by Skillwise, an organisation that works with people with an intellectual disability, to provide programmes and work opportunities¹⁶⁰ to take a drama group, she brought to the work a mainstream theatre culture. “I treated them like actors and they responded from the beginning”. The one hundred or so Skillwise clients rotate through the drama group on an annual basis, but some stay for years. Each year the group will create an Access Radio project. At the time the interview was recorded they’d just finished putting together a piece based on nursery rhymes. At the end of each year they perform a play, which is usually based on an existing story. Once the story is selected, members of the group create characters, then improvise scenes. The improvisations are recorded and O’Connor then writes a dialogue script which goes through a rehearsal process. This year Lewis Carroll’s, Alice Through The Looking Glass provides the story, but twice they have generated original material. O’Connor set one play, The Way Home, in the bus exchange, for the cast had all had experiences there of both unhelpful and helpful people. In 2008 they devised a play based on a small town’s experience of World War Two. The cast researched family history and the plot centred on people going off to war and the tensions that creates for those left at home. O’Connor found it important “for people with disabilities to claim their right to history. Family history took on new importance and they really understood what a terrible thing war is”.

As performance approaches, many of the other Skillwise clients get involved in making sets and costumes, and then operate the front of house during the season. She uses other Skillwise tutors and occasionally a professional actor in the cast or as

¹⁶⁰ www.skillwise.org.nz, 11/11/09.

prompt. The cast have short term memory problems, so dialogue is difficult. Since O'Connor's theatre culture is based on dialogue centered plays, the prompt is busy, but from watching the video of a performance one accepts this, and it simply becomes a convention, like the Kabuki actor's 'shadow'.¹⁶¹

Actors who have been in the group for years told me they were proud of the parts they have played, pleased with a good audition, pleased when they can remember lines, and pleased at learning to speak clearly – not too different from mainstream actors. For O'Connor, the work extends her clients' imaginations. "They see the world from different perspectives, play people of different social status than the one they're usually accorded. Taking on a role gives them power. They often feel powerless in the rest of their lives". They perform in a theatre in order to experience "theatre magic", and she employs technicians so that there is competent lighting and sound. Once again, family, caregivers, other clients and some general public attend. The work then has much the same rationale as that of a school production or amateur theatre production. It profiles the parent organisation and gives easily measurable outcomes, it requires an understanding audience, yet often that audience is moved past the 'poor dear' syndrome to enjoy the theatre experience.

In terms of Williams' framework, this theatre work is pre-market, despite a charge for performances. It is dependent on patronage: for O'Connor's group, direct patronage by the charitable organisation which employs her; for A Different Light, tutors' fees and rehearsal space costs are provided by The KiwiAble Recreation Network Programme of the Christchurch City Council, a programme which is designed "to broaden recreation opportunities for people with disabilities" and to meet the Council's Community Outcomes, of being: "A city of Inclusive and Diverse

¹⁶¹ The black clad people who follow each actor around, adjusting their costume.

Communities” and “A city for Recreation, Fun and Creativity”. This, in turn, led to a vision of mixed ability arts called In the Mix, which is seen as a ground breaking programme for other local bodies to follow.¹⁶²

Williams’ definition of aesthetic activity as essentially providing “recognitions” of “kinds of people in kinds of places” produces, in the case of mixed ability theatre, an interesting circularity, in that the work shows “a kind of people” (the disabled) “in an art-form place” (the theatre), as much as a geographic or social place, and by so doing, asks the question of whether you can put people with a physical or mental disability in a place which normally celebrates skills which they do not have? This question resonates in other areas of social exclusion and interestingly resituates the art for art’s sake paradigm.

Because of this, when I turn to Cohen-Cruz’s principles of Community-based theatre, the categories become seamless, one blending into another, and revolve around this, in some ways, aesthetic circularity. The *artist’s craft and vision are at the service of a group desire*, which is, in this case, to participate in the art form. The content is then, in one sense irrelevant. Except, as McCaffrey notes, the participants need to enjoy the experience. Both tend to use, in Cohen-Cruz’s words, “oft adapted literary texts” (153), the text being adapted through the artist’s observations of the participants’ lives. The principle of *reciprocity*, something in the relationship for either party, is similarly circular, in that, for the artist, the task is to solve the formal difficulties of creating theatre with non verbal people, or people who have difficulties with memory. This means that improvisation and devising, which those with a mental disability can be good at, does not easily lead to a repeatable performance. There is also an element of distortion or grotesqueness (to use Suzanne Cowan’s term),

¹⁶² See www.ccc.govt.nz/cityleisure/communityservices/kiwiable/index.aspx, 12/2/2010.

physically and verbally. One solution is to have able actors on stage as support people and to choose texts where the distortion is advantageous: for McCaffrey, Faust, Dante, Foucault and his study of madness and *Frankenstein*; for O'Connor more the fairy tale or children's story. Into this frame, documentary and personal storytelling are placed. Each artist's techniques have been stretched: McCaffrey's background in Le Coq's methodology logically led him to using Gaulier's buffon, the grotesque clownish outsider; O'Connor needed to incorporate a devising process. McCaffrey is worried about the support people on stage and is gradually shedding them, O'Connor is not concerned by the element of dependency that support people continue to foster. She is content to be part of a community service, whereas McCaffrey is pushing at the boundaries, imagining a professional group or professional work, and developing a training programme which would allow disabled people to become facilitators.¹⁶³

For the disabled performer, there is the *whanaunatanga* of the group experience, but as well, in both cases, an enjoyment for, in McCaffrey's eyes, "the crap of theatre", in O'Connor's view, "the magic of theatre": the bright lights, the audience buzz, the name in the programme, the recognition. O'Connor analyses this more specifically than McCaffrey, in seeing the therapeutic value in the playing of different roles, and especially the playing of high status roles for people whose lives are generally considered low status. Whether there is the pleasure of making their life experience more objective, the distancing and so on that Cohen-Cruz assigns to Community-based performance, is uncertain, at least unmentioned. Rather, there is an owning of the character. McCaffrey talks of an actor really identifying with the part of

¹⁶³ In his seminar he talked of the possible exploitation of the disabled person as muse, quoting the American avant-garde theatre director, Robert Wilson's relationship with a disabled young man, with Wilson requiring his able actors to copy the disabled man's movements and instinctual presence. McCaffrey posed the question as to whether this was parasitic and romantic.

Mephistopheles to the point of signing his text messages with the name. For McCaffrey, collective writing or story telling is fraught, as often the people have been heavily influenced by the media, so that the stories they offer will be media stories rather than personal stories, or personal stories heavily mediated by media influences. O'Connor, in mainstream regional fashion, ignores this and places the content in a cozier, slightly old fashioned family space. As well, her clients tend to be older. In the case of *hyphenation*, there is a sense in which the art for art's sake syndrome provides its own additional purpose of social acceptance. However, the In the Mix vision of the KiwiAble Network includes "self esteem, control over life, empowerment, choice, and providing role models", the usual buzzwords attached to developing the marginalised into mainstream citizens. Once again, this is a byproduct, rather than content. Finally, there is an *active*, participatory culture at work here.

Turning to Defilippis, Fisher and Shragge, this theatre work takes place, for the funders, in the neo-communitarian model of asset building and providing social glue to enable a fully participatory and diverse democracy. With the state withdrawal from providing institutional care for the disabled, a variety of community providers have evolved, and in the case of Christchurch, the City Council programme for the disabled has drawn these providers into a network involving Community Arts, Health Volunteers, Adult Learning, Continuing Education, Community Service Group, Sport and Active Leisure, Events, Disability Agencies and Services. The stakeholders are Christchurch Polytechnic and Institute of Technology, Christchurch City Council, the Canterbury Community Trust and the Creative Communities Funding Scheme. It is a complex web whose vision is "to contribute to better health and strong communities" and "to facilitate strong social connections that strengthen individuals, families and communities". But the work will also "stretch the boundaries of creative

performance”.¹⁶⁴ Attendance at international conferences, local gatherings, a website and a DVD are part of the spin. But the talk can seem distant from the reality of a dozen or so people gathered in a hired room once a week, of six annual performances between the two theatre groups, and the two groups operating on a small annual budget of probably not much more than \$20,000. Like aid schemes, the talk is large, the work is more limited; and this implies no criticism of the people involved. The criticism lies with the neo-communitarian model which lets the state off the hook of under-resourcing. With the specialty service, community becomes associated with the marginalised. The social glue-ing of the marginalised supposedly provides an entry into the basement of the mainstream. If the impulse for the disabled is to escape the community of the disabled, then the community of the disabled as an advocacy base is undermined. I asked McCaffrey whether his group would be able to do a forum theatre piece. He thought they could, but it was unfamiliar territory for him personally. He has never been comfortable working in the space of naturalism. Yet perhaps, a forum theatre piece would provoke a better understanding for audiences of the issues of disability, and could explore the issues which the carers have, which seem important and are subject of a current low-wage union campaign. Finally, it would seem possible for the controlling structural voice to be built into such a forum (the joker role?) and then be, in itself, contested.

¹⁶⁴ See www.ccc.govt.nz/cityleisure/communityservices/kiwiable/index.aspx, 12/10/10.

Talking House: a regional practice

Simon O'Connor told me that he had a disturbed childhood. After his parents split up (the war had made his father "crazy") and then his mother died, he was brought up by extended family, mainly his grandparents. As an adolescent he was a boarder at a "reasonably posh" Catholic boarding school. When he saw the NZ Drama Quartet at school, "I was blown away by the fact that four people could travel around in a van and earn a living by that". It was his first encounter with the theatre. It was a working class childhood where family and community were uncertain; but as well, infused by the culture of Catholicism with its aesthetic qualities. He spent time teaching for Volunteer Service Abroad at a Catholic school in Tonga and while there he read about the Globe Theatre in Dunedin. When he returned to New Zealand he "hung around Patrick [Carey]". He was interested in acting and writing, but as well, "there was a feeling around then that included community theatre and some of it rubbed off onto me". He worked in mainstream theatre, but it was a "love-hate relationship. I was always looking for something else to do in theatre which had more meaning for me". Then a play he'd written, Song of Johny Muscle, was put on at Wellington's Unity Theatre (1975), and that led to writing work for television.

But after he and his partner had a child, they shifted back to Dunedin because the rents were cheaper. When Robert Lord, the playwright-teaching fellow at Otago University Theatre Studies Department died, O'Connor was asked to fill in. The role became a permanent one and in 1990, he and colleague, David O'Donnell, introduced a level three Community Theatre paper into the Theatre Studies syllabus.¹⁶⁵ O'Connor recounted that:

¹⁶⁵ THEA 302 Creating Community Theatre, Otago University Theatre Studies 1993-1998.

We were interested in Living Archives, Melbourne Workers Theatre, Welfare State, those kinds of models. Along with Boal of course. The focus of the paper was looking at alternative ways of making theatre, and alternative rationales for theatre, examining the relationship theatre has with its audience. The focus was very much with community, and it was a kind of nostalgic thing, for the community we were thinking of had gone. Or was fighting a rearguard reaction.

The course ran for five years and was mainly assessed through groups of students creating a piece of Community-based theatre. Groups devised pieces in partnership with, for example, the local Prostitutes Collective (Discreet Ladies for Discerning Gentlemen, 1993), taxi drivers (If You Can't Trust a Taxi Driver Who Can You Trust, 1993), firemen (Infer No Heroes, 1994), the residents of a street (Eddie Eddie Eddie, 1994), and the residents of a rest home (Another Birthday, 1994). The plays were performed at Allen Hall, the university theatre, but the first performance was always in the host community: the fire station, the taxi drivers' clubrooms and so on. O'Connor remembers memorable moments, of fire fighters who'd missed the fire station performance because they were on duty arriving at Allen Hall in their uniforms. The projects were very much about evoking the spirit of these groups of people. He found the most difficult aspect to teach the students was the concept of partnership with the community group (*reciprocity*):

People can either want to do good or to make art. And that thing of forming partnerships and working productively where everybody is contributing tangibly, that can take a while to sink in.

That concept was one that he had been personally searching for, so when he

left the university position, O'Connor, David O'Donnell and an ex student, Trish Wells, started Talking House, a Community-based theatre group, whose mission was to work with the methods and the ethos developed in the paper, and to take them into the wider, regional community. In order to announce their presence, they adapted Oscar Wilde's children's story, The Selfish Giant, into a piece called The Giant's Wall. It was performed for the Dunedin Summer Festival of 1996 and was, in O'Connor's words, "a Welfare State kind of thing, about tearing down walls". They involved people on employment schemes and brought together a range of visual artists, musicians stilt walkers and so on. They received an arts council grant and operated as a collective.

More people, including Clare Adams, who was to assume an important production role, joined Talking House and they were approached by Helen Frizzel, who was recording oral history for the Presbyterian Support Services. She suggested that there was a theatre project in the histories she had recorded for the Dunedin Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The Dunedin YWCA was the second oldest in the world and had been through interesting stages, for example, working with solo mothers in the 1960s, when the role was socially marginal, and developing a community bank to assist women into small businesses. The group developed a series of intercut monologues based on the transcripts, tracing three phases of the YWCA, including its collapse. The methodology was simple. They'd develop some material, then take it back to the YWCA management group for feedback. The play, called 3 Y's Women, was performed at The Settlers Museum, toured the region and was made into an audio recording. Funding came from local organisations, in particular the Otago Community Trust, which became a regular patron of the group's work, and the tour was subsidised by Creative NZ.

By that time, in O'Connor's words, "we were in thick with the Presbyterians" and the Presbyterian Synod wanted "some sort of show" to commemorate their 150th anniversary, and one which could widely tour, including schools, churches and prisons. O'Connor wrote a solo piece (there wasn't the money for a big cast), based on the life and times of the Reverend Donald McNaughton Stuart,¹⁶⁶ the second minister in Dunedin. Once again, he would write some material and take it back to the synod for feedback.

I said to them from the start, look, I'm a Catholic, that's my culture. I can't write anything about the holiness of Stuart because I don't understand that terribly much, but I'm attracted to the guy because as a man of his time he seemed to cross a lot of borders and they said, That's what we want.

Stuart (1998) went through a hundred performances in a wide range of venues.

O'Connor reports that people would come up afterwards and remember a farming grandmother talking about Stuart turning up on his horse. In his words, "there was a sense of honouring a community that was distinctive. It was great".

Despite the number and range of performance venues, there was no interest shown by mainstream theatre and critics in the production. The only review they received, apart from one in a local theatre magazine by colleague, David O'Donnell, was from the Australian playwright, Alex Buzo, who happened to be visiting the city. But O'Connor has no regrets about this.

This is a regional thing. It's Otago and Southland. I couldn't care less whether anyone else notices. It's irrelevant. It's the relationship of the work to a certain group of people that's important.

¹⁶⁶ Donald McNaughton Stuart, 1819 ?- 1894. See www.dcab.govt.nz

O'Connor reports that someone then sent them a "little autobiography" that Avis Hunter, an ex inmate of the local psychiatric institution, Cherry Farm, had written with the assistance of one of her helpers after the institution had closed down.¹⁶⁷ O'Connor found the autobiography "a fantastic book" and began working with Avis, "who remained a damaged person", and some of her helpers. They would meet at a café once a fortnight and he would write "bits" based on her book. Avis had been abandoned at the age of four, fostered for a period, then placed in the mental institution because "she was evil". She had spent her life there until it closed down. O'Connor made it clear to her that, "I wasn't telling the facts of her story, but wanted to stage a performance that would evoke what it was like to have experienced these things". In order to do this he broke away from the story telling monologue and used three actors to play the various facets of Avis, had a musician on stage and used both documentary and abstract slides, plus some choreography. He found the audience that came to Avis (1999) an interesting mix: people who had been in Cherry Farm, arts school people, mental health professionals and the curious. In his eyes, "It was a fantastic bringing together of people who would rarely find themselves under the same roof". The play toured the province in 2001.

By this time there were a core group in Talking House: O'Connor, Trish Wells, Lindsay Shields, Jamie Carroll, Prue Edge (artist), Clare Adams (singer and producer) and Nigel Waters. They continued to mount outdoor shows. In The Shiner (1997), O'Connor took the character from John A Lee's Slattery and set him in modern day Dunedin. The Shiner played The Octagon¹⁶⁸ for eighteen performances as

¹⁶⁷ Before the move to community care, each region had one of these institutions, which were of village size and often used as dumping grounds for difficult family members. Most families would have some connection with these places.

¹⁶⁸ The Dunedin civic centre.

part of the Summer Festival. That same summer, the group also mounted “a Welfare State type” children’s show commissioned by the Dunedin Rhododendron Festival Society. O’Connor describes it as “a satirical play about dictators with an environmental theme”, which used giant puppets and musicians. 1997 also saw members of the group working for eight months with primary school children to devise a children’s play and an art exhibition called Toroa.¹⁶⁹

The company was commissioned once again by Presbyterian Support Services to produce a performance based on experiences of aging and caring for the aged. The writers, Lindsay Shields and Gemma Carroll, used the local playback theatre group to elicit stories and as well, members of the Talking House group conducted interviews. They then pieced together anecdotes and the oral histories of elderly people living in a variety of situations: rest homes, living at home but receiving help, to those who were still independent. The play, called My Place, played at the mainstream theatre, The Fortune (1999), before touring the region in 2000.

Clare Adams, the producer of the show, told me she has fond memories of the piece:

We were focusing on an age group, so there was a period of time they were talking about and we had to reflect that. It’s lovely to see yourself reflected on stage and for old people that was great. And the actors themselves got a lot from that. They’d acted in lots of plays but hadn’t done much recently.

O’Connor then recalls that someone who’d worked in the hospital library had seen a memoir written by a community nurse, Mavis Dallas, who’d started her career, based in the rural areas of the province, in the 1930s. The company tracked down the book and eventually produced a play, White Shoes, based on the memoirs and interviews with Mavis and her family. Written by Carroll and Shields, the play was workshopped

¹⁶⁹ The toroa is a large albatross.

in 2002 and produced and toured widely in South Canterbury and Southland in 2004. The last performance by Talking House, The White Rats Lecture (2007), was site specific, written by O'Connor and commissioned by the Historic Places Trust. It took place at Oamaru's Totara Estate, which had produced the first shipment of refrigerated meat to the UK. O'Connor reflects that "like a lot of these things, the story itself was pretty boring, didn't lend itself to theatre, so I brought together people from the margins. I brought in two tramps and gave them the pretext to work up this show. It was a kind of retelling of how the sheep left, but also this other side of life, the graffiti on the wall".

Throughout this period, the involvement of Clare Adams as producer was, in O'Connor's eyes, vitally important. Adams told me that she had been brought up in a big, Catholic family of artists, actors and performers. Her primary focus was music, but came to include theatre. In the UK she worked with a community theatre company, Pegasus, based in Oxford and was involved in devising a piece about the Cowley Car Works closing down. She also had contact with Theatre du Complicite and Philippe Gaulier. Back in New Zealand she joined a cabaret performance group called The Short and Girlies and toured the country, learning a lot about "how to get things on", which she finds, is often the issue. Producing Talking House shows has been interesting because it usually took two years to get a show together, but then the resonance with the community was a great advantage in arranging performances. "You could say, this isn't English farce, this is something that relates to you. People who are connected to a place enjoy this sort of work". As a producer she'd tap into local networks by finding a key community person to liaise with, "someone who owned a shop or who knew everyone. I found these people through word of mouth. I'd send this person the publicity, give them comps and they'd publicise it". The

group played in local little theatres, or schools or community centers, places that people knew. They needed to learn local routines, for example, to avoid shearing season, and to play at earlier than normal times, because farmers get up early. But always the experience has been positive: “I just love the interaction you have, the purpose”. Despite playing in community venues, the staging became more sophisticated when they bought their own lighting equipment, which included a digital projector, enabling projection of images. The actors and technicians were always well paid and comfortably accommodated.

At the time of recording these interviews, Talking House had been inactive for two years and in terms of membership, had narrowed to O’Connor and Adams. O’Connor had always been reluctant to lead the group, but while others had started projects, they had not come to fruition. He wondered whether it was time for Talking House to disband, but Adams has a project she is developing based on a woman scientist who worked in the Portobello Aquarium, and O’Connor also has a water-themed project, looking at buried taniwha and reclamation. He was also inspired by a visit to the Chavaal Centre in New Caledonia, a visit which awakened his past interest in the South Pacific. Come what may, they have accomplished a decade of impressive work.

Talking House productions relied on a mix of patronage and market, with both having a strong regional focus. Otago and Southland are marginal areas of New Zealand, yet with a strong history of parochialism. By focusing on local stories, Talking House attracted the support of both a dominant religious organisation, Presbyterian Services, and the main charitable donor in the region, the Otago Community Trust, which had its origin as a local savings bank. It’s mission, “to support, encourage and enhance Otago communities” and its objective to promote

“the unique qualities and values of Otago”,¹⁷⁰ meant it could embrace Talking House’s work. When it came to touring, Creative NZ provided support. Otago’s regional mainstream theatre, The Fortune, is not as dominant an influence on local theatre culture as more northern regional theatres, which means the theatre culture of Dunedin is more varied, with a strong university influence, so that a community-based organisation like Talking House could play a significant role. O’Connor agrees that Talking House was unique to Dunedin and Otago and that the marginality of the region was important.

That’s why I came down here. If I had of stayed in Wellington, I don’t think I would have done this stuff. It’s not so much a matter of funding as a matter of who I was up there. And how art is conceived and so on. Here, those things don’t matter. Here in Dunedin, you’re free to do anything you want. The only problem is that you’re irrelevant. Nobody gives a shit. Of course, that’s not quite true.

Not quite true because the regional market for local stories proved to be a strong one, especially in the outlying districts. A further factor in attracting patronage was O’Connor’s track record as a writer, so that patrons could see the community venture as mainstream because of his input. In this sense, he and the other writers were playing the ancient role of bard, holding the history and traditions of the tribe, or to use the Māori concept, telling the stories of the tupuna.¹⁷¹

When I turn to Cohen-Cruz’s framework, the craft and vision of Talking House were often *at the service of a specific group desire*, but in the case of Presbyterian Support Services, in the form of a formal church body, representative of

¹⁷⁰ www.oct.org.nz

¹⁷¹ Ancestors

a community, rather than a grass roots community. Otherwise it took the form of an individual representative of an institutional community (Avis Hunter), or a professional working in a community context (Stuart and Mavis Dallas), who had written of their experience and whose writings could be adapted to the stage. The creative process of Talking House was therefore close to that of the commissioned, mainstream writer, except in the shows which were based on grass roots interviews (3 Y's Women and My Place). Their outdoor community performances were influenced by Welfare State's, 'engineering the imagination' aesthetic, where the artist's craft and vision are at the service of a community celebration.

The *reciprocal* partnership aspect was certainly present, with the partner formally engaged in feedback during the devising process, whether it took the form of the commissioning relationship with the formal church body, or the more personal dialogue with Avis Hunter and the family of Mavis Dallas. In both the latter cases, the distancing had already happened in the writing of the memoir, and it was more a matter of transposing the material into the theatre form.

The *hyphenation* or additional purpose, was for O'Connor and Adams, very much a matter of honouring members of the community by sharing their work and their experiences. It is the motivation behind the honours system and often the stuff of community newspapers. But in this case, the theatre performances gave a performative energy to that honouring, placing it in the tradition of popular culture, which, according to Cohen-Cruz, "emerges out of the common experience which audience and performer share" (81). This experience is deepened when re-enacted. In Avis Hunter's case, there was an element of testimony, of mastering the narrative, leading, in Susan Brison's words, "to greater control over the memories themselves, making them less intrusive and giving them the kind of meaning that enables them to

be integrated into the rest of life” (qtd Cohen-Cruz 145), which would be shared by other survivors of the institutional experience. In terms of *active culture*, that all people are creative, while Talking House generally employed professional actors, children and untrained adults were involved in their outdoor shows, and by basing their work on ordinary people’s stories, there was a democratising of creative possibility.

In Defillips, Fischer and Schragge’s framework, Talking House’s work largely took place within a neo-communitarian framework of asset building, of “providing social capital”, of “portraying citizens who participate in civil society as virtuous for so doing, regardless of their politics or cause”, of promoting “the need to foster trust and co-operation between people” and “instilling values and traditions” (676).

O’Connor reflects, “I would scratch my head and say this should be harder edged, but we took what came to us”. They attempted to bring a harder edge to their devised outdoor shows, brought in marginal characters in The White Rats Lecture and accepted the challenge of portraying the alienation behind mental illness and institutionalisation in Avis, but it would be fair to say, their methodology of “taking what came to us”, meant that politically, they did not challenge the regional status quo. Within the theatre industry, however, they certainly made a case for a very different production agenda for the regional professional theatre, an agenda which significantly moved away from service provision focused on a sector of the urban middle class to a more democratic and inclusive practice. By taking the stories of those they were honouring to small regional communities, Talking House were, in fact, imitating the people they were honouring. By travelling to isolated places, a minister or a district nurse maintain religious or health infrastructure. Talking House

were maintaining cultural infrastructure. And in doing so they were, as well, promoting cultural democracy.

Of equal significance is the fact that this decade of work by Talking House was spawned by the setting up of a single paper in Community-based theatre in the university's theatre studies programme, which, other than an honours course at Victoria University taught by O'Connor's colleague, David O'Donnell, and UK import, Angie Farrow teaching a paper at Massey for a period, has been the sum total of academic interest in the field. I turn now to O'Donnell's subsequent work with students in Wellington.

An ally in the capital – David O'Donnell

David O'Donnell retains fond memories of the Otago days, memories of some moving, simple human stories being told in student-led, Community-based theatre productions. For example, one show (Another Birthday, 1994), was set in an old folks' home and focused on an over eighties dance club. One of the women had been brought up a strict Presbyterian, but had wanted to dance. In an interview I held with him, O'Donnell remembered that:

Her father wouldn't allow it, nor her husband. But finally, in her eighties, in this old folks home, after her husband died, she joined a dance club and learned all these dances she'd been dreaming about all her life. Very moving, very simple, yet subtly political as well.

He told me that the students were very challenged by the work, with course assessments often more negative than for playscript-based courses, because the work was so hard, especially for the less motivated. But to balance this, there were cases of productions leading to work for the students, for example, a show based on war veterans (We'll meet again, 1994) was funded to tour South Island Returned Servicemen Associations.

O'Donnell was brought up in a working class family in Nelson, hated his time at a mono cultural, authoritarian Nelson Boys College and escaped into the fictional world of movies. "I went to every film that came to Nelson," he recollected. From there he went to Toi Whakaari, the NZ Drama School in the late 1970s and subsequently acted professionally before turning to directing. It was in the latter role that an interest in Community-based theatre developed. The first play he directed for Palmerston North's Centrepoint Theatre, Greg McGee's Out In The Cold (1983), was

set in a freezing works. But when the production team went out to the local freezing works to encourage the workers to come and see the play:

that created a lot of tension because the Board of Centrepunt wasn't very happy about having freezing workers in their theatre. I began to realise that Palmerston North was split along class lines and that Centrepunt Theatre was part of the class base, and freezing workers weren't supposed to be there. I decided that if you were genuinely going to do a play about the freezing works, you should be doing it in the freezing works.

A year later, in rural Wairarapa, he directed a Roger Hall musical called Footrot Flats (1983), based on NZ cartoonist, Murray Ball's comic strip of rural life. O'Donnell recollects:

We did it the Greytown Town Hall which held five hundred people and it was full for ten performances. It was about farming and the community just loved it. People were queuing up to help. I was starting to get disillusioned with theatre and how irrelevant it was and it was experiences like that which made me think there must be ways to make theatre more relevant.

That impulse led him to Dunedin and his work with O'Connor. Subsequently, at Victoria, he has offered a Community Theatre paper at honours level ¹⁷² which has resulted in further successful student-led productions: Blue Suits Won't Fit (2002), working with local policewomen; Between Walls (2003), working with migrant groups based in a high density Council housing facility; Paved Paradise (2004), working with anti-motorway bypass activists; and Stretchmarks and Homework (2004), working with returning to school teenage mothers.

¹⁷² THEA 404 Community Theatre, Victoria University Theatre Programme.

In O'Donnell's opinion, all of these were successful and had potential as social change agents. For example, the policewomen show was critical of the macho culture set by the men and the roles that were accordingly forced on the women. When it played in the police canteen, the policemen stuck around afterwards and talked about it for hours. O'Donnell commented, "If that play had been performed in every police station in the country it could have changed the [police] culture". The play with teenage mothers was very moving and broke down stereotypes and gave the mothers an opportunity to act, while the show in the flats revealed the possibility of theatre bringing the different nationalities together. O'Donnell suggested that, "If the Council said, 'We're going to put a theatre company into the flats for three months,' the benefits for the community would be unbelievable".

All of this work meets the requirements of Cohen-Cruz's checklist. The *Creative Context* (the idea coming from the community) would be less than organic, with students approaching a group with a proposition, as part of their course work. Yet that also has its advantages in that it moves outside the possible bureaucratic or committee control of many more mainstream, Community-based projects. In terms of *reciprocity*, there is a tension between the individualised outcome of university study - an individual acquires the mark rather than the group - and the paradigm of community. In this sense the *reciprocity* is complex with the students both learning about community internally (themselves as a temporary community of practice) and externally (their work with a group from the community). In terms of *hyphenation* (the additional purpose), with the university being the infrastructural body, it is necessarily temporary, a performance concluding the course, with there being little chance of follow-up work or real continuity. Unlike at Otago, there were no tours of these shows. Possibly this reflects the very busy and contestable theatre culture of

Wellington in contrast to the South Island. An *Active Culture* was always presumed, but often the students would act in the performance, although the teenage mothers performed as well. Time would be a factor in this, as well as convenience.

In terms of Defillipis, Fischer and Schragge's framework, there was only one neo-communitarian project, that set in the Council flats. The others tended to dissolve a stereotypical community (as viewed from the outside) into either individuals (in the case of the teenage mothers) or a sub community (policewomen) within that community (police), while the fourth project worked with the anti-bypass group of young alternative activists. This reflects the likely post-modern, politics of identity leanings of the course students.

But from a wider perspective, this sort of work should have a stronger role to play in the town-gown agenda often promoted by university leaders, the bridging of the gap that can grow between the university and the wider community(s). It is a role much more resonant than the usual elitist events that take place.

Ultimately the continuity of this university work, taking place within a generalised theatre studies department, is based on the interest of a lecturer, in this case O'Donnell. The course hasn't been taught for the last few years, for it is the most labour intensive course and O'Donnell is only allowed to teach one honours course a year. The other option is a New Zealand Theatre Course where students document mainstream NZ theatre developments, a task in which O'Donnell passionately believes. He is torn, I suspect, between the two impulses, and generally, there is more acceptance of the latter task. But he writes about Community-based theatre and co-teaches the Master of Theatre Arts director's course at Toi Whakaari, a course in which students are required to direct either a community or corporate production in their second year.

On the road – The Travelling Tuatara

Whenever I meet up with Jim Moriarty, he looks me in the eye and says affirmatively, “You’re still doing it, mate.” Still, in his terms, making theatre. Brian Potiki and Jill Walker, who call themselves The Travelling Tuatara, are “still doing it”. Potiki, as we have seen, was immersed in the early blossoming of Māori theatre, being involved in both Death of the Land and Maranga Mai. Walker, a trained accountant, became active as a teacher/facilitator on training programmes for the unemployed in Rotorua in the early 1980s, met Potiki and moved with him to Mangataipa in the Hokianga and participated in the Community-based theatre projects of a campaigning nature which emanated from that activist community. In 1984 she worked with two members of the English group, Welfare State, who conducted projects in New Zealand. Welfare State, originating in the Counter-cultural movement of the 1960s and one of the longest surviving Community-based groups, use art and music to create community-specific rituals and celebrations. Group members have developed shareable working techniques and when I interviewed Walker, she told me the experience of working with Welfare State, “was one of the defining moments in terms of where I work now”. She learnt how to bring untrained people together to create a show, learnt “how to make a giant mask in ten minutes”, to “free the creative impulse”, to “stop thinking about whether it’s right or wrong”, and how “to join art, music and story”.

After Potiki’s involvement in Te Tutakitanga I Te Puna, they took their young baby and lived at Pongarehu, near Parihaka, in an intense community situation with a group of “last chance guys” working on the land. She remembers having to fight for food, of meetings every night, protests against a forthcoming Springbok tour, and

some theatre work – puppet shows for the kids and some street theatre work in New Plymouth. Since then the couple have continued to work at a grass roots level, travelling the country from their base at Lake Rotoehu, near Rotorua.

In the late 1980s, they spent time in Bluff, Potiki's tūrangawaewae, working with Training Opportunity Programmes (TOPs) students, providing workshops for the early childhood sector, developed a Community-based theatre piece based around Invercargill, and had a stint on Stewart Island. Walker described their basic working approach at that time. "We'd hit town, go and see the Community Arts Council and the Polytech, then work with schools to create a story-telling show and perform it in town".

From there, they had a year in Christchurch running a performing arts course. They met members of the Philippines Educational Theatre Association (PETA) and thereafter, modelled their work with children on the PETA manual. Subsequently, they returned to Rotorua and worked on high school transition programmes. Walker was heavily involved in the community arts movement during the nineties and they diversified their work to include special needs groups and running holiday programmes, continued their programme for creches and playcentres and ran story-telling workshops. Meanwhile, Potiki wrote and performed a cycle of South Island based history plays, recently published as Te Waipounamu, Your Music Remembers Me.

Hiroki's Song (1990), based on the imprisonment in a Dunedin jail of Parihaka protestors arrested during the invasion and the hanging of one of them, Wiremu Hiroki, toured extensively in 1991, playing at thirty three different venues. Boulton (1998), was culled from the diary of an English misfit who worked as a sealer and lived among the Murihiku Māori in the 1820s. Potiki comments, "This is

the most authentic account we have of southern Māori before their population was halved by measles and other epidemics, and before the loss of traditional food gathering to large-scale sheep farming" (Potiki 129). The play was premiered at a Ngai Tahu arts hui and then toured Southland communities. The Mutiny Stripped (2002) dealt with the Pākehā takeover of land near Oamaru and the overcoming of Māori resistance. Finally, Motupohue (2006) was a solo piece based on Potiki's ancestor, a WWI veteran, and Dan Davin's Southland writings. In Potiki's words, "it's about exile and ageing". These plays reflect Potiki's literary interests, his love of song and his need to explore his Ngai Tahu origins. Potiki became then, something of a troubador for Ngai Tahu, taking tribal stories to communities who had been swamped by the Pākehā culture. The Travelling Tuatara, as their name implies, are then, travelling players, people coming from outside, with skills and stories to enhance the life of the community.

But, of late, with the embedding of neo-liberal market relations, they have been disenfranchised by the institutionalising of the services they used to provide. Walker comments, for example, that holiday programmes used to be run as a community event, with the children having a say in the content, learning to cook for themselves and so on. But they have now become a business with a user pays ideology. Similarly, the school sector, as a market place, has become increasingly competitive. But they have found a new niche by providing for the children at big hui and festivals, setting up a tent and running an integrated art, music and drama programme which culminates in a procession.

The couple are very expert at what they do. When I employed them for the Blackball '08 Commemoration, they spent a day at the local school helping the students create banners and wind socks for the parade. Their technical knowledge and

facilitation skills meant the children quickly produced some beautiful pieces that are now cherished locally. The workshop they provided for the local playcentre was similarly appreciated. But increasingly, in Walker's words, they feel "like loose cannons" in a policy driven service industry heavy with bureaucratic demands.

In Williams' framework they have suffered from operating as artisans in the market place, generalist in the "product" they are selling. They have loyally clung to the concept of community as a healthy developmental paradigm, rather than a place of disability and dysfunction and the scale of their work has been too small to achieve institutional status. Walker and Potiki have made forays into the performing arts training scene but for limited periods, unwilling to be tied to the institution. The disappearance of community arts infrastructure in the late 1990s made life difficult, and, ironically, as Potiki turns more to literary work and an elitist audience, he has been able to attract greater patronage.

In terms of Cohen-Cruz's checklist, the boxes are easy to check with regard to their work with children, although Walker can find the *group desire* vague so that they are left with a simply decorative task. She was pleased to find a strong content involved in the '08 Commemoration work. Potiki's history plays do not meet the *Communal Context* criteria for they have been driven by his own creative agenda, yet, in form and production requirements, they are community friendly, not requiring significant technical infrastructure, and his tours have focused on community venues. Hiroki's Song in particular, has a strong popular culture feel, meeting most of William's characteristics.

In terms of the *additional purpose* of their work, Walker and Potiki picked up on the Welfare State role of being 'engineers of the imagination.' The use of the word 'engineer' is key, for engineers are technical, practical people who design

structures. In this sense, the artist is a designer of the community's imagination, imagination being the imaging of something not immediately present. This definition contains, then, on a technical level, a utopian agenda or at least a change agenda, which characterises Welfare State's work.¹⁷³

In working with children, Walker and Potiki's aim is to move past institutional policies and practices to create new creative associations. In holiday programmes it has been to foster a creative community of children. Obviously an *Active Culture* has always been at the heart of their work.

When it comes to Defilippis, Fisher and Schrage's framework, their work is neo-communitarian in the sense of providing assets, whether it be teaching models or artefacts for the community, and in the sense of the creative experience providing some 'social glue', even for the temporary community of a festival gathering. However, while not having an articulate political stance re late capitalist society, their unwillingness to succumb to a service model has made them critical of commodification. They remain then, something of an enigma, troubadors, on the road, with their stories to tell of places and happenings, reluctantly forced to participate in the modern service industry.

¹⁷³ See Tony Coult and Baz Kershaw, eds. Engineers of the imagination: The Welfare State Handbook, (London: Methuen, 1983).

Back to the future – Peter Falkenberg and Free Theatre

People emigrating in order to escape persecution, or to live a value-based life, then forming in the new country communities of the like-minded or like-experienced, are a recurring historical phenomenon. As well, there can be migrations within countries. In the sixties, the commune movement involved young people from within the dominant culture experimenting with communal living in order to escape what were seen to be the false disciplines and false desires of consumer society. However, as the decade progressed and reaction set in, the love-in turned to more hard-edged political action, ending in urban guerrilla or terrorist groups (according to point of view) such as the Weathermen in the US, the Baader Meinhoff Gang in Germany and The Red Brigade in Italy. Parallel to this movement was the continuing avant-garde strand of modernism, from Dadaists to Surrealists to absurdists, ongoing attempts to reframe bourgeois relations through the creating of the art object. In theatre, this took many forms, from the absurdist playwrights such as Pirandello and Beckett, to the anarchist community of The Living Theatre, to the monastic Poor Theatre of Jerzy Grotowski, or to the polemical theatre of Brecht. For Theodor Adorno, the modernist project could create a small window of opportunity in the dense wall of exchange relations created by the culture industries, a window through which the socialist dream of mutuality might still be glimpsed.¹⁷⁴ The consumerism and spectacle of late capitalism has however, diluted, emasculated and commodified these currents, or banished them to the academy or the museum. By living in exile in the South Island provincial city of Christchurch, a city which has always hosted cells of radicalism as well as being the official home of the Anglican middle class, Peter

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter Five.

Falkenberg has kept these sixties themes alive and attracted a student following, to form a theatrical community of practice based around the university.

Falkenberg told me that he was born into a middle class German family, went to university in the sixties, and was attracted to the theatre experiments that were happening at that time, conducted by “small groups of people that did way out things”.¹⁷⁵ There was no drama school, but he served apprenticeships with some of the directors he admired and undertook actor training, before helping to establish a theatre department in the university at which he was studying. He was active in the student revolution of the time, using theatre to disrupt lectures, stage sit-ins, and to engage people in discussion. But then the backlash occurred within the universities, followed by the heavy politics of the Baader Meinhoff period. After the immense joy of the sixties this was, for him, alienating. Some of his colleagues went into the urban geurilla movement, but Falkenberg wanted “to get out of Germany, maybe out of Europe”.

After a period in the UK, he came to the University of Canterbury to teach German drama. An interdepartmental project which involved theatre led him to working with a group of people on a production of Woyzeck.¹⁷⁶ It is a play venerated by the German expressionists and Falkenberg discovered the Kiwi-born cast empathising with its themes and form. He felt at home in New Zealand during the Kirk period and became involved in the Values Party, the precursor of the Green Party. He remembers the party’s manifesto being very influential with the German Greens. With members of the Woyzeck cast, many of whom were not conventional “drama people”, Falkenberg formed a theatre group. In an old lecture room of the Arts

¹⁷⁵ The following is taken from an interview with Peter Falkenberg, 23 July, 2009.

Centre they built a theatre which they called Free Theatre after an existing theatre in Germany, which in turn is modelled on Piscator's theatre of the same name.

Falkenberg, as well as continuing to work at the university, tutored on a work scheme with a theatre component and met some interesting people, for example, a young Stuart McKenzie, later to become a mainstream playwright.

The Free Theatre group began devising plays and experimenting with the classics. Falkenberg found the theatre here too dependent on the English naturalist tradition, so went back to Dada, the surrealists and the absurdists. "That way people could create something fresh, breaking free from this realistic story telling they were used to". The productions often incorporated live musicians whose fans added to the diversity of the audience and they also played outside the theatre building. According to Falkenberg, "it was a kind of underground theatre", and the group worked through a collaborative, non-hierarchical process.

But the two jobs and sustaining the theatre costs through a continuous stream of productions, became exhausting, so Falkenberg persuaded the university to establish a theatre studies department. In this way the university could pay the theatre rent and he could integrate the actor training into his teaching. In this way, he removed the work process from the demands of the market place. Now the group members are mostly ex students of the theatre studies courses, but the impulse has remained constant. Falkenberg explains:

It is to create a society I can breathe in. Even if it is a small one. One where people can follow their own desires, where they can be as free as possible within a group situation. Where you are not dependent on other people's

¹⁷⁶ By the German playwright, Georg Buchner (1837), a play which deals with the dehumanising effects of doctors and the military on a young man's life.

decisions. We feel that what we do is not to necessarily be different from the people around us, but that the people around us might like the same things we like. We want to open a door for them.

When I put it to him that Adorno eventually came to the view that commodification had reached a stage of such density that opening the door through the avant-garde intervention was no longer possible, Falkenberg responded as follows:

There's something so existential about live theatre. It is so encompassing it has great possibility of emancipation. What might interest you is that we are in a way building a kind of community that has a common goal. The common goal is the work that we do. People are taken away from their own personal life into a shared goal that creates a community that has meaning. Whereas I feel that the community that we live in has only meaning about individual selves. Here the group is a community that is at the centre of the whole enterprise.

This is similar to Baz Kershaw's view that the current task is, "to create various kinds of freedom that are not only resistant to dominant ideologies, but that also are sometimes transgressive, even transcendent, of ideology itself" ("Brecht to Baudrillard 18). It also echoes Barba's concept of a "Third Theatre" ("Solitude, Craft, Revolt" 169-170).

The content of the work has covered the classics such as Electra and Oedipus; the absurdists- Ionesco and Beckett; the German expressionist writers such as Handke, Müller and Fritsch; Brecht; Shakespeare and Wilde; and occasionally included the work of New Zealand writers. At the moment the group is exploring the differences and similarities between acting in theatre and 'acting in life'. Faust Chroma (2008), by Werner Frisch, explored the collaboration of a German theatre

director, Gustaf Gründgens, with the Nazi regime. When he put on a play in these circumstances, what were the actors acting: the characters in the play, or themselves as performers for the regime? This contradiction was explored within the framework of the Faust story. Productions increasingly use digital projection as a social narrative against which the actors ‘test’ their performance, both imitating and transgressing the digitalised social narrative. In their latest production, Distraction Camp (2009), based on Genet’s The Balcony, the audience ‘performance’ was similarly scrutinised.

The group has been isolated from New Zealand mainstream theatre, and as it became increasingly bound to the university setting, without the earlier variety of group members and their contacts, it could be read as monastic in its concerns. This description is not necessarily critical, for the processes of training and creativity prior to production can be of greatest importance for group members. As well, they can be seen as the undertaking of a task, on behalf of the wider community, in the same way that monks’ spiritual practices can be seen as an advocacy for the wider society. Yet, it can also lead to a sense of irrelevancy, as we found toward the end of *Amamus*, and the task of refinding a role begins. Accordingly, after seeing Fantasia, a 2006 production, I wondered whether a Community-based theatre dialogue with the Christchurch Muslim community might not have been more worthwhile? Falkenberg replied that:

The aim was not to explore the reality of the Muslim world at all. The idea was to explore the Western imagination with regard to the Muslim world. How we make it attractive or frightening, how we form our own desire.

While the production was technically accomplished, I remained untouched by the aesthetic journey involved and personally would have found a community-based

dialogue of greater interest. The digitalisation of something like the Western imagination of the Muslim world has become such a vast transaction, which exposes its own contradictions quite shamelessly, that a theatrical expose can seem pale in comparison.

Free Theatre has also been isolated from the local community, apart from its small following and the occasional use of their venue by other groups, and in this is reminiscent of the 1970s 'experimental' theatre groups. Similarly, its international connections are more important than its local ones. Once again, recalling the seventies period, the group's formal experimentation and the growing technical ability derived from regular training and regular ensemble work, challenges the sheer commonplace of much mainstream literary theatre. Of late, it has begun to tour, playing fringe festivals, and has received a positive critical response. But the route is predictable: promotion, presentation, reviews, awards, grants more readily available, participation in an Australian fringe festival, Edinburgh...a stall in the back room of the theatre boutique in the cultural emporium.

In the university, Falkenberg has found a relatively secure patron, although the relationship is covert rather than formal. In one sense, the university unwittingly supplies theatre infrastructure, with members of the group finding employment within the department and so on. This is not a criticism – I did the same thing in Petone - and can easily be justified. However, such patronage can disappear, and in 2008, in a round of budget cuts, the department was threatened with closure. It survived and at this stage, the group exists economically, in a similar manner to a section of a monastic order devoted to artistic production. Market forces operate, but in an arms length fashion.

Free Theatre's work is certainly not conventionally community-based, but

as Falkenberg refers to the organisation as a community, it is useful to analyse their work in the usual manner. Accordingly, Cohen-Cruz's Community-based theatre checklist, when applied to Free Theatre, reveals some interesting paradoxes. If the group itself is the community, then Falkenberg's craft and vision are at the service of the group members' desire. But that desire might simply be to work with Falkenberg. Very quickly the analysis becomes circular. Yet, for Falkenberg, the kaupapa is "to create a society I can breathe in, one where people follow their own desires". It is an emancipatory impulse, dissolving any authority he may have (once again, the situation becomes circular.) Presumably the group members wish to pursue a similar aim, and therefore the aim is collectivised. But the commonality is the theatre work they do. Only in the work can they follow their own desires. That becomes then, the element of *hyphenation*, the additional purpose. However, in my own experience, and from observation of other such groups, the privileged position of the person who leads the group creatively remains, despite the emancipatory desire. And as the group "makes life possible", there is a desire to hold onto it – elements of co-dependency creep in. The *reciprocity* element is accordingly, similarly ambiguous, in the sense that Falkenberg's artist role in relationship to group members, defined as the artist's technique being stretched to encompass a particular community's experience, dissolves into the group desire, as does the opposite side of the coin, the benefits for the community group of personal story telling, distancing, giving form to experience and so on. The *Active Culture* element, that everyone is creative, is held historically, but as the group become more technically expert, and as this becomes their strength, the problem of sharing the results of this expertise, in human terms, arises. Is there a quicker route than the hours of training and exploration that the group members have undertaken? This problem took Grotowski into his lengthy para-theatre period, which

ended, perhaps inevitably, in a monastic practice. Ultimately, the modelling of emancipation as an isolated creative activity produces either narcissism or monasticism, and the journey involved in reaching out from either of these positions is the subject of this thesis. In this light, Falkenberg has not solved the problems of the 1960s (in New Zealand, the 1970s), but is reliving them.

It can be argued however, that post modernism has reframed the task.

Kershaw, refers to the crisis of community under post modernism as it is rejected as being antithetical to diversity. But he then refers to the possibility of “an *ecology of performance* that engages with the new world disorder to produce radical insights into its dilemmas?” (“Brecht to Baudrillard” 193) In this sense, Free Theatre’s creating of performances as ‘a community’ could be seen as an ecological paradigm, and this offers insights into the larger world disorder, in the same way that an organic garden offers insights into agri-business. Kershaw also argues of the need to “play in the realm of cultural memory” (19) and to reclaim history through performance, both of which tasks Free Theatre are undertaking. The key task for the radical, in Kershaw’s view, is to find a way through the dilemma of the unlimited freedoms (and anxieties) offered by post modernism, and the certainties (and oppressions) situated within community. In this light, Free Theatre’s work can be seen as pointing to the future, rather than being some relic of the past.

Finally, in terms of the framework of analysis for community-based projects offered by Defilippis, Fisher and Schragge, the work of Free Theatre can be considered neo-communitarian in that it asset builds for its core community of participants; but in the space of ideology it questions the impacts of late capitalism by promoting individual desire and non hierarchical processes as the basis of its work. While it may charge a small entrance fee for performances, its kaupapa is to offer the

theatre experience, “free from social conventions, free from political limitations, free from audience expectations and, as much as possible in contemporary society, free from bottom-line financial considerations.”¹⁷⁷ It is a vision close to that of the anarchist group found at anti-WTO conventions and latterly, at climate change camps and demonstrations. So, for me, the relationships with the wider society, remain problematic. Perhaps their task is to build links with like movements of resistance, rather than, as happened in the 1970s, to bang their head, no matter how imaginatively, against the establishment wall?

¹⁷⁷ www.freetheatre.org.nz, 12/12/09.

Back to the future 2 – the Our Street project

Early in 2007 I received an e-mail from the Auckland City Council Community Arts Development Co-ordinator announcing a job opportunity: to direct a community theatre production. Such opportunities existed in the 1990s, but in the current climate, this was unusual. The project culminated in the performances of a Community-based theatre production, Our Street, which took place at the Auckland City Concert Chambers, August 13-16, 2009. It is useful therefore to provide some background.

Between 1991 and 2001, Liz Civil, who heads the Leisure and Arts Planning Division, Community Planning Group of the Council, facilitated a team which contained at least three people with a community arts background (Sandi Morrison, Philip Clarke and Elisabeth Veneveld). The resulting report included amongst its goals, one of participation: “Opportunities for all – to create opportunities for Auckland City residents and communities to participate in an abundance and variety of arts and cultural activity, appealing to the diverse range of ages, ethnicities, cultures and interest of Aucklanders.”¹⁷⁸ The action involved required the Council to “support community arts programmes (existing and new) at Council facilities and venues”. This led to the creation of an Arts Services Group in the Council bureaucracy and two Community Arts Development Co-ordinators as part of Arts Station, a team of four people who put policy into practice. Arts Station supports the mainstream arts as well as community arts. Team member, Sally Markham, told me that “no other [NZ] city has such schemes. Auckland is the most pro-active city in the arts”.

The Our Street project, centred on the Wesley community, was initiated

by the officers in response to the 2007 State of the Nation speech by then Leader of the Opposition, John Key, in which he stated that there were “streets in our country where helplessness has become ingrained, dead ends for those who live in them, places where rungs on the ladder of opportunity have been broken. I’m talking about streets like McGehan Close.”¹⁷⁹ Residents of the street responded angrily. But as well, the wider area is home to over eighty different ethnic groups, with there being hostility between older groups such as the Pacific Islanders and more recent arrivals such as the Somalians. The aim of the intercultural theatre project was to bring different ethnic groups together to share their stories. According to Markham, “Housing NZ became involved and the idea got bigger and bigger. There was a whole team of professionals: director, dramaturg, choreographer, composer”. The Tongan Brass Band came on board, the Somali Women’s Sewing Group made the costumes and the process involved quite young children to the elderly.

Samoan director, Justine Simej-Barton, was the logical person to direct the piece. Brought up in Porirua, she told me she was inspired as a secondary school student by seeing Māori actors Don Selwyn and Jim Moriarty play major roles in Amamus’s production of Hamlet.¹⁸⁰ She moved to Auckland and in 1987 formed the Pacific Theatre Company, to provide a framework for Pacific Island Theatre. Since then she has been involved in nurturing Pacific Island theatre into the mainstream, but always with one foot remaining in the community base of church and extended family. Under Don Selwyn’s guidance, she extended her practice into film and television. With dramaturg, Fiona Graham, Simej-Barton took participants through a devising process which resulted in a script based on two intercultural weddings. They

¹⁷⁸ Auckland- arts agenda *rarangi take toi*, (Auckland City Council, February, 2001).

¹⁷⁹ www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/3326116/Hollow-promises-haunt-PM, accessed 1/12/10.

asked the Indian amateur theatre group, Prayas, to assist with the production. The show was originally conceived for a community hall, but ended up being put on in the Concert Chamber in the central city, with Wesley audiences being bussed in to the free performances. Markham considers that “in some ways it was the wrong place. The performers didn’t overcome the awe of being in a professional venue”. But her colleague, James Beaumont, disagreed: “I was so pleased to see the work presented here, with the people coming to the center. They got such mana from their work. Such pride. To take over the civic chambers and to get the common person in there. Generations of working people had paid for that structure”. Reviewers and participants interviewed on the DVD made about the production were overwhelmingly positive:

The enthusiasm and raw promise shone through. There is something uniquely Auckland to see a young Indian girl performing a Polynesian dance and PI kids doing Bollywood.¹⁸¹

The project, as is customary in the community arts field, has spawned further projects, for example, a group developing an Our Street designer label for clothes they are making, and youth video projects.

Our Street was fully funded by its initiator and patron, the Auckland City Council. As Markham wryly remarked, “It used up most of the community arts budget for that year”. Performances were free so there was no market involvement. In terms of Cohen-Cruz’s checklist, there could be a question with regard to the original energy and idea coming from Council officers, but they simply approached the communities with the idea for the project, with thereafter *the creative vision* coming

¹⁸⁰ Wellington Concert Chamber, 1977

¹⁸¹ www.stuff.co.nz. Review: Our Street in Auckland, 15/08/2008.

from work with members of the communities. In terms of *reciprocity*, there was the challenge for the artists to find a theatrical structure which could incorporate the diverse range of ethnic groups and their cultural skills (including hip hop and rap), while for the participants, the DVD interviews reveal great pride in their accomplishment. The *hyphenation* or additional purpose was to create understanding between the ethnic groups and to heal the mana of the community. In Markham's words, "They were not going to be labeled by white middle class men and the media". With a fully amateur cast, an *Active Culture* was certainly present. While it was certainly a neo-communitarian exercise, seeing community as providing a social glue, and the performance provided an asset for the geographic community (and the wider city), because of the context provided by John Key's original condemnation, the project questioned politically the mainstream neo-liberal concept of ladders and a runged hierarchical society of winners and losers. As well, it questioned assumptions about Auckland, the NZ powerhouse of late capitalism, as a monoculture of "carpetbaggers", revealing instead, an actual "city of villages" (Liz Civil's words). In the same way the conventional assumption of Los Angeles as a motor-way/Hollywood/ Disneyland monoculture is a media-based assumption, with the reality being very different.¹⁸² It is in this reality, that new agendas of resistance are being formed.

¹⁸² See, for example, Dean, Amy B., and David B. Reynolds, *A New New Deal, How regional activism will reshape the American Labor Movement*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

A new century – the southern corridor project

The fall of the USSR, postmodernism and politics of identity movements, rapid globalisation, the techno sciences and a new millenium, has brought a shift of paradigm in a generation of Community-based theatre workers who now work in what UK writer, Helen Nicholson calls, Applied Drama. For Nicholson, processes of globalisation are of central importance as “they threaten to erode local, national and regional cultures” (11). Of equal significance for Nicholson is the impact of migration as it forges new identities amongst migrant peoples, identities which include connections to the places they find themselves. As a result:

Individuals inhabit dialogic spaces in which they continually negotiate and renegotiate a sense of who they are and who they might become, in narrative and through conversations. (150)

In the absence of traditional left political change agendas, this programme “brings together the ethics of human rights – its legal and formal frameworks – with the aesthetics of self-construction” (150).

While New Zealand, because of geographic isolation, has been less affected by this phenomenon than many northern countries, there are nevertheless, increasing numbers of migrants in our cities. The Our Street project took place in a geographic community context, the aim being to enable different ethnic groups to live together in a location. Wellington based Eko Theatre’s current project is more centred within a Nicholson-style Applied Theatre construct. It is led by Australian, Heather Timms. Timms told me that she grew up in Asia and her interest has always been in Community-based theatre. She has worked in the UK, in Nairobi, in India, and with Aborigine communities, before she came to New Zealand and spent time with Te Rakau. Upon arriving in New Zealand, she was shocked at the attitude to Community

Theatre. “You say Community Theatre and everyone turns away”. Eko was set up to work with communities, “who are on the margins yet are involved in critical national issues”.¹⁸³ Their Southern Corridor Project involves bringing the local Māori communities together with the Somali community, “to talk about their relationship with each other and the land, and to build a greater understanding of each other’s perspective.” A number of events are planned: A hui where there will be some playback theatre; a disposable camera initiative; training in photoshop so people can play with the images generated; a photographer working with the different communities; a sound designer collecting sound from the different communities; a range of interviews; a weaving group involving elderly Māori and Somali women; and a young people’s jamming session. The resulting material will be collated and a performance devised which will involve professionals and community actors.

From this description, all of Cohen-Cruz’s checklist will be met, with the *hyphenation* being Nicholson’s “right to narrate which enables people to recognise their own experiences, reinterpret history and change the direction of the future” (150). A key political question for Timms is who has access to the means of expression and she will build training opportunities into the project so that participants can be mentored to go back into their communities and continue working. The *Active Culture* aspect is then of key importance. In Timm’s words, “for a more inclusive New Zealand we need to hear the voices that are not heard”. This also means working across art forms so that different aptitudes and interests can be included. Eko is therefore, basically mounting a community arts programme for a specific subset of communities.

¹⁸³ <http://sites.google.com/site/theatreeko/the-southern-corridor-project>.

At the time of this interview, the group has raised 70% of the funding and some work had begun, but it will be difficult, without significant infrastructural support, to maintain the impetus for what is a large project. In terms of Defilippis, Fisher and Shragge's framework, this work is neo-communitarian in the sense of creating a firmer sense of overall community, in Timms' words, "to move past generational tension both within and between communities, getting different factions to talk to one another, even getting different Māori organisations to talk to one another". But, as well, there is an implied agenda of dissolving community as an oppressive structure, so that individuals can be themselves, playing out their multiple identities in the urban context with their full human rights. There is some acquiring of cultural capital envisaged, but no critique of the state or the wider economic system. Finally, within this framework, there remains for me, a question of whether the human rights agenda can effectively respond, in the words of Andrew Ross:

to the heated debates over language rights, regional autonomy, minority representation, education curricula, land claims, national symbols, immigration policies and so on. These are issues that appear to demand treatment on a basis of group or collective rights, which may not always be congruent with the rights of individuals and which, in some cases, may suppress these rights. ("Real Love" 190)

In other words, for the marginalised, the hard issues require the discomfort of political struggle against a system which, while preaching human rights, denies them in terms of real equality on a wide range of issues.

The above overview of some of the work which has taken place and which

continues to take place in the Community-based theatre field in Aotearoa over the last two decades ¹⁸⁴ reveals, as promised, a diverse range of practices with a diverse range of communities. The task of this chapter has been to begin to uncover this movement, to let it speak, and to thus take its place in the history of New Zealand theatre. There is no one story, but a diversity of stories being told, with an ability, where appropriate, to focus on identity politics issues of gender, or age, or ethnicity, through this particular mode of production. The aesthetic outcomes, showing kinds of people in kinds of places, have been framed by the avant-garde, the popular, story telling, the political (mainly influenced by Boal), and naturalism. The work has called on ritual and cultural forms from Māori and other ethnic cultures, as well as popular commercial forms such as hip hop and rap. There have also been influences from the LeCoq- Gaulier school of mime/clown/commedia, the Welfare State style of visually based work, the Theatre for Development work of PETA, and latterly, human rights based, Applied Drama. Community-based theatre has explored and extended theatre form to a greater extent than the mainstream, which has seldom moved outside the opportunist technical innovation. ¹⁸⁵ Most of the practices have centred on a key creative figure, who has often had experience in the mainstream but who has made the ideological choice to work in Community-based theatre. Often these people have come from a working class background. All of the work has been deeply embedded in social movements and changing social structures. As a practice it has suggested models for:

¹⁸⁴ And there have been other major exercises, e.g. Miranda Harcourt's *Verbatim*, (1993) written by William Brandt and devised by William Brandt and Miranda Harcourt, a play based on interviews with hard core prisoners which toured prisons as well as playing mainstream theatres.; as well as local Community-based theatre such as Pacific Underground's work in Christchurch.

¹⁸⁵ Once again, it is useful to recall Grotowski's sceptical description of mainstream 'innovation': "scenography using current sculptural or electronic ideas, contemporary music, actors independently projecting clownish or cabaret stereotypes" (74).

- a national, Tiriti-based theatre,
- regional theatres firmly linked to their specific region,
- a theatre connected to progressive social and political movements,
- a theatre restoring the voice of the oppressed,
- a theatre giving voice to the disabled and marginalised,
- a theatre which connects the learning institution to its surrounding communities.

A central argument in this thesis is that, after 1984, the opportunity for this work was created through a contradiction of neo-liberalism: the market-based system attacks community infrastructure and then uses the community sector to deal with the problems thus created. In using community providers it both disciplines those providers and provides opportunities to challenge the neo-liberal power structure. Accordingly, the economic structure sustaining (or not) the professional Community-based theatre practice has varied. Practices have received insitutional support by either providing a specific targetted service for an NGO or Government department, or by existing in tandem with an educational provider. They have also been supported by a variety of patrons, the most generous being regionally-based. The ideology of neo-communitarianism has been most favoured by the patron. As well, there has been a market component for many of the practices.

All the practices took place, or are taking place, on a stringent budget, with a lack of a career path. Sustainability has been, and remains a problem. Patronage can be fickle, for example, the diverse range of performing arts courses allowed during the high unemployment of the 1990s, when such courses were tolerated as life skills courses, disappeared when employment outcomes became scrutinised. Similarly, interest from investments, which forms the basis of trust fund grants, shriveled during the recent recession. The tendency of the funding, or scarcity of it, has been to drive

the provider either toward the mainstream or the specialist practice, with the latter becoming the norm in the community-based field, despite some interesting exceptions.¹⁸⁶ There are gains in a growing expertise, but with the emphasis on the specialist practice, community becomes associated with dysfunction rather than a functional framework in which to live, with the exception of the Te Reo Māori speaking community. And the ideological associative of the above, despite the revealing of the underbelly of the system, is to rehabilitate or to incorporate into the mainstream society, rather than critique the project of neo-liberalism. A broad community-based practice such as that which was undertaken by Pou Mahi a Iwi, which made links with oppositional community groupings, becomes unsustainable unless infrastructural arts funding is available for Community-based work in the same way as it is available for mainstream work. The withdrawing of this funding, and the subsequent push towards specialist practices, has been the censoring mechanism. How this censoring evolved is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁸⁶ With the growing ethnic mix of a mobile labour force, perhaps a new community bonding agenda is required, as the Our Street and Southern Corridor projects reveal.

Chapter Four

The tax-payers' money

The impact of neo-liberalism on state patronage and educational theory

“That’s why the government’s shopkeeper hands us oblivion and repression, because he cannot sell us at a good price” (Marcos 83).

In New Zealand, which lacks the range of philanthropic trusts of the US or the extra layer of state government funds in federal Australia, funding provision of the arts remains heavily reliant on the central state. While there was a growth of private philanthropy during the neo-liberal period, it is only regional trusts with limited resources that provide money for arts projects.¹⁸⁷ For this reason, in this chapter, I will concentrate on policy shifts within state provision for the arts.

When I interviewed long-standing arts council officer, John McDavitt, there was a point in the conversation when we realised that there has been no history of the arts council(s) written, that it has in fact, largely escaped analysis other than through its own review processes. Yet the state has been the chief patron of the arts in New Zealand, and as Williams points out, its role is necessarily controversial, because of the privileged situation of the patron. Williams writes:

...in the crudest terms, he [the patron] is doing what he wishes with his own. It is this fact, above all, which makes the patronal definition of any public body, deriving its authority and resources from the supposed general will of the

¹⁸⁷ ASB Community Trust, Wellington Community Trust, Canterbury Community Trust and Otago Community Trust.

society, at best controversial, at worst quite inapplicable. (“Sociology of Culture” 44)

How does a government make subjective judgments and at the same time reflect the general will, except through the mechanism of ideology? But is that ideology *the formal and conscious beliefs of a class or other social group* or the looser, more intuitive *characteristic world-view or general perspective*? (26)

Furthermore, for Williams, there are close connections between “*the formal and conscious beliefs of a class* and the cultural production associated with it” (26). In this sense, the first government patronage of the arts in New Zealand, which took place under the first, second and third Labour governments (1935-1949), expressed the social democratic ideology of those governments (interrupted by the military phase of WWII), which centred on the creating of a more independent, more egalitarian society. Accordingly, national cultural institutions were established during this period: public broadcasting, a national orchestra, a national film unit, a national library, and a national literary fund. The assertion of social democratic nationhood involved cultural production on a national scale.

But social democracy, with its reliance on state intervention to mediate capitalism, suffers contradictions, and state policy continually adjusts to the tensions that these contradictions produce. As Barrowman revealed, from the beginning of state subsidy of the arts there was an ideological tension between the fine art and the community art positions. This debate has never gone away. Is the art object something unique created by experts (subsidised by the state), and then attempts made to distribute it widely (once again subsidised by the state), or should the making of the art object be an activity carried out as widely as possible (with expert assistance where required) and be subsidised by the state on this broad basis?

There is, as well, a class basis to these positions, for as is proven over and over by surveys, the 'high arts' of classical music, literature, fine art, ballet, opera and theatre, are patronised by the middle class or those aspiring to the middle class. In fact, according to the judgement of English writer, J.Lewis, "Public funding of the arts represents the redistribution of wealth from the working class to subsidise middle class entertainment and middle class aesthetics" (21). This is made more poignant in New Zealand as state funding of the arts comes from taxes on gambling, an activity pursued by low income people in an attempt to climb the social ladder. Lewis, referring to comments made by Raymond Williams in an interview, reveals that this class capture of the high arts is based on competency. In order to absorb a work of high art:

Specific competencies are required, that is to say, a knowledge of the codes specific to a given art form, competencies that are not innate but can only be acquired through inculcation in the setting of family, through experience of a range of artistic objects and practices, and/or through formal inculcation in school. (8)

It was inevitable that over time, the first nationalist push should reveal this class contradiction. But there are contradictions as well, in the community art position. Once again, as Barrowman revealed, worker and union interest in the arts was not high. And often, at the local level, art activity is carried out on an amateur basis by the local middle class, rather than involving a broad cross section of the population. But despite complexities, the negotiation between these two positions has formed the basis of arts council policy over the years.

It is complex content, demanding a separate thesis. For my own purposes, I can merely sketch the broad policy outlines, focusing in particular on the 1994

transition from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council to Creative New Zealand and the manner in which the community arts agenda (and hence Community-based theatre agenda) was marginalised and then excised. There is, furthermore, with regard to the above, the complex question of how policy is made by Government and then how it is interpreted and practised within an administrative body, which can only be indicated in this work through reports from participants.

The first arts council, named The Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, was set up in 1963, with its aim being: “To constitute a body to encourage, foster and promote the practice and appreciation of the arts in New Zealand.”¹⁸⁸ The Council consisted of nine persons appointed by the Governor General, plus the Secretary of Internal Affairs, the Director of Education and the Director-General of Broadcasting. The functions of the Arts Council were:

- (a) To encourage, foster and promote the practice and appreciation of the arts in New Zealand:
- (b) To improve standards of execution of the arts:
- (c) To foster and maintain public interest in the arts and culture in New Zealand.

In order to carry out the above it was able to make policy, make grants to individuals and organisations, make awards for accomplishment, acquire cultural property and delegate powers to committees. It was a generalist agenda following on from the creation of national arts bodies under the first Labour Government, which had slowly added an ad hoc rewarding of outstanding individuals with grants or scholarships. There is no mention of Māori in the act and the council was focused on the Pākehā

nationalist agenda. Similar to earlier Australian moves the aim was, as described by Radbourne and Fraser, “to showcase art indicative of the nation” (28). It existed in what was still a philistine environment of rugby, racing and beer, with only a few individual artists braving it out locally rather than working overseas. Yet, with the society opening up to previous alien influences, change was occurring. TV was established, the Vietnam war and the anti nuclear and anti apartheid movements produced a new wave of activists, and a poet, James K. Baxter hit the headlines with his prophet-like judgments of mainstream society. Regional theatres were established and by the 1970s, as we have noted, an avant garde theatrical movement existed. Demands for tino rangatiratanga and feminist agendas were surfacing, heralding the arrival of politics of identity.

The Norman Kirk led Labour government, elected in 1972, reflected the progressive times with its encouraging of communes (ohu) and its anti-nuclear testing stand. As part of the 1960s counter cultural agendas, the community art movement’s promotion of broad-based creative participation registered locally. Australian moves foreshadowed changes to our own Arts Council structure. Radbourne and Fraser write that:

Flagship funding and centralisation of institutions helped develop the showcase pieces desired, but soon a call for a more democratic and less centralised funding arose, reflecting a desire for democratic institutions from society in general. The main funding body responded by supporting diverse community arts at the grass roots level, as well as the major institutions, and by managing that support through the mechanisms of arms-length funding and peer assessment. (28)

¹⁸⁸ The Queen Elizabeth 11 Arts Council Act, 1963.

The Australian move to community arts was led by arts council officers, supported by the union movement and the Labour Party, which consciously associated itself with politicised artists. The New Zealand path was less activist, but followed the same pattern when legislation for a reformed arts council was passed in 1974.¹⁸⁹

While the name remained the same, the central body was supplemented by three Regional Arts Councils, and Community Arts Councils were given statutory recognition. A democratic, pyramid structure was thus put into place. A Community Arts Council could be simply established in a geographic area by residents holding a public meeting and electing a committee. The local authority could have a representative on that committee and was expected to provide some infrastructural support. State education bodies were also expected to assist by providing premises and amenities. The Act stated that a Community Arts Council was to provide information on arts activity in its area to the Regional Arts Council, to give advice as to distribution of funds to both the Regional Arts Council and the Central Arts Council, and to encourage and promote the arts in the area. It was given a small operating budget and seeding money was available to assist local authorities to establish Community Arts Officers.

The three Regional Arts Councils consisted of five ministerial appointees (including the Chairperson), with four members elected by the Community Arts Councils within the region. Their functions were to inform the central body of arts developments within the region, to give advice and provide assistance to the central body, to co-ordinate and assist Community Arts Councils, and it had a fund from which it could make grants to arts organisations and practitioners within their regions.

¹⁸⁹ Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand Act, 1974.

The Māori and South Pacific Arts Council (MASPAC) function was to inform the central body of activities and developments relating to Māori and South Pacific arts, to give advice as to how the central body could support such arts, to provide assistance and guidance to Regional Councils and Community Arts Councils, to co-operate with educational bodies and broadcasting services to encourage and develop the said arts, and to distribute funds in the form of grants.

The central body, still called the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, consisted now of six ministerial appointees, one of whom was Chairperson, the Chairperson of the new Council for Māori and South Pacific Arts, the three Chairs of the Regional Arts Councils, the Secretary for Internal Affairs, the Director-General of Education and a representative of the Broadcasting system. The functions of the central body were a mix of encouraging professional standards, encouraging the practice and appreciation of the arts (including Māori and South Pacific Arts), but also a radical new function: “To make accessible to every person in New Zealand, as far as it may be practicable, all forms of artistic activity”. As well, it was required to “co-operate with educational bodies so as to develop the practice and appreciation of the arts as integral aspects of education in New Zealand”. In addition to its traditional powers of making grants, support and advocacy, there was a range of delegated powers to MASPAC, the Regional Arts Councils and to the Community Arts Councils.

In theory then, the new Council structure was democratic, with a grass roots, arts-for-all participatory agenda standing alongside the specialist, fine arts agenda. What happened in practice? Once again there is a lack of formal information. Community art activity is local and underwritten, whereas the professional organisations were always aware of the advocacy task. In 1976, for example, Michael Volkerling prepared a report for QEII articulating the need for cultural research. He

writes that in 1976 the Council supported over two hundred individuals, organisations and projects including seven professional theatre companies, the NZ Ballet, smaller theatre groups, regional orchestras, art exhibitions and festivals, as well as the national Ballet and Drama schools. However, he is concerned that:

While the broad achievements of the Council since its establishment may be clear, more detailed information concerning the effects of its activities has never been systematically gathered or analysed.

What is remarkable in this document is Volkerling's total ignoring of community arts, and it was an area that, despite the new democratic structure, struggled to gain a mainstream voice, its articulations remaining at the level of Regional Arts Councils' newsletters and a number of How-to-Do publications.¹⁹⁰ In 1989, partly in response to this, Community Art Workers lobbied successfully for funding to set up a national network. This network held annual hui and attempted to remain active between times, but in the absence of e-mail and internet and a co-ordinator's wage, this proved difficult (I was co-ordinator for two years, so know from personal experience).

Community Arts Councils and Community Art Workers employed by these Councils, varied in their purpose and the range of their work. There was always tension between meeting the demands of the local amateur artists and performers, who pursued conventional art activities such as water colour painting and amateur theatre, and what came to be called community cultural development, which involved, as in Community-based theatre, the development of art objects by a professional artist(s) in partnership with a community. This tension was exacerbated by class interests: the former tended to involve a local middle class, whereas the latter tended to focus on

¹⁹⁰ For example, Community Activities, (Central Regional Arts Council, 1980), outlines a number of activities that can be used to encourage community participation.

lower income groups. Establishing programmes with local iwi was often on the agenda and a local council would always be keen on festival-type public events. Finally, there was always the need to lobby in order to retain local body funding, especially as neo-liberal cost cutting began to impact. But as we have seen in the Hutt Valley, a capable worker could achieve a broad range of work. Regional Councils, as well as assisting CACs in their negotiation with the local body, sponsored many touring groups and development activity (skill development workshops and the like).

As well as Arts Council support, in the early 1980s, as I have noted, high unemployment and Government work schemes that could be manipulated to provide work for artists, generated a level of funding for community art activity that was unprecedented. In Auckland, Artwork, in partnership with the City Council, employed over 365 artists on community projects during a six year period. “We had residencies in schools and hospitals, old peoples homes and mental institutions,” recollected Sandi Morrison, who set up the scheme. “We did a huge amount of work”. Philip Clarke, who managed the scheme in its later years, told me that during its existence, Artwork had a budget which was a quarter the size of the QEII budget. Over the period of its existence, it spent \$6 million, with 90% of that going on wages. For Morrison, a politicising of cultural work took place during this period. “There were a lot of working artists who’d never worked in the community context. They’d talk about how beneficial the work was”. She and Elizabeth Vanervelt set up an Alliance for Cultural Democracy in the greater Auckland region with its key plank being the view that every community had the right to its culture. This view in turn was embodied in the Community Art Workers’ Network kaupapa.¹⁹¹ In other cities, similar work took place. As has been seen in Brian Potiki’s story, Māori played a

significant role in the Unemployed Workers Network, Te Roopu Rawakore O Aotearoa, and cultural work, including campaigning theatre, was an important advocacy tool, with the Philippines Educational Theatre Association (PETA) tour of 1987 leading, as we have previously noted, to the formation of a short lived Māori Community Theatre Network. In their application to MASPAC and QE11 Arts Council for a major grant, the Network wrote:

The need for a Māori Community Theatre Network is evident in all the communities we have been to so far. People are enthusiastic to do more work with drama, dance and music/waiata that comes from themes drawn from their lives and the life of their community.¹⁹²

There was then, a period of activity, debate and ideological development in the community art and culture scene during this time, generated by social and economic conditions (which were on the edge of crisis), and assisted by the new arts council framework. For with community arts officially articulated and structurally embodied for the first time, officers had to do more than pay lip service to the concept. And, as part of this move, at a policy level, the Council promoted a broad view of the arts. A 1984 Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council report, An Agenda for Social Action, made recommendations to other government departments regarding the arts. For example, with regard to education, the report stated, “The Council believes that the arts are not frills to be indulged in during time left over from the ‘real business’ of education; they are the business of education”. The Council called on the Minister of Education to reinstate the Performer-in-Schools Scheme, the Composer-in-Schools Scheme, to make provision in secondary schools for artists and craftworker residencies. To the

¹⁹¹ Agenda and philosophy.

¹⁹² Copy of grant application of 5 August, 1987. Turnbull Library, Te Roopu O Aotearoa, 95-180 Box3.

Minister of Justice it requested he “recognise the important role that the arts play in the amelioration of the physical environment of corrective institutions”, and that he “facilitate arts activities/programmes in these institutions”, even “provide for those sentenced to community service the alternative of involvement in community art projects”. The Minister of Health should recognise the important role that the arts play “as a didactic tool in preventative health care”, and should “utilise artists in health services by providing funding for artists’ residencies, arts centres etc”. The document was heavily influence by the cultural democracy viewpoint.

But funding is of central importance and once neo-liberalism became the official response to the economic crisis, that funding began to disappear. The 1984 Labour Government dissolved unemployed *work* schemes that employed trained people on community projects (because there was no mainstream work for them) and replaced them with *training* schemes, the reasoning being that the unemployed couldn’t get work because they lacked job market skills. In this way, the blame was shifted from the system to the individual. Until the end of the 1990s, it was still possible to run schemes that trained artists and performers, but it made programmes like Artwork no longer viable, for Community Art projects demand skilled workers. Morrison stated, ”I wouldn’t move Artwork into a training programme. It wasn’t a good fit”.

And despite the democratic structure, the level of funding for community art activities remained low. If we take the last year of QEII’s existence the ratio of funding was as follows: Fine Arts 10 million, Community Arts 2.1 million, MASPAC .75 million.¹⁹³ Accordingly, it was always difficult for the professional community artist to make a living and to build a project budget large enough to enable a

professional fee to be paid. This would require applying for a local grant, one from the region and one from the central body – a time consuming process. For arts funding remained a class issue. There have been some analyses of audience for arts events; perhaps the best a 2000 publication called, Know your audience – me nohio ki to whakaminenga, written by Jenny Keate. If I extrapolate the indicative percentages of people attending fine art events such as theatre, ballet and opera, and apply those figures to arts council subsidy of these media in 1994, some staggering figures emerge. Mainstream theatre attendance is subsidised by \$33 a seat; opera attendance by \$18 a seat; and ballet by \$47 a seat. When the report reveals that regular attendees come from high income brackets, then the class nature of arts subsidy is apparent, and this did not radically change through this period, despite a move in this other direction. But at least ideologically, the arts funding structure, between 1974 and 1994, was sympathetic to cultural democracy.

But, as in other areas, the neo-liberal passion for restructuring was felt in the arts area and came to be embodied in a new act: The Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa Act, 1994. The establishing of this Act and its subsequent interpretation was complex. For long serving arts officer, John McDavitt, some revamping was necessary for the QEII structure had led to fractionated funding. He told me that “by the end, QEII had seventy two funding programmes, all art form based. Each art form had its own nuances and they were all quite small pots of money”. Neo-liberal ideology required the separation of policy maker and provider, in order to avoid capture of policy by providers – in this case capture of arts council policy by its officers and the artmakers they were in contact with. Accordingly, the Community

¹⁹³ Annual Report, 1994.

Arts Councils/Regional Arts Councils/Central Arts Council/MASPAC pyramid was abolished in the act and a central Arts Council, appointed by the Minister, was to set policy and in turn appoint two boards: an Arts Board which included a South Pacific Arts Committee and a Māori Arts Board called Te Waka Toi. The function of these arts boards were:

- (a) To encourage, promote and support the arts in New Zealand for the benefit of all New Zealanders;
- (b) To recognise in the arts the role of Māori as tangata whenua;
- (c) To promote the development of a New Zealand identity in the arts;
- (d) And to allocate funding.

The following principles were to lie behind their activities: Participation; Access; Excellence and Innovation; Professionalism. The Arts Boards could establish community arts councils and could designate community arts providers and allocate funding to these providers.

On the face of it, there was continuity, even though the structure was much more centralised. But in reality, community arts as a category largely disappeared from arts council funding over a short period and was marginalised in a funding scheme organised by local bodies. In community arts activist, Sandi Morrison's words, "a sort of lobotomy happened". The continuity of words was there, as a politic gesture, because, as ex-arts council employee, Philip Clarke recalls, there was huge public interest when the act was first tabled.

When the government said the act was going to change it provoked a huge response. They got over six hundred submissions. The bureaucrats were shitting themselves. The select committee had to move around the countryside.

For Morrison, there was concern in the community arts sector at the proposed wiping of Regional Arts Councils and Community Arts Councils and lobbying from the sector led to the establishment in September 1993, of a Community Arts Working Party, which she chaired. The Working Party prepared a discussion document which was widely circulated, then held meetings throughout the country and received written submissions. The information gathered was then analysed in order to develop recommendations for a national Arts Council policy on Community Arts.¹⁹⁴ It was a complex task, for they had to define community and community arts, collate the diversity of local needs, and align these as well with the status of Māori as tangatawhenua, and the needs of major ethnic groups. The report recommended the Boards have a common goal for community arts policy; gave a definition of community arts that covered all tendencies; wished for Tiriti-based equity for Māori; desired the recognition of the needs of other ethnic groups; recommended that the Council continue to provide for community arts infrastructure; and recommended a national fund for larger community and cross-community projects.

But the writing of the discussion paper had revealed tensions, the most severe being a lack of interest from Māori. Darcy Nicholas, a member of the working party had written:

Unemployment programmes for Māori [in the arts] led to the need for access to the market place, both locally and internationally, in order to achieve independence.

In his view:

¹⁹⁴ Report and recommendations, A national Arts Council community arts policy. Report of the Community Arts Working Party, June 1994.

Community arts does not exist as a separate entity within the Māori world. Community Arts Councils as they exist today are Eurocentric in both their structures, services, methodology and membership. In some situations the cultural arts scene of the local iwi is already formulated and carried out every time there is a function at the local marae. (24)

The Pacific Island member, Sai Lealea was also ambivalent:

To a Pacific Islander, it is difficult to come to terms with what is Community Arts. This is due to implied absence in such a term of any reference as to the ownership ties or links associated with Community Arts. (32)

This antagonism, shared, as we have seen, by other identity politics movements, was crucial and revealed contradictions that were to be played out over the next two decades. In the new structure, the core *Gemeinschaft* role of Māori was recognised. But at the same time, thanks to post-modernism, ethnicity was becoming a marketable quality, and the proposed new structure was creating more substantial pots of money for Māori and Pacific Island artists working professionally in the market place, both locally and internationally. Ironically, part of the marketable *Gesellschaft* quality of their work was the embedded *Gemeinschaft* relations. A further contradiction was that the post-modern suspicion of community as excluding and oppressive of minorities was suspended when it came to tangatawhenua. In this complex environment, the advocating of the localised, underfunded, multicultural, pre-market activity of community arts with its roots in the counter cultural sixties and left politics, was more of a threat than an opportunity. As well, there was a genuine confusion, for, as both writers said, community arts was alive and well in both Māori and Pacific Island cultures. Accordingly, the report faced hostility from neo-liberalism, suspicion from those operating within a post-modern identity politics framework, and indifference

from Māori and Pacific Islanders. Morrison told me that “we ended up calling it the frog report, because it was green [the cover] and because it quickly croaked in the new environment”. Morrison thinks that the first Chairperson of the new Council, Claudia Scott, who was very powerful and dominant, was partly to blame. She remembers, “the report was presented and nothing happened for there was a rebranding going on”. And then, “a lot of long-standing arts council officers got cleaned out because it was considered they had been captured. They were replaced by generalists. The whole managerial revolution. The trend was so big. There was no understanding”. Morrison had been appointed to the Council, “but it felt like fighting paper tigers”. As well, the focus on biculturalism sabotaged the community arts push. Morrison comments, “It was an impossible environment to get a coherent policy about community”. Philip Clarke remembers chairing the Arts in Community advisory panel:

The panel met and we had a good discussion around the criteria in the programme. Everyone was of one mind and clear about where it might go and we agreed to a process. I wrote it up and got everyone’s approval, and then the document got suppressed inside Creative NZ. I think now I can understand the forces that were arraigned against the community sector. I’m pretty sure it was Cath Robinson who suppressed it. She was the manager of all the programs.

John McDavitt confirms this tendency:

The centre didn’t value community art expertise. There weren’t many applications [to the Community Art fund] for the organisation wasn’t in touch with the sector.

So, while there was, for the first two years of the new Council, a Community Arts goal, alongside Creation, Presentation and Touring, this became absorbed into the

other three goals and then disappeared altogether in funding guides. Instead, a Creative Communities funding scheme was introduced, administered by local authorities and based on 57 cents per head of population. The guide to the scheme states:

The aim of the scheme is to increase participation in the arts at a local level, and increase the range and diversity of arts available to communities, plus enhance and strengthen the local arts sector.

However, “Salaries for ongoing administration and services, administration costs not related to a specific project, and facility development cannot be funded”. Accordingly, the community arts sector was marginalised, in most areas receiving a small pot of money (for example, \$17,100 annually for a city of 30,000) none of which could be used for infrastructural purposes. As we have seen, with Taki Rua being the one exception, some project support could be gained from arts board funding for Community-based theatre, usually for touring a developed show that could be seen to have some resonance as a mainstream product. But overall, there was, under neo-liberalism, a determined culling of infrastructure at the community level.

The climate of managerialism, defined by Denis Saint-Marten as “the set of broadly similar management ideas imported from business administration” with the guiding principles of “pursuit of efficiency, effectiveness, and value for money” (1), also affected the mainstream arts sector in its practice, and this created a broader climate that was hostile to community arts. With new generations of artists and performers being produced by the training schools, competition for government subsidies increased and there was an expectation of an increase in private sponsorship. The art sector was increasingly referred to as an industry, and this produced, for Australian writers, Radbourne and Fraser, an increased need for professionally trained

arts managers. Such people could dialogue easily with other managers, could enable an arts organisation to comply with health and safety and other labour legislation, and they would have the ability to work alongside competitors within the industry in order to achieve industry goals (4-5).

As an industry, the arts sector could justify the need for government subsidy through it being labour intensive and therefore having to bear excessive costs. In return it encouraged tourist expenditure and made available skills and talents to a whole range of activities and promoted national feeling and pride (24-25). When marketing principles were applied to the arts industry, the writers found that, “Most arts organizations tend to be product and sales oriented, focused on satisfying their own needs rather than being market oriented or focused on satisfying the needs of the customer” (48). In other words, painters tend to paint what interests them and then try and sell the painting, rather than paint what the customer wants.

When it came to fundraising, the writers decided that the arts’ *cause* was “to enrich the quality of life through a cultural experience.” But as well, the arts fulfilled the needs of preserving cultural heritage, spiritual development and compassion. But to attract donors these must be translated into benefits and outcomes (65). Any arts organisation must “actively seek corporate sponsorship” and corporations, we learn, “expect their sponsorships to enhance their corporate image or marketing aims”. And, “while the arts aspire to be non-competitive, their mass-marketing manner and the direct association with the world of ideas and creativity provide corporations with unique measurable benefits for entertaining clients and spreading an image” (79-81). The deal then, is with the marketing department, rather than the seeking of a philanthropic donation.

Accordingly, there was, in New Zealand during this period, a considerable increase in these corporate alliances in the mainstream arts sector, with the large corporates such as Telecom, Air NZ and the banks, much sought after. Between 1999 and 2008, this concept of the culture industry, or the creative industries, was pushed by the Labour Government, with Prime Minister, Helen Clark, putting the arts higher on the agenda for key government departments such as Economic Development and Tourism, and including cultural well-being in the goals of local government.

According to ex Arts Minister, Judith Tizard, they encouraged the link between tourism and the arts, setting up a new Ministry of Arts, Culture and Heritage. Regional arts marketing boards were also developed, linking current activities to the region's heritage. She gave me an example:

Ceramics was big in Nelson and they could link it to the traditional ceramics industry in the region. The Wearable Arts could be linked to flax growing and the early cotton mill. Music could be linked to the Cathedral School of Music.

So you could sell the idea right through everything.

And the creative industries could be linked to jobs and exports, the arts used to *brand* the country, with cultural packages prepared for overseas events. Radbourne and Fraser see the trade push being packaged with the arts in order to “deliver maximum impact and media exposure”. They explain that “the arts motivate and capture interest, resulting in tangible economic returns” (248). But it is equally important for towns and regions “to assess their heritage and find the means to present their culture in a memorable and intense fashion” via the museum or festival or other event (254).

City Councils were thus drawn into the creative industry concept. Auckland City Council, for example, produced a policy document in 2007, Blueprint, Growing Auckland's creative industries, which is typical. The authors pick up on the UK

Creative Industries Taskforce definition of the creative industries as being, “those industries that have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, and have the potential for wealth and job creation through generating and exploiting intellectual property” (3). The document identifies six sectors: design; publishing; music; performing arts; visual arts, crafts and photography; and screen production and radio. The creative industries are seen as “key enablers in the wider economy”; “adding value”; “substantial export earners”; and they “make our city a lively, exciting and interesting place in which to live and work”(4). The spin continues, with the document quoting ex Te Papa ¹⁹⁵ CEO, Dame Cheryll Sotheran: “We’ll be globally established as the hot place to visit, to buy from and to get content from”(11). And of course, the success of Weta animation studio in Wellington and its production of the film trilogy, Lord of the Rings, remains the jewel in the local creative industry crown.

In this framework, theatre tended to become the poor cousin, for it is labour intensive, not easily reproduced and generally, word driven. As Baz Kershaw famously stated:

As corporate capitalism spreads across the globe the established estate of theatre is transformed into a playground for the newly privileged, a quick stop-over site on the tourist and heritage map, an emporium in which the culturally curious can sample the latest short-lived life-styles. (“Brecht to Baudrillard” 5)

Mainstream theatre organisers report the constant pull of playwrights, directors and actors into the sexier industries of television and film production. For example, when I interviewed Playmarket’s representative in Auckland, Katrina Chandry, she bemoaned the fact that there was little Māori work happening. Māori practitioners were writing for TV and film and didn’t want to know about theatre.

¹⁹⁵ The National Museum.

But ideological control occurred at a more intimate level during this period, as the management culture extended to the methodology of production. To quote political scientist, J. David Edwards, “The primary value of managerialism is economic efficiency, or the pursuit of maximum outputs with minimum inputs.”¹⁹⁶ And inputs and outputs must be measurable. When applied to theatre, the production company’s output will be measured by the number of measurable products it produces (most commonly, performances) and the number of consumers who purchase those products. The inputs of labour and material and marketing costs can be minimised through mounting small-cast productions with minimalist sets, and in fact, this has become the norm in the mainstream. When Total Quality Management type techniques are also applied, the just in time resource supply necessary to cut costs can extend to labour, so that the neo-liberal theatre seldom employs a company of actors; in fact, can find it more profitable to operate simply as a venue, purchasing performances from groups of performers who self-impose casualised and exploitative labour conditions.

As well, the push towards commodification of the theatre experience leads to the measurement of the event in terms of the pleasure gained by the consumer. Previously, the modernist work, especially the avant-garde modernist work, deliberately challenged the audience, disturbing its comfort as it questioned the social status quo. But in a highly competitive marketplace, audience gratification is required and courtesan theatre becomes the norm, with a dash of post-modern colour – the whores are multicultural.

The creative industry concept, and the associated managerial culture, is antithetical to Community-based theatre. It is unlikely that a corporate will want to

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.utc.edu/Academic/MasterofPublicAdministration/managerialism.htm>

entertain their clients at a prison performance. Or that they would see this as a useful association for their brand. In Community-based theatre the emphasis is on a total process and neither inputs nor outputs are easily measured. Of course, there is an input of professional labour, but how do you measure amateur labour? How do you measure the *creative context*, or the *reciprocal* partnership, or *the additional purpose* or even the *active culture*, which are the outputs (and sometimes the inputs), with there often being a short season of performances for which nothing, or a donation, is charged? How do you measure the outcomes of a Boal type forum? How do you measure the pride of someone who is performing their own story for the community? How do you measure a community celebration?

The above neo-liberal restructuring was heavily influenced by the aesthetic climate of post-modernism with its expulsion of meta narratives and its promotion of diversity. Community arts should have been able to promote itself as a production process that neatly fitted this ideology, and attempts were made to do so. But they failed, partly because of the suspicion of community and collectivism that was part of the post-modern impulse, but even more antagonistic was the fact that post-modernism, as the cultural manifestation of late capitalism, demanded that diversity facilitate a more diverse marketplace. In the words of Alain Badiou:

Capital demands a permanent creation of subjective and territorial identities in order for its principle of movement to homogenize its space of action; identities, moreover, that never demand anything but the right to be exposed in the same way as others to the uniform prerogatives of the market. The capitalist logic of the general equivalent and cultural logic of communities and minorities form an articulated whole. (“St. Paul” 10-11)

Everyone has the right to their story, as long as that story is a commodity in an expanded marketplace.

But by the end of the first decade of the new millenium, there began to be an adjustment within this tendency. Like a great deal of activity spawned by neo-liberalism, there proved to be a more commonplace reality behind the spin and the glamour. A concert in a park remains a concert in a park, whether it be a community art event or a creative industry event; careers in the creative industries remain precarious for the majority of the workforce – a few become millionaires, the rest get by or end up doing something more stable. The sub prime mortgage recession removed much discretionary spending from the economy and milk powder proved more trustworthy as an export driver than fashion. And then socially, crime rates and community fragmentation increased. Suddenly, in 2008, a community criteria reappeared in Creative NZ's funding document:

Community Arts

Creative New Zealand is interested in supporting arts projects that:

- ❖ engage diverse populations, such as youth (under 25), ethnic communities, and communities that are socio-economically disadvantaged,
- ❖ provide a creative focus for communities to explore issues and aspirations
- ❖ create new and diverse artistic work and cultural experiences
- ❖ develop confidence, pride and a sense of belonging in participants
- ❖ provide artists and participants with new career pathways and work opportunities

As well, community becomes one of eight key drivers to all funding, so that centrist bodies, even those receiving recurrent funding, will need to pay some attention to community service, probably through outreach type programmes.¹⁹⁷ I asked John McDavitt what had brought about this change and he told me that Creative NZ

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.creativenz.govt.nz>, 10/12/12.

officers had kept receiving project applications which they couldn't get through because there were no suitable criteria. But I suspect as well, international examples, such as the broader social democratic role played by the Arts Council of England, had begun to impact. Creative NZ CEO, Elizabeth Kerr, after a visit there in 2005, wrote, somewhat apologetically:

The Arts Council of England goes much further than we do in acknowledging and supporting what they refer to as the 'instrumental' role of the arts. They believe in the transforming power of the arts in areas such as health, youth justice, regeneration of urban areas and education.

She tries to justify New Zealand's tardiness, by writing: "Our resource constraints have meant a focus on support for the arts 'for their own sake'..." (1).

I can only reflect, while dealing more fully with this situation in the final chapter, how destructive this cycle of capitalism has been. In this instance, the material contained in the 1994 report which was 'lobotomised', and a destroyed movement which had built at least some infrastructure, will need to be recovered and reinstated in the new contexts.

Finally, I need to note that through this period, as in other areas, the rich got richer. When I analyse typical figures (CNZ 2005-2006 financial year), the mainstream arts sector now received \$23 million subsidy, the community sector, \$2.3 million. When compared with the 1993 figures, there had therefore been a doubling of money to the mainstream arts, while the Community Art sector funding had remained static.

Before concluding this chapter, I need to note that perhaps even more insidiously, the neo-liberal managerial climate has affected theatre training. This is

best studied by turning to the formation of a drama curriculum in New Zealand secondary schools, where young peoples' ideas of theatre are laid down. Once again, this is an underwritten area, so has to be undertaken anecdotally and from personal experience.

Susan Battye has worked in drama in the secondary school setting since the 1970s. She first taught at Greymouth High School where she was given free reign to develop a piece of Community-based theatre based on the Brunner Coal Mine Disaster. She then studied under the iconic figure, Dorothy Heathcote at Newcastle University in the UK, before moving to Epsom Girls Grammar as Head of Drama. In the 1980s, with ex Downstage director, Sunny Amey, as drama curriculum officer for the Department of Education, the New Zealand Association of Drama in Education (NZADIE) was formed and Battye remembers that people started talking about writing a curriculum.

We talked Sunny into agreeing to start work on a sixth form certificate. I helped write that. Plus Jenny Watman. People came from a variety of backgrounds in terms of training. Christchurch was big on theatre arts. Up here we were interested in social aspects. So there was a three pronged statement: drama as self expression; theatre arts; and drama as a means of learning. The course outline allowed people to do all these areas.

It was then, sensibly, a document that broadly defined possible 'inputs' and left it to the teacher to produce some of these inputs according to the teacher's strengths and interests, in negotiation with a group of students. 'Outcomes' would be measured in terms of the students' commitment and their work within the terms set. From this sixth form certificate, which worked well, Battye remembers a curriculum document for drama across the board being finished in the 1990s, in which the subject was once

again, generally conceived. At each level, students would be: Learning the Languages of Drama, Developing Ideas in Drama, Communicating and Interpreting Meaning in Drama, and Understanding Drama in Context. Most drama activity could be interpreted as meeting one or more of these curriculum definitions.

But then managerialism arrived, with its emphasis on outcomes, that is, what a student learns is the important thing, rather than what they are taught. The first system to embody the ideology was called Unit Standards, introduced in the early 1990s and it was then followed by the introduction in 2002 of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). In both these systems, measurement of outcomes was closely defined. A subject had to be deconstructed into elements to be learnt (outcomes) and from these elements, units built through which the learning of these elements could be assessed across schools. In drama, these elements were a remarkable hodge podge: Languages of drama, Elements, Structures, Techniques, Conventions of drama, Dramatic Space, Dramatic context, Technologies, Dramatic forms and styles, Ideas in drama, Roles, Dramatic works, Meaning in drama, Structured presentations, Functions of drama, Dramatic traditions, Communities and Cultures were all mentioned. And attempts to define these more closely produced greater confusion. Elements of drama were: the components of drama – role and situation, time, place, mood, symbol, tension, focus of attention, contrast (movement and stillness, light and dark, sound and silence). These turned into *Drama techniques*, which to quote from a current unit of learning, may be shown through such things as:

- voice – using appropriate pace, pausing, projection, volume, pitch
- body – using posture, gesture, body-awareness, eye-contact
- movement – showing timing, direction, energy
- space – choosing levels and groupings.¹⁹⁸

Assessment was no longer simple and there could be no room for subjectivity. The assessor could no longer know what was good (based on her experience), she had to know how she knew what the student knew, and someone else could ask, How do I know that you know what the student knows? In Battye's words:

It became clear that what was going on was a carving up, a pixellation of the whole thing. I could never get my head around the fact that students could get assessed in terms of conventions but you weren't supposed to be looking at their acting. They could show you that they know how to do some melodramatic pose and that meant they understood a convention. It was a nonsense and still is.

The result, from my own experience in teaching the curriculum, is the encouraging of a self conscious, 'acting in the mirror' phenomenon and an accompanying narcissism, and even more seriously, a missing of opportunity. A teacher can manipulate the curriculum situation. For example, I could loosely use a unit called: Demonstrate knowledge of a drama/theatre form, to produce with the students a forum theatre piece based on teenage pregnancy, which could then have easily toured every secondary school and tertiary provider in the region, providing the students with a significant learning experience. But once the unit is assessed, the students have no desire to continue. It has been achieved. And the whole learning climate is governed by this "pixillation".

Susan Battye remembers devising with her class at Epsom a piece based on

the experiences of the refugee parents of a Chilean student. They ended up involving the Latin American community, who were split “between the lefties and the middle class”, for some were Pinochet escapees, others were free market, investor types. But when the students performed the piece, the lefties chanted protest slogans along with the actors. In Battye’s words, “The kids suddenly realised this was real”. But, “the direction it’s going in, it’s harder and harder to do that stuff. NCEA is like a juggernaut. They can’t stop the bus now they’re on it”.

But, according to Battye, there is some hope. Good teachers can learn over time to manipulate the system for saner purposes. There has been an influx of UK drama teachers and “some very good young people coming through, people who have trained at Toi Whakaari, the national drama school [which wisely avoided becoming entangled in the new learning model], and who have chosen to become teachers”.

In summary, the shifts in funding provision and the subsequent impacts on the arts sector were heavily influenced by the ideological climate of neo-liberalism. These were similarly experienced in like nations such as the UK and Australia, but were more severe in New Zealand, matching the more severe application of the ideology. Now there is a move back toward the centre, driven by unseen forces. Community-based theatre survived. Drama training in schools survives. Theatre is based on people and people continue to make choices. But currently, as I complete the writing of this thesis, a move back to purist neo-liberal economic policies is being heralded, which is sure to impact on the cultural sector. The question to be asked in the final chapter

¹⁹⁸ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/search.do?query=drama&view=achievements&level=01>, Unit 90006.

becomes then, Is this mode of stressful survival, this constant oscillation between centre left and centre right, good enough, or sustainable?

Chapter Five

Facing the future

The place of Community-based theatre in the period of transition

“We, who nourish the hurt with the bitter bread of hope” (Marcos 91).

The story telling circle that has comprised this thesis has revealed that since the 1930s, Community-based theatre as a production process has been a major tendency within New Zealand theatre. When seamlessly merging with a collective devising process with a campaigning or documentary or group expressionist purpose, this tendency has sometimes challenged mainstream, playwright driven theatre for allegiance and importance. From the 1960s, the practitioners were influenced by the counter-cultural movement with its mix of left politics, avant-garde challenging of mainstream society and its positing of community as a primary value. Māori and Pacific Island practitioners were influenced both by the community base of their culture and by this alternative movement. Generally, the interest in Community-based theatre has come from practitioners who grew up in working class families, which resulted in their experiencing a discomfort in mainstream theatre with its predominantly middle class clientele. A subsequent generation of practitioners were influenced by a human rights, politics of identity framework, combined with a continuing seeking of a wider expressionist agenda for the actor. This provided a technical vocabulary for specialist practices with youth or different ability groups outside the dialogue-focused theatre of the mainstream.

The state patronage necessary for any professional theatre to be sustainable has been grudging when it comes to supporting the Community-based tendency, instead, devoting most of its available funds to mainstream, writer-based, theatre

companies. While there was a more benign and democratic patronage structure in the 1970s and 1980s, the neo-liberal revolution removed that structure and, as well, increased the commodification of the production process, embedding the arts more thoroughly into the market. This was offset by the neo-liberal regime giving the community sector an official role to play in service provision. While the mainstream theatre became increasingly market oriented, Community-based theatre could piggy back on to community-based service providers, with the accompanying danger of the theatre worker becoming institutionalised, a part of an NGO bureaucracy. But currently, there is a move by the state patron to reintroduce Community-based art processes into its funding criteria.

After this brief summary, I return to the question with which I ended the previous chapter. Is this stressful survival, this ebb and flow within the democratic neo-liberal structure, from centre left to centre right, all we can hope for, especially given the warnings of crisis that are daily evident. Dawn Hillier, in her study of midwifery practice, Childbirth in the Global Village, writes:

We are experiencing accelerating social and environmental disintegration in nearly every country in the world, as manifested by increases in poverty, unemployment, inequality, violent crime, failing families, and environmental degradation. The continued drive for economic growth as the organising principle of public policy is accelerating the breakdown of the ecosystem's regenerative capacities. Moreover, the social fabric that sustains human community is under threat. (9)

She finds that:

Those who bear the costs of the system's dysfunction have been stripped of decision-making power and are held in a state of confusion regarding the

cause of their distress by corporate-dominated media that incessantly bombards them with interpretations of the resulting crisis based on the perceptions of the power holders. (10)

What is the position of the new generation of young people who inherit this crisis?

When I spoke to Annie Ruth, Director of Toi Whakaari, she told me that:

The new students coming in are a bit like us. There is more social awareness. The world is more volatile and questions are bubbling up. I find it very refreshing. They're very idealistic, some of them. The environment issue has been consistently there, but now I see a conscience regarding people.

Promising. But, if we are in crisis, are the theoretical frameworks that I have so far used, sufficiently robust to examine that crisis and the role that Community-based theatre might play, and to frame the knowledge that we need to pass on to a new generation? These are the issues I begin to explore in this final chapter.

Raymond Williams, in a prophetic essay written in 1979, sketched the nature of the crisis. He wrote of "a widespread loss of the future" ("Modern Tragedy" 208). Whereas, in the sixties there had been an optimistic mood of managed change, "the dominant messages from the centres are now again of danger and conflict, with accompanying calculations of temporary advantage or containment but also with deeper rhythms of shock and loss" (208). When such rhythms are felt, Williams writes, "They can be traced, with some accuracy, to a dying social order and a dying class". He speaks of a new authoritarianism which has surfaced, of legitimated violence from those in power, of nostalgic yearning for past social orders. And when a social order is dying, he writes, it grieves for itself, and unexpectedly, even those who were opposed to that order, are caught up in that grieving process, finding themselves connected to it at a deep level. Accompanying this is a culture of degradation, of conscious insult and

diversion, “a hurt so deep it requires new hurting”, “a conscious killing of hope”, and a “negative collectivity” (213-214). Faced with this deadlock, this loss of future, “there is need for theoretical analysis of the most general kind, and by many kinds of specific analysis and action” (219).

To meet this demand for analysis, it is necessary to turn to the work of Theodor Adorno, who first analysed the penetration at a deep level of exchange values into the production of culture. His analysis has, in turn, led to further responses as the phenomenon has increased in intensity. For Adorno, when cultural production becomes an integrated component of the capitalist economy there is a radical shift of purpose:

Culture is no longer the repository of a reflective comprehension of the present in terms of a redeemed future; the culture industry forsakes the promise of happiness in the name of the degraded utopia of the present.(8)

This phenomenon is embodied in every soap opera. Adorno further proposes that this shift takes place through a false conflating of the general and the particular within the culture industry product. For example, its celebrities are unique, yet every celebrity is the same. For Adorno, while modernist art was based on class oppression, it nevertheless critiqued society, but, with the arrival of the culture industries, that “power of refusal” has been lost. There is a replacement of “the reasoning subject” by “instrumental rationality” (9), the sort of managerial ‘logic’ that we have seen in action above.

As well, the culture industry organises free time, “the remnant domain of freedom under capital, in accordance with the same principles of exchange and equivalence that reign in the sphere of production outside leisure” (3). The working class is, accordingly, fully colonised by capitalist relations. As well, for Adorno, the

culture industry produces a narcissistic psychology within the consumer, a psychology characteristic of fascism. He concludes his study with the chilling pronouncement that fascism, rather than socialism represents the realization of Western rationality (3).

But Adorno was writing in the infancy of the culture industries. Since then, they have developed exponentially, aided by the rapid development of the techno sciences and their products (computers, cell phones, DVDs, iPods and so on). Frenchman, Guy Debord, analysed the resulting “Society of the Spectacle”, the *spectacle* being “capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image” (24). Here, “the commodity contemplates itself in a world of its own making” (34). For Williams, art was something essentially useless, outside the production of food or shelter, but now, in Debord’s view, the spectacle is at the very heart of society’s production of unreality.

In all its specific manifestations – news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment – the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life. It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice. (13)

Debord explains the passivity, the negative collectivity that Williams identified as characteristic, for the spectacle is essentially tautological. “It is the sun that never sets on the empire of modern passivity”(15). The spectacle is everywhere and the spectator is trapped in passive contemplation of his own non-being:

The more he contemplates the less he lives; the more readily he recognises his own needs in the images of need proposed by the dominant system, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires. The spectacle’s externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual’s own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone

else who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere. (23)

This image of a society trapped in front of Sky TV and bombarded by advertising and spectacles, in turn leads to an everyday life characterised by “a breakdown in the faculty of encounter, and the replacement of that faculty by a *social hallucination*: a false consciousness of encounter, or an “illusion of encounter” (152). From this, flows the dysfunction with which those working in the professions of teaching, health, social work and the like, are daily faced.

Debord’s work was followed by Guattari and Deleuze’s proposition in their seminal work, Anti-Oedipus, that schizophrenia with its random flows of fragmented free association has become the psycho-analytic framework of late capitalism, making Oedipal complex generated ethical resistance, useless. From this Baudrillard investigated the effects of digitalisation and the technoscience ability to image the image, leading to the disappearance of the signifier until all that is left is signification. This leads to a loss of the traditional sources of identity:

We no longer have the time to seek out an identity in the historical record, in memory, in a past, nor indeed in a project or a future. We have to have an instant memory which we can plug into immediately – a kind of promotional identity which can be verified at every moment. (11)

Alienation takes on a new and totalising character:

... the worst alienation is not being dispossessed *by* the other, but being dispossessed *of* the other, and so continually thrown back on oneself and one’s own image. If, today, we are condemned to our image (to cultivate our bodies, our ‘looks’, our identities, our desires), this is not because of alienation, but

because of the end of alienation and the virtual disappearance of the other, which is a much worse fate. (55)

Narcissism becomes a virus, like AIDS, and terrorism and economic crisis. These are not, “mere episodic events in an irrational world. They embody the entire logic of our system, and are merely, so to speak, the points at which that logic crystallizes spectacularly. Their power is a power of irradiation and their effect, through the media, within the imagination, is itself a viral one”(6).

This line of analysis, this story, couched in prophetic language, is not widely known in this country. Indeed, it is a story of which, before writing this thesis, I was unaware. In this story, the individual subject is more and more powerless, in the face of a totalising, indifferent and essentially psychotic system. Like Williams, these writers see us existing in an increasingly fragile holding pattern in this period of decadence. And forces of resistance are inchoate and marginal.

But is there a story which breaks through this hopelessness, without simply ignoring the above analysis in some simplistic act of faith? Is there a story which restores a knowable future? And if so, does Community-based theatre have a role to play? It is clear that such a story will involve a new and unfamiliar theoretical framework, rather than simply be a reworking of the old, and it would be logical that it is a framework that is being at least felt, at some sub textural level, by a new generation of young people.

When I interviewed two young people who had been drawn to work in Community-based theatre, I was struck by the lack of a traditional political framework behind that choice. Kim Watman, who has worked with Tony McCaffrey, for example, told me, “I wasn’t all that interested in the fame and glory and the more superficial side of theatre”. Instead:

I wanted to do it more for the heart. The feeling that something's worthwhile. You get a lot of joy from it. I'm not very political. I go more with the people. The disabled – they've got this relentless love and energy for things they go into. You can get addicted to that. We were bringing these communities of people together that we'd assumed knew each other. But we realised they didn't.

There is a rejection of commodity theatre and instead, a choice based on something that could almost be called love. But as well, there is an energy which attracts, and the bringing together of community. When I questioned her further as to what her politics might be, she replied, "I don't know. Society needs a kick up the bum. So many closed minds. People stay in their holes". This is close to a sixties rejection of 'uptightness'.

Vanessa McDonald, a Whitireia Performing Arts student, had decided to do her placement with Te Rakau. For Vanessa,

Community theatre has more substance. Like, it's a better vibe for me. The normal [theatre] industry doesn't have an impact on the sort of people I'm interested in. I like mixing with people from different cultures and backgrounds. I think places like this are more about what life is actually like.

For Vanessa, as well, love is an important value:

A lot of people my age are lost. I believe that if you find something you love doing, everything else falls into place. It reflects out of you.

When I asked her about the future, she told me:

I don't think about it much. It looks kind of bleak. That's really sad. I wonder how many people are generally happy in their lives and that worries me. I

don't like the way most people view the world. I just feel like lots of people are just so caught up in little things that don't matter.

What is coming across here is an instinctual grappling with feeling, for love of the other, the different, the vulnerable; a need to belong and a rejection of the superficiality of commodity culture. It is a complex of feelings which could lead to a charismatic religion. But there are a group of post-marxists who are, in my opinion, more usefully speaking to the nascent ideology of this generation.

They base their work on the difficult but ground-breaking thought of French mathematician and philosopher, Alain Badiou, who used mathematical set theory to restore classical Marxism's concept of praxis as being born from within real economic and social situations. Set theory describes "an inconsistent multiplicity which enacts what it speaks of" ("Being and Event" xxiv). So:

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If these sets are pushed together, where the sets overlap is a site of complexity. At one of these sites, particularly if a situation of excess and scarcity simultaneously exists, an *event* might occur. Someone may intervene and name that event, a series of enquiries may develop, and finally, at a global level, these enquiries may become generic. The current climate change campaign(s) is a good example of this model. This concept subtracts praxis from any form of the One; and this is where traditional Marxism is structurally reformed, as Badiou rejects the One of historical determinism (that the working class will take over the means of production), the One of redemptionism (the coming of a classless society) and the One of a privileged and

necessary agent (the proletariat as the subject of history). Accordingly, truth procedures may take any number of historical forms; they do not possess a single goal, and any subject may carry out the enquiry. But an eventual site is a *local* site, a subject is manifested *locally*, and the enquiry is carried out by those *locally* engaged (xxiv-xxx). It requires no great stretch of the imagination to see the methodology of Community-based theatre as fitting this model. It is an event that can take place at any number of sites, a subject is manifested locally, and the enquiry is carried out by those locally engaged.

Following Badiou, the Italian activist philosopher, Antonio Negri, sees the Empire of late capitalism as constituting the One, against which the multiplicities are waging the struggle. Through the insertion of exchange values into every area of life, the Empire now owns everything. The battle is for the multitude to reclaim the Common from the empire. By the Common, he means:

The network, the series of material goods that enables us to reproduce ourselves and to produce; to move; the series of things that makes us able to build language; the whole series of exchange instruments... (“Goodbye Mr Socialism” 138)

For Negri, “The giant can be stopped if everyone pulls their rope, even independently of the others”. For facing the Empire is Negri’s “multitude”, bound by *solidarity*, which he defines, interestingly, as “the articulation of subjectivity within the Common”. This is a new egalitarianism, which is not “a machine for the flattening of difference. On the contrary it is open to singularities that live and produce within this Common network” (28).

This vision embraces community and he uses the ethnically based Zapatista struggle in Southern Mexico, the chief spokesperson for whom’s words front each

chapter of this thesis, to illustrate what he means by the term. In Negri's view, the Zapatista wish to reconstruct, or better, to "reinvent" community, as a development of liberation, by taking production back to the community "as process". The community is not One, but "a dynamic totality of singularities, experiences and processes" (78-79). There is a theological resonance, which I believe, reflects Vanessa and Kim's motivation.

In so far as man is poor, he demands love, he can't be born without love, without love he cannot grow and develop himself, and only insofar as he is a bearer of poverty does he love and is loved and it is from this perspective that he manages to construct real community. (82)

At this stage of history the multitude does not have direct political expression, but uses trade unionism, as well as other public or democratic collective structures in order to organize. Finally, for Negri, the life of the multitude is precarious, whether they be migrant labourers or intellectuals. Secure jobs have disappeared for most workers. This leads to a demand for a citizen's wage (in New Zealand called a Universal Benefit). It is, once again, a simple enough assertion that Community-based theatre is centred on the Common, with the multitude as its subject and that it reflects a community as "a dynamic totality of singularities"; whereas commodity theatre belongs to the Empire.

From this school arises also the concept of political theology, which takes us to the heart of community. The concept is based on exploration of the Pauline command to love one's neighbour as oneself. Kenneth Reinhardt writes that, for Badiou, in set theory, "the process of a truth is the elaboration of a subset of elements that remain faithful to the event and testify to its truth." (Zizek et al. "Neighbours" 63). Transposing this to the concept of neighbourhood, he argued that to assert that

two elements are in the same neighbourhood is to make a decision, one that involves work, to construct a common open area. We can, according to Badiou, choose either to “point to our objective differences, the things that separate us from the world, the differences that wall off an inside from an outside, or we can expose ourselves to the world”. Love then, “is the decision to create a new open set, to knot two interiorities into a new logic of world, a new neighbourhood” (66-67). But this work of neighbourliness, which is at the heart of the Community-based theatre process, does require processes of self, which enable difference to be safely negotiated. It is here that the subtle and not so subtle manipulations of late capitalism must be confronted. Eric Santner, in his essay, Miracles Happen, in the same volume, writes that:

Badiou sees the tendency toward ever more subtle modes of identifying individuals and groups – a tendency often linked with grievances and claims to victim status (black, lesbian, single-parent, etc.) – in much the same way that Michel Foucault understood the proliferation of sexualities: as an expansion of the field by which power is able to invest human life with certain kinds of meaning, knowledge, and value. The “deterritorialization” of populations into diverse minority identities is seen here as the means by which capital spreads its logic of general equivalence throughout the globe, configuring the world precisely as world-market... (10-11)

But as well, Santner sees a deep problematic in conceiving of identity. We are *thrown* into the world, do not choose our language, society, class, gender and so on. But even more importantly, the social formation in which we find ourselves immersed, is itself, *haunted by a lack*, to which we are in some fashion answerable (86-87). This phenomenon is, of course, exacerbated by globalisation and the mobility of people.

As I have previously noted, it is here, that there is for me, a technical place in Community-based theatre for Grotowski's para-theatrical experiments based on identity, in particular exercises such as creating a Song of Self and an Ethnodrama, exercises which I have found useful for both myself and students with multiple identities, and which lead effectively to a 'prayer of self'.¹⁹⁹ This work addresses, in freedom, current existential anxiety.

Finally, in this school of post-marxists, there is a blessing of the monastic stance of the Community-based theatre worker. Slavoj Zizek, in his essay, Neighbours and Other Monsters, comments that the 1960s mottoes of spontaneity, creative self-expression and so on, have been taken over by the System. Now, they all directly serve the System (Zizek et al. "Neighbours" 134). He quotes Badiou's statement on the same theme:

Since it is sure of its ability to control the entire domain of the visible and the audible via the laws governing commercial circulation and democratic communication, Empire no longer censors anything. All art, and all thought, is ruined when we accept this permission to consume, to communicate and to enjoy. We should become pitiless censors of ourselves.²⁰⁰

For both writers, 'pitiless self-censorship' is required for emancipatory politics. Such a concept is a useful touchstone for the Community-based theatre practitioner, for the lure and the allure of the System is ever present.

As a final affirmation of the place of Community-based theatre in the current milieu the American philosopher, Fredric Jameson, in conversation with Anders Stephanson, stated:

¹⁹⁹ For a description of this work, see Lisa Wolford, Subjective Reflections on Objective Work, Grotowski in Irvine. (The Drama Review 35, no 1 (T129), Spring 1991).

I always insist on a third possibility beyond the old bourgeois ego and the schizophrenic subject of our organization society today: a *collective subject*, decentred but not schizophrenic. It emerges in certain forms of storytelling that can be found in third world literature, in testimonial literature, in gossip and rumours, and in things of this kind. It is a story telling which is neither personal in the modernist sense, nor depersonalized in the pathological sense of the schizophrenic text. It is decentred, since the stories you tell there as an individual subject don't belong to you; you don't control them the way the master subject of modernism would. But you don't just suffer them in the schizophrenic isolation of the first world subject of today. (Ross ed. "Universal Abandon" 21)

This is the stuff of Community-based theatre.

The question remains, of how to offer this theoretical framework to the workers and to those potential workers, to make conscious what have been and what will be, experiential choices, in a time of both crisis and transition? For Negri we are crossing a marsh, or a river. We are in a type of interepoch or interregnum from every point of view ("Goodbye Mr Socialism" 101). How far this marsh stretches and how long it will take to cross I do not know.

All I can do, at this twilight of my own career, is to offer these stories to those who have been, to those who are, and to those who will come, in good faith, and with an ironical smile of neighbourly hope.

²⁰⁰ Alain Badiou: Fifteen theses on Contemporary Art, Lacanian Ink 23 (Spring 2004): pp 10-119.

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