

# The Applied Theatre Reader

*The Applied Theatre Reader* is the first book to bring together new case studies of practice by leading practitioners and academics in the field and beyond, with classic source texts from writers such as Noam Chomsky, bell hooks, Mikhail Bakhtin, Augusto Boal and Chantal Mouffe.

This new edition brings the field fully up to date with the breadth of applied theatre practice in the twenty-first century, adding essays on playback theatre, digital technology, work with indigenous practitioners, inter-generational practice, school projects and contributors from South America, Australia and New Zealand. *The Reader* divides the field into key themes, inviting critical interrogation of issues in applied theatre whilst also acknowledging the multi-disciplinary nature of its subject, crossing fields like theatre in educational settings, prison theatre, community performance, theatre in conflict resolution, interventionist theatre and theatre for development.

A new lexicon of Applied Theatre and further reading for every part will equip readers with the ideal tools for studying this broad and varied field. This collection of critical thought and practice is essential to those studying or participating in the performing arts as a means for positive change.

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# The Applied Theatre Reader

*Second Edition*

Edited by Tim Prentki and Nicola Abraham

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and attending conferences. Ahmed is also known as a director and scenographer in theatre, with numerous production credits at home as well as in India, Pakistan, and the US. His signature brio has evolved from a refashioning of traditional-Bengali theatrical vocabulary and indigenous archetypes for modern theatre to a comingling of the visual-metaphoric with the multilinear narratorial techniques, giving shape to a unique post-dramatic inscription.

### **Almarza, Cristian**

Cristian Almarza is the founder and CEO of Educaswitch.com. He has also taught on the 'Applied Theater' diploma course at the Catholic University of Chile and the 'Educational Theater' MA at New York University. He has previously worked as a drama teacher and artistic director at 'Cypress Schools' in London, England. He was the co-founder of 'Crossroads', a project dedicated to uniting young people from communities in conflict in Cyprus. Cristian has experience working as a facilitator supporting the rehabilitation process in prisons in both England and Chile. Cristian has an MA in 'Applied Theatre in Education and Communities' from Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, England, a Diploma in Psychology 'Pedagogy of Coexistence and Development of Socio-Emotional and Ethical Competencies' at the Catholic University of Chile and a BA in Acting from the Catholic University of Chile.

### **Balfour, Michael**

Michael Balfour is Head of School and Professor of Theatre and Performance in the School of the Arts and Media at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Michael's research explores applied theatre and performance work in a range of social contexts. He is currently lead investigator on Future Stories, which explores the social benefits of co-designing virtual reality (VR) experiences with children in hospital. Michael has authored or edited eight books and over fifty book chapters and academic journal articles. His most recent publications include *Performing Arts in Prisons: Creative Perspectives* (Intellect, 2019) and *Applied Theatre: Understanding Change* (Springer, 2018) with Kelly Freebody, Michael Anderson and Michael Finneran. He is the series editor of the Bloomsbury Methuen applied theatre book series that brings together leading international scholars to engage with and advance key themes in the field of applied theatre.

### **Bester, Gerard**

Gerard Bester was born in Hillbrow (1966), and returned to the area while studying at the Wits School of the Arts. Throughout his career, Bester has danced for Robyn Orlin, PJ Sabbagha and Jean-Paul Delore and collaborated with the likes of Tony Miyambo, Nhlanhla Mahlangu, Luyanda Sidiya and Sue Pam-Grant. Bester explores the post-modern, anti-hero, and naïve clown in his practice. As an arts administrator he has worked for Soweto Youth Drama Society, Moving into Dance, Dance Umbrella, Johannesburg and the Volkswagen MusicActive Programme. He is presently manager of the Outreach Foundation Performing Arts Programme, through which he inspires inner-city children and youth to engage with the world in new and exciting ways.

### **Black Friars**

The Black Friars Theatre Company are a family of Polynesian creative artists based in South Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. They are working to change the world by fostering performance places and practices that honour the Pacific principles of

Teu Le Vā/Tauhi Vā and re-storying Pasifika peoples in the largest Polynesian city in the world. Some of their work is with young people, where they hold space for the telling of indigenous stories of what it might mean to reach back and pull forward, to honour our ancestors, to elevate our traditional literacies, to grow our future leaders and to encourage our young people to walk tall in both of their worlds. They are educators and counsellors, facilitators and enablers, theatre-makers and storytellers. Embracing these multiple identities constitutes the fabric of the company. They are proud to be pan-Polynesian, poly-vocal performers invested in the construction of identity for Pasifika people.

### **Breed, Ananda**

Ananda Breed is Professor in Theatre at the University of Lincoln. She is the author of *Performing the Nation: Genocide, Justice, Reconciliation* (Seagull Books, 2014) and co-editor with Tim Prentki of *Performance & Civic Engagement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) in addition to several publications that address transitional systems of governance and the arts. She has worked as a consultant for IREX and UNICEF in Kyrgyzstan on issues concerning conflict prevention and conducted applied arts workshops in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Palestine, Rwanda and Turkey. Prior to this, she was the co-director of the Centre for Performing Arts Development (CPAD) at the University of East London (2014–2017) and former research fellow at the International Research Centre Interweaving Performance Cultures at Freie University (2013–2014). She is Principal Investigator of AHRC GCRF Network Plus project Mobile Arts for Peace: Informing the National Curriculum and Youth Policy for Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Indonesia and Nepal (2020–2024), Principal Investigator of AHRC project Ubwuzu: Shaping the Rwandan National Curriculum through Arts and Co-Investigator of AHRC GCRF Network Plus project Changing the Story (2017–2021).

### **Burns, Brendon**

Brendon Burns is an experienced director and facilitator who has led major participatory and educational theatre projects in the UK, Europe and West Africa. He is currently Head of Applied Theatre and Community Drama at The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts. Previous posts include artistic director of Solent Peoples Theatre, Indefinite Article and First Draft Theatre and associate director posts at Proteus Theatre and The Haymarket, Basingstoke. As a playwright, he has written numerous original plays and adaptations, including the first conventional theatre adaptations of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and John Boyne's *Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. He trained as an actor at the Arts Educational School, London and later completed postgraduate research degrees in Theatre in Education at the University of Middlesex and in Rhetoric at Royal Holloway, University of London.

### **Cohen Cruz, Jan**

Jan Cohen Cruz (PhD, New York University, Performance Studies) wrote *Local Acts* (Rutgers University Press, 2005), *Engaging Performance* (Routledge, 2010) and *Remapping Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), edited *Radical Street Performance* (Routledge, 1998) and, with Mady Schutzman, co-edited *Playing Boal* (Routledge, 1994) and *A Boal Companion* (Routledge, 2006). She was most recently Director of Field Research for A Blade of Grass, an organisation that supports socially engaged

artists, and co-founder of its magazine. From 2007 to 2012, she directed *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, a consortium of colleges and universities committed to civic engagement, and co-founded its journal, *Public*. A long-time professor at NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Cohen Cruz initiated its minor in applied theatre. She received the Association for Theatre in Higher Education's Award for Leadership in Community-Based Theatre and Civic Engagement (2012). She was evaluator for the US State Department/Bronx Museum cultural diplomacy initiative smARTpower as well as for seven initiatives of the City of New York's Public Artists in Residence (PAIR) project. With Pam Korza, she researched and wrote a field guide for artist–municipal agency partnerships. She continues to teach at NYU and CUNY and to write. She is a partner in a family business that operates a food truck in rural Pennsylvania.

### **Conroy, Colette**

Dr Colette Conroy is Director of the Institute of Arts, University of Cumbria, UK. She has a background in theatre making, including time spent as Associate Director of Graeae Theatre Company, Europe's foremost professional theatre company of disabled people. Her contribution to applied theatre and performance studies includes current service as joint editor of the international refereed journal, *RiDE: the Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* (Routledge). Colette has published widely on the connections between politics, bodies and performance. She is currently exploring ideas about political recognition and the cultural industries in the UK.

### **Dennison, Kurtis**

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Dr Sarah Jane Dickenson is a playwright researcher and Head of Department of English, Creative Writing and American Studies at the University of Hull. Her work has been produced in a variety of settings, from theatres and community centres to rugby clubs, schools and prisons, working extensively with large and small casts in participatory and community settings. She specialises in working collaboratively with arts organisations, NPO's, NGO's and regional councils and government to develop creative community projects. Her latest plays to go into print are *REF!*, *CBA* and *That Berlin Moment*, all published by Barbican Press.

### **Dunn, Julie**

Professor Julie Dunn is a member of the Griffith Institute for Educational Research and an academic within Griffith's School of Education and Professional Studies. Julie's research is focused on the application of improvised and playful forms of drama within

school and community settings. She has been a co-investigator on a number of large-scale applied theatre and arts education projects including: *Playful Engagement* – a project focused on quality of life for people living with dementia; *Refugee Resettlement* – a body of research aimed at supporting the resettlement process for young people newly arrived to Logan City, Australia; and *Y Connect* – a three year artist/teacher partnership project aimed at enhancing the learning, pathway perceptions and sense of belonging of young secondary students in a culturally diverse school. Julie is also passionate about drama and play for children in the early years, with many of her publications being in this area.

### **Fox, Jonathan**

Jonathan Fox is the co-founder of Playback Theatre and was artistic director of the original Playback Theatre Company from its inception in 1975. From 1993 until 2010 he was director of the Centre for Playback Theatre in New York. He earned a BA from Harvard University in English, where he studied the oral tradition under Albert Lord; an MA in political science from Victoria University in New Zealand, where he was awarded a Fulbright scholarship; and in 2008 a D. Phil. h.c. from the University of Kassel in Germany for his artistic and scholarly contribution to theatre. He is also a trainer, educator and practitioner of the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama. He is the author of *Acts of Service: Spontaneity, Commitment, and Tradition in the Nonscripted Theatre* (Tusitala Publishing, 2019) and *Beyond Theatre: A Playback Theatre Memoir* (Tusitala Publishing, 2015), and the editor of *The Essential Moreno: Writings on Spontaneity, Psychodrama and Group Method* (Tusitala Publishing, 2008).

### **Gunn, Ben**

Ben Gunn received his BA and MA in Applied Theatre from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. He has worked on several community-engaged theatre projects with youth, seniors, professional performers and arts/charity organisations across the UK and in Johannesburg, South Africa. His creative interests focus on performance and theatre with, by and for children and intergenerational and community groups. Gunn is currently the Content & Theming Manager at KidZania London, where he is responsible for the creation and supervision of creative and educational role-play based programmes.

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Marina Henriques Coutinho teaches undergraduate and postgraduate courses at the Federal University of State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO). She has a PhD in Performing Arts. In 2007, she received the European Union High Level Scholarship Program for Latin America and attended the Theatre and Media for Social Development course at the University of Winchester, UK (2008). Her doctoral thesis, 'The Favela as a stage and persona', received an Honourable Mention at the 2011 thesis CAPES Award. She has experience in the area of Arts, with emphasis on community theatre, applied theatre, theatre and education. At UNIRIO she coordinates the research project 'Applied Theatre: investigations on an expanding universe' and the 'Theatre in Communities extension program'. She recently conducted postdoctoral research in collaboration with Professor Tim Prentki at the Centre for Performance, Practice and Research, University of Winchester.

**Herrmann, Anna**

Anna Herrmann is Joint Artistic Director of Clean Break. She has been working in the field of theatre and social change for thirty years, specialising in theatre and participation in the UK and abroad. She has been with Clean Break since 2002 as the Head of Education, leading the company's award-winning work with women in the criminal justice system and women at risk of entering it. Anna is co-author of *Making a Leap: Theatre of Empowerment: A Practical Handbook for Creative Drama Work with Young People* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999). She has an MA in Arts Education from Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and a PG Cert (Distinction) in Race and Ethnic Relations. She is a regular visiting lecturer on applied theatre courses at universities across the country and between 2006 and 2018 was a trustee of Leap Confronting Conflict, a UK-based national charity specialising in youth and conflict. Anna is also a trained coach and regularly mentors artists in participatory settings.

**Low, Katharine**

Katharine Low is a practitioner and researcher in socially engaged theatre and sexual health. She is Senior Lecturer in Applied Theatre and Community Performance at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. As a practitioner, Low has developed applied theatre practices as ways of engaging young adults and women living with HIV in discussions around sexual health, in South Africa, Tanzania and the UK. Her practice lies in creating participatory-led theatre and creative arts-based practice with local communities to explore and gain greater understandings of the key health and social concerns facing their communities. She collaborates with medical practitioners and NGOs to co-facilitate projects based around sexual health and other social concerns. Low has co-edited *Applied Theatre: Performing Health and Wellbeing* (Bloomsbury Methuen, 2017) and has completed a monograph examining sexual health and applied theatre practice in South Africa for Palgrave Macmillan. She tweets about arts and health practice at @katlow1.

**Dube, Phana**

Phana Dube was born in Zimbabwe and moved to work in South Africa in 2001. He has worked as a theatre facilitator, director, lighting designer and choreographer for numerous organisations, including the Outreach Foundation Performing Arts Programme (2008–2019), Dance Umbrella (2010) and the MUKA Project (2001–2007). His passion is working with young people, making theatre and performance in different ways and creating spaces for their voices to be heard.

**Mayo, Sue**

Sue Mayo is a theatre maker and researcher, who specialises in community performance practice. She is Director of the MA in Applied Theatre at Goldsmith's, University of London, which investigates and develops participatory, collaborative and socially engaged theatre practice. Mayo is also Associate Artist with Magic Me, a leading intergenerational arts charity, and has developed the practice of intergenerational work both through her own projects and with Magic Me, designing and leading fourteen years of women's projects, mentoring artists, and running training in the UK and internationally. She runs The Gratitude Enquiry, a series of community projects that centre on the practice of reciprocity. Mayo is co-author, with Susan Langford, of *Sharing the Experience*, a handbook of intergenerational arts practice, and contributed to *Performance*

& *Community: Case Studies and Commentary* (2013) and to *The Routledge Companion to Applied Theatre* (2020), both edited by Caoimhe McAvinchey. [www.suemayo.co.uk](http://www.suemayo.co.uk)

### **McAvinchey, Caoimhe**

Caoimhe McAvinchey is Professor of Socially Engaged and Contemporary Performance at Queen Mary University of London. Prior to this, she established the MA Applied Drama: Theatre in Educational, Community and Social Contexts at Goldsmiths. Publications include *Theatre & Prison* (2011); *Performance and Community* (2013); with Fabio Santos and Lucy Morrison, *Phakama: Making Participatory Performance* (2018); and *Applied Theatre: Women and the Criminal Justice System* (2020).

### **McNamara, Catherine**

Catherine McNamara is an academic from a professional background in applied theatre and drama education. She is Head of School (Art, Design and Performance) within the Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries at the University of Portsmouth. She is a co-founder and member of the board for Gendered Intelligence, an organisation that works to improve the lives of trans, non-binary and gender diverse people. McNamara's work has included practice research into the benefits of voice workshops for trans-gender communities, a collaborative play-writing project run in conjunction with Fringe Benefits Theatre Company (Los Angeles, US), which led to a performance and workshop being delivered nationally (2008–2011), INTERarts, an intergenerational arts project with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer identified people and more recently the TransActing project, a collaboration between the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, My Generation and Gendered Intelligence. Recent publications include 'Methods and Approaches for Working with Trans, Non-binary and Gender Diverse Young People in the UK' in *The Handbook of Youth Work Practice* (edited by Pam Alldred, Fiona Cullen et al, London: SAGE, 2018) and 'A Complex Matrix of Identities: Working Intergenerationally with LGBTQ people' in *Minding the Knowledge Gap* (edited by Sue Westwood and Andrew King, London: Routledge, 2018).

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Molly Mullen, PhD, is a senior lecturer in applied theatre with over ten years of experience producing theatre education, youth theatre and community arts projects in the UK and Aotearoa New Zealand. Her research examines the opportunities and constraints experienced by artists and arts organisations as they work towards social change within particular funding and policy contexts. Her book, *Applied Theatre: Economies*, examines the ways socially committed theatre makers fund, finance or otherwise resource their work and, in doing so, negotiate tensions between an economic imperative and their political, aesthetic, pedagogic and ethical values.

### **Norris, Sonia**

Sonia Norris is Assistant Professor in the Department of Theatre at California State University, Northridge and works in theatre, circus, puppetry, mask and clown as a director, deviser, performer and teacher. Her work spans professional and community-based projects with a diversity of international companies, including the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Handspring Puppet Company South Africa, Cirqiniq Arctic Social Circus, Zimbabwe's HIFA Festival, Banff Centre Indigenous Dance and Caravan Farm Theatre. Her work uses physical theatre and humour to engage with the



challenges and discomfort of staying present in our current world. Sonia is a graduate of the Playhouse Acting School and trained in physical theatre at Ecole Jacques Lecoq, Ecole Philippe Gaulier and the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theatre. She received her MFA in Directing from York University and is completing her PhD at the University of Toronto's Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies, examining female clown as a performance of failure/practice of survival. Her research has been published in *Puppetry International* and *Canadian Theatre Review* and forthcoming publications include 'Les Zoubliettes: Raging Through Laughter' in Judith Rudakoff's *Performing #MeToo: How Not To Look Away* and 'Trickster or Trickery?: The Contentious Content of Canadian Clowning' for *Canadian Theatre Review*.

### **Nødtvedt Knudsen, Marianne**

Marianne Nødtvedt Knudsen has an MA in applied drama and theatre from the Western University of Applied Science. She lectures in drama and theatre at the Faculty of Fine Art at the University of Agder and she teaches contemporary theatre and theatre in kindergarten. Knudsen is director of The Theatre Behind Walls and has worked with prisoners for a decade. Her artistic and academic interests are applied theatre/drama/performance, prison theatre, performance, devising, improvisation, drama-pedagogy and interdisciplinary art.

### **Nzahabwanayo, Sylvestre**

Dr Sylvestre Nzahabwanayo is a lecturer at the University of Rwanda, College of Education (UR-CE). He has completed a two-year Postdoctoral Fellowship in Education and Curriculum Studies at the University at Johannesburg, South Africa. He holds a PhD in Education obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand – Wits (Johannesburg) in 2016. His doctoral dissertation reads: 'Citizenship and values education in post-genocide Rwanda: An analysis of the Itorero training scheme for high school leavers'. His research area is political philosophy applied to education, including issues such as citizenship, values, and peace education, with a focus on adolescents in conflict-affected communities. Since 2018 he has served as a senior researcher in the project Mobile Arts for Peace (MAP). Nzahabwanayo is also Director of GCRF Global Engagement Network 'Building Cultures of Peace in Rwandan Schools'.

### **Ong, Adelina**

Adelina Ong completed her PhD at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (London, UK) in August 2018. Her thesis proposed a theory for compassionately negotiated living inspired by parkour, art du déplacement, breakin' (breakdancing) and graffiti. As a Singaporean applied theatre practitioner, she has worked with young people in Singapore (2003 to present) and London (2012 to present). In Singapore, she worked mostly with young people from low-income families, many of whom were struggling with depression and anxiety. Her current research builds on her theory of compassionate mobilities and uses cosplay, street dance and martial arts to initiate conversations about how we might reimagine mental well-being. She also playfully antagonises AI chatbots, in various attempts to teach these AI chatbots about the political, social and cultural dimensions of mental well-being. She has published in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Journal* and *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance (RiDE)* and co-edited a special issue of *RiDE* 'On Access' with Colette Conroy and Dirk Rodricks.

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(2017–2021). Amongst his latest international works are ‘Arts Education and Cultural Democracy: The Competing Discourses’, *International Journal of Education and the Arts* (2017, Volume 18(8) p. 1–17), and ‘Applied Theatre in Times of Terror: Accepting Aesthetic Diversity and Going Beyond Dilemma’, *Applied Theatre Research* (2017, Volume 5(3) p. 169–183).

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**Part I**

PROOF

PROOF



# 1 Applied theatre

## An introduction

*Nicola Abraham*

**AT THE TIME** of writing this chapter, a majority of the world are in lockdown or at least some form of social isolation as a protective measure to reduce the spread of COVID-19, a virus that has caused an international pandemic. It is at this point that our practice will be tested to see how we can adopt new technology-driven approaches to find ways of navigating uncertainty and embracing community through technology available to us. It is not the circumstances we are used to for the delivery of applied theatre projects, nor is it the ideal relationship to hold with vulnerable community groups. Yet, it is also a call to action to support loved ones, to support local communities, to volunteer to deliver food and emotional support to older adults living in isolation and to come together as a community. At 8 p.m. on Thursday 26 March 2020, people across the UK leant out of windows or stood at the end of their driveways and applauded National Health Service (NHS) staff for their bravery, hard work and dedication to tackling COVID-19. The applause connected neighbours and communities with a sense of social solidarity across the nation, following the examples set by Italy, and many other countries throughout the world. It signified a sense of unity and shared experiences in an extraordinary, emotional performance of understanding shared circumstances. This global crisis will undoubtedly change the way that applied theatre practitioners work to overcome the hurdles of physical space to enter virtual worlds of collaboration and community building. However, what is important is the maintenance of the essential foundations that inform the range of methodologies that encapsulate applied theatre practice.

What can be drawn from this moment in time and what is the significance of the #clapforcarers campaign for applied theatre? Firstly, this campaign demonstrates a social drive towards a shared goal, which in this case is the fight to contain, and eradicate, COVID-19, but presents a parallel quality to applied theatre: an intention for social change. This social drive to action is a common feature of applied theatre practice. Tim Prentki and Dave Pammenter (2014) suggest that the 'subversive potential of theatre is located within the dialectical interaction between lived experience and the creative imagination' (2014: 10). In this case the safe and socially distanced connection between people forms a performance of togetherness that may be the starting point for the collective action that Prentki and Pammenter discuss. The creative imagination behind the idea for a nationwide campaign, or the initiative 'to do something', and the shared act of applause, as a creative signifier of support and community, provides an example of a moment of planned performance that created connections and built a following for a particular social issue. This moment may be likened to the routes of applied theatre in the celebratory political theatre work of John Fox, Sue Gill and Welfare State International (founded in 1968). Baz Kershaw and Tony Coult, discussing the work of Welfare State International,

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describe their approach as a means to ‘break down physical and social inhibitions between strangers to create a shared communal experience’ (1983:160). Their large scale public events, often featuring giant models and puppets, music and related festivities, signified a political message. For example, their 1976 community art piece entitled ‘Parliament in Flames’ was ‘performed’ to an audience of 10,000 members of the local community to serve as a political metaphor. Welfare State International innovated in their approach to bringing performance and their extravagant aesthetic to communities outside of conventional theatre spaces, another common theme of applied theatre. There is clearly a strong motivation to reach people who may not conventionally attend theatre performances to bring to life the potential of ritual in theatre to call for communities to participate in immersive festivities. The challenge here may be the resulting action or motivation to turn political critique into resistance beyond the time span of the event itself. We may also see this as a parallel to the #clapforcarers approach wherein the community who took part in the celebratory applause highlighted the importance of the need for social isolation to protect those working in our healthcare services.

It is not just the representation of community voice that shares common ground with applied theatre, but also the importance of inclusion and participation in an event that was created with, for and by the community (Prentki and Preston, 2009:10). This echoes priorities for applied theatre that are arguably unchanged over the past decade. But perhaps the ways in which each approach happens has necessarily shifted and required further thought over time. For example, we may think about the power dynamics at play when a practitioner running a community project or facilitating a piece of interactive theatre (such as Forum Theatre) has the responsibility of enabling the audience to have their say and to honour their suggestions regardless of their own politics. In reality, this sounds rather more utopian than perhaps it is possible to offer. Those who ‘hold a space’ – whether that is a community workshop in a village hall, a devising session in a prison or a campaign for human rights in an indigenous community – need to recognise their own positionality as a representative of a funder or as an outsider traversing culture, language, gender, race, sexuality, and the general lived experience of those they work with. It is imperative that practitioners don’t ignore this hierarchical structure that is in place, whether it is intended or not, and that needs to be navigated with great care and thoughtfulness for those who participate in applied theatre projects. Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton discuss the potential of applied theatre in the offer it makes as a theatrical form presenting opportunities for playing with alternatives:

The liminality (third space) of collective theatremaking presents opportunities to try things out in an existential and metaphoric world that is different because we are making it as it makes us. The ability to pretend as ‘other’ offers multiple openings to try on identities and, perhaps, to shape our becoming in directions we might not have considered.

(2020:11)

The potential to play with alternatives, and offer space for communities to engage with the politics of oppression, is often a central theme within applied theatre projects to varying degrees. Oppression may come in many forms including neo-colonial rhetoric and behaviours that deviously underlay our practice and require practitioners to assert critical self-reflection to avoid re-presenting the very narratives they are trying to deconstruct in their practice. There is also a further contradiction that applied theatre has learnt

to identify and engage with, which is the neoliberal discourses that permeate funding calls, indicators of efficacy for end of project reports, and the use of applied theatre as a corrective approach to challenge *at-risk* behaviours. This approach draws upon and has shifted the original intentions of theatre in education (TIE) companies such as Belgrade Theatre (first venturing into theatre in education in 1965) and later Dorothy Heathcote, Gavin Bolton, Cecily O’Neil and Jonathon Neelands’ approaches to drama in education (DIE) strategies in the 1980s and beyond. Though of course there are remaining similarities at play between current practice and the original methodologies. Trends tend to follow social issues, which in turn relate to funding on offer for third sector companies to develop interventions to address and improve the latest situation under the media microscope whether this is gang violence, knife crime, school exclusions, rehabilitation, bullying or cybercrimes. Belgrade Theatre was influential in the mid-1960s for pioneering theatre in education strategies to take theatre to schools to explore and unpack particular topics. Tony Jackson (2002) describes TIE as ‘a co-ordinated and carefully structured pattern of activities, usually devised and researched by the company, around a topic of relevance both to the school curriculum and to the children’s own lives’ (2002: 4). Heavily influenced by the work of Bertolt Brecht’s *Epic Theatre* and Brazilian practitioner Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, TIE usually incorporates some sort of performance, generally with a participatory forum theatre element at the end of a problem-posing piece of theatre or with follow-up participatory workshops that allow the audience to further examine, explore and critically engage with the themes of the play. Dave Pammenter (2002) exposes the challenges for TIE devisers, noting that they are caught up in an oppressive system of education that is not child-centred, a term that was the focus of Education Act advancements in 1944 and later in 1948, but are instead concerned with the production of a future workforce (see Ken Robinson, 2006) and re-enforcement of a class system that maintains social divides (see Paul Willis’ *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, 1977, and Jay MacCleod’s *Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations & Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*, 1987). Balancing the priorities of a new radical educational practice (TIE), and working within an education system that must meet government standards and requirements for the development of a future workforce, TIE companies found themselves navigating a high wire walk to maintain funding from Local Education Authorities (LEAs), whilst offering child-centred and politically astute projects. We can see from Sheila Preston’s (2011) assessment of the ideological entanglement of practitioners and projects in neoliberal agendas that applied theatre continues to walk this well-trodden track to maintain project commissions whilst offering pedagogical values that draw heavily upon a co-intentional approach. This is a complex contradiction that exists and warrants constant thought for practitioners negotiating funding agendas, safeguarding guidance and radical approaches to practice that provoke critical consciousness in participants.

The invitation to participate and encourage critical debate is another central theme of applied theatre. The approach often adopted by practitioners originates from Brazilian educator and innovator of radical pedagogy Paulo Freire. Freire (1996) is clearly identifiable as one of the leading influences in applied theatre practice. Freire’s notion of co-intentionality as a form of learner–teacher exchange places the learner on an equal footing with the teacher/leader. In this case, both learner and teacher respect one another as co-Subjects who discover and develop their understanding of situation, circumstance and knowledge together. Freire suggests that this is important to ensure that those impacted by oppressive rhetoric are involved in a process of discovery through education that is ‘not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement’ (1996: 51). This approach is significant

in that it recognises the expert lived experiences of communities over the often research-informed knowledge of the practitioners. The tension here is the move away from the 'banking' system of education, which Freire describes as a hierarchical one-way transmission of knowledge from the all-knowing teacher to the empty vessel of the student. The banking system of pedagogy doesn't view both teacher and students as Subjects in a state of becoming. Instead it assumes superiority of knowledge for the leader in the room (the teacher) and rejects the contextual knowledge of the student (community participant). Though a shift to co-intentional practice is clearly, to borrow from British Psychologist Tom Kitwood's (1997) proposed model of care, a relational view of personhood or a 'person centred' approach that we may view as a method to focus on humanising people, it isn't necessarily easily received without resistance. bell hooks (1994) recounts responses from a group of students who demonstrated opposition to a transgressive pedagogy: '[t]o these students, transgressing boundaries was frightening. And though they were not the majority, their spirit of rigid resistance seemed always to be more powerful than any will to intellectual openness and pleasure in learning' (1994: 9). The 'danger' associated with co-intentional radical pedagogy is important to note, not only for fear that it might be resisted, but also because it is different and signals a change to learning approaches that are unfamiliar in an increasingly exam driven system of education.

The politics of intervention and the poetics of applied theatre need to account for the need to find different ways of offering radical pedagogy through artistic forms. In DIE there are a number of notable practitioners who have fused critical engagement with dramatic form. Dorothy Heathcote innovated the use of drama in education which speaks to Freire's co-intentional pedagogical proposal by using a structural technique she developed, referred to as Mantle of the Expert (MoE). This approach places participants 'in role' within a narrative providing permission for participants to shift power hierarchies between the teacher/artist and their own positions as students. Discussing the influence of Heathcote's work, Roger Wooster (2016) relates Heathcote's approach to a Socratic method in action: 'Heathcote's range of questioning and musing tones ... can be used to engage and elicit responses without leading, so that the children come to their own understanding of a situation' (2016: 71). Wooster also notes Heathcote's determination to 'arrest' a moment of action through a 'depiction' or tableaux allowing time for problem-posing, interrogation and critical reflection upon the action. This provided a different means to navigate knowledge, subjectivity and critical reflection, and permits the dismantlement of power hierarchies.

TIE and DIE are two important parts of the umbrella term of applied theatre, but the field encapsulates a much broader array of practices that draw from other traditions which are important to note. In both TIE and DIE practices, it is also significant to recognise that there may be 'ready formed' communities of children who are enabled to attend through timetabling sessions into their daily schedules. However, applied theatre works with communities where a readily available community isn't always easy to identify or bring together, particularly in a world where individualism, protectionism and neoliberal discourses of social exclusion are rife in everyday life. In this case, it is important to think about how to draw a community together. For our initial #clapforcarers example, there was a desire to be together, to celebrate and congratulate. This drive to be together as social beings is important for our wellbeing, for the creation of support networks and a sense of community in troubling times and beyond. The drive for community in this sense also provides opportunities for applied theatre to happen through the offer of events that

draw different people into the same space to explore ideas through sharing in a performance or participating in an event.

In the 1970s, John McGrath founded theatre company 7:84 (Scotland). The performances created by the company drew upon local popular entertainment, traditions and histories to create participatory performances laced with music, dance, comedy, song and storytelling. One of their well-known performances is the *Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil*, a performance offering critical examination of the English occupation of the Scottish highlands for economic gain. This production presented an historical parallel to the impact of international oil companies invading the oil-fields located in the North Sea, predominantly near Aberdeen, Scotland. Elaborating on the approach taken by McGrath, Baz Kershaw (1992) indicates the importance of connecting with communities: ‘authenticating conventions should be from the immediate socio-cultural environment of the performance ... the non-fictional aspects of the performance – the rhetorical conventions – are central to the ideological transaction between company and community’ (1992: 154). This model of community theatre reached working-class audiences and used popular traditions of entertainment to perform subversive depictions of oppressive acts facing the community. We can see this approach across current practice through the use of, for example, technology or device-driven practice that connects with popular and trending forms, which can allow us access to reach different audiences with an interest in the fusion of story and technology. Though this approach is clearly able to reach audiences, we may also need to exercise caution to avoid the challenges of appropriating forms that belong to a particular community, tradition or heritage and using them as our own. This approach may otherwise be viewed as a form of neo-colonialism, which would be counter to the ethos of the field.

Entering any context, we need to be aware of our perspectives on the community, and the assumptions we may make about what will ‘make things better’ for the Other we are working with. Theatre for development (TfD), another practice under the umbrella term of applied theatre, is described by Tim Prentki (2015) as an approach that is at a crossroads between ‘social accommodation and social transformation’ (2015: 246). Discourses of colonial development approaches done to others permeate the context of practitioners working in this area and often focus on projects in less economically developed countries (LEDCs) responding to Government or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) trying to implement a strategy or initiative in a community. Whether or not the initiative is actually beneficial is partly the role of TfD to unpack, explore and determine. The practice has a long history originating in many approaches we have already discussed, for example Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, and Brecht’s *Lehrstücke* plays intending to inform, educate and critically distance audiences from reality. But, as Prentki suggests, it’s often the geographical location of the project that determines whether one calls the practice community theatre or theatre for development. The inherent contradiction in TfD practice that must be addressed if it is to change paths to follow a more radical route towards challenging systemic oppression is the worrying potential that ‘it will become the exclusive property of governments (increasingly rarely in the era of permanent austerity) and NGOs and be wielded as a tool with which to support and encourage ‘pro-social’ behaviour ... in the main its consequence, perhaps unwittingly, will be to make systemic inequality and injustice tolerable’ (2015: 246). This approach, rather than the more radical challenge to the neoliberal world order that TfD was arguably meant to address, will be an acceptance of the world as it is. This path would mean that TfD would become an

instrument to reinforce neoliberal ideology – a clear departure from the historical origins of radical theatre practices that sit within the umbrella of applied theatre.

Offering an alternative perspective, James Thompson (2009) proposes an end to the preoccupation we may have with the effect of applied theatre, and moves us towards the affective potential of moments of joy that can be felt from engaging with creative processes. In this case, affect becomes the radical and may also be seen as the necessary engagement to move people to action. In a related approach, challenging social constructivist conventions, Helen Nicholson (2016) discussed the need to challenge the self-surveillance of biopolitical societies, arguing for the need for a relational ontology of applied theatre, which ‘brings together the ephemeral, the technological, the environmental, and the material, and in ways that extend beyond binary thought, enabling new affective patterns of relationality’ (2016: 266). Proposed movement to action through affect may connect to our shared experience of the #clapforcarers’ campaign, in that we may have felt the need to participate in a celebratory act whilst in isolation, which in its basic form provided us with a good night out together, albeit short lived, though the impact of that moment may live on and stay with us as we remember the collective experience of this point in our history and the challenges it poses for us. Perhaps then, we may see another side of the #clapforcarers, when we think beyond the catharsis of a shared action, and consider the underlying struggles for medical staff putting their lives on the line every day, and the unequal access to healthcare that encompasses the world.

We can see the impact of neoliberalism on the world very clearly at present, highlighted by the relationship of the global pandemic to access to healthcare provisions. This ‘exposure’ magnifies the level of poverty, the rich–poor divide and the lack of care for all citizens, a clear contravention of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). In the wake of this global incident, it is imperative that we rethink what is acceptable and what is not. Applied theatre practitioners have a duty of care to consider the contradictions inherent in their practice and to find ways to avoid falling into the trap of promoting pro-social behaviour over the intention of challenging oppression. Perhaps the communities we work with will understand the reality of the world and its stark contrasts more clearly after this period of our history. Perhaps this will make way for more explorations of *what if* and *what could be* through applied theatre to envision a world that is together seeking to humanise, and will no longer tolerate oppressive regimes from the ‘old normal’ we thought we missed. It is the challenge for all practitioners to locate themselves within this field, to be open and transparent about their intentions, identities and politics and find new ways to avoid the traps of neoliberalism in their work. The themes within this second edition of the Applied Theatre Reader aim to provide theoretical lenses and practical case study examples to demonstrate how practitioners, companies and community groups are already having this conversation and finding ways through. Now is indeed the time when people need the arts the most, let us not forget how we meet that need and why we choose a particular approach to offer our practice.

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## 2 Lexicon

*Nicola Abraham and Tim Prentki*

*This chapter offers summative definitions of key terms within Applied Theatre. This isn't an exhaustive list, but intends to reflect current topics within the field.*

### **Activism**

**ACTIVISM IS A** term more usually applied in political contexts to describe those who take action to support or resist current policy. Today, when cynicism abounds in relation to representative democracy, active citizenship is seen as a way of engaging more meaningfully in political activities. Within the discourse of applied theatre activism can describe both the process of actively participating in a piece of theatre that is applied to a specific socio-political issue at local or national level, and to engaging in follow-up action arising from the discoveries made during the making of that theatrical presentation. The implication is that applied theatre is *per se* a form of activism in contrast to the passive consumption mode of mainstream theatre.

### **Aesthetics**

All art forms communicate via aesthetics: these are conventions, rituals, materials through which understanding and feeling are shared among art-makers and audiences. The core material or starting-point for applied theatre aesthetics is the lived experience, the stories of those who participate. These stories enter into a dialogue with conventions of theatre-making by which they become shared and re-energised as interventions into the business of living. Another key element is the target audience in contrast to the random, ticket-buying audience of mainstream theatre. Audiences for applied theatre typically have a vested interest in the subject, either because it is about themselves or because they are required to respond in action to that which is presented.

### **Affect**

Affect is a useful term that has been used in Applied Theatre to describe a type of impact that is more about joy and a sense of feeling moved towards taking the decision to act. It has been described as the prequel to change because it presents a driver to enable a person to feel they want to make change. It also values enjoyment, happiness and celebration as a form of impact that has previously not been noted or necessarily prized. The term is often used to denote a change of emphasis from 'effect' – the results discernible from an applied theatre intervention. Affect highlights the process, the experience of



participating in theatre whereas a concentration on effect can result in an overly instrumentalist approach that ignores the influence of the art form.

### **Agency**

Agency refers to the idea of being able to take action. To be in a position of agency means to be able to act to alter the circumstances of one's life, rather than being dependent upon the actions of others. One of the benefits of applied theatre is that it can confer agency upon participants by opening a space where the individual can rehearse an action to test whether it does, indeed, lead to change. However, it is incumbent on facilitators to understand the limits of the process so that agency is not promised in situations where it cannot be delivered. At its best, applied theatre explores the constraints operating on groups and individuals in order to tease out those elements that are susceptible to personal agency from those that require intervention from elsewhere. In the latter case, it may be that the target audience is the agency that can instigate change.

### **Artist**

In Western culture the artist has traditionally been thought of as a special person, set apart from the lesser mortals who lack their genius by the depth of their insights and the skills by which they communicate them. In applied theatre there are no artists or, perhaps, there are only artists. As we organise our lives into stories, selecting what to recount, what to omit, we are, *de facto*, artists. The art of applied theatre exists in the interactions between facilitators and participants and between the participants themselves. It is a collaborative art dependent upon willing participation which flourishes in the moment when the meeting of experience with imagination makes transformation a possibility.

### **At-Risk**

At-Risk is a term often used in relation to particular societal groups, including youth, to describe a potential to cause harm or damage in a number of ways. It is a label that acts as an expectation of behaviour and as such has led to policies that may demonise youth in their prediction of possible life outcomes. It has been said that risk in and of itself does not exist. Therefore judging a group or person as 'at-risk' is a further acknowledgement that nothing has yet happened but, because of the precarity of circumstances surrounding a person, it is possible, if not expected, that they may choose to take actions that are risky in the future. This may mean there are concerns for someone's well-being or health. However the term also relates to the potential to do harm to others through engaging in criminal acts or anti-social behaviours. The term is problematic, yet is often another criterion for applied theatre projects to address on funding forms.

### **Care**

This is an important term that belongs often to professions that look after people. What constitutes the act of caring can differ greatly. Care can be pragmatic and/or emotional. Sometimes people who care for others are not related to those they care for; for example nurses, social workers and housing officers. The place of care and what that means in applied theatre is more complex. There are important safeguarding and professional

boundaries to consider, but there is increasing dialogue about the importance of caring and what that may look like in applied theatre contexts.

### **Democracy**

A principle of applied theatre is that it must work democratically. However, there are, in practice, many definitions of democracy. As a working principle of our discipline, it means much more than its common meaning in political discourse. For an applied theatre process to be described as democratic all participants must have the opportunity to be heard and to shape the direction of the project. It is not satisfactory for a facilitator to set the agenda and then allow opinions within the frame of that agenda. This is why it is important for a facilitator to be invited to contribute to a process of the community's choosing, rather than entering a community at the behest of an external body such as a funder. Real democracy is the capacity to act and to react to the actions of others.

### **Digital Technology**

A new area of applied theatre is emerging that makes use of the integration of digital technologies within community projects. If we break down the term, digital means the use of digits or hands to control or use a type of technology. Technology may take the form of a phone, laptop, tablet, or application within a device that is used to enable creativity or more fluid exploration of online resources, or the creation of media content that may be easily shared and disseminated.

### **Disobedience**

This term is self-defining in its nature. Disobedience may be seen as an action or thought or protest that defies a rule or challenges law or expectations of what might be conceived of as socially accepted behaviours. This may mean disobeying a rule, or offering a new way of reading a situation/political decision/rule that questions rather than conforms. It may be more active and involve action to defy a law. Disobedience is in essence moving towards action that attempts to challenge, unravel and question the status quo, often, but not always, to challenge oppression.

### **Efficacy**

Efficacy has arguably been synonymous with impact, in that there is an expectation of success, which the term embodies. Efficacy is the successful implementation of an idea or project that has achieved its end-goals. It may also be used as a term to describe value or worth of an intervention. Additionally, efficacy could be seen as an ability to be effective. This may relate to a methodology as much as it may relate to a facilitator or broader project.

### **Empathy**

Empathy is not to be confused with the term sympathy, which means to feel *for* others. Rather, empathy means to feel *with* others. Empathy is a useful component of intuitive thought that enables a facilitator to make a decision based on the way the group may feel. It is arguably an ability that allows a facilitator to make an informed decision

that goes beyond language and towards a *feeling* of support for a community. See also **Intersubjectivity**.

### **Ethics**

At first sight it may appear uncontroversial to require practitioners of applied theatre to behave ethically in all their dealings. Government departments, corporations, NGOs and higher education institutions (HEIs) have written ethical policies and set up committees to ensure these are adhered to. In the case of HEIs, ethics policies are usually framed within the context of research and concern such matters as the anonymising of research subjects, the signing of consent forms, and agreements concerning disclosure, particularly where any photographic material is involved. However, in recent years there has been a tendency for ethics committees to extend their reach into areas such as the giving of offence, unacceptable language and potential for emotional stress caused by the research. These areas are more prone to interpretation than traditional ethics. Consequently, there is now among some practitioners a backlash against the over-dominance of ethical concerns, reflected in an anxiety that ethics can be an excuse for not dealing with difficult issues or risking articulating uncomfortable contradictions. Where the invocation of ethics is elevated to the status of a gagging order, the result can be a bland rehearsal of a secure identity or, worse, the reinforcing of prejudice and tribalism.

### **Facilitator**

The facilitator can be a Joker, a clown, a fool, a playful devil's advocate, a 'difficultator', a provocative commentator, an enabler, a director, a teacher and an artist, to name but a few possible roles and approaches to this complex and important role in applied theatre projects. The facilitator often 'holds' a community by encouraging collaboration, communication and creativity in a group of people who may or may not have previously known one another. They may also direct a show, but often this is conducted collaboratively, aiming to ensure the community hold a sense of ownership and agency over what is created. Often, but not always, their pedagogical approach is based on Freirean principles.

### **Gatekeeper**

Gatekeepers often present a barrier to effective applied theatre practice. They are the people whose permission is required and who seek to own the process. They come in many guises and can be officially appointed or self-appointed. As the term suggests they can choose to hold the gate open or to slam it shut. Many projects have to negotiate with a gatekeeper: prison governor, local authority representative, teacher, funder etc. The experienced facilitator attempts the delicate balance between satisfying the gatekeeper's demands and protecting the autonomy of participants. Contradictions abound and the facilitator can be caught in the tension between transparency and trickery.

### **Identity**

Identity is a two-edged sword within the processes of applied theatre. On the one hand a shared identity is frequently the means by which a group of participants is collected: prisoners, the homeless, transgendered, teenage mothers etc. On the other hand such

identity labelling can reinforce the very social exclusion that the applied theatre process aims to mitigate. Paradoxes operate, too, at the macro level. Identity politics, while bringing in vulnerable or exploited groups from the social margins, has also operated against the former mass movement style of activism by fracturing the old-fashioned solidarities of class.

### **Immersive**

Creating an environment or space or performance where an audience feels they are entering into a new world may be a useful way of seeing immersion. It may also mean an emotional or political involvement or 'buy in' to a fictional context created theatrically. This environment may or may not offer points of interaction through the invitation for audience members to participate in the performance/space/event presented.

### **Intergenerational**

This term describes an interaction between groups or individuals from different age brackets or generations. Often in applied theatre, this term is used to describe a community of multiple generations collaborating artistically with one another.

### **Intersubjectivity**

Intersubjectivity is the term used in neuroscience and psychosocial research to describe the relationship between people. It is a key concept in relation to a collective activity such as applied theatre because it posits that each person's identity, their personality, is formed and reformed out of the interactions with other people. Recent discoveries in neuroscience, in particular the existence of mirror neurons adjacent to motor neurons in the human brain, have added evidence of the significance of intersubjectivity in understanding mind and consciousness. Consciousness raising and confidence building outcomes of applied theatre lend weight to the notion that it is an especially appropriate art form for the development of empathy which lies at the heart of intersubjectivity.

### **Migrant**

Migrant is a term used to describe a person who has moved from one geographical location to another. It is often seen as synonymous with refugees, but is actually a much broader word that defines any person who has moved, including expatriates who have moved abroad out of choice, refugees who are escaping war-torn homelands to try to survive, and people who have been exiled to seek support and asylum in another country for protection and safety.

### **Neoliberalism**

Political scientists have several definitions for neoliberalism but its significance within applied theatre often relates to the shrinking of the state and the replacement of erstwhile governmental functions by private organisations driven by the requirement to make a profit. The withering of social democracy since 1980 has resulted in a culture where economics determines the viability of many activities previously thought to exist beyond its reach such as health and education. Struggling to operate within an economic paradigm,

applied theatre often seeks justification on those terms: reducing recidivism, saving the health service money by improving mental health, etc.

### **Oppression**

Oppression is related to power dynamics that suppress a group or people or individual through policy, force or coercion. It is often related to the domination of one group or person over another, which may be enforced by law, cruelty, threat, harassment, subjugation or persecution.

### **Pedagogy**

Often referred to as the teaching–learning exchange between a teacher and student, this term can also be used to name the philosophical approach to conveying ideas, communicating and collaborating through applied theatre practice. It is an exchange that is informed often by Freirean principles of learning and offered by a facilitator in their approach to working with a community.

### **Play**

Play refers to both process and product in applied theatre. The play is the product of the playful nature of the processes that create it. The facilitator plays a key role in setting the playful tone through her actions as joker; in the sense both of Boal's Joker and of the traditional fool of medieval and Renaissance drama – the wide-eyed naïve character who poses awkward questions and reminds the audience that it's 'only' a play. Therefore play carries three meanings in applied theatre: that which is produced for workshop or performance; the means by which it is created – playing around; and thirdly the notion of living matter that, like young timber, has plenty of play in it – it moves, bends with the pressure, and springs back; in other words the quality of improvisation.

### **Precarity**

This term refers to uncertainty in a variety of forms. The notion of uncertainty is apt as a description of insecurity, fear and a lack of certainty. This impact may echo very clearly in current politics of protectionism and the negotiations of Brexit and what this means for citizens. It may also refer to times and locations of war, economic upheaval and zero hour contracts. Each provides insecurity, and often a sense of fear.

### **Recidivism**

This is a term used to describe reducing reoffending. It is often a measure of impact and thereby efficacy for prison theatre practice, which may operate on the intentionality that offenders' involvement in theatre may consequently lead to a reduction of reoffending.

### **Resilience**

Resilience is perceived in different ways depending on the politics of the situation. For example, resilience may be a term used to describe our ability to build strategies to enable

us to cope with different situations and circumstances. This can be an emotional type of defence or it could be perceived as physical resilience built through healthy living. It is also arguably a term that is seen as misleading, because it may also relate to neoliberal governments placing blame on individuals for their situation; i.e. if you aren't resilient to economic upheaval, you have chosen not to cope. Resilience is often a criterion for funding in applied theatre projects.

### **Rights**

Rights are a legal entitlement to have or do something. Rights can be universal, for example those listed in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child, but are not necessarily enabled unless a country agrees to uphold these rights for their citizens. Rights may also help to put pressure on countries with segregation or carrying out atrocities to end such politics of violence to ensure all citizens have equal rights.

**Part II**

**Poetics of representation**

PROOF

PROOF



### 3 Introduction to poetics of representation

*Tim Prentki*

**CONCEPTUALISING A POETICS** of applied theatre required consideration of all those elements that contribute to the ways in which a theatrical communication is received and understood by its audience. The use of 'poetics' does not endorse a binary division between content and form that would privilege the 'content' as the maker of meaning and reduce the 'form' to the delivery of that meaning. Rather it is an acknowledgement that poetics, with all their contribution to the aesthetic development of form, play a crucial role in determining the content of a piece of theatre and, further, what that content might mean in the collective and individual understanding of an audience. This is especially important in the context of applied theatre where there is a history of marginalising the aesthetic (taken to be the sole property or preoccupation of mainstream theatre) on the grounds that it is the 'applied' aspect of applied theatre that merits all critical attention and that the 'theatre' aspect is a given. In contrast there have been trends in applied theatre that counter this tendency, developing instead arts-led practices which privilege the form at the expense of community ownership of content. Thinking about the poetics of applied theatre necessitates critical analysis of the relationships *between* all aspects of the creative process: the theatre form, its application and its reception. An important contribution in the area of aesthetics has come from James Thompson who has undertaken a rebalancing of the dialectic between politics and poetics through his assertion of the significance of affect over effect. Too much concentration on the latter has resulted in a predominantly instrumental approach whereby applied theatre is evaluated according to criteria which are unrelated to and lie wholly outside the art of theatre. This, in turn, can lead to overlooking the ways in which humans understand their relationship to others and the world around them; through body, emotions and the unconscious, as well as, if not more than, through the operation of a logical, conscious mind. I would contend that, for applied theatre to be effective, it must engage participants affectively.

One of the key areas which differentiate the poetics of applied theatre from those of the mainstream is that of the target, or context-specific, audience. Typically with applied theatre practices there is a strong, intentional relationship between the manner in which the piece is created and the idea or picture of the audience for whom it is created. In relation, for example, to the desire to use the theatrical process to raise consciousness around a particular issue, applied theatre practitioners will often hope that their presentation will take their audiences beyond the point of awareness and into the arena of social action. So the choices around target audiences and the best means of stimulating them to action are likely to play a major role in any decisions about appropriate poetics to achieve an outcome beyond the theatre event. Unlike mainstream theatre, the distinction between participants – actors – and audience is not fixed. In many practices there

may only be participants while in others there is the combination of both with the volatile or predetermined possibility of audience becoming actors, thereby relegating the protagonists to the role of spectators.

The content of applied theatre is commonly supplied by the participants directly in the form of their own stories or by the community who are often also the target audience through the research carried out in that community. However, the shaping of those stories and that research into dramatic forms that can communicate powerfully is often seen as the province of facilitators who use their experience to guide participants through a bewildering array of poetic choices. These choices have themselves to be related to the cultural parameters of the participants so that the chosen forms can enter into a meaningful relation to their life experiences and understandings. A participatory poetics for rural African women is likely to involve very different choices from those appropriate for male inmates of a British prison, for example. Today, though, there is often a tension between local or indigenous forms of artistic and cultural expression and those deriving from the global dissemination of satellite technology. When asked to improvise a situation drawn from their daily lives, it is common for participants to ape the styles and manners of soap operas and crime series regardless of race, religion, gender, class or any other defining characteristic. Yet if earnest facilitators believe that part of their function is to support communities in resisting the global monoculture, it may be that they become guilty, themselves, of imposing a poetics that they deem appropriate or traditional upon the hapless participants. Within the questions arising around poetics, as with so many other aspects of applied theatre, contradictions abound.

Two figures who have exerted a profound influence upon the poetics of applied theatre during the second half of the twentieth century are Mikhail Bakhtin and Bertolt Brecht. Bakhtin, through his story of the French sixteenth-century novelist François Rabelais, reinvigorated the critical tradition of the popular as an alternative discourse existing independent of but in parallel with the official discourse of dominant culture, the so-called 'second world' of carnival and marketplace. Bakhtin's poetics of the popular have since been adapted and applied to many areas of cultural analysis, including the works of Shakespeare and the performances of Dario Fo. Of particular interest to the practice of applied theatre has been the focus upon the figure of the fool as an emblem of the popular tradition who is adept at spanning two worlds: the official and the popular; the scripted and the improvised; the fictional and the real; the stage and the auditorium; the spirit world and the material world, to name but a few. This trickster who juggles with simultaneous realities functions in many respects as the facilitator of the dramatic action, at once provoking the performers and interpreting for the audience: Puck, Feste and Lear's Fool from Shakespeare belong in this camp as do Schweik and Azdak from Brecht's plays.

Brecht's great contribution to the poetics of applied theatre was to develop a dramaturgy that answered his need for a theatre that could demonstrate the need for and inevitability of social change. Although historical circumstances, the Nazi election victory of 1933, forced Brecht to return to the writing of plays for formal theatrical production, the continuous search for theatrical means through which to highlight the contradictions of capitalist societies meant that he left a rich legacy for those who attempt to use theatre to stimulate social change. The development of his 'epic' theatre aesthetic with its emphasis upon narrative and the impact of social circumstances upon human actions underpins much of the story-based work of a wide variety of applied theatre practitioners. The *Verfremdungseffekt*, a key element of his epic theatre, is at its core a means by which to show up the contradictions that can undermine the official, dominant versions of history, politics

and culture. *Verfremdungseffekte* are wedges driven into the heart of the assumptions by which our societies are organised in order that we can see whose interests are being served by the *status quo*. This counter-hegemonic practice is intended to work upon audiences as a form of intellectual empowerment that enables them to practise anti-oppressive social change outside the theatre. There is, however, no static, achieved formula for creating theatre for change but only a constant process of refining and reforming poetics in answer to changing social realities. At his death Brecht was still in the process of revising his epic theatre towards a more dialectical version that would enable epic and dramatic elements to operate within a framework of creative tensions.

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## 4 Rabelais and his world

*Mikhail Bakhtin*  
(*tran. H. Iswolsky*)

*Rabelais and His World*, MIT Press (1968), excerpt from pp. 197–277.

[...]

**HERE IS A DIMENSION** in which thrashing and abuse are not a personal chastisement but are symbolic actions directed at something on a higher level, at the king. This is the popular-festive system of images, which is most clearly expressed in carnival (but, of course, not in carnival alone). In this dimension ... the kitchen and the battle meet and cross each other in the image of the rent body. At the time of Rabelais these images were still alive and full of meaning in various forms of folk entertainments as well as in literature.

In such a system the king is the clown. He is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people. He is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over, just as the carnival dummy of winter or of the dying year is mocked, beaten, torn to pieces, burned, or drowned even in our time. They are “gay monsters.” The clown was first disguised as a king, but once his reign had come to an end his costume was changed, “travestied,” to turn him once more into a clown. The abuse and thrashing are equivalent to a change of costume, to a metamorphosis. Abuse reveals the other, true face of the abused, it tears off his disguise and mask. It is the king’s uncrowning.

Abuse is death, it is former youth transformed into old age, the living body turned into a corpse. It is the “mirror of comedy” reflecting that which must die a historic death. But in this system death is followed by regeneration, by the new year, new youth, and a new spring. Therefore, abuse is followed by praise; they are two aspects of one world, each with its own body.

Abuse with uncrowning, as truth about old authority, about the dying world, is an organic part of Rabelais’ system of images. It is combined with carnivalesque thrashings, with change of costume and travesty. Rabelais drew these images from the living popular-festive tradition of his time, but he was also well versed in the antique scholarly tradition of the Saturnalia, with its own rituals of travesties, uncrownings, and thrashings.

[...] the system of popular-festive images was developed and went on living over thousands of years. This long development had its own scoria, its own dead deposits in manners, beliefs, prejudices. But in its basic line this system grew and was enriched; it acquired a new meaning, absorbed the new hopes and thoughts of the people. It was transformed in the crucible of the people’s new experience. The language of images developed new and more refined nuances.

Thanks to this process, popular-festive images became a powerful means of grasping reality; they served as a basis for an authentic and deep realism. Popular imagery did not

reflect the naturalistic, fleeting, meaningless, and scattered aspect of reality but the very process of becoming, its meaning and direction. Hence the universality and sober optimism of this system.

[...] This old authority and truth pretend to be absolute, to have an extratemporal importance. Therefore, their representatives (the agelasts) are gloomily serious. They cannot and do not wish to laugh; they strut majestically, consider their foes the enemies of eternal truth, and threaten them with eternal punishment. They do not see themselves in the mirror of time, do not perceive their own origin, limitations and end; they do not recognize their own ridiculous faces or the comic nature of their pretensions to eternity and immutability. And thus these personages come to the end of their role still serious, although their spectators have been laughing for a long time. They continue to talk with the majestic tone of kings and heralds announcing eternal truths, unaware that time has turned their speeches into ridicule. Time has transformed old truth and authority into a Mardi Gras dummy, a comic monster that the laughing crowd rends to pieces in the marketplace.

[...] All the episodes we have discussed in this chapter, as well as the individual scenes of battles, fights, beatings, the uncrowning of people and objects (for instance, the bells) are presented by Rabelais in the popular-festive carnival spirit. Therefore, all the episodes are ambivalent: destruction and uncrowning are related to birth and renewal. The death of the old is linked with regeneration; all the images are connected with the contradictory oneness of the dying and the reborn world. Not only the episodes discussed but the entire novel is filled with that carnivalesque atmosphere. More than that, a number of important scenes are directly related to feasting and festivity.

We give here a broadened meaning to the word “carnavalesque.” As a special phenomenon, carnival has survived up to our time. Other manifestations of popular-festive life, related to it in style and character (as well as origin), have died out long ago or have degenerated so far as to become undistinguishable. Carnival is a well-known festivity that has been often described throughout many centuries. Even during its later development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it still preserved certain fundamental traits in a quite clear, though reduced, form. Carnival discloses these traits as the best preserved fragments of an immense, infinitely rich world. This permits us to use precisely the epithet “carnavalesque” in that broad sense of the word. We interpret it not only as carnival per se in its limited form but also as the varied popular-festive life of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; all the peculiarities of this life have been preserved in carnival, while the other forms have deteriorated and vanished.

But even in its narrow sense carnival is far from being a simple phenomenon with only one meaning. This word combined in a single concept a number of local feasts of different origin and scheduled at different dates but bearing the common traits of popular merriment. This process of unification in a single concept corresponded to the development of life itself; the forms of folk merriment that were dying or degenerating transmitted some of their traits to the carnival celebrations: rituals, paraphernalia, images, masques. These celebrations became a reservoir into which obsolete genres were emptied.

Obviously, this consolidation took place in its own way, not only in various countries and at various seasons but even in different cities. The clearest, classic carnival forms were preserved in Italy, especially in Rome. The next most typical carnivals were those of Paris. Next came Nuremberg and Cologne, which adopted a more or less classic form at a somewhat later period. In Russia this process did not develop at all; the various aspects of folk merriment of a national or local character (shrove days, Christmas, fairs) remained unchanged. They offered none of the traits typical of Western European amusements.

Peter the Great, as we know, tried to bring to Russia the later European style of the “feast of fools” (for example, the election of the all-clowns’ pope) and the pranks of the April fool, but these customs did not take root and did not mix with local traditions.

Even in the cities where the process of development acquired a more or less classic character (as in Rome, Paris, Nuremberg, and Cologne), local festivities formed the basis of carnival. Its ritual was enriched by these local traits, which otherwise were doomed to vanish.

Many of these popular-festive forms that had lent some of their essential elements to carnival continued to lead contemporaneously their own pallid existence. This was, for instance, the case of the French charivari; its main traits had been transferred to carnival, but it still retained a feeble resemblance to bridal mockery (if the marriage for some reason or other was not considered normal). It is still presented in our days, as a cat-concert under the windows of newlyweds. Furthermore, all the elements of folk merriment which constituted the second, unofficial part of holy days and legal feasts continued to exist independently; however, they had many traits in common with the carnival rituals: the election of kings and queens for a day on the feast of the Epiphany (“the feast of beans”) and on St. Valentine’s day. These common elements are determined by the fact that they are all related to time, which is the true hero of every feast, uncrowning the old and crowning the new.<sup>1</sup> These popular unofficial forms of merriment continued, of course, to surround the feasts of the Church. Every fair, usually scheduled for the dedication of a church or a first mass, preserved carnivalesque traits. Finally, the carnivalesque character appeared on private family occasions, christenings and memorial services, as well as on agricultural feasts, the harvest of grapes (*vendage*) and the slaughter of cattle, as described by Rabelais. We also saw the carnivalesque character of the *noces à mitaines*, a typical bridal ritual. The common denominator of the carnivalesque genres is the essential link of these feasts with “gay time.” Whenever the free popular aspect of the feast is preserved, the relation with time is maintained, and this means the persistence of its carnivalesque flavor.

But when carnival developed in the narrow sense of the word and became the center of all popular forms of amusement, it diminished all the other feasts and deprived them of almost every free and utopian folk element. The other feasts faded away; their popular character was reduced, especially because of their connection with ecclesiastic or political rituals. Carnival became the symbol and incarnation of the true folk festival, completely independent of Church and State but tolerated by them. This was true of the Roman carnival described by Goethe in his famous sketch in 1788; and true also of the 1895 carnival in that city, pictured by Dietrich for his *Pulcinella* (and dedicated to his Roman friends and to the similar 1897 celebration). In Dietrich’s time this festival was the only surviving vivid and colorful testimony of true popular life as it existed in bygone centuries.

In the time of Rabelais folk merriment had not as yet been concentrated in carnival season, in any of the towns of France. Shrove Tuesday (*Mardi Gras*) was but one of many occasions for folk merriment, although an important one. A considerable role in the festive life of the marketplace was played, as we have said, by the fairs held three or four times a year in several towns. The amusements offered at the fairs usually bore a carnivalesque character.

[...] A [...] sense of unity was brought to the people by all the forms and images of medieval popular-festive life. But the unity did not have such a simple geometric character. It was more complex and differentiated; most important of all, it had an historic nature. The body of the people on carnival square is first of all aware of its unity in time; it is conscious of its uninterrupted continuity within time, of its relative historic immortality.

Therefore the people do not perceive a static image of their unity (*eine Gestalt*) but instead the uninterrupted continuity of their becoming and growth, of the unfinished metamorphosis of death and renewal. For all these images have a dual body; everywhere the genital element is emphasized: pregnancy, giving birth, the procreative force (Pulcinella's double hump, the protruding belly). Carnival with all its images, indecencies, and curses affirms the people's immortal, indestructible character. In the world of carnival the awareness of the people's immortality is combined with the realization that established authority and truth are relative.

Popular-festive forms look into the future. They present the victory of this future, of the golden age, over the past. This is the victory of all the people's material abundance, freedom, equality, brotherhood. The victory of the future is ensured by the people's immortality. The birth of the new, of the greater and the better, is as indispensable and as inevitable as the death of the old. The one is transferred to the other, the better turns the worse into ridicule and kills it. In the whole of the world and of the people there is no room for fear. For fear can only enter a part that has been separated from the whole, the dying link torn from the link that is born. The whole of the people and of the world is triumphantly gay and fearless. This whole speaks in all carnival images; it reigns in the very atmosphere of this feast, making everyone participate in this awareness.

[...] The influence of carnival, in the broadest sense of the word, was great during all periods of literary development. However, this influence was in most cases hidden, indirect, and difficult to detect. During the Renaissance it was not only exceptionally strong but direct and clearly expressed, even in its exterior forms. The Renaissance is, so to speak, a direct "carnivalization" of human consciousness, philosophy, and literature.

The official culture of the Middle Ages was evolved over many centuries. It had its heroic, creative period and was all-embracing and all-penetrating. This culture enveloped and enmeshed the entire world and every segment, even the smallest, of human consciousness. It was supported by an organization unique of its kind, the Catholic Church. In the time of the Renaissance the feudal structure was nearing its end, but its ideological domination of the human mind was still extremely powerful.

Where could the Renaissance find support in the struggle against the official culture of the Middle Ages, a struggle which was as intense as it was victorious? The ancient literary sources could not per se offer a sufficient basis, because antiquity was also still seen by many through the prism of medieval ideology. In order to discover humanist antiquity, it was necessary at first to be free from the thousand-year-old domination of medieval categories. It was necessary to gain new ground, to emerge from ideological routine.

Such support could be offered only by the culture of folk humor which had developed throughout thousands of years. The progressive leaders of the Renaissance participated directly in this culture and first of all in its popular-festive, carnivalesque aspect. Carnival (and we repeat that we use this word in its broadest sense) did liberate human consciousness and permit a new outlook, but at the same time it implied no nihilism; it had a positive character because it disclosed the abundant material principle, change and becoming, the irresistible triumph of the new immortal people. This was indeed a powerful support for storming the stronghold of the Gothic age; it prepared the way for a new, free and sober seriousness.

In one of his articles, Dobrolyubov expressed a thought that deserves our notice: "It is necessary to work out in our soul a firm belief in the need and possibility of a complete exit from the present order of this life, so as to find the strength to express it in poetic forms."<sup>2</sup> At the base of Renaissance progressive literature there existed such a "firm

belief.” It was only thanks to this conviction that a radical change and renewal of all that exists became “necessary and possible,” that the initiators of the Renaissance movement could see the world as they did. But this conviction also inspired the culture of folk humor; it was no abstract thought but a living experience that determined this culture’s forms and images. Official medieval culture tried to inculcate the exactly opposite belief in a static unchanging world order and in the eternal nature of all existence. This teaching, as we have said, was still powerful. It could not be overcome by individual thinking or scholarly perusal of antique sources (not seen in the light of “carnival consciousness”). Popular culture alone could offer this support.

This is the reason why in all the great writings of the Renaissance we clearly sense the carnival atmosphere, the free winds blowing from the marketplace. We find this element in the very structure of Renaissance writings and in the peculiar logic of their images, although nowhere more clearly than in Rabelais.

The analysis we have applied to Rabelais would also help us to discover the essential carnival element in the organization of Shakespeare’s drama. This does not merely concern the secondary, clownish motives of his plays. The logic of crownings and uncrownings, in direct or in indirect form, organizes the serious elements also. And first of all this “belief in the possibility of a complete exit from the present order of this life” determines Shakespeare’s fearless, sober (yet not cynical) realism and absence of dogmatism. This pathos of radical changes and renewals is the essence of Shakespeare’s world consciousness. It made him see the great epoch-making changes taking place around him and yet recognize their limitations.

Shakespeare’s drama has many outward carnivalesque aspects: images of the material bodily lower stratum, of ambivalent obscenities, and of popular banquet scenes.

The carnivalesque basic element in Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and in his novellas is quite obvious: his novel is directly organized as a grotesque play with all its attributes. The depth and consequent nature of his realism are also typical of this pathos of change and renewal.

Renaissance literature still needs special study in the light of correctly understood popular-festive forms.

Rabelais’ novel is the most festive work in world literature. It expresses the very essence of the people’s gay spirit. This is why this novel stands out so sharply against the background of the humdrum solemn literature of the following periods, especially of the nineteenth century. This is why it is impossible to understand him if we adopt the nonfestive posture that prevailed during those later years.

However, even within bourgeois culture the festive element did not die. It was merely narrowed down. The feast is a primary, indestructible ingredient of human civilization; it may become sterile and even degenerate, but it cannot vanish. The private, “chamber” feast of the bourgeois period still preserves a distorted aspect of the ancient spirit; on feast days the doors of the home are open to guests, as they were originally open to “all the world.” On such days there is greater abundance in everything: food, dress, decorations. Festive greetings and good wishes are exchanged, although their ambivalence has faded. There are toasts, games, masquerades, laughter, pranks, and dances. The feast has no utilitarian connotation (as has daily rest and relaxation after working hours). On the contrary, the feast means liberation from all that is utilitarian, practical. It is a temporary transfer to the utopian world. The feast cannot be reduced to any specific content (for instance to the historical event commemorated on that day); it transgresses all limited objectives. Neither can it be separated from bodily life, from the earth, nature, and the cosmos. The sun shines



in the festive sky, and there is such a thing as “feast-day” weather. All these elements have been preserved in the bourgeois truncated forms of these celebrations.

Characteristically enough, modern Western philosophy of anthropology has sought to discover the festive awareness of man and this special aspect of the world, in order to overcome the pessimistic conception of existentialism. However, philosophical anthropology with its phenomenological method, alien to the historic, social element, cannot solve this problem. Moreover, this philosophy is guided by the narrow spirit of the bourgeois period.

### Notes

- 1 Actually, every feast day crowns and uncrowns, and has therefore its own king and queen. See this theme in the *Decameron*, where a king and queen are elected for every day of the festive discourses.
- 2 Dobrolyubov: “Poems of Ivan Nikitin.” Collected works in nine volumes, Goslitisdat Leningrad, 1963. Vol. 6, p. 167.

## 5 Brecht on theatre

*Marc Silberman, Steve Giles and Tom Kuhn (eds.)*

*Brecht on Theatre*, Methuen Drama (1964), excerpts from pp. 37, 186–201, 276–7.

### Notes to the opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*

[...]

**THE MODERN THEATRE** is the epic theatre. The following table shows certain changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and the epic theatre:

<i>DRAMATIC THEATRE</i>	<i>EPIC THEATRE</i>
plot	narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer, but
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
experience	picture of the world
the spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
suggestion	argument
instinctive feelings are preserved	brought to the point of recognition
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares experience	the spectator stands outside, the studies
the human being is taken for granted	the human being is the object of the inquiry
he is unalterable	he is alterable and able to alter
eyes on the finish	eyes on the course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
feeling	reason

### Extracts from *A Short Organum for the Theatre*

23

The bare wish, if nothing else, to evolve an art fit for the times must drive our theatre of the scientific age straight out into the suburbs, where it can stand as it were wide

open, at the disposal of those who live hard and produce much, so that they can be fruitfully entertained there with their great problems. [...] A theatre which makes productivity its main source of entertainment has also to take it for its theme, and with greater keenness than ever now that man is everywhere hampered by men from self-production: i.e. from maintaining himself, entertaining and being entertained. The theatre has to become geared into reality if it is to be in a position to turn out effective representations of reality, and to be allowed to do so.

35

We need a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which the action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help transform the field itself.

36

The field has to be defined in historically relative terms. In other words we must drop our habit of taking the different social structures of past periods, then stripping them of everything that makes them different; so that they all look more or less like our own, which then acquires from this process a certain air of having been there all along, in other words of permanence pure and simple. Instead we must leave them their distinguishing marks and keep their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen to be impermanent too. [...]

37

If we ensure that our characters on the stage are moved by social impulses and that these differ according to the period, then we make it harder for our spectator to identify himself with them. He cannot simply feel: that's how I would act, but at most can say: if I had lived under those circumstances. And if we play works dealing with our own time as though they were historical, then perhaps the circumstances under which he himself acts will strike him as equally odd; and this is where the critical attitude begins.

42

The kind of acting which was tried out at the Schiffbauerdamm Theater in Berlin between the First and Second World Wars, with the object of producing such images, is based on the 'alienation effect' (A-effect). A representation that alienates is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar. The classical and medieval theatre alienated its characters by making them wear human or animal masks; the Asiatic theatre even today uses musical and pantomimic A-effects. Such devices were certainly a barrier to empathy, and yet this technique owed more, not less, to hypnotic suggestion than do those by which empathy is achieved. The social aims of these old devices were entirely different from our own.

43

The old A-effects quite remove the object represented from the spectator's grasp, turning it into something that cannot be altered; the new are not odd in themselves, though the unscientific eye stamps anything strange as odd. The new alienations are only designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today.

44

For it seems impossible to alter what has long not been altered. We are always coming on things that are too obvious for us to bother to understand them. What men experience among themselves they think of as 'the' human experience. A child, living in a world of old men, learns how things work there. He knows the run of things before he can walk. If anyone is bold enough to want something further, he only wants to have it as an exception. Even if he realizes that the arrangements made for him by 'Providence' are only what has been provided by society he is bound to see society, that vast collection of beings like himself, as a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts and therefore not in any way to be influenced. Moreover, he would be used to things that could not be influenced; and who mistrusts what he is used to? To transform himself from general passive acceptance to a corresponding state of suspicious inquiry he would need to develop that detached eye with which the great Galileo observed a swinging chandelier. He was amazed by this pendulum motion, as if he had not expected it and could not understand its occurring, and this enabled him to come on the rules by which it was governed. Here is the outlook, disconcerting but fruitful, which the theatre must provoke with its representations of human social life. It must amaze its public, and this can be achieved by a technique of alienating the familiar.

45

This technique allows the theatre to make use in its representations of the new social scientific method known as dialectical materialism. In order to unearth society's laws of motion this method treats social situations as processes, and traces out all their inconsistencies. It regards nothing as existing except in so far as it changes, in other words is in disharmony with itself. This also goes for those human feelings, opinions and attitudes through which at any time the form of men's life together finds its expression.

47

In order to produce A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which he plays. Aiming not to put his audience into a trance, he must not go into a trance himself. [...]

48

At no moment must he go so far as to be wholly transformed into the character played. The verdict: 'he didn't act Lear, he was Lear' would be an annihilating blow to him. He has just to show the character, or rather he has to do more than just get into it; this does not mean that if he is playing passionate parts he must himself remain cold. It is only that his feelings must not at bottom be those of the character, so that the audience's may not at bottom be those of the character either. The audience must have complete freedom here.

61

The realm of attitudes adopted by the characters towards one another is what we call the realm of gest. Physical attitude, tone of voice and facial expression are all determined by a social gest: the characters are cursing, flattering, instructing one another, and so on. The attitudes which people adopt towards one another include even those attitudes which would appear to be quite private, such as the utterances of physical pain in an illness, or of religious faith. These expressions of a gest are usually highly complicated and contradictory, so that they cannot be rendered by any single

word and the actor must take care that in giving his image the necessary emphasis he does not lose anything, but emphasizes the entire complex.

65

Everything hangs on the 'story'; it is the heart of the theatrical performance. For it is what happens *between* people that provides them with all the material that they can discuss, criticize, alter. Even if the particular person represented by the actor has ultimately to fit into more than just the one episode, it is mainly because the episode will be all the more striking if it reaches fulfilment in a particular person. The 'story' is the theatre's great operation, the complete fitting together of all the gestic incidents, embracing the communications and impulses that must now go to make up the audience's entertainment.

67

As we cannot invite the audience to fling itself into the story as if it were a river and let itself be carried vaguely hither and thither, the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgment. [...] The parts of the story have to be carefully set off one against another by giving each its own structure as a play within the play. To this end it is best to agree to use titles [...]. The titles must include the social point, saying at the same time something about the kind of portrayal wanted, i.e. should copy the tone of a chronicle or a ballad or a newspaper or a morality.[...]

## Appendices to the Short Organum

4

a If we now discard the concept of EPIC THEATRE we are not discarding that progress towards conscious experience which it still makes possible. It is just that the concept is too slight and too vague for the kind of theatre intended; it needs exacter definition and must achieve more. Besides, it was too inflexibly opposed to the concept of the dramatic, often just taking it naïvely for granted, roughly in the sense that 'of course' it always embraces incidents that take place directly with all or most of the hall-marks of immediacy. In the same slightly hazardous way we always take it for granted that whatever its novelty it is still theatre, and does not turn into a scientific demonstration.

b Nor is the concept THEATRE OF THE SCIENTIFIC AGE quite broad enough. The Short Organum may give an adequate explanation of what is meant by a scientific age, but the bare expression, in the form in which it is normally used, is too discredited.

45

The theatre of the scientific age is in a position to make dialectics into a source of enjoyment. The unexpectedness of logically progressive or zigzag development, the instability of every circumstance, the joke of contradiction and so forth: all these are ways of enjoying the liveliness of men, things and processes, and they heighten both our capacity for life and our pleasure in it.

Every art contributes to the greatest art of all, the art of living.

The bourgeois theatre's performances always aim at smoothing over contradictions, at creating false harmony, at idealization. Conditions are reported as if they could not be otherwise; characters as individuals, incapable by definition of being divided, cast in one block, manifesting themselves in the most various situations, likewise for that matter existing without any situation at all. If there is any development it is always steady, never by jerks; the developments always take place within a definite framework which cannot be broken through.

None of this is like reality, so a realistic theatre must give it up.

**Note**

This table does not show absolute antitheses but mere shifts of accent. In a communication of fact, for instance, we may choose whether to stress the element of emotional suggestion or that of plain rational argument.

1 ember 2004, Toronto.

## 6 Laughing and yelling in the trouble

### Spaces of consensual courage

*Sonia Norris and Julie Salverson*

**THE WORLD IS** bleeding out, why would we laugh? What stories are left to tell, and what place has art and theatre in any of it? *The blood of the children ran in the streets like the blood of the children*, wrote Pablo Neruda. The tired, bruising words of Adorno haunt us: *No poetry after Auschwitz*. And yet. The heart keeps beating. The sun keeps rising. Every year I gather with drama students in my witnessing class and tell them what Adorno said later: *After Auschwitz, only poetry*. Every year theatre artist and scholar Sonia Norris gets on another plane, wades into the swamp and creates another feminist disturbance of enraged laughter. This email exchange dives into the trouble and looks at how on earth we stay there without *only* despair, *only* paralysis and *only* fury. We arrive at what we think is the last stand in this Anthropocene moment of crisis and opportunity: in the alarm and feelings of consequence that entail a meeting with a traumatized environment, how do we sit together on this ground, feel the world and sing with joy as if we were celebrating?

#### Julie Salverson

Sonia!

We're going to archive a tumultuous theatrical correspondence, so here goes! We're both theatre artists, teachers, older white women with years of barely surviving on infrequent freelance pay cheques, me relieved of this in 1999 by a university job, you about to start your first reliable (tenure track!) employment. You're in your fifties, me my sixties; we're roughed up by the journey and ready for the next bend in the road.

#### Sonia Norris

Julie!

I've just returned from a conference in Vancouver. My presentation was about the impact of female shame on the costuming choices of female clown performers—their clown 'skins' a form of dressing up their failure to fulfill expectations: dressing for failure. I performed this paper as my clown, dressed in my buck teeth, blonde wig and a blue recycling garbage bag, spouting feminist theory as the trash aging women are perceived to be in our society—funny stuff as I am sure you can imagine! I'm interested in the insistent, persistent presence of those who are discarded—the ability to survive. Yet as I read your email I cringed at the truth of your description of me as an "*older white woman with years of barely surviving ... roughed up by the journey*." I'm ashamed at my own mere survival, no matter how hard won; ashamed about getting older; ashamed by the



Figure 6.1 Bleeding Out

Source: include credit line © Bill Penner

reality of my ‘roughed up’ appearance at the conference in my ragged sweatshirt amidst well-heeled academics; ashamed on the plane home when the businessman next to me insists on buying me a cheese plate after I clarify the appalling state of finances for most Canadian theatre artists (even though I insist I’m fine, especially now I’m starting an academic job, and offer to buy him a glass of wine to prove it—which he declines, leaving me to drink both glasses myself). I’m ashamed by the reality of my persistent, insistent, raggedy presence—even though this is exactly what I have just championed in my clown presentation, reveling in my ridiculous survival against all odds. I’m at odds with my own skin—more comfortable with myself in a clown skin. Sara Ahmed talks about how shame contorts us, as it is both a hiding and a revealing: we need to hide that which we know is revealed as failing. At the conference, I listened to the response of the all-women audience. Surprisingly, for an academic panel, they were highly responsive, laughing and voicing their agreement with my clown’s confusion about how to be female. I was listening to the sounds of communal discomfort. As I unpacked my bags this morning after reading your email and washed the Polident from my clown’s buckteeth and the sweat out of my plastic red nose, I decided to not pack them away again. They allow me to face “*the next bend in the road*,” dressed for failure but not hiding in shame: reveling in the celebration of persistent survival—and free cheese plates!



### Julie Salverson

I'm preoccupied with learning to listen to the place we're surviving *in*, this earth I suppose, but how place matters to each group and class I work with. In Canada, we're responding to the 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission which looked at residential schools and the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous, including settler Canadians. Maori activist Donna Awatere says something that blows my mind: "for European immigrants, original trauma lay in the dis-connection from their roots. Only a people severed from their own land and culture could ... so systematically disinherit indigenous peoples from theirs."<sup>1</sup> When I read this, I think it's not indigenous people who are this 'national problem' Canada likes to claim, it's the rest of us. We don't know who—or, where—we are. No wonder we fucked them over; we're fucked up ourselves.

'Who am I on this ground where I stand?' was the orienting calculus for readings and discussions in my Applied Theatre and Theatre History classes this year. The students read from Tim Lilburn's *Going Home*, where he addresses the restlessness and rootlessness that makes many with European heritage detached from elements of Western wisdom traditions that could teach us how to live "undivided from one's earth."<sup>2</sup> Lilburn says this happened to our ancestors long before they left Europe, and is a result of modernity and the Enlightenment. My students think about their own lost heritages, their hidden resources: who are our ancestors, what traditions can we claim to learn the exacting apprenticeship of knowing place? The white students are nervous, they think it sounds like white supremacy, or privilege. They don't think about class, whether their ancestors had jobs, they don't think about poor whites, and the structure of divide and conquer implemented by owners of big businesses. When you visited my Applied Theatre class a few years ago, we were creating a performance about the real story of the 'Bonnie and Clyde' gang, what it was to be young and poor in 1930s America. We read and performed *Careen*, Carolyn Smart's book of poems about the Barrow gang, and read *White Trash*, Nancy Isenberg's history of class and whiteness, and it made some people uncomfortable. Some of them didn't like this discomfort; they thought it meant something was wrong.

### Sonia Norris

I remember the uneasy discomfort in your class. But I also remember the courage of your students as we explored the destabilizing possibilities of clown and bouffon in our attempts to find a style of performance that embodied their discomfort and lack of safety in the world.

I attended a panel recently discussing issues we face as theatre teachers, directors and creators in this time that demands greater consent and transparency in our work. It was agreed that transparency creates a 'safe space' empowering students and participants with the agency to consent. It's our responsibility as facilitators to create this safe space. Everyone agreed. I don't trust this 'safe space' idea. It is too easy to accept without any idea how to tangibly create it while practicing a craft that is inherently unsafe in its willingness to engage. How do we feel safety—or, how do we feel a lack of safety? Usually it is uncomfortable. Does a safe space imply we will all feel comfortable? Embodying the truth of our own humanity in public, let alone someone else's, as is common practice in theatre, is not comfortable. This discomfort doesn't mean it's unsafe—or perhaps it *is* unsafe because it is alive and unpredictable, but this doesn't make it wrong. Discomfort doesn't



Figure 6.2 Into the Swamp

Source: include credit line © Bill Penner

mean something needs to be changed. I believe our theatre spaces must be alive with the sensations of our humanity chafing against each other—uncomfortable but allowing us to see something we don't see with our skins intact. It requires a kind of *consensual courage* to engage in such precarious proximity. This is then an agreement, not a limit: consenting to move forward with courage amidst the acknowledged risks inherent in the practice—but to do so acknowledging these risks exist; not eradicating them to create safety.

### Julie Salverson

I'll be honest, I get very frustrated at this notion of a 'safe space' ... this comfortable safe little group sitting in a circle while the tsunami arrives. I think about the obsession with trigger warnings, certainly big in North America. We warn people they might feel something difficult when they come to our workshop, our performance or our class. Making the content clear is important—deep traumas can be, yes, triggered. But these relationships between the body and psyche's wounds and the external environment are subtle, not predictable, and when we set people up to think being unsettled, feeling something difficult, equals being abused, we are making misleading mischief. We diminish the trauma a person carries and the troubling and unsettling challenge of any good workshop, class or play. When we accept the common proposition that we can protect people from trouble, we're buying into a dangerous presumption of control. Let's face it, usually people do this so they won't be sued.

It's fear that produces this desperate wish to be safe, which feeds the populism and polarization in much of the world. Every probing thought meets instant judgement on social media, the public conversation has been reduced to sides and the fury of conviction, the righteous sound bite. Joy Kogawa says "there is an Olympics of victimization ... an

Olympics of everything—to be the most important, to be the centre of attention, to get the most applause, to be the most of the most. There’s a hunger for the gold medal” (2016, p.164). Do we pull back from this roiling current of accusation and indignation? Or do we stay in this trouble; pause, listen, act in this thick material present from some deeper place that isn’t pure reaction? But who, right now, has the nerve to reveal themselves. And now I’ll use the word *we* are uncomfortable with—speaking out isn’t safe.

### Sonia Norris

We are living in a time of rampant hollering of opinions on social media that’s become a safe substitute for the “trouble” of engagement. Donna Haraway advises us *not* to protect people from the trouble, but instead to “stay with the trouble,” finding the “generative joy, terror, and collective thinking” (Haraway, 2016, p.31) that can result from landing in the shit with each other.

Maybe we can more readily access the consensual courage to stay present in the discomfort with each other—at this time of apocalyptic overwhelm—by going for the small stories that don’t skin us alive with the chafing. Haraway says that our stories are so huge right now that they “invite odd apocalyptic panics and even odder disengaged denunciations rather than attentive practices of thought, love, rage, and care” (Haraway, 2016, p.55–56). So perhaps we should focus on telling small stories that solicit attentiveness rather than send us running for safety?

Stories full of tiny moments in which we can remember how to feel something other than despair and terror; stories as small spaces of engagement where we do not have to scream to be heard—not “safe spaces” but spaces of consensual courage: spaces we are able to agree to stay present inside, with each other. Perhaps we should return to telling



Figure 6.3 Small Moments

Source: include credit line © Bill Penner

stories using only the simplicity of our fingers as the characters in the play, or only puppetry, with its demands for such extraordinary attentiveness to the small details of what it is to be alive. Through such tiny acts of care, we might achieve what Lauren Berlant calls “rebooting relationality,” which might be a good working definition of a safe space. Berlant believes “one has to reinvent life by transforming what reciprocity means from its most simple to most complex and unclear exchanges” (Berlant, 2011, p.5). This requires a “collective courage” (ibid p.7) she says, to not seek belonging, but rather *being with* each other. I think the allure of belonging is that it creates the illusion of safety. Being with each other contains the risk of chafing.

### Julie Salverson

Ondinnok is an indigenous theatre company in Montreal who call themselves “a space of indigenous resistance and re-appropriation” (Burelle, 2014, p.257). The company resists a “damage-based framework.” I’ve called this idea an aesthetic of injury that pays more attention to loss than to people who lose.<sup>3</sup> Instead, a framework of desire cultivates “a space of productive collisions”.<sup>4</sup> Ondinnok defines its theatre as one that seeks to repatriate a memory in order to unleash a future. One of the founders says: “One cannot live carrying the dead on one’s back” (ibid).

Deborah Bird Rose writes an essay that captures the imagination of my undergraduate class in ethics and witnessing. Their state of overwhelm and despair is challenged by a concept from Aboriginal people who live near the Victoria river in northern Australia. Shimmer is the ancestral power of life, and it arises in relationship and encounter—with human and non-human, with light on water, the shimmer of an idea, a possibility, a dream perhaps ...<sup>5</sup> “one’s actual capacity to see and experience ancestral power” (Rose, 2017, G54). We’re going to be asked again and again to take a stand for life. Rose challenges us: “Instead of the kiss of life, we humans too often offer a resounding no ... unmaking ancestral power.” (Rose, 2017, G61). Why do we turn away from all this abundance?

### Sonia Norris

I love this idea of shimmering! Philippe Gaulier trains actors in “the impossibility of looking,” to perceive the shimmerings refracted between us—a practice of aberrant attentiveness.<sup>6</sup> We need a theatre that can reveal this shimmering that occurs when our fractured pieces encounter each other. A theatre that, like the Japanese art of Kintsugi, rubs gold dust into the cracks of our world, not to hide the broken bits, but to better reveal the surviving fragments. Julie, earlier you asked, “*Who, right now, has the nerve to reveal themselves?*” This is such an important consideration for theatre artists in a world that often makes it seem either irrelevant or too costly to share of our selves—to chafe against each other to reveal our nerve. Theatre provides the chafing and the nerve for this revelation.

### Julie Salverson

Applied theatre practitioners, all theatre artists, bring the vocabulary of drama, the matter of our art, to the practice of attentiveness. It’s hard to stay put and listen. We risk our feelings exploding inside us. We risk being accused of being inert, moderate, voyeuristic. Hungry. I’ve heard my colleague Dylan Robinson talk about ‘hungry listening.’<sup>7</sup> So much is right in what he says—listening that consumes, steals—but something felt missing,

something that has eluded me until now. It's about what we really do in the face of hunger. Hunger needs to be fed. It's okay to listen from our hunger, as—and choose your own words for yourself, because surely we all have the right to our own words: her, him, they, settler, arrivant, ally, white folk, people suffering from solastalgia (the condition of being homesick in a home place that has been degraded or destroyed). If you are hungry, honor your hunger. Feed it with nourishment, not resentment. Sonia, you've worked with so many groups, exploring and encouraging the performance of enraged laughter. Anything you, or the artists you are in touch with, are naming about what's most going on and what's most needed in 2019?

### Sonia Norris

I would say laughter—because we're living in such enraging times. I need laughter to survive my own rage. Someone said to me that I could just choose to not be mad. This is true, so I guess I choose to *not* not be mad until there are no more justifications for my rage. I turn to laughter to release the unbearable burning heat of my anger. By turning specifically to clown, I choose joy—radical joy. Which leads me back to your question of what we need and your desperate preoccupation with “*learning to listen to the place we are surviving in.*” To choose joy, when it is not the obvious choice, is a form of listening to how our world is actually surviving—not just suffering because of our impact. Which



Figure 6.4 Raptor Love

Source: include credit line © Bill Penner

leads me to the Raptors' recent victory and your reference to our collective hunger for the gold medal.<sup>8</sup> I live in Toronto and I completely ignored this event in my city because huge sporting events don't animate me. But they animate millions of other people, and as they descended on the city to celebrate this unprecedented victory I became fascinated by the impact this event was having on the collective consciousness. People were so full of joy—crazy, heart-exploding, love-inducing, boundary-exceeding, all-embracing joy. It was extraordinary.

You love sports with a passion that astounds me. The night the Raptors won you sent me a text: "Complete Raptors fever last night! [...] we watch the last third of it down at our local pub full of amazingly cheerful cheering fans, who then wept and danced with strangers for quite a while. It was the best night in the world." How brilliant. The best night in the world experienced with cheering, weeping, dancing strangers. I think you have answered your own question about what we need: more of this joy! I found a Facebook post from a stranger last night—I still don't understand why the posts of strangers show up on my feed but this one I was happy to read—and he was talking about his experiences at the Raptors' victory parade in Toronto. "Hi pals. I want to tell you a couple of stories from today's parade in Toronto, which was just beyond anything I'd ever imagined." His stories were about people helping each other when they were lost or overwhelmed, even when it meant they gave up their coveted view of the parade to navigate the crowd or guide someone home. He summed up these stories: "These were tiny human moments of people making other people's problems their problems, too. They didn't fix anything systemic, weren't giant hero moments, just instances of carrying your neighbor's burden if you can. I love Toronto. But I especially love this Toronto."

Julie, to me, this is another example of your idea to "learn to listen to the place we are surviving *in*, this earth." To love a place is to listen to it. And this brought me back to my own desire for small stories of human proximity that don't skin us alive, but make us more aware of how we feel because we have chafed from the contact with each other. I return again to your question about who, right now, has the nerve to reveal themselves. I think millions of people just did exactly this, through the explosion of their collective joy.

Hey, I keep meaning to ask if our conversation needs to more specifically reference applied theatre. I've focused on engaging with trouble, listening amidst discomfort and outrage, and discovering how to tell stories about this mess. To me this is where/how we 'apply' theatre to our world and our communities.

### Julie Salverson

Let me answer that with a story about how my applied theatre students took an idea from science and made it their own. The seminar was called *Staying in the Trouble: Theatre as Witness*. Near the end of the course we read an essay where Haraway describes the idea of *sympoiesis*, which means *making with*. Not only are humans never alone, in true Levinasian fashion all two-footed, four-footed and microbotic critters "do not precede their relating; they (are) becoming with each other at every node of intra-action in earth history" (Haraway, 2017, p.25). Through biology, a hot compost—the rich mix of sometimes unlikely ingredients—produces something fertile. If we can stand the smell. If we can stand "the intimacy of strangers" (ibid). Haraway describes a public art project started by two sisters in America that has spanned dozens of countries. People weave reproductions of coral from the garbage found in oceans. The students who gave a presentation on this



Figure 6.5 By Any Other Name  
Source: include credit line © Bill Penner

reading struggled through the science, terms unfamiliar but provocative, and their excitement was palpable. One student, concluding the final seminar of the term, showed us a slide of the myriad images of weavings from around the world, beauty created out of garbage. The looping of love and rage. He said simply, “We are all coral now.”

## Notes

- 1 Myers (1994, p.133), cited in Myers, Ched (Ed.). (2016) *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*. Eugene, Oregon, Cascade Books, p.9.
- 2 Lilburn is quoting Canadian historian George Grant’s 2005 essay “In Defence of North America” from *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* in *The Collected Works of George Grant*, volume 3: 1960–1969, Arthur Davis and Henry Roper (Eds). Toronto, University of Toronto Press, pp.480–503. Cited in Lilburn, 2008.
- 3 Salverson, Julie. (2017) “Shameless Acts of Foolish Witness”. *Comedy Begins with our Simplest Gestures: Levinas Ethics, and Humour*, Brian Bergen-Aurand (Ed.). Duquesne Press. pp.141–162; Salverson, Julie. (2001) “Anxiety and Contact in Attending to a Play About Landmines”. Re-printed in *Popular Political Theatre and Performance*, Julie Salverson (Ed.) Critical Perspectives on Canadian Theatre in English, volume 17. Playwright’s Canada Press. 2010. pp77–92; Salverson, Julie. (2006) “Witnessing Subjects: A Fool’s Help”. *A Boal Companion: Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*, Jan Cohen Cruz and Mady Schutaman (Eds). New York & London, Routledge. pp.146–158.
- 4 Julie Burrelle (2014) is referring to Eve Tuck’s idea of a “damage based framework” and “desire-based framework”. Tuck writes about this in “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities”. *Harvard Educational Review* 79.3 (2009):409–28. Print.
- 5 Another term for this is *bir’yun*, meaning brilliant or shimmering. This allows or brings us “into the experience of being part of a vibrant and vibrating world” (Rose, 2017, G53).
- 6 Gaulier describes his actor training as teaching “an impossibility of looking: as if always, somewhere else, another image was going to appear ... I teach the angle of aberrations” (Gaulier, 2007, 165).
- 7 Robinson, Dylan. (2020) *Hungry Listening: Resident Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. University of Minnesota Press.
- 8 On June 13, 2019, men’s basketball team the Toronto Raptors won their first National Basketball Association championship. Toronto is the only NBA team outside the United States, and a Canadian team had not won a major championship (played in North America among North American teams) since 1992. This was an enormous national moment, people in every village,

town and city lined up outside pubs and bars and stayed up late at home to watch the final series. Basically, Canada exploded in celebration.

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## 7 Provoking intervention

*Adrian Jackson*

**HAVING SPENT MUCH OF THE** past 20 years working with the Theatre of the Oppressed and especially Forum Theatre as a tool for social and individual change, both with my own company, Cardboard Citizens, and in training and development situations all around the world, a major preoccupation of mine has been finding the methodology to make the game of Forum work in an unforced way – to create the conditions whereby the participation of Boal's *spectator* is natural, easy and productive. Much of this of course resides in the skill of the joker and his or her ability to solicit participation from an initially recalcitrant or too well-behaved audience. But the real forces creating the possibility of intervention are the seduction and provocation provided by the model, the piece of theatre whose outcome is to be rewritten in action by the audience. At best Forum Theatre retains the subversive intentions of its origins, as a counterweight to the standard power relations obtaining in the theatre context and, by extension, in the society which supports that theatre.

Sometime in the late eighties or early nineties, I went, on two occasions, to see versions of a show by the avant-garde Belgian director, Jan Fabre, entitled *The Power of Theatrical Madness*. By no stretch of the imagination would this kind of work fall within the ambit of the at-that-time-unused designation *applied theatre* – indeed it might even be described as being at the opposite end of that spectrum, as *unapplied theatre*, being work that appeared to be made solely for an art-crowd audience, with no declared goal of social change, art for art's sake (whatever that means). However, on both occasions, the work succeeded in provoking quite extreme reactions, and indeed interventions, from members of the audience. Whether this was the desired response or not, to this day, I have no idea, but, apart from being a very beautiful, concentrated, strange and difficult meditation on the nature of theatre, paradoxically there were also things to be learnt from it which overlap into the subject areas discussed in this book, and how an audience may be coaxed or challenged into moving beyond the role of passive spectator into active critic or subversive participant.

*The Power of Theatrical Madness* was very much *auteur* theatre, a grand design with much stylisation, occasional literary or other references, choreographed grace and ugliness, performers, both male and female clad, as I remember it, in smart suits and open-necked shirts. It contained wonderful moments and enduring images, most particularly one which clearly referenced the tale of the 'Emperor's New Clothes', with a naked crowned figure parading round the stage; it also had the repetitive tics and over-long sequences which characterised the rather self-regarding theatrical avant-garde of that time. Maybe the whole thing was a pun on the Emperor's new clothes, the Emperor being Fabre and his troupe, awaiting the brave little boy who would point out their preposterous

self-important aesthetic nakedness. Or maybe not. I liked the experience enough to watch it twice, though I also thought it contained moments of unutterable tedium. On both occasions, however, a version of the brave little boy appeared, to puncture the pretension with enjoyable irreverence and break the rules of theatrical convention.

The first time, in the small auditorium of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, there came a point in the show when a tray of live frogs was brought on stage, and they hopped off in various directions. After a few minutes, a number of performers whipped off their white shirts and each appeared to trap one of these hapless reptiles under their shirts on the floor. Then, with much gusto, they appeared to stamp vigorously on the shirts, crushing their ranine victims underneath, as seemingly evidenced by large red stains that appeared on the shirts.

At about this point, a female voice came from the back of the auditorium, prefaced by a very British 'Excuse me', asking 'Are you really killing those frogs?' The company ignored the question and went on with their show. So she asked again, louder. Again, no response. She left the auditorium, and we could hear her loudly persisting outside the theatre space, repeating her question to the staff and remonstrating generally about cruelty to animals. The show continued and came, eventually, to its conclusion. Later, in conversation with other theatre-goers, I established from a more zoologically minded punter that had they really been 'killing those frogs', the stain that appeared on their shirts would have been blue, not red, frogs being cold-blooded animals (please do not ask me for a more detailed chemical or biological explanation – suffice it to say that apparently this detail of colour would have proved the actors' innocence without the need for more detailed forensics). It seemed certain to me that the company's intention was to provoke, though whether they experienced these animal-loving interventions in other countries to which they toured seemed less certain. They did nothing with the intervention, however, seemingly simply ignoring it – but perhaps knowing that this was the reaction most likely to increase the level of protest.

A year or so later, I saw the same company performing a version of the same show at the Albert Hall – a venue which combines a very stuffy and well-behaved British Empire feel with a circular configuration which forces members of an audience to be conscious of their fellows. This time the piece, though again undeniably brilliant and striking in parts, had considerable *longueurs*, which seemed like a statement, a taunt, a deliberate taxing of the audience's patience; of course, it may be that the audience was simply not considered as a factor in the construction of the piece – that this was the vision of a creator, taking the artist's prerogative to do as he liked, to make the piece he wanted, at the length he wanted. Or maybe it was a bit of both.

Anyway, after an agonisingly slow sequence, in which little happened over a long repetitive period, a member of the audience from the stage right side – the performance effectively being played on a thrust stage surrounded on three sides – shouted out: 'Get on with it!' At which another member of the audience from the other side shouted sternly: 'Shush (PAUSE) ... I'm doing the crossword'. After a further short pause, a third member of the audience joined in the dialogue from elsewhere with: 'Give us a clue'. Again, at no point did the company acknowledge or react to these interventions, which released a healthy critical dialogue and irreverent levity in their audience.

I tell this story because this was my first serious experience of theatre audiences breaking the rules and thereby creating a more interesting spectacle. This was before I myself started experimenting with the Theatre of the Oppressed, specifically Forum Theatre, in which intervention is a *sine qua non*, an anti-rule even, though of course not an

obligation (except in the worst of forced Forum Theatre events). A considerable preoccupation of mine since then has been how to provoke and seduce meaningful intervention from audiences – and how sometimes one sees Forum Theatre in which intervention is solicited (or even begged) for all the wrong reasons and by all the wrong methods.

Why does an audience member intervene, and what is a meaningful intervention? At first, my Bible was the story Augusto tells of the powerfully built woman – her dimensions used to increase with his every telling of the story, to the point where these days she is girthed like a sumo wrestler – who intervened in a session of the precursor of Forum Theatre, Simultaneous Dramaturgy, because she was so angry, both with the oppressor in the story and with the pathetic attempts of the actors to use the strategy she was suggesting, that she simply could not stay passively in her seat any longer. The drivers here for intervention were frustration and anger, and a sense that she had to do it otherwise no one else would.

Augusto attributes to this moment, the *Ur-Intervention* if you like, the birth of Forum Theatre as we know it. Solidarity, fellow feeling, coupled with a sense of – in the immortal words of the bleakly brave protagonist in Alan Bleasdale's seminal eighties TV drama, *The Boys from the Blackstuff* – 'I can do that'. She was neither bored by artistic pretension nor outraged by animal abuse, but she was angry both with a character whose type she knew and the ineffectual responses of those faced with this oppressor on the stage.

Unlike the barrackers and questioner in the Fabre performances, this woman waited till Boal (belatedly) gave her permission to intervene – but then her intervention, actually taking the stage and taking control of the action (to administer a sound beating to the erring oppressor-husband), was obviously on a different scale. It takes a lot of courage to enter someone else's stage without a script.

Much Forum intervention does work on those lines, implicating the audience in the action of the piece by stimulating the essential, but often dormant, human urge to put right injustice. The comparative safety of the theatrical environment works with the driver of *anger* to overcome the restrictors of *fear* and *convention*. Spectators forget their fear for a few precious moments – and the hope is that by forgetting their fear in the theatrical conceit, they may then be encouraged to forget their fear of upsetting convention in their real lives. The power of theatrical solidarity, if you like. The audience provides the backup, if the intervention is not totally misguided, and proves to the intervening spectator that they are not alone, and that it is possible to take arms against a sea of troubles.

The theatre must provoke, if the target is truly to move people beyond the normative conventions which keep the spectator passive, the citizen obedient. Of course if you simply provoke, you run the risk of meaningless outrage – the question is what you do with that provocation and the resulting release of energy. You also have to seduce, by the power of the narrative and the quality of the theatrical experience. Seduction and provocation in equal measure. The experience has to be seductive enough to warrant participation. And to make the experience truly seductive, the art must be good enough. Good enough for the circumstances you find yourselves in, with the resources you have at hand.

Jan Fabre's piece, seductive and provocative enough to elicit transgressive audience response, no doubt supplied material for many post-show drinks and dinner-party conversations, but there, I imagine, it ended. I doubt that many personal or social acts of real-life revolution resulted from it. The best *applications* of Forum Theatre link the event of performance to follow-up, working with organisations and bodies which can harness the initial transgression and embed it in programmes to enable concerted long-term change and development.

For many years now, Cardboard Citizens has used Forum Theatre in hostels and day centres, first of all just as an event in itself, and more latterly in its Engagement Programme in which after the initial performance and Forum session, the ex-homeless actors, trained as short-term mentors, hook up with members of the homeless audiences to offer suggestions of how or where they might best follow up the ideas or changes initiated or implied during the Forum. Many participants will start attending the various weekly workshops offered by the company, in a range of performance-related disciplines – and the workshop group, composed of people in similar situations, becomes a launch-pad for embedding the change. Or a meeting might be arranged for the day or week after the performance, and an actor might even accompany individuals on a trip to one of the numerous schemes and charities the company has links with, to capture the urge displayed in the moment of intervention and allow the person to solidify their desire for change into action in real life. Or, to paraphrase Augusto, *to extrapolate from rehearsal in the theatre to performance in real life*.

What is the seduction? At bottom, always, a good piece of theatre – the better the theatre, the easier the seduction. The seduction in a Cardboard Citizens show is also, in part at least, the nature of the seducers – the performers are mostly ex-homeless people – for the audience, these are people like us, telling stories like ours. The seduction will often be by the use of a lighter form to clothe a more difficult issue; for instance, treating the subject of abuse and homelessness under the guise of a pantomime version of Dick Whittington – Dick and his Dog, the world's first *panto-forum* (there is a longer story to be told here one day, of the adaptation of this noble British theatre form, with its subversion and apparent interactivity, into a genuine tool for political debate ...). People came on stage to play with the Dame (*ooh er missus ...*), and found themselves engaged in deeper questions.

The provocation can be as simple as the visible mistreatment of a homeless person – in ways familiar to the audience. The small device of a beggar harangued or spat upon by a passing commuter has often worked an easy trick of provoking the first five or six interventions, bringing the audience onto the stage simply to remonstrate or reason with the ignorant character who stops long enough to say 'you people make me sick – why don't you get a bloody job like the rest of us...'. Once this first transgression has been performed, others will follow with more ease, seeing that this original sin has not resulted in cataclysmic consequences for its perpetrators – indeed discovering that it can be fun.

The best Forum Theatre acts with this combination of seduction and provocation to release the innate dissatisfaction in its audience members so that, without coercion, they feel an overwhelming urge to make their thoughts and feelings known by taking action; in the form of *intervention*. The worst manifestations of Forum Theatre simply replace one set of rigid theatrical and social conventions with another, even to the extent that the audience feels compelled to participate as a sort of penance, and sometimes even to save a vicarious embarrassment for the performers as to whether the game is working or not. At its least subversive, civic duty can take the place of the art and pleasure of theatre; at best, theatricality combines with content to produce the perfect conditions for an audience to take an active part, to the point of genuinely taking the power.

To end with a similar story of transgression from the world of the Theatre of the Oppressed, in 1992 I attended a festival of Forum Theatre in Paris at which companies and organisations around the world showed pieces they had made. Amongst them was a so-called Forum Theatre play from one of the newly independent Eastern bloc countries. In this disastrously (and possibly unpleasantly) misconceived production, the scenario featured a number of shipwreck survivors washed up on a desert island. The survivors

were, we were told by an interpreter, representative of various ethnic groups: there was an Arab, a Jew, an African prince from the Ivory Coast (*sic*, as translated to us), a Red Indian (*sic*, as before), a French lady, and I forget the rest. Since the play was made for an international audience, with little or no knowledge of the originating language, it was to be performed out of verbal language; each performer was to speak in ‘characteristic’ sounds, though we were not told who was who. One’s suspicions were aroused when one character made ‘ooga-wooga’ sounds, while another, dressed in a long black coat, made nasty rasping throaty noises.

I had the misfortune to be sitting in the front row. The audience of over 200 was in festival mode, and (overly) respectful of each international contribution. The first event in the narrative was the awakening of the rasping black-coated character, whilst all the rest of the survivors lay exhausted on the shore. This character made as if to steal a wallet from the pocket of another, till the latter awoke in the nick of time. Later all the survivors were making offerings of coats and such-like for the building of a fire, and some were striking sticks together to try to make sparks to light it. While this was going on, the rasper was calmly standing elsewhere, not offering his coat, and lighting a cigar with his lighter. By now the general tenor of the production was clear.

The ‘model’ ended fairly rapidly, and we were told that now ALL THE PARTS were to be replaced by members of the audience (rather than the protagonist as is the working norm in Forum). As it happened the rasping actor approached my neighbour to take his place – no question here of voluntarism, we were to do as we were told in this woeful misunderstanding of the methodology and function of Forum. I took the opportunity to ask him, in various languages, whether he by any chance represented the Jew. On receipt of an affirmative answer I started to leave, horrified to find that some members of this polite audience were playing along and happily taking people’s places, as if they had left their brains at the door. On my way out, I passed Boal slumped in his seat and said to him: ‘Augusto, this is racist shit of the worst order’. He replied disconsolately: ‘I know, you should say something’. So I did, and was rapidly joined by others. I became the protesting audience member, provoked in this case by the utter ineptitude and offensiveness of the production to speak out, against polite convention.

Various discussions and protests followed, Boal gave his damning verdict on this woeful adaptation of his form (*‘C’est bon pour Club Méditerranée, mais cela n’a rien à faire au Theatre de L’Opprimé’*) and eventually the whole group made images of their reactions to the piece. Finally the presenting company, horrified by the responses they had provoked but still, I fear, sadly not in full comprehension of why their piece had been so ill-received, made their own *mea culpa* image.

Here, for a dangerous moment in which the audience was starting to play along, it might have appeared as if one set of theatrical conventions had been replaced by another, equally unthinking one. The rule to be quiet and passive had been replaced by the rule to be active and participate, but was being followed with the same level of docile unthinkingness that Forum Theatre had been created to counter. Thankfully, normal subversive service was resumed in time, and hopefully some lessons were learnt. There was no seduction here, merely provocation, but still that provocation caused a revaluation of the theatrical event, along with a sobering awareness that however revolutionary any form, even in the Theatre of the Oppressed, its power can still be commandeered by the enemy and consciously or unconsciously *applied* with a completely different end in mind.

Forum Theatre should always retain at least a frisson of the ‘original sin’ of transgression – in the image of the spectator as unknown quantity, marching from floor to stage

to execute an action, who knows what – and should always provoke dialogue and debate, expected or unexpected. If one model of thoughtless obedience has simply replaced another, the game is not worth the candle. However popular and widely used the form, it must never lose its subversive edge, even when its audiences come to be as well-versed in its conventions as the other theatre's punters are. And it should always be ready for the still small voice of protest....

PROOF

## 8 'Lift your mask'

### Geese Theatre Company in performance

*Andy Watson*

**SINCE 1987 GEESE THEATRE COMPANY** (UK) has been developing theatre projects with offenders and people at risk of offending. The company works from the principle that theatre and drama are highly effective vehicles for exploring behaviour and contemplating the possibility of change. Whilst acknowledging that there exists a wide range of factors which influence people's decision making, the company focuses on individuals' responsibilities for their offending, and invites those individuals to challenge the attitudes and beliefs which underpin their offending behaviour. Geese's work asks questions and stimulates debate; it prompts participants to stand outside themselves and to evaluate who they are. Although the company's work follows an agenda, that of reducing re-offending, we do not deliver projects that teach participants not to re-offend, or which provide a moral or lesson to be learned. We present theatre and deliver groupwork which encourages offenders to consider the roles they play, have played or could play in the future, and invites them to consider whether or not they are content with those roles. Any changes that participants make are their own – our work provides the catalyst or framework but any changes are instigated and owned by the participants themselves.

The majority of our projects incorporate performance, whether it is an hour-long five-person full-mask piece, or a two-minute solo scene spontaneously created by a practitioner and integrated into a wider groupwork programme. This chapter will focus on the company's use of performance, as opposed to concentrating on our more participatory groupwork projects, of which there has been much discussion.<sup>1</sup> A detailed analysis of Geese's performance work must consider some of the important factors which influence our decision making about those performances. Firstly, the audience: as with all applied theatre we are creating theatre with a specific audience in mind. Our audience consists of offenders; however, offenders are not a homogenous group. In a prison there is only one definite assumption we can make about the composition of our audience: they have all been convicted of a crime (unless we are working with people on remand). Beyond that there may be little we know about who we are working with or what their motivations are for attending the project. A performance of *Lifting the Weight*<sup>2</sup> could attract eighty inmates, drawn from all sections of the prison, with a variety of reasons for attending. We cannot assume that they are attending because they are interested in theatre, in the project or in the process of change. Although we ask that participants are volunteers, 'volunteering' in prison is often a little different from more traditional notions of volunteering. When asked about their motivations for attending, some people will inform us that they were 'told to come'. Others might see it as an opportunity to meet associates whom they seldom see; some attend because it gets them out of other activities; others might see it as an opportunity to get out of their cell for a couple of hours. This degree of uncertainty about the make-up

and motivations of our audience demands that we employ specific strategies in order to ensure the theatre is immediately engaging to a potentially disparate and disengaged group.

In contrast, some Geese performances operate in much more tightly defined parameters than *Lifting the Weight*. *Stay*<sup>3</sup> and *So Far*<sup>4</sup> were both designed to be delivered as part of probation service groupwork programmes with men who have been convicted of violence against a partner or sexual offending against children respectively. As with a prison audience, the eight to ten men who watch *Stay* are not a homogenous group, but in addition to the knowledge we have about their offending (they have been convicted of violence against a partner or ex-partner) we also know that their attendance is as part of a court order. They have not volunteered: they must attend or risk being returned to court for breaching an order, with the additional risk of a more severe sentence being handed down. Consequently, audiences for *Stay* and *So Far* are often very resistant, and this resistance demands that we make very clear choices about the nature of our performance.

Another primary consideration for us in the creation of our work is an understanding of the function of the piece, and how it relates to other work which we (or others) might be delivering with the same group. Our performances are seldom delivered in isolation, but often as part of a wider project, delivered either by ourselves, or, as in the case of *Stay*, by the probation services who have commissioned us. Therefore it is vital to understand what it is we are trying to achieve with our theatre.

*Gutted*<sup>5</sup> provides a useful example of how we create theatre within clearly defined parameters according to the project's function. The project is designed to explore masculinity and to look at the ways in which a man's underlying schema, his attitudes, thinking and feelings, impact on the way in which he interacts with the world and those around him. The performance which prefaces the project therefore had to reflect and enhance that groupwork process. In devising the performance we wanted to: provide an easily accessible narrative which the audience could recognise; show a man's struggle with the choices he has made and the impact of those choices on his friends and family; illustrate, using highly visual metaphors, some of the man's internal processes.

In addition, we are choosing to use theatre because we believe that the performance itself has a power to motivate, to shift people's thinking, to create affect and to act as a catalyst for the change process. As one inmate in HMP Elmley recently commented after watching a performance of *Gutted*, 'it gave me for probably the first time an objective look at the effects of my lifestyle on my family'. This power can then be harnessed when we enter the more participatory aspects of the work – if an audience member has recognised an aspect of himself in the performance, and also experienced a moment of dissonance or ambivalence in that recognition, we can move forward in the groupwork process exploring what might need to happen if that participant wants to begin to make changes.

In discussing the early development of Geese Theatre in America in 1980, Bergman and Hewish (Liebmann 1996: 97) describe a significant moment which helped to clarify the company's remit and scope. The first Geese performance took place in Stateville Correctional Centre in Chicago, a 'didactic historical/political treatise entitled "Gimme a Dollar"'. As Bergman and Hewish reflect, 'It did not take long for us to realise that our theatre was amusing to the inmates but wholly irrelevant. We knew that if we were to continue working in prison, we had to find theatre that was relevant'. It was this understanding that led the company to decide that 'the work must: create and mirror the inmate's special world, accurately' and this is one of the principles which still holds true for the performances created by Geese Theatre (UK) today.



All the company's performances are designed to accurately mirror the audience's world: our characters, their stories and the situations in which they are placed are immediately recognisable by the audience. In the example already cited, *Gutted* is designed to be delivered to an audience of fathers who have had several short prison sentences. The performance itself follows the story of Craig, a young male recidivist who is also a father. The audience immediately recognise Craig; they are familiar with the situations he finds himself in, the debates he has with himself, the emotions he feels, and the strategies he employs. The performance is clearly designed to encourage each man in the audience to 'catch sight of himself' (Liebmann 1996: 102).

This close mirroring has several distinct advantages when working with an offender audience. If offenders attend a theatre project for a number of different reasons, not all necessarily about wanting to engage with the performance itself, showing that the performance is relevant to their lives can help to unify those offenders into an audience. If they are witnessing characters who, although not them, bear a striking resemblance to them, in situations which they recognise, they are more likely to 'see the point' and be willing to engage with what is presented. In *The Plague Game*,<sup>6</sup> the audience watch an inmate struggle to communicate with his family on a prison visit. This is a scene which the vast majority of the audience will recognise for themselves – they have been there. In this moment of recognition they become 'hooked' into the performance – they want to know how the fictional inmate is going to deal with the situation, what impact any decisions will have on his partner and, most importantly, how he might be feeling during the visit. The offender in the audience is able to make direct connections between his own experience of being in a prison visit and the fictional version he is witnessing being played out before him.

The significance of this close mirroring goes beyond the initial moment of recognition; it is more than a rapport-building device to get an audience 'onside'. By presenting characters in recognisable situations we are able to invite the audience to reflect upon some of their own decision making, to explore some of their motivations and to consider potential alternative strategies. In *Lifting the Weight*, a character who has been released from prison and who has made a commitment not to offend again could be in a scene in which old associates are putting pressure on him to return to his old lifestyle. In theatrically presenting a scene which many of the audience will recognise we are positioning them as active observers in something very close to their own lives. Our character can articulate how it feels to be placed under pressure, can demonstrate potential ways out of the problem, and can illustrate some of the difficulties posed by the encounter. In this articulation of exactly what is going on for the character at that moment we are inviting the audience to consider what goes on for them in similar moments; by externalising the character's internal process we are inviting the audience to consider their own internal processes, their own decision making.

Of course, a professional theatre company consisting of trained actors/ practitioners who do not necessarily have experience of offending themselves, creating performances *for* offenders and *about* offenders' lives can be seen as problematic. Geese takes this issue very seriously and the company takes great pride in reflecting the offenders' world accurately. All Geese practitioners have a dual role – they are performers but they are also groupwork practitioners, working in a variety of participatory contexts with offenders. It is through these groupwork processes that we learn about the offender's world; through listening to offenders' stories and asking questions about their experiences we are able to

accurately reflect that world back to them in our performance work. As two former Geese practitioners, Farrall and Mountford, stress:

My map of the world is not the same as yours, because my experiences are different. The Company moves on therefore, by continually asking those we work with to share with us the landscape they inhabit so that we, through theatre and drama, can assist them in living their lives in a different world.

(Thompson 1998: 125)

Adrian Jackson, in his introduction to the UK edition of Boal's *Games for Actors and Non Actors*, discusses why the traditionally 'reserved' British might intervene in a Forum Theatre piece. He states that 'if the model is right, if it is true to life, and is sufficiently effective at making the audience angry about the treatment of the protagonist, then up on stage they will come' (Boal 1996: xxii). Something similar is true for Geese's performance work in prisons: if the model is right, if it is true to life, and the audience invest in the characters and the world they inhabit because they recognise it, they will engage with what is being presented. The key is getting the model right and true to life – an audience of eighty inmates in a prison do not hold back when providing feedback about what you are presenting – if they do not recognise the characters and the world which you are holding up as a supposed mirror for them, they are entitled to challenge your interpretation of their world. An offender who witnessed a performance of *Hooked on Empty*<sup>7</sup> clearly summarises some of the attitudes we might be presented with when working in a prison, but also goes on to demonstrate the power that the theatre can hold if delivered sensitively and accurately:

Before I went in to watch your play, I said to myself, 'Yeah, yeah, here we go again, people that don't know what they're talking about.' How wrong I was. In every aspect you got it down to a 'T' ... I think it hurt me to see what I had been through and what I had been putting up with ... The play most definitely put a lot of things in perspective for me. Before I stepped into the room yesterday, I had an 'I don't give a fuck' attitude towards drugs ... But I swear, if I've got anything to do with it, my life is not going to go on like my past.

(Baim, Brookes and Mountford 2002: 198)

By observing a world which is recognisable and believable, this offender is galvanised into wanting to make changes in his life. The theatre serves as a catalyst, propelling that offender into wanting to make changes but only because he believes that the fictional theatre world created resembles the world in which he is living. Another of the defining features of Geese's performance work, namely, interactivity and responsivity, helps to clarify Geese's position with regards to a professional's representation of an offender's world. The earliest of Geese performances, *Lifting the Weight* and *Plague Game*, and some of the more recent creations, such as *Inside/Outside*,<sup>8</sup> have audience interaction at their core. Audience members are positioned not as passive observers of a narrative which unfolds before their eyes but as active participants who are integral to both the development of the characters and the direction of the narrative. As Baim, Brookes and Mountford explain:

The drama takes place between the characters on stage, but even more crucially, between the characters and the audience. A character will often need help or advice

when facing a desperate situation. He or she turns to speak with the audience: 'What can I do next?' Now the character and the audience are directly linked; the character serves as the conduit for the audience's ideas, fears, frustrations and, often, their disbelief that there is a way out of the cycle of offending.

(Baim, Brookes and Mountford 2002: 182)

The performances act as a forum in which the audience can debate, often very passionately, the situations presented. The audience may be provoked into discussing the best course of action in a given situation, or to analyse what certain individuals (not just the protagonist) might be thinking or how they might be feeling. They may be asked to suggest advice or to consider some of the obstacles which might stand in the way. The structure of the theatre performance creates a dialogue between the on-stage action and the audience. This dialogue allows the audience of offenders to engage directly with versions of themselves, to suggest alternative ways of behaving and to view the consequences. The audience is encouraged to take ownership of the action, of the narrative, and in doing so they are invited to consider the role of the fictional offender not as a passive victim of circumstance, but as an active participant in the narrative who makes clear decisions about how that narrative will unfold. In effect, audience members are encouraged to reflect upon their own role of offender and consider how some of their decisions have influenced the narrative of their own lives.

The audience are carefully positioned to respond; they are often subtly placed in the role of 'expert'. In *Stay*, the male abuser character periodically turns to the audience of male abusers and seductively attempts to explain away his violence against his partner using the distortions, minimisations and justifications that the men in the group will have used. After a sustained period of physical and verbal abuse directed towards his partner, he will invite the group members to collude with his distortions: 'I don't do it with anyone else so it must be something about her that makes me ...' The group, many of whom will have used similar distortions, experience cognitive dissonance: a tension arises from holding two conflicting thoughts at the same time. On the one hand they may want to agree with the character's distortions, as they are distortions they themselves have used to justify their behaviour; on the other hand, they have just witnessed a set of behaviours which clearly show the fictional perpetrator being in control and making clear choices about his use of violence. This dissonance is often uncomfortable. The men will challenge the distortion and confront the man with the reality of what he has done, what they have just witnessed. In so doing, their interaction becomes not only a challenge of the fictional character but of themselves. In the groupwork process the men might be asked how it felt to witness the abuse taking place. The majority of them find it uncomfortable and it makes them angry. If one probes a little further to examine that discomfort, they are angry not with the character, but with the bits of the character they recognise in themselves. This dissonance, created by the performance, is one of the key components in promoting the possibility of change.

Integral to the structure of all our performance work has been the development of highly accessible visual metaphors. The search for appropriate metaphors has been at the heart of the company's work from the outset, driven by a belief that visual images which reflect some part of the audience's experience can be strong 'hooks' in the process of change. For Geese, metaphor provides a tool, a language which can be interpreted, analysed and explored in follow-up groupwork processes. The whole set for *Gutted* serves as a metaphor – a large wall within which the central protagonist locks away uncomfortable

or difficult feelings; the character of the 'Fool' from *Lifting the Weight* and *Plague Game*, a larger than life master of ceremonies who continually throws problems at the protagonist and who physically embodies the things in life which are beyond our control; the 'Consmith' from *Gutted*, who symbolises, amongst other things, the part of the offender that does not want to change, that wants to maintain an offending lifestyle; the child's drawing of a female figure which is periodically ripped up in *Stay* which might represent the gradual destruction of the female partner; and the oversized blanket which is carried into every scene by Ellie, the central character in *Journey Woman*,<sup>9</sup> and which represents her maladaptive coping strategies, and which she uses to hide away from the possibility of making changes in her life. These metaphors have several commonalities: they are highly visual; they are open to interpretation; they are theatrically powerful and therefore memorable; and they provide a common language to talk about personal experiences.

In the groupwork process which is delivered in conjunction with our performances, the power of these metaphors comes alive. The images and metaphors resonate with the audience – they provide meaning for some of the experiences which they have not fully been able to articulate. In a discussion after a performance of *Gutted* the men may be asked to consider the character of the 'Consmith' and each will place a different interpretation on the role. Many men describe the 'Consmith' as the destructive, negative voice that we all carry with us; others see him as a negative father figure, an anti-role model. The majority of the men make very strong personal connections with the character – for many the 'Consmith' is an external, visual representation of an internal process. By concretising this internal process we are able to invite the men to challenge the Consmith, to unpick what holds him in place and gives him power, and to rehearse the counter-arguments which might work against him. The metaphor provides a vehicle and a language for that exploration.

One of Geese's most recognisable metaphors is that of the mask and the concept of mask lifting. In performances such as *Lifting the Weight*, *Plague Game*, *Gutted* and *Inside/Outside* actors wear character half-masks. These half-masks represent the 'front' that people show to the outside world. With the mask down the character is demonstrating their external, presenting behaviour. However, audiences are encouraged to ask the characters to 'lift their masks' throughout the performance. When requested to do so, an actor will literally lift the mask from their face and the character will reveal something to the audience, and to the other characters, that they have kept hidden, thoughts and feelings which are not publicly shared. The mask is not necessarily about lying; when we lift the mask we are inviting the character to verbalise their 'inner voice', often revealing attitudes and beliefs which might motivate the behaviours we are witnessing, or allowing the character to reveal vulnerabilities, insecurities and fears which might otherwise remain hidden. Audience members, especially inmates, quickly comprehend the metaphor. They acknowledge that survival in a prison environment often involves the use of masks or fronts but also that the masks which are used to justify offending can be very destructive.

Of course, the company acknowledges that everyone wears masks throughout their life, and probably different masks for different situations, and also that some masks might actually be useful and constructive. It is the destructive masks which we concentrate on when working with offender groups; the masks that they accept cause damage to themselves and others; the masks which support and justify their offending; the masks which hold them in role as offender. The mask and the concept of mask lifting allows the audience direct access to a character's internal world and becomes a powerful groupwork tool for

challenging distortions and exploring the underlying thoughts, feelings and behaviours which contribute to a presenting behaviour.

Geese utilises other masks in its repertoire of performances and groupwork projects. Half masks such as the Fragment Masks which represent key behaviours or coping strategies;<sup>10</sup> helmet masks such as Death Bird<sup>11</sup> which represents the impulse to offend; and Buzz, Suck, Wheedler and Crash, four masks used as representations of different elements of addiction in *Hooked on Empty*. Again, these are highly visual, powerful theatrical images which make concrete attitudes, behaviours or feelings which otherwise might be hard to explore. By inviting participants to recognise the masks they use we are also inviting them to become aware of how they might be perceived by others, aware of the internal processes which feed into their more destructive behaviours, and aware of the situations which might provoke their appearance. It is through this awareness and recognition that the men and women we work with are able to consider the efficacy of their choices, and can start to generate alternative strategies and rehearse new skills and roles.

## Notes

- 1 For further reading on Geese Theatre Company see the Bibliography at the end of this chapter.
- 2 A structured improvisation exploring the difficulties faced by prisoners post-release. *Lifting the Weight* was originally created by John Bergman for Geese Theatre (USA).
- 3 A semi-improvised play about domestic abuse. Co-created by Geese Theatre (UK) with John Bergman, Geese Theatre (USA).
- 4 An exploration of the experiences of men who commit a range of sexual offences, primarily created for sex offender treatment settings. Co-devised by Geese Theatre (UK) under the direction of James Neale-Kennerly.
- 5 Co-devised by Geese Theatre (UK) under the direction of Tony McBride.
- 6 An improvisational play about prisoners and their families. Originally created and directed by John Bergman for Geese Theatre (USA).
- 7 A play about drug and alcohol addiction. Co-devised by Geese Theatre (UK) under the direction of John Bergman, Geese Theatre (USA).
- 8 A play exploring the hopes, fears and anxieties for lifer prisoners contemplating release and their families. Co-devised by Geese Theatre Company (UK) under the direction of Andy Watson.
- 9 A full-mask performance for women offenders. Co-devised by Geese Theatre Company and directed by Andy Watson.
- 10 For more information on Geese Theatre Company's Fragment Masks, see Baim, Brookes and Mountford (2002: 184 and 185).
- 11 For more information on Death Bird see Thompson (1998: p 114)

## References

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## 9 Geographies of hope

### Exploring departures in applied theatre work with people living with advanced dementia

*Michael Balfour and Julie Dunn*

*Hope locates itself in the premise that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act.*

(Solnit 2004: xiv)

#### Introduction

**IN THIS CHAPTER**, we draw upon our experience as researchers within the *Playful Engagement* project, aimed at identifying the efficacy of applied theatre practices as a means of enhancing the quality of life for individuals living with mid to advanced stages of dementia, to consider how normative assumptions within applied theatre need to be re-evaluated in such contexts. Based on these discussions, we share our thoughts about the ways in which applied theatre practice with people in the final phases of their lives challenged our ideas of aesthetic intentionality and brought about new understandings of the geographies of hope.

In our individual and shared work in other contexts, including with people from refugee backgrounds, prisoners, school students and soldiers returning from war zones, there always appeared to be an unspoken belief that the work was in some way connected with notions of hope. However, as the *Playful Engagement* project progressed, we began to wonder if, within dementia contexts, the notion of hope needed to be re-framed. To do this, we stepped back and considered two key aspects of applied theatre work: participation and purposes.

#### Background

Dementia affects around 50 million people worldwide, and there are nearly 10 million new cases every year (World Health Organisation 2017). The disease has physical, psychological, social and economic impacts, not only for the individual who has dementia, but also on their families, carers and society more broadly. Over the last two decades, the arts have been increasingly applied in response to the challenges of rising rates of dementia (Schneider 2018). This growth in practice derives from a recognition that, in the absence of a cure, there is a need to develop approaches that address its key impacts of social isolation, depression and reduced quality of life (QoL).

Arts researchers and practitioners have become increasingly interested in the possibilities of arts practices that are created with or for, or that are inspired by, people with dementia. Theatre research and practice have developed significantly in the last decade, including theatre productions about dementia, creative and participatory work, specially

organised theatre visits, theatre projects with a strong inter-generational component, professional theatre companies of older people, multisensory programmes, play readings and other forms of dementia-friendly theatre movements (Schneider 2018). The benefits of arts and health work have been assessed by observing people with dementia to determine their interest, engagement and pleasure, and by recording any reductions in what are called 'problem behaviours', such as wandering, verbal outbursts or aggressiveness (Basting 2006).

Our own work, as researchers within the Australian Research Council funded project *Playful Engagement: understanding the efficacy of applied theatre practices for people with dementia in residential aged care facilities*, used a relational clowning approach specifically designed to be responsive to the moods of people living with dementia. The relational clown is subtle and underplayed, and draws from a legacy of European clowning that has at its heart a philosophy of spontaneity, connection and respectful playfulness. The engagement between a relational clown and a participant is conceived of as a non-threatening encounter, designed to break the institutional tedium and enable a different kind of relationship to exist. Relational clowns utilise improvisation, stories, reminiscence, humour, songs and music with an emphasis on individual engagement (Dunn et al. 2013; Warren & Spitzer 2011).

The relational clowns who worked within the *Playful Engagement* project were Clark Crystal and Anna Yen who make up a team called The Lamingtons. The very tall Clark becomes 'Tiny Lamington', with Anna being portrayed as his identical twin sister who engages with residents as 'Dumpling Lamington'. They dress in character costumes from the 1950s and each wears a red nose. Their story is that they live together out of town with their mischievous dachshund dog Peg, catching the bus to the care centres to visit the residents once a week. The siblings carry suitcases with them, with these cases containing games, wigs, old magazines, wool for knitting, musical instruments, sheet music, lengths of material and toys that squeak. They are always lost, tangled, confused, hopeless and in need of help. They do not prepare set pieces or conceptualise their work as entertainment but, instead, playfully create spontaneous interactions by working in the moment.

To understand and report upon their work, the *Playful Engagement* investigating team was made up of researchers and practitioners with expertise in psychogeriatric nursing, applied theatre and ethnography. The study was conducted in Brisbane, Australia in partnership with Wesley Mission Brisbane (WMB), one of Queensland's largest providers of aged care. Involving 64 participants living with mid to advanced stages of dementia, the project generated 340 visits. In most cases, these visits saw the two relational clowns working spontaneously with individuals whose families had given broad consent for their involvement, whilst the assent of each participant was confirmed at the commencement of each visit.

## Approach

The *Playful Engagement* project adopted a mixed-methods, multi-disciplinary approach that made use of a range of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Across the study the quantitative data collection and analysis processes were managed by the health researchers and their specially trained research assistants, whilst the corresponding qualitative processes were the responsibility of the applied theatre researchers and a further research assistant who also worked as the project manager. Due to the goals of this chapter and the constraints of space, we do not draw here on the data generated by the project, but rather use our experiences to offer some general observations.

### **The research participants and the care environment**

The participants involved in the study, 49 women and 15 men, each had their own unique history, personality and sense of wellness, along with varied levels of frailty and capacity. Almost all were over 70 years of age, with varied ethnicity and opportunities to engage with family members. The WMB facilities they shared were equally diverse in terms of the opportunities they provided for playful engagement and meaningful interaction. One site was particularly homely, with heavy-duty seats arranged in groupings that enabled some opportunity for personalised visits. Other sites, however, were less conducive to visits from Tiny and Dumpling, with the residents lined up in rows of chairs facing inevitable television sets. In these spaces, the possibilities for interaction were more limited, as the artists tried to avoid disturbing residents not engaged in the interactions.

Differences in the mobility and communication skills of individuals was another important factor, with some of the participants within this study no longer having any independent mobility. For them, visits occurred in reclined geriatric chairs or day beds, with the artists standing on either side of the resident, their only option for interaction being to look down on them. In many of these cases, the person living with dementia was also aphasic, and was thus incapable of coherent speech. During visits with individuals experiencing this condition, the true value of having two artists collaborating was obvious, with the interactions between Tiny and Dumpling serving to both instigate and sustain engagement.

### **Departures**

As applied theatre researchers new to work aimed at engaging individuals living with mid to advanced stages of dementia, we were somewhat unprepared for the fact that some of our normative assumptions about participants and their participation, and indeed about our purposes, almost immediately became problematic, creating necessary points of departure in our thinking. In this section, we discuss these departures within the context of the *Playful Engagement* project.

### **Participation**

Within the *Playful Engagement* work, the notion of participation offers a point of departure for several reasons. Some of these reasons relate to the nature of dementia itself and its impact on the individuals experiencing this illness, while others relate to the context of the work, including the involvement of family members and nursing staff/carers.

First, in relation to the people living with dementia who participated in this project, it is important to note that some were close to the end of their lives, whilst all were suffering from declining cognitive and linguistic capabilities with fragmented perceptions of past and present. For some, these perceptions were also accompanied by feelings of disconnection from the self. The implications for the practice were therefore considerable. Rather than the work being characterised as developmental – where, over a series of workshops and encounters, relationships and trust are built – for most of our participants there was little or no recollection of the work, only a degree of familiarity with the artists who worked with them.

In addition, depending upon their level of wellness on a given day, participation itself was a type of departure. Whilst our usual practice in applied theatre work would be to



ensure that participants' voices are heard, that the work is active and that individuals have control over aspects of the drama form and its content, for these participants, this was only possible for some and then to only a limited extent.

Adding to this complexity was the fact that participation was not limited to the elderly people themselves but also extended to include family members and carers. To build relationships with families and as part of the ethics process, we held information evenings where we discussed the project. We also wrote up notes from the visits and sent 'postcards' from the practice out to the families so that they could hear how their parent/spouse had responded. In addition, at the conclusion of each series of visits, a compilation video was created to share significant moments.

In response to these materials and events, some families timed their visits to be present to witness the work in action. Many of these family members were struggling to connect and come to terms with the changing cognitive and linguistic capabilities of their loved ones, and as such positively embraced opportunities to observe the artists as they engaged with their family member. Whilst most of these visitors would have been more than happy to simply observe the play, due to the nature of the practice, they soon found themselves spontaneously involved. This involvement was keenly accepted by most, and on these occasions the play was enriched. But there was sadness in these moments too, as the visitors shared with us their associated emotions including shame, guilt, concern, anxiety, anger and varying degrees of understanding and acceptance of the decline of their loved one.

Another consideration in terms of the notion of participants was the fact that the participating group also included the community of nurses and carers charged with the task of ensuring the well-being of the residents in the homes we worked in. These carers were integral to the project's design and sphere of influence as they are fundamental to the institutional culture that exists and, as such, for the level and quality of support provided to individuals. The policy frameworks that govern any given care home are interpreted and applied within both the management structures and the individual relationships, which co-exist and weave together to create a dynamic, networked living culture. Notoriously, these cultures are challenging due to economic factors (low wages), poor training (a high percentage of workers with English as a second language and varying degrees of qualifications) and high resident to staff ratios creating a 'task-based' culture of care (Sawbridge & Hewison 2013).

In the *Playful Engagement* project, the team was advised that clear and creative modes of communication and engagement with these communities of carers would be needed. In response, we structured in regular project management meetings with key staff before, during and after our visits, and we held briefing meetings with general staff so we could let them know about the project and answer their questions. We also ensured that within the day-to-day visits we worked to engage with staff, drawing them into the playful encounters or making the space for them to witness the activities.

An example of how this widened participation (including both family members and carers) worked in action is worth including here. It involved an elderly woman living with dementia (who we shall call Eunice), her visiting husband and some of the care home staff. In this example, the play with Tiny and Dumpling was focused on an aspect of Eunice's social biography, which was that she and her husband had, in their younger days, worked in a water-skiing show. Based on this information, the two artists playfully encouraged Eunice and her husband to relive those days by inviting them to 'water-ski' through the home while they provided commentary on the action. Soon staff became involved as well, excitedly noting that they were getting splashed or calling out praise for the skills of the

skiers. In this moment, participation was experienced by multiple individuals, not just the person living with dementia, while the benefits were also more widely distributed as there was great joy and laughter in the usually quiet and somewhat sombre home.

### Purpose

Although the *Playful Engagement* project was originally aimed at achieving improvements in the quality of life for individuals living with dementia, the team soon realised that this was a problematic notion. Instead, we came to understand that the work could more appropriately be understood as generating what we have described elsewhere as ‘quality moments of life’ (Dunn, Balfour and Moyle 2019). This shift in understanding created another point of departure from the norms of applied theatre, this time relating to our purposes. Here we came to understand that the present tense nature of these quality moments necessitated a reconsideration of our aesthetic intentions, specifically in relation to the notion of hope.

According to O’Connor and Anderson (2015, 19) in their work focused on applied theatre research, they note:

Hope is founded on the critical imagination. It is therefore not enough for research to tell us what the world is. Instead it must provide opportunities for communities to imagine what it *might* be. Imagining the world as it might become is the first and necessary step in creating the possibilities of social justice.

In articulating this view, O’Connor and Anderson capture both the passion and the rationale for applied arts held by many who work in these fields, with the notion of hope being central and associated with ‘the possibilities of social justice’. According to this perspective, the arts may serve to open up possibility and help individuals and groups to imagine a different orientation to the structural inequities of schools, refugee detention centres, prisons etc. However, when working with individuals living with advanced dementia, only some of these perspectives apply, for whilst these individuals are unlikely to experience any sustained shifts in their sense of empowerment and are even less likely to feel renewed hope, care homes *are* places where structural inequities apply and where disempowerment is an ongoing factor. For example, the current Australian Government enquiry into the aged care sector has unearthed some tragic examples of elder abuse.

Given these conditions, it could be argued then that the point of departure for applied theatre work in this context is that its purpose might be better understood as being more strongly associated with broader, more systemic ideas of critical hope than individual drivers of hope. Critical hope, as an idea, draws on the concepts of critical theory emerging from the Frankfurt School and the work of Freire (Bozalek et al. 2014; Freire 1970, 2007). It can be summarised as ‘an act of ethical and political responsibility that has the potential to recover a lost sense of connectedness, relationality, and solidarity with others’ (Zembylas 2014, 14). Bozalek et al. (2014) identify two ways that critical hope can be employed. First, it can act as a ‘unitary and unified concept which cannot be disaggregated from either hopefulness or criticality’ (p.1), and second, it might provide an analytical framework that acknowledges the affective, the political, the spiritual and the cognitive. Zembylas (2014) separates critical hope from other forms of hope: naïve hope (things will get better if we just hope), fake hope (that people can just overcome barriers by simply trying harder), mythical hope (idealistic hope that marginalised groups can access equal

opportunities but without accounting for the long political and historical implications of political inequities) and hope deferred (which, while framed in progressive political ideals, gets sidetracked in the critique of structures and as a result does not provide a progressive approach to achieve practical and applied solutions).

Based on these ideas then, one of the key departures for the *Playful Engagement* project is that hope in these contexts is located *less* in the individuals living with dementia and *more* through the ripple effects these encounters have on the observing professional staff, the families present in the moment, potentially the absent family members, who might view the play via recordings shared with them, and the broader institution.

Closest to the centre of this ripple effect were the quality moments of life created by the applied theatre artists. As witnesses of, and sometime contributors to, these moments as experienced by the elderly individuals, care staff and family members regularly reported seeing 'something different' in the individual, with that 'something' helping them to rewrite their expectations and perceptions of the person. In some cases, this rewriting process informed a shift in relationships and/or care, which are, in themselves, representations and expressions of critical hope.

However, the ripples extended beyond these individual relationships and perceptions to also influence the broader culture of each facility, with the applied theatre work serving to shift, albeit in small ways, the tone and mood of the environment. Laughter and song filled the spaces where normally silence would dwell, while interactions such as the one described above, relating to Eunice, brought recognition that each individual had a story and a history worth knowing.

## Conclusion

These reflections on our *Playful Engagement* experiences have helped us to understand that, while in most applied contexts the creation of hope for the individual may be a key purpose, a more appropriate goal within care homes is critical hope, achieved through shifts in the perceptions of individuals and in the culture of these institutions. While institutional contexts are always informing elements in applied theatre, the difference in care homes is that these structural networks are as significant as the individual work. Critical hope in a care home setting, therefore, is about a conscious acknowledgement of the challenges that the sector has in delivering 'quality' care, and it is about building into this delivery ways to engage staff and families so that they can affect small degrees of change.

The partnership with WMB is itself a testimony to the willingness of an aged care organisation to engage with these challenges, with this project contributing to a range of positive outcomes, including its impact on the culture of the institution. While the practice element of the research has concluded, WMB has continued their involvement, exploring ways to extend and develop the insights gained, with additional funding being attained to begin the process of training professional care home staff in understanding and enacting some of the relational approaches used within the *Playful Engagement* project. In taking this direction, WMB's goal is not to train their staff to become relational clowns (such as the creation of Laughter Bosses in other programmes) but, rather, to distil some of the philosophies used by relational clowns so they might be applied by staff as they interact in more everyday and 'in the moment' ways with people living with dementia.

These outcomes suggest that through participation in this project, critical hope has helped the institution to identify ways of working that might help it to create an ecology of care that is driven by critical rather than false or naïve hope. As Freire outlines, however,

without a strong commitment to institutional progress or understanding the structural frustrations that carers may be dealing with, progress may stall. He notes:

Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair. Hence the need for a kind of education in hope.

(2007: 3)

These ideas of critical hope may help other organisations identify with greater precision the geography of hope in dementia settings, supporting them to deepen their understanding of the real value and purpose of interventions in these contexts.

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## 10 Culturally producing and negotiating women's rugby league histories through applied performance

*Colette Conroy and Sarah Dickenson*

**RUGBY LEAGUE IS** a community-based and working-class sport, contrasted with the more resource-rich Rugby Union. Areas of Rugby League's popularity map closely onto areas where, in 2016, populations voted in favour of the UK leaving the EU. The working-class communities of the North of England have been represented in the media in injurious terms during the UK recession and the Brexit debates, and there has emerged in the press a narrative of communities that have been left behind by neoliberal economic development. This chapter and, of course, the project are not explicitly related to the debate, but they share a field of concern with the political discourse of populism and community identity. *REF: Crossing the Line* has worked across theatre and museums to develop spaces for the cultural memories of women within Rugby League communities, using the structures and spaces of community cohesion and activism built around sport. Communities exist through interactions and actions and they are dynamic, whereas some external notions such as 'working-class culture' are not. As part of this resistance to nostalgia, histories of Rugby League and their communities are important and significant to British politics, moving us from the generalised and injurious to the specific and nuanced. Some Rugby League clubs have begun to establish archiving projects in recognition of their importance, but none so far focus on the memories and multiple contributions of women. The danger is that the roles women have played and are playing in the clubs and the connected communities will be ignored and lost, overwritten by an assumed absence of women in a male domain.

The *REF: Crossing the Line* project is a bundle of works: a piece of theatre, a variety of interactive workshops and a SMART (Social, Museum and Art) Gallery. The contributions of participants to the project will result in a permanent exhibition at the Rugby League Museum in Bradford. Participants are women from the white, working-class communities in several of the areas involved. The workshops and curating processes are intergenerational in order to establish a working process for the gathering of future memories and to allow space for community activism and intervention. Delivery of phase one of the project was in partnership with Rugby League Clubs and Foundations based in Batley, Castleford, Hull and Featherstone, all areas in the North of England. Phase two of the project expands the engagement base both in the UK and abroad. The project is funded by the ACE Strategic Touring Fund, The Heritage Lottery Fund and the University of Hull. We focus here on phase one, which took place between September 2017 and October 2019. This case study looks at the processes and implications of developing a project with multiple participants. It focuses on the process of negotiating autobiographies and archives of memory with the development of cultures of reception and activism.

At the centre of the project is a play, written by Sarah Jane Dickenson, about the life and experiences of Hull-born Julia Lee, one of the first women to referee Men's Rugby League matches in both Britain and Australia and an important but under-recognised figure in the history of sport. The play is based on Lee's memories of her life from the 1980s to the present. Its protagonist, Alex, is a fictionalised version of Lee, and the story follows Alex as she develops over two decades from obsessive child fan to pioneering adult referee.

The play was performed by professional actors in a variety of community settings, including Rugby League Clubs. The performances often included entertainment by young female fans of Rugby League, including cheerleaders, many of whom were known to the audience of the play. The different companies of cheerleaders brought large numbers of young women and girls into the project. They participated in the performances with rehearsed dance and movement routines and then were a visible presence, in costume, throughout the performance and discussion. Their contributions and centrality gave a context to the process of writing histories. They were participants, but in a specifically female role within the structure of the Rugby League clubs. There were post-performance discussions, which Lee attended, answering questions and discussing the relationship between her own experience and her sense of social change, and exploring the gaps between her memories and the fictionalised account portrayed in Dickenson's play. Techniques of condensation and the process of selecting and editing were of concern to the audience. They wanted Lee to mediate between the play and the source of the play, happy to appreciate the specificity of the play as a medium, but keen to explore further. The sharing of the stage between the professional actors, the cheerleaders and Lee herself was a distinctive part of the experience of the performances and a crucially dynamic part of the emergence of the stories of the women. Many of the exchanges were conversational and involved audience-members and participants telling their own personal stories and expressing their opinions on a wide range of related ideas and experiences.

The project's core is a dialogue between a playwright and members of the Rugby League community. Its structure mirrors a number of Dickenson's previous projects. The catalyst is an autobiographical story, negotiated with the storyteller to make a piece of fictional theatre. To this are added a variety of interactive workshops, many facilitated by Lee, in which memories and artefacts are collectively curated. Finally, a shared outcome is co-created with members of the audience in the form of a SMART gallery in the communities. The SMART gallery is a concept originated by professional artist Helen Payton. It enables the arts producers, Space2, to collaborate with community arts producers to develop the outcome together, working out the details of the public work of representation and expression.

Lee's workshops often began with reluctance from the women to tell their stories. They often articulated a belief in their own relative lack of importance, recounting stories of the men of the clubs. Lee got increasingly active in setting up the meetings, and was happy to work in any context and with any size of group, including one to one and small meetings over coffee. Established groups such as knitting groups were accessed and the telling of stories was allowed to emerge from the usual patterns of conversation. Lee also used her personal acquaintance with women who had significant roles in the sport to engage and connect other women from the less visible context of women's contributions of Rugby League communities. The gradual investment of a large network of women led to the sharing of many stories and also treasured material artefacts for the archive.

Writing from Hull in the month of the UK's exit from the European Union (January, 2020) makes this case study feel complex. The *REF* project is an entity with many parts. At the centre of the project there is a defiant but under-represented history of women in sport, specifically working-class women, and specifically the sport of Rugby League. Sport is at the centre of many communities. Most clubs and teams have informal but serious historians who act as senior members. As with most social discourses, community sport histories reflect hegemony and can be used both to celebrate cohesion and to justify exclusion. The appearance or availability of these histories in a wider or more inclusive context has started to change. Rugby League Clubs have begun to establish archiving projects but so far none have focussed on the memories of women. The danger is that the newly accessible archives erase and ignore the roles women have played and are playing in the clubs and the connected communities. What will be the account given of the contributions of the young cheerleaders, for example? If a significant lived experience is written out of the accounts that are kept, the result is more likely to be static, manipulated, ideological. This issue emerges when partial and hegemonic community histories are viewed uncritically as if they were merely neglected histories being made visible.

Running through this dynamic of visibility is the question of spectatorship and the field of visibility. Communities' histories are written and used by the communities themselves as a means of celebrating and also regulating behaviour and participation. The discourse of visibility and representation relies on casting a wider public outside that community and projecting a carefully framed portrait of a community outwards. Histories that are dynamic and conflicted, that make clear the political nature of this archiving and representation, may be more use to the communities and the stories that are emerging. To show and discuss conflict between male hegemony and a female pioneering referee is a catalyst for multi-vocal and dynamic historiography.

For some time now, we, the two authors of this case study, have struggled with and disliked the habit of speaking about arts projects as 'giving voice' to marginalised communities. Our work together has involved engagement in ideas about memory, forgetting and being forgotten. We have aimed to make arts projects that use the structure and form of playwriting and drama, and which rely on the vernacular use of these conventions to create a common ground or shared perspective between us and other participants. Insofar as this project is framed as an applied project, we have a complex position which most, if not all, practitioners work through in their daily lives. We started to work together as a playwright and an academic with a shared interest in the critique of discourses of empowerment and marginalisation. Reading work by Spivak, particularly her deployment of deconstruction to articulate the simultaneous necessity and inadequacy of notions of marginality (e.g. Spivak 1976), launched an immersion in post structuralist gender theories. Identity and marginality are problematic, strategic, discursive and always political, always strategically antagonistic (Mouffé 2013); notions of power and empowerment examine but also enact the inequality of resource and esteem they may seek to challenge. Discourses of the empowerment of others are normative and they reify experienced inequality by accepting it as the base line of the arts project encounter. Clear aims to apply arts to social scenarios and groups in any project, and the associated analyses of impact, address community partners and co-creators as the docile subjects of social science and what Jacques Rancière calls sociocracy (2004). This approach deprives art of its radical uselessness, turning multi-vocality into message, and creates an inequality of knowledge, skill and funding. Artists in non-professional settings, artists who collaborate or who make work informed by wider communities have to negotiate between the sources of funding

available to solve social problems and the wish to avoid the overbearing interpellation of their relationship as agent–patient, professional–client or any other sort of problematic distribution of agency. The role of the cultural producer in this context is crucial and, we believe, potentially radical.

This project and our ability to duck some of the implications of our practice depends on the role of the creative producer, and this case study is facilitated and enabled by the input of producers as co-creators of the project. Space2, a Leeds-based company, fulfilled this role, and enabled the relationships between audiences, stakeholders and co-creators to develop in a very open way. This project has been a process of negotiation, acquiring collaborators and co-creators as it has developed, finding opportunities to create connections, conversations and performances. It has been a complex project, free from an artificial need to identify a destination or to culminate in a specific, pre-determined output. Lee's agenda is the empowerment of women. Dickenson is interested in memory and autobiography, and many of the participants are interested in the memory and representation of their communities and the process of reflecting on past and present inequality. The bundled project has developed space for all these perspectives.

Given the divergence of perspectives, the project has grown through contact and conversation and the cultural producers have looked for ways to foster and resource this growth, finding further opportunities to show the play, to hold discussions or to develop further strands of the work as need has arisen. There is an interesting dynamic of resistance and interpretation in this model of working. Judgements of quality or of the positivity of specific representations are based on the establishment of a single and agreed adopted perspective. The role of the cultural producer is to engage deeply with the work in its perspective, understanding its traditions of reception and production but encouraging individual breaks from this. For a project about women's history, there might, for example, be objections about the positivity of cheerleading as a replication of marginal female roles of support and appreciation of men's efforts. Such an interpretation would require the adoption of a specific external critical stance, and an acceptance of only certain actions and roles as both politically recognisable and therefore deserving of a history. The cultural producers stand between the different creators, whether they are individual writers or performers or the individuals who have a stake in the telling and inscribing of histories in public consciousness. The models of production and reception are broken down in this project because of its complexity and because of its curated openness to the inputs and influences of its stakeholders.

Artists who attempt to facilitate are in the difficult position of doing two jobs at once. In projects that explore history as well as creative outputs, the negotiation between stakeholders is complex and crucial but also specifically political. Representative conventions can be representative algorithms – shortcuts for the overall vision of the artist in charge, or the funder. The cultural producer is precisely specialist in brokering the relationship and finding ways for the negotiation of the outcome of the project, enabling playwrights and interviewees and workshop participants to develop through the different outputs. As in relational art, the notion of 'an artwork' is misleading. You have a catalyst and a series of cultural organisations that are brought into contact with each other through the cultural practices and institutions, and you have art works that respond to these. Clearly also the notion of reception is a completely inadequate model for this sort of composite process, but instead we see the growth of a culture of reception. This gives space and specificity to the different perspectives of story tellers, audiences, playwrights and future viewers.



The participants are working with the articulation of their stories, but also on the framing and representation of their lives beyond their immediate communities. This projected external perspective is part of the dynamics of recognition and is the basis of a claim to political existence. Such a claim cannot be made on behalf of others, nor can it be staged or facilitated. The process of talking about Rugby League for its own sake opens up the differential levels of access given to male and female participants and is the occasion for the articulation of intricate dynamics of engagement, resistance and recognition.

The specific contribution of the producers lies in the process of identifying funding streams that work across art forms. To offer a piece of professional theatre and to connect it to the life story of a member of the community models the process of securing the audience's esteem for their own stories and then the process of crafting their own creative outputs for public viewing through the gallery. Creative producers are in a position to recognise the meanders and branches of the project when it is allowed to interact and respond to a community. In serving the project and its participants, they do not give voice and they do not empower. Instead, they open stories and histories to the active control of a community, catalysing a process that can lead to the assertion of the importance of individuals' shared experiences.

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PROOF

**Part III**

**Ethics of representation**

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# 11 Introduction to ethics of representation

*Nicola Abraham*

**THE REPRESENTATION OF** narratives, communities, experiences and challenges through applied theatre is a crucial part of practice to be considered throughout the entire process of a project. The intentions of the practitioner, funder and community often intersect at points but may well be divergent in outcome for a number of reasons that are both known and unknown to the practitioner attempting to understand and make informed choices for the benefit of multiple stakeholders. The set-up of a project may be the first point of representation to consider regarding the call to participate. Firstly, it's important to consider whether this call was voluntary or not. Voluntary calls could be offered on a 'sign-up' basis through a community centre, or an appropriate call to take part sent through Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, email subscriptions to established memberships or other technological platforms. The call to participate may ask for people from a particular sector of the community, or it may be an open call for people to join a campaign or support and explore a particular cause. A more closed and involuntary approach may also be taken for inmates in prisons recommended by educational workers, or recommendations from teachers for 'at-risk' students to take part in a project to improve behaviour, or perhaps it was a referral by a social worker of a young person to a provision provided by an applied theatre company. There are a myriad of practices that sit between these two suggested layers of recruitment for participants. What are the assumptions underlying the construction of participants of the calls to take part? For example, it would be naïve of practitioners to think that youth at risk aren't aware of the reasons they are taken out of a maths lesson to participate in a theatre project. It is not a celebration for them, and it may well be perceived as a punishment. George Kelly's (1963) *Theory of Personality* draws upon personal construct theory as a means to understand the way we make assumptions about people. Two particular types of constructs, which Kelly identifies, are important for applied theatre practitioners to consider when planning how to negotiate the subsequent self-perception and representation of participants within projects:

[...] *A preemptive construct* is one which preempts its elements for membership in its own realm exclusively – for example, species names...

*A constellatory construct* is one which fixes the realm of membership of its elements – for example, stereotypes.

(Kelly, 1963:156)

Participants may, even before the start of a project process, hold a pre-emptive view of themselves as a group identified to miss class and take part in a project. This perception is generally unlikely to be positive though there may be a sense of relief for

stepping out of school routine and other disciplinary measures. For prison projects, the representation of the people behind the community, designated by the label of 'inmate', is important to consider when devising a performance for a public or restricted family audience depending on the category and security rules of a particular prison. Not considering how to challenge constellatory constructs held by the group about themselves, or of the group held by their audiences, risks reinforcing constellatory constructs and limiting the opportunity to challenge reductive perceptions of community groups. Stuart Hall (1997) explores a further layer of representation, which relates to power and stereotypes.

Within stereotyping, then, we have established a connection between representation, difference and power. However, we need to probe the nature of this power more fully. We often think of power in terms of direct physical coercion or constraint. However, we have also spoken, for example, of power in representation; power to mark, assign and classify; of symbolic power; of ritualized expulsion. Power, it seems, has to be understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way... It includes the exercise of symbolic power through representational practices. Stereotyping is a key element in this exercise of symbolic violence.

(Hall, 1997:259)

The implications of Hall's ideas reinforce the importance of cyclical consideration of how representations are made of a group and by a group for an audience in creating theatre for, with or by a community. Part of this process requires a dialogical approach to naming and unpacking intentions behind projects. This is not only from the perspective of the practitioner. All stakeholders and beneficiaries should be involved in this conversation for transparency, and to ensure an ethical approach is taken from the start of the project, and revisited, reassessed and refined throughout the course of the process.

Sara Ahmed (2010) in *The Promise of Happiness* breaks down conventional assumptions of what constitutes an implicitly shared pursuit of happiness. The emphasis here is placed on the *assumptions* of what happiness means, proposing a universally understood recognition of what makes us happy, which Ahmed critiques to locate the oppressive narratives of happiness:

Happiness shapes what coheres as a world. In describing happiness as a form of world making I am indebted to the work of feminist, black, and queer scholars who have shown in different ways how happiness is used to justify oppression. Feminist critiques of the figure of the 'happy housewife', black critiques of the myth of 'the happy slave', and queer critiques of the sentimentalization of heterosexuality as 'domestic bliss' have taught me most about happiness and the very terms of its appeal.

(2010:2)

Ahmed's critical engagement with the term *happiness* provides a lens for us to see the assumed values and aspirations people hold towards achieving what is perceived as a 'common goal', but in reality means a plethora of different things to different people. In terms of applied theatre practice, this may translate to the assumed end goals or intended outcomes shared by a group, including the representation of a particular context, narrative and resolution. The choice, for example, to avoid stereotyping the antagonist of the story

through demonising the character is complicated. The community, who hold their own image of the antagonist, may feel that a caricature is more accurate as a portrayal because this is how they have experienced that person through their interactions whether through cruelty, political violence or any other form of oppression. But dehumanising is reductive. We know that an antagonist who is a local counsellor may well be perceived as cruel, even though they are just a representative of a policy and not the policy maker. From another perspective, we may see this person as a caring parent, or as a philanthropist, but through the gaze of those who experience oppression because of this person's actions, they are reduced for accuracy and felt perception to the constellatory construct of a role.

The practitioner, in this scenario, now needs to think carefully because it is possible that the antagonist is also the funder of the project being implemented in this community. Now they have to juggle dual loyalties to at least two stakeholders. Paulo Freire (2014) emphasises the importance of striving for 'humanization as [an] ontological vocation of the human being' (ibid:89). He recognises that dehumanisation is a consequence of reductive perceptions that lead to, excuse or have given cause for oppression throughout history. Therefore, humanisation, utopian in vision though it may be, 'whose concretization is always a process, and always a becoming, passes by way of breach with the real, concrete economic, political, social, ideological, and so on, moorings that are condemning us to dehumanization' (ibid). To avoid being oppressive and thereby reconstructing power hierarchies that alienate and dehumanise, the practitioner has a responsibility to seek to humanise and avoid the easier representation of oppressor as a 'monster' rather than a human being. The significance of this difference is the potential for a construct to shift, a behaviour to change and a solution to be sought. It also implies a drive to compromise representations in a way that presents a more complex, messy and untidy vision of a character that would otherwise be reductive through the streamlining that stereotyping provides. Collaboratively, inviting this type of agonistic pluralism is an essential part of the process of representation.

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## 12 The work of representation

*Stuart Hall*

'The Work of Representation', *Representation*, Sage Publications Ltd (2013), excerpt from pp. 1–5.

**THE CONCEPTS OF** representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture. Representation connects meaning and language to culture. But what exactly do people mean by it? What does representation have to do with culture and meaning? One common-sense usage of the term is as follows: 'Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people.' You may ask, 'Is that all?' Well, yes and no. Representation *is* an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It *does* involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things. But this is a far from simple or straightforward process, as you will soon discover.

[...]

What does the word **representation** really mean, in this context? What does the process of representation involve? How does representation work?

To put it briefly, representation is the production of meaning through language. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* suggests two relevant meanings for the word:

- 1 To represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses; as, for example, in the sentence, 'This picture represents the murder of Abel by Cain.'
- 2 To represent also means to symbolise, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for; as in the sentence, 'In Christianity, the cross represents the suffering and crucifixion of Christ.'

The figures in the painting *stand in the place of* and, at the same time, *stand for* the story of Cain and Abel. Likewise, the cross simply consists of two wooden planks nailed together; but in the context of Christian belief and teaching, it takes on, symbolizes or comes to stand for a wider set of meanings about the crucifixion of the Son of God, and this is a concept we can put into words and pictures.

[...]

Representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer to* either



the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events.

So, there are *two* processes, two **systems of representation**, involved. First, there is the ‘system’ by which all sorts of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts or *mental representations* which we carry around our heads. Without them, we could not interpret the world meaningfully at all. In the first place, then, meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thoughts which can stand for or ‘represent’ the world, enabling us to refer to things both inside and outside our heads.

Before we move on to look at the second ‘system of representation’, we should observe that what we have just said is a very simple version of a rather complex process. It is simple enough to see how we might form concepts for things we can perceive – people or material objects, like chairs, tables and desks. But we also form concepts of rather obscure and abstract things, which we can’t in any simple way see, feel or touch. Think, for example, of our concepts of war, or death, or friendship or love. And, as we have remarked, we also form concepts about things we have never seen, and possibly can’t or won’t ever see, and about people and places we have plainly made up. We may have a clear concept of, say, angels, mermaids, God, the Devil or of Heaven and Hell, or of Middlemarch (the fictional provincial town in George Eliot’s novel), or Elizabeth (the heroine of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*).

We have called this a ‘system of representation’. That is because it consists not of individual concepts, but of different ways or organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them. For example, we use the principles of similarity and difference to establish relationships between concepts or to distinguish them from one another. Thus, I have an idea that in some respects birds are like planes in the sky, based on the fact that they are similar because they both fly – but I also have an idea that in other respects they are different, because one is part of nature while the other is man-made. This mixing and matching of relations between concepts to form complex ideas and thoughts is possible because our concepts are arranged into different classifying systems. In this example, the first is based on a distinction between flying/not flying and the second is based on the distinction between natural/man-made. There are other principles of organization like this at work in all conceptual systems: for example, classifying according to sequence – which concept follows which – or causality – what causes what – and so on. The point here is that we are talking about not just a random collection of concepts, but concepts organized, arranged and classified into complex relations with one another. That is what our conceptual system actually is like. However, this does not undermine the basic point. Meaning depends on the relationship between things in the world – people, objects and events, real or fictional – and the conceptual system, which can operate as *mental representations* of them.

Now it could be the case that the conceptual map which I carry around in my head is totally different from yours, in which case you and I would interpret or make sense of the world in totally different ways. We would be incapable of sharing our thoughts or expressing ideas about the world to each other. In fact, each of us probably does understand and interpret the world in a unique and individual way. However, we are able to communicate because we share broadly the same conceptual maps and thus make sense of or interpret the world in roughly similar ways. That is indeed what it means when we say we ‘belong to the same culture’. Because we interpret the world in roughly similar ways, we are able to build up a shared culture of meanings and thus construct a social world we

inhabit together. That is why 'culture' is sometimes defined in terms of 'shared meanings or shared conceptual maps' (see **Du Gay et al.**, 1997).

However, a shared conceptual map is not enough. We must be able to represent or exchange meanings and concepts, and we can only do that when we also have access to a shared language. Language is therefore the second system of representation involved in the overall process of constructing meaning. Our shared conceptual map must be translated into a common language, so that we can correlate our concepts and ideas with certain written words, spoken sounds or visual images. The general term we use for words, sounds or images which carry meaning is *signs*. These signs stand for or represent the concepts and the conceptual relations between them which we carry around in our heads and together they make up the meaning-systems of our culture. Signs are organized into languages and it is the existence of common languages which enable us to translate our thoughts (concepts) into words, sounds or images, and then to use these, operating as a language, to express meanings and communicate thoughts to other people. Remember that the term 'language' is being used here in a very broad and inclusive way. The writing system or the spoken system of a particular language are both obviously 'languages'. But so are visual images, whether produced by hand, mechanically, electronically, digitally or some other means, when they are used to express meaning. And so are other things which aren't 'linguistic' in any ordinary sense: the 'language' of facial expressions or of gesture, for example, or the 'language' of fashion, of clothes, or of traffic lights. Even music is a 'language', with complex relations between different sounds and chords, though it is a very special case since it can't easily be used to reference actual things or objects in the world (a point further elaborated in **Du Gay**, ed., 1997 and **Mackay**, ed., 1997). Any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning is, from this point of view, 'a language'. It is in this sense that the model of meaning which I have been analysing here is often described as a 'linguistic' one; and that all the theories of meaning which follow this basic model are described as belonging to 'the linguistic turn' in the social sciences and cultural studies.

At the heart of the meaning process in culture, then, are two related 'systems of representation'. The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between things – people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc. – and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts. The relation between 'things', concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call 'representation'.

## 13 On the political

*Chantal Mouffe*

*On the Political*, Routledge (2006), excerpt from pp. 29–34.

### **Agonistic confrontation**

**MANY LIBERAL THEORISTS REFUSE** to acknowledge the antagonistic dimension of politics and the role of affects in the construction of political identities because they believe that it would endanger the realization of consensus, which they see as the aim of democracy. What they do not realize is that, far from jeopardizing democracy, agonistic confrontation is the *very* condition of its existence. Modern democracy's specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order. Breaking with the symbolic representation of society as an organic body – characteristic of the holist mode of organization – a pluralist liberal democratic society does not deny the existence of conflicts but provides the institutions allowing them to be expressed in an adversarial form. It is for this reason that we should be very wary of the current tendency to celebrate a politics of consensus, claiming that it has replaced the supposedly old-fashioned adversarial politics of right and left. A well-functioning democracy calls for a clash of legitimate democratic political positions. This is what the confrontation between left and right needs to be about. Such a confrontation should provide collective forms of identification strong enough to mobilize political passions. If this adversarial configuration is missing, passions cannot be given a democratic outlet and the agonistic dynamics of pluralism are hindered. The danger arises that the democratic confrontation will therefore be replaced by a confrontation between essentialist forms of identification or non-negotiable moral values. When political frontiers become blurred, disaffection with political parties sets in and one witnesses the growth of other types of collective identities, around nationalist, religious or ethnic forms of identification. Antagonisms can take many forms and it is illusory to believe that they could ever be eradicated. This is why it is important to allow them an agonistic form of expression through the pluralist democratic system.

Liberal theorists are unable to acknowledge not only the primary reality of strife in social life and the impossibility of finding rational, impartial solutions to political issues but also the integrative role that conflict plays in modern democracy. A democratic society requires a debate about possible alternatives and it must provide political forms of collective identification around clearly differentiated democratic positions. Consensus is no doubt necessary, but it must be accompanied by dissent. Consensus is needed on the institutions constitutive of democracy and on the 'ethico-political' values informing the political association – liberty and equality for all – but there will always be disagreement

concerning their meaning and the way they should be implemented. In a pluralist democracy such disagreements are not only legitimate but also necessary. They provide the stuff of democratic politics.

Besides the shortcomings of the liberal approach, the main obstacle to the implementation of an agonistic politics comes from the fact that, since the collapse of the Soviet model, we are witnessing the unchallenged hegemony of neo-liberalism with its claim that there is no alternative to the existing order. This claim has been accepted by social democratic parties which, under the pretence of 'modernizing', have been steadily moving to the right, redefining themselves as 'centre-left'. Far from profiting from the crisis of its old communist antagonist, social democracy has been dragged into its collapse. In this way a great opportunity has been lost for democratic politics. The events of 1989 should have provided the time for a redefinition of the left, now liberated of the weight previously represented by the communist system. There was a real chance for a deepening of the democratic project because traditional political frontiers, having been shattered, could have been redrawn in a more progressive way. Unfortunately this chance has been missed. Instead we heard triumphalist claims about the disappearance of antagonism and the advent of a politics without frontiers, without a 'they'; a win-win politics in which solutions could be found favouring everybody in society.

While it was no doubt important for the left to come to terms with the importance of pluralism and liberal democratic political institutions, this should not have meant abandoning all attempts to transform the present hegemonic order and accepting the view that 'really existing liberal democratic societies' represent the end of history. If there is a lesson to be drawn from the failure of communism it is that the democratic struggle should not be envisaged in terms of friend/enemy and that liberal democracy is not the enemy to be destroyed. If we take 'liberty and equality for all' as the 'ethico-political' principles of liberal democracy (what Montesquieu defined as 'the passions that move a regime'), it is clear that the problem with our societies is not their proclaimed ideals but the fact that those ideals are not put into practice. So the task for the left is not to reject them, with the argument that they are a sham, a cover for capitalist domination, but to fight for their effective implementation. And this of course cannot be done without challenging the current neo-liberal mode of capitalist regulation.

This is why such a struggle, if it should not be envisaged in terms of friend/ enemy, cannot be simply envisaged as a mere competition of interests or on the 'dialogic' mode. Now, this is precisely how most left-wing parties visualize democratic politics nowadays. To revitalize democracy, it is urgent to get out of this impasse. My claim is that, thanks to the idea of the 'adversary', the agonistic approach that I am proposing could contribute to a revitalization and deepening of democracy. It also offers the possibility of envisaging the left's perspective in an hegemonic way. Adversaries inscribe their confrontation within the democratic framework, but this framework is not seen as something immutable: it is susceptible of being redefined through hegemonic struggle. An agonistic conception of democracy acknowledges the contingent character of the hegemonic politico-economic articulations which determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment. They are precarious and pragmatic constructions which can be disarticulated and transformed as a result of the agonistic struggle among the adversaries.

Slavoj Žižek is therefore mistaken to assert that the agonistic approach is unable to challenge the status quo and ends up accepting liberal democracy in its present stage. What an agonistic approach certainly disavows is the possibility of an act of radical refoundation that would institute a new social order from scratch. But a number of very important

socioeconomic and political transformations, with radical implications, are possible within the context of liberal democratic institutions. What we understand by 'liberal democracy' is constituted by sedimented forms of power relations resulting from an ensemble of contingent hegemonic interventions. The fact that their contingent character is not recognized today is due to the absence of counter-hegemonic projects. But we should not fall again into the trap of believing that their transformation requires a total rejection of the liberal-democratic framework. There are many ways in which the democratic 'language-game' – to borrow a term from Wittgenstein – can be played, and the agonistic struggle should bring about new meanings and fields of application for the idea of democracy to be radicalized. This is, in my view, the effective way to challenge power relations, not on the mode of an abstract negation but in a properly hegemonic way, through a process of disarticulation of existing practices and creation of new discourses and institutions. Contrary to the various liberal models, the agonistic approach that I am advocating acknowledges that society is always politically instituted and never forgets that the terrain in which hegemonic interventions take place is always the outcome of previous hegemonic practices and is never a neutral one. This is why it denies the possibility of a non-adversarial democratic politics and criticizes those who, by ignoring the dimension of 'the political', reduce politics to a set of supposedly technical moves and neutral procedures.

## 14 Choosing the margin as a space of radical openness

*bell hooks*

‘Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness’, *Yearning*, Between the Lines Press (1990), essay from pp. 145–53.

**AS A RADICAL STANDPOINT**, perspective, position, “the politics of location” necessarily calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of re-vision.

[...]

I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me. I have confronted silence, inarticulateness. When I say, then, that these words emerge from suffering, I refer to that personal struggle to name that location from which I come to voice – that space of my theorizing.

Often when the radical voice speaks about domination we are speaking to those who dominate. Their presence changes the nature and direction of our words. Language is also a place of struggle. I was just a girl coming slowly into womanhood when I read Adrienne Rich’s words, “This is the oppressor’s language, yet I need it to talk to you.” This language that enabled me to attend graduate school, to write a dissertation, to speak at job interviews, carries the scent of oppression. Language is also a place of struggle. The Australian aborigines say “that smell of the white man is killing us.” I remember the smells of my childhood, hot water corn bread, turnip greens, fried pies. I remember the way we talked to one another, our words thickly accented black Southern speech. Language is also a place of struggle. We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination – a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle.

It is no easy task to find ways to include our multiple voices within the various texts we create – in film, poetry, feminist theory. Those are sounds and images that mainstream consumers find difficult to understand. Sounds and scenes which cannot be appropriated are often that sign everyone questions, wants to erase, to “wipe out.” I feel it even now, writing this piece when I gave it talking and reading, talking spontaneously, using familiar academic speech now and then, “talking the talk” – using black vernacular speech, the intimate sounds and gestures I normally save for family and loved ones. Private speech in

public discourse, intimate intervention, making another text, a space that enables me to recover all that I am in language, I find so many gaps, absences in this written text. To cite them at least is to let the reader know something has been missed, or remains there hinted at by words – there in the deep structure.

Throughout *Freedom Charter*, a work which traces aspects of the movement against racial apartheid in South Africa, this statement is constantly repeated: *our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting*. In much new, exciting cultural practice, cultural texts – in film, black literature, critical theory – there is an effort to remember that is expressive of the need to create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality. Fragments of memory are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a “new take” on the old, constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation. [...]

I have needed to remember, as part of a self-critical process where one pauses to reconsider choices and location, tracing my journey from small town Southern black life, from folk traditions, and church experience to cities, to the university, to neighborhoods that are not racially segregated, to places where I see for the first time independent cinema, where I read critical theory, where I write theory. Along that trajectory, I vividly recall efforts to silence my coming to voice. In my public presentation I was able to tell stories, to share memories. Here again I only hint at them. The opening essay in my book, *Talking Back*, describes my effort to emerge as critical thinker, artist, and writer in a context of repressions. I talk about punishment, about mama and daddy aggressively silencing me, about the censorship of black communities. I had no choice. I had to struggle and resist to emerge from that context and then front other locations with mind intact, with an open heart. I had to leave that space I called home to move beyond boundaries, yet I needed also to return there. We sing a song in the black church tradition that says, “I’m going up the rough side of the mountain on my way home.” Indeed the very meaning of “home” changes with experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal and fragmentation as part of the construction of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting. “Our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting.”

This experience of space and location is not the same for black folks who have always been privileged, or for black folks who desire only to move from underclass status to points of privilege; not the same for those of us from poor backgrounds who have had to continually engage in actual political struggle both within and outside black communities to assert an aesthetic and critical presence. Black folks coming from poor, underclass communities, who enter universities or privileged cultural settings unwilling to surrender every vestige of who we were before we were there, all “sign” of our class and cultural “difference,” who are unwilling to play the role of “exotic Other” must create spaces within that culture of domination if we are to survive whole, our souls intact. Our very presence is a disruption. We are often as much an “Other,” a threat to black people from privileged class backgrounds who do not understand or share our perspectives, as we are to uninformed white folks. Everywhere we go there is pressure to silence our voices, to co-opt and undermine them. Mostly, of course, we are not there. We never “arrive” or “can’t stay.” Back in those spaces where we come from, we kill ourselves in despair, drowning in

nihilism, caught in poverty, in addiction, in every postmodern mode of dying that can't be named. Yet when we few retain in that "other" space, we are often, too isolated, too alone. We die there, too. Those of us who live, who "make it," passionately holding on to aspects of, that "down-home" life we do not intend to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. Without such spaces we would not survive. Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice.

For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a "safe" place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance.

In the preface to *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, I expressed these thoughts on marginality:

To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town.

There were laws to ensure our return. Not to return was to risk being punished. Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole.

This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world-view – a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity.

Though incomplete, these statements identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation; in fact I was saying just the opposite, that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.

This is not a mythic notion of marginality. It comes from lived experience. Yet I want to talk about what it means to struggle to maintain that marginality even as one works, produces, lives, if you will, at the center. I no longer live in that segregated world across the



tracks. Central to life in that world was the ongoing awareness of the necessity of opposition. When Bob Marley sings, “We refuse to be what you want us to be, we are what we are, and that’s the way it’s going to be,” that space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the downpressor, is located in the margins. And one can only say no, speak the voice of resistance, because there exists a counter-language. While it may resemble the colonizer’s tongue, it has undergone a transformation, it has been irrevocably changed. When I left that concrete space in the margins, I kept alive in my heart ways of knowing reality which affirm continually not only the primacy of resistance but the necessity of a resistance that is sustained by remembrance of the past, which includes recollections of broken tongues giving us ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings. Once mama said to me as I was about to go again to the predominantly white university, “You can take what the white people have to offer, but you do not have to love them.” Now understanding her cultural codes, I know that she was not saying to me not to love people of other races. She was speaking about colonization and the reality of what it means to be taught in a culture of domination by those who dominate. She was insisting on my power to be able to separate useful knowledge that I might get from the dominating group from participation in ways of knowing that would lead to estrangement, alienation and, worse, assimilation and co-optation. She was saying that it is not necessary to give yourself over to them to learn. Not having been in those institutions, she knew that I might be faced again and again with situations where I would be “tried,” made to feel as though a central requirement of my being accepted would mean participation in this system of exchange to ensure my success, my “making it.” She was reminding me of the necessity of opposition and simultaneously encouraging me not to lose that radical perspective shaped and formed by marginality.

Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as sign marking the despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the *very* ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one’s creativity, one’s imagination is at risk, there that one’s mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost. Truly the mind that resists colonization struggles for freedom of expression. The struggle may not even begin with the colonizer; it may begin within one’s segregated, colonized community and family. So I want to note that I am not trying to romantically re-inscribe the notion of that space of marginality where the oppressed live apart from their oppressors as “pure.” I want to say that these margins have been both sites of repression and sites of resistance. And since we are well able to name the nature of that repression we know better the margin as site of deprivation. We are more silent when it comes to speaking of the margin as site of resistance. We are more often silenced when it comes to speaking of the margin as site of resistance.

Silenced. During my graduate years I heard myself speaking often in the voice of resistance. I cannot say that my speech was welcomed. I cannot say that my speech was heard in such a way that it altered relations between colonizer and colonized. Yet what I have noticed is that those scholars, most especially those who name themselves as radical critical thinkers, feminist thinkers, now fully participate in the construction of a discourse about the “Other.” I was made “Other” there in that space with them. In that space in the margins, that lived-in segregated world of my past and present. They did not meet me there in that space. They met me at the center. They greeted me as colonizers. I am waiting to learn from them the path of their resistance, of how it came to be that they

were able to surrender the power to act as colonizers. I am waiting for them to bear witness, to give testimony. They say that the discourse on marginality, on difference has moved beyond a discussion of “us and them.” They do not speak of how this movement has taken place. This is a response from the radical space of my marginality. It is a space of resistance. It is a space I choose.

I am waiting for them to stop talking about the “Other” to stop even describing how important it is to be able speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak. Often this speech about the “Other” is also a mask, an oppressive talk hiding gaps, absences that space where our words would be if we were speaking, if there were silence, if we were there. This “we” is that “us” in the margins, that “we” who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. Often this speech about the “Other” annihilates, erases: “No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better that you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk” Stop. We greet you as liberators. This “we” is that “us” in the margins, that “we” who inhabit marginal space that is not a site of domination but a place of resistance. Enter that space. This is an intervention. I am writing to you. I am speaking from a place in the margins where I am different, where I see things differently. I am talking about what I see.

Speaking from margins. Speaking in resistance. I open a book. There are words on the back cover, *Never in the Shadows Again*. A book which suggests the possibility of speaking as liberators. Only who is speaking and who is silent. Only who stands in the shadows – the shadow in a doorway, the space where images of black women are represented voiceless, the space where our words are invoked to serve and support, the space of *our* absence. Only small echoes of protest. We are re-written. We are “Other.” We are the margin. Who is speaking and to whom, Where do we locate ourselves and comrades?

Silenced. We fear those who speak about us, who do not speak to us and with us. We know what it is like to be silenced. We know that the forces that silence us, because they never want us to speak, differ from the forces that say speak, tell me your story. Only do not speak in a voice of resistance. Only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain.

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.

Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice.

As Pratibha Parma notes, “The appropriation and use of space are political acts.” To speak about that location from which work emerges, I choose familiar politicized language, old codes, words, like “struggle, marginality, resistance.” I choose these words knowing that they are no longer popular or “cool” – hold onto them and the political legacies they evoke and affirm, even as I work to change what they say, to give them renewed and different meaning.

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of

resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfils desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world.

PROOF

## 15 Drama for moral education in mainland China

### Tensions and possibilities

*Joe Winston and Chenchen Zeng*

Applied theatre is no more or less at the service of a particular ideology than any other kind of theatre .... and is influenced by context and the social, cultural or political landscapes which shape the artistic interventions that are created.

(Prentki and Preston, 2009, p.13, p.14)

**THE GROWTH OF** educational drama in mainland China has been significant over the past ten years, with the government increasingly advocating the place of the arts in schools and promoting their integration with other subjects, particularly at primary level. Chenchen has recently written a summary of these developments, in which she describes the current range of drama education activities in the country.<sup>1</sup> She notes that many primary school teachers are unskilled at drama but that some find a home for it as part of the moral education curriculum, which is timetabled as a discreet subject in China. This chapter will examine issues that impact on the use of drama to teach moral education within this strongly defined, cultural and curriculum context. It is informed by two doctoral studies recently completed by Chinese students, both of whom graduated from the University of Warwick, UK in 2019 and were supervised by Joe Winston.<sup>2</sup> It is also informed by the practice of Chenchen herself and by her experiences working as an educational drama practitioner / artist in southern China since she returned there after completing her MA in Drama and Theatre Education at Warwick in 2016. In particular, it will examine the tensions – ideological, cultural and political – that underpin her and others' attempts to use the forms of practice she was taught in a liberal, western institution inside a country where democracy and critical thinking carry different nuances of meaning from those she had grown used to in the UK. We shall consider how these tensions manifest themselves and how they can be negotiated and exemplify some pragmatic forms of practice that allow the teacher-artist to continue their work with integrity.

Feng (2019) provides a useful summary of the ideological development of moral education in China since 1949. Between the founding of the communist regime and the economic reforms of 1979, she describes the moral education curriculum as 'conservative and authoritarian', emphasising as it did the individual's submission to the collective good in all aspects of life and cultivating attitudes of obedience and closed-mindedness (2019, p.19). The inevitable social changes effected by the post 1979 reforms, she explains, were recognised in policy changes that use the concept of 'regulated individualism'. This accepts aspects of individual freedom as being beneficial to the person and the state provided they do not challenge the Marxist ideological basis to which the government still adheres. Feng refers to the work of Lu (2004), who sees in this a tension and a core

dilemma for moral education in China, which she defines as the friction between an insistence on authority on the one hand and the cultivation of ‘self-determined, liberal, democratic, equal and fair individuals’ on the other (Feng, 2019, p.20. See also Lu, 2004, p.74). This dilemma persists and, as we shall see, can cause confusion and worry in teachers when they come to experience how drama education has been theorised and practiced as moral education in anglophone writings. To this effect, Feng examines the work of Edmiston (2008), Neelands (2009) and Winston (2000) and concludes that, despite their differences, they all present ideas that advocate autonomous reasoning, open-ended dialogue and critical, imaginative engagement with difficult moral issues. They also stress the significance of the process this engagement takes through drama as well as the content of the issues being examined. This she sees as chiming well with the values promoted by Lu (Feng, 2019, p.53), while still recognising that things remain complex in practice.

Due to strong, political centralisation in China, teachers feel most secure when responding to moral topics that the government has recently promoted or outlined in policy documents, and both schools and drama companies are quick to respond to the agendas set. In 2017, for example, when traditional cultural values became a prime focus of national educational policy, one of the most influential drama companies in China hired the services of Jonathan Neelands to spearhead the use of drama to explore moral issues through traditional Chinese stories such as *Lady White Snake* and *The Butterfly Lovers*.<sup>3</sup> Chenchen has attended some of this training and, from talking with teachers afterwards, she has found that, although many of them are moved and appreciative of their experience of the drama, they feel unable to translate what they have experienced into their own classroom practice. In addition, some can be suspicious of hidden, political agendas covertly introduced by Western educators. For example, in one workshop he conducted with teachers in Cheng-du, Neelands was taken aback when a young teacher queried a simple, initial exercise in which participants were asked to explore the space, changing direction, concentrating on keeping the same distance from those around them. During a Q and A session at the end of the day, she asked if the purpose of this exercise was to promote the values of Western individualism over those of Chinese collectivism.

When teachers do make an effort to use drama for the purposes of moral education, there are often strongly ingrained attitudes that divert them from doing so either effectively or appropriately. Cai provides numerous examples of this. At school level, many teachers began to use environmental themes in drama classes when the government emphasised their importance early in 2017<sup>4</sup> and Cai describes how one kindergarten teacher she observed worked with a charming story about a lonely old man, forced to live on a rubbish dump, possessing nothing but items of rubbish to build his kingdom. However, the stated objective of the drama was to teach children not to drop litter (Cai, 2019, p.49). In other examples, she refers to drama lessons designed with the intention of teaching children to wash their hands, be polite and not to tell lies (ibid, p.19)

A further example from Feng illuminates more subtly how democratic attitudes promoted in Western practice can be undermined by teachers unwilling or unable to embrace their spirit. In her original round of practical research, she was supported and advised by an experienced teacher used to teaching drama, whom she refers to as Miss Li. Feng wished to follow the advice of Neelands whereby teachers should initially negotiate a contract with a class of students, encouraging them to contribute democratically to rules of conduct in drama sessions. Miss Li was acquainted with this idea and said she would lead the activity. Feng was grateful for the help of an experienced teacher but quickly became aware that much of the negotiation was, in fact, manipulation, leading

the students into agreeing the kind of rules that Miss Li, rather than the students, saw as desirable. For example, she responded warmly with praise to a child's suggestion that students should always obey the teacher, writing this in as a key rule. She also insisted that there must be some kind of punishment for children who did not stick to the rules agreed (Feng, 2019, pp.126–128). The headteacher observed this session and was greatly impressed by Miss Li's handling of this contract; knowing Neelands as we both do, we are certain that he would have been less impressed, lacking as it did the democratic, egalitarian principles he sees as foundational to the exercise (1984, 2009).

Chenchen lives and works in Guangzhou, China's third largest city and the capital of the southern area of Guangdong. Shenzhen, on the border with Hong Kong, is half an hour's train journey away. The education department in Guangzhou recently brought together a team of drama teachers to design a set of lessons (as yet unpublished) to promote the core values of Chinese socialism. These are envisaged as a three-tiered hierarchy – the national, the social and the individual. The national tier is seen as of prime importance and includes the values of democracy, civility and harmony. Such values would appear to blend well, of course, with the writings on drama for citizenship that Chenchen came across during her time in the UK.<sup>5</sup> However, experience has taught her to be wary of making any parallel claims within the ideological context of her own country. The following example of her naïve enthusiasm on returning to China from the UK she now sees as a salutary lesson.

In July 2017, the twentieth anniversary of Hong Kong's reunification with China was celebrated on the mainland. Chenchen was at that time working with an experimental theatre group for young people alongside an experienced primary school teacher and suggested that they might use drama to help children examine and reflect upon the present relationship between Hong Kong and mainland China. Her colleague agreed and the workshop was conducted with a group of sixth grade students. She used a *Mantle of the Expert* approach, splitting children into groups where they were to dramatise investigations made by different government departments, in different roles as journalists, government officials and residents of Hong Kong. Some of the groups came up with positive ideas in their roleplays, around cultural collaboration and knowledge exchange, but one group emphasised a particular area of discontent, namely Chinese tourists flooding into Hong Kong at weekends, using up local resources and displaying mildly anti-social behaviours such as shouting, smoking and spitting in public places. Such complaints from Hong Kong residents had been commonly reported on the local news in Shenzhen and had been introduced into the drama by the children themselves. They then went on to design – at their own instigation – posters to urge Chinese mainlanders to be more sensitive about their conduct when visiting Hong Kong. Such an outcome from the drama might seem benign enough to an outsider. Nevertheless, one participant – an eleven-year-old boy – became vocally very upset about it and Chenchen's teacher colleague took her aside after the workshop, quietly advising her never to do that kind of political workshop again in China 'if you don't want to get into trouble'.

So what can the teacher who is passionate about the more liberal values potentially inherent in drama education do in such a context, when on the one hand it is being encouraged but on the other hand being regarded as potentially suspect in ideological terms? She must learn to dance cleverly between what is prescribed and what is proscribed, holding faith with what she knows to be good practice and learning how to justify it in terms that teachers can feel comfortable with and parents can appreciate. There is no place for the drama teacher as hero here; she must have a subtler, less egocentric vision than that.

She does, in fact, have plenty of room for manoeuvre still. There are many areas of government policy that the drama teacher can readily engage with. In the Guangzhou proposals, for example, values such as freedom, equality, justice, integrity and friendship are listed. And Feng explains that the reforms called for in moral education are not only directed at content but also at pedagogy. Students were simply too bored from being lectured at and being told stories that were crassly and obviously prescriptive in their moral agendas. Innovative educational methods that can engage and hold children's attention are therefore welcomed, as is the use of stories. But here, too, there are difficulties. The kind of stories that teachers are used to – and comfortable with – tend to be overly didactic, illustrative of simple moral rules and often linked directly to children's lives. Feng presents a few examples of these. She recalls the stories told during moral education lessons when she was a young girl about young martyrs for the Republic, such as the fourteen-year-old Liu Hulan, beheaded in 1947 by the Kuomintang army for her unshakeable loyalty to the Communist party. Feng admits to being intimidated rather than inspired by such stories (2019, p.1). Less exhortatory are the stories presented in text books following the recent curriculum reforms, intended to promote such values as empathy, care, honesty, co-operation, respect, kindness and forgiveness, as well as to help children to develop a positive self-image. For example, one story, about a wild young boy from a single parent family, is intended to promote empathy and kindness; another is designed to help children appreciate those who do menial work in order to enable society to run smoothly (ibid, p.35). Such stories fail to engage many students, however, due to their predictability and straightforward didacticism. We propose the use of more literary stories, those that are aesthetically pleasing, with moral issues embedded in plots that are imaginatively engaging to children rather than straightforwardly moralistic. These, we suggest, are more likely to hold children's attention and encourage them into forms of critical, moral thinking.

With these issues in mind, we will now refer to how two literary stories have been used to design drama schemes that include a moral education agenda and have been taught successfully. By this we mean children have engaged with and enjoyed them, teachers have felt comfortable with them and parents have appreciated them. They could also be shown to fit explicitly within values promoted in government policy documents. Most importantly, they are schemes that the practitioner herself could teach with integrity and be proud of.

In 2017, a primary school in Shenzhen asked Chenchen to run a drama club for a group of 25 children, aged eight to eleven years. Roughly one-third of these children were diagnosed with special educational needs (SEN) and a number of them demonstrated behavioural difficulties. The government had recently specified that children's mental health should be a priority for schools and that they should 'cultivate students' personalities, a positive mentality and good psychological health'.<sup>6</sup> The school was interested in whether drama could help in this area, so the class was something of an experiment for them. Chenchen quickly learned that many in the class saw themselves as victims of bullying. The school, however, did not want this as a focus for her work in case it damaged its reputation among parents. Instead, it asked her to work on Hemingway's story *The Old Man and the Sea*, which turned out to be a positive development. At the start of the story, the old man is laughed at and mocked by the villagers. Without mentioning the term 'bullying', she was able nonetheless to examine the issue, using drama approaches to explore the old man's history, his feelings and reasons behind the villagers' attitudes to him. These she related to values listed within the school's moral education curriculum

such as community, respecting difference and friendship. The children empathised readily with his predicament and shared a subtle level of understanding, listing his personal traits as perseverance, stubbornness, kindness and loneliness, which in itself signifies an understanding of the complexity of human motivation rather than the parroting of values they knew the teacher was digging for. At the head's insistence, Chenchen then helped the children turn the story into a short performance of fifteen minutes in length. Teachers and parents watched and were impressed by their work. Several parents commented positively about how much their children had benefited from the course overall in terms of more positive attitudes to school; improved self-confidence; motivation to pursue performing on stage in the future; and an increased willingness to talk about their feelings. None of these comments were solicited and were offered freely. The process of working together towards this common aim had evidently strongly complemented the moral learning of the previous workshops.

One final example further illustrates how drama can help subtly promote the kind of critical thinking that many Chinese teachers are wary of, through the use of non-didactic stories and the delightfully transgressive potential of humour and irony. In a drama class for young primary-aged children around the story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, the class is lured into an imaginative world very unlike school, in which the temptation to steal is a real one.<sup>7</sup> The action is halted and children are asked to provide five reasons why Ali Baba shouldn't steal from the robbers' treasure and – crucially – five reasons why he should. This exercise follows immediately on from an energetic and comic representation of the treasures he finds in the cave, which has given free rein to the children's imaginations. The exercise encourages them to tap into their natural, human foibles and asks them openly to engage with the kind of dilemma all too real in moral life, but one that is safely bounded within the context of a story that allows for some ironic detachment from their everyday lives. Chenchen has taught this scheme more than once and recalls the different responses children have readily given her: if he takes the money, he will be no different from the robbers; the money is not his and should be returned to those from whom it was stolen; if he becomes rich, his character might well change for the worse. However, there are always children who will say that the money doesn't belong to the robbers anyway; that Ali Baba really needs it as he is poor; and even, perhaps, that fate has guided him here. Teachers know it is Ali Baba the children are talking about, not themselves; they understand that in order for there to be a story he *has* to take the treasure; and, of course, the drama moves on to explore (albeit in a comic way) the dangers he unleashes when he does take it. So their didactic sensibilities are both satisfied and undermined at one and the same time, as the prescribed value of 'honesty' is examined in a way that is both morally and aesthetically satisfying for children.

These two examples illustrate that drama teachers in mainland China can engage with prescribed moral values in ways that avoid narrow didacticism and allow them to exercise pedagogic and artistic integrity. To play with the popular metaphor of border crossing, teachers can temporarily transport children into worlds where they are encouraged to think imaginatively and in a greater spirit of freedom, while working, playing and practising with one another. Although we can never predict with certainty what kind of learning will emerge from such experiences and what moral effects they will have on future lives, we can have faith in the secret power of good artistic practice and its potential to sow seeds that may well take root and flower at some future time in the hearts and minds of children.



## Notes

- 1 See *Research in Drama Education: the Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, vol.24, no.4, November 2019.
- 2 Feng, M. (2019) *Learning to Teach Moral Education through Drama in a Chinese Primary School*. Cai, J. (2019) *How Can Drama Benefit Children's Language Learning and Moral Thinking in a Chinese Early Years Educational Context?* Both are unpublished doctoral theses at the University of Warwick, UK
- 3 The International Drama Education Congress (IDEC). This is arguably the most influential drama company in mainland China and has government support.
- 4 <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2017-01-25/doc-ifxzunxf2052452.shtml>
- 5 See, for example, *Research in Drama Education: the Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, themed issue on Citizenship and Human Rights, vol.12, no.3, November 2007.
- 6 教育部关于印发《中小学德育工作指南》的通知<Circular of the Ministry of Education on the Issuance of Guidelines on Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools> “心理健康教育。开展认识自我、尊重生命、学会学习、人际交往、情绪调适、升学择业、人生规划以及适应社会生活等方面教育，引导学生增强调控心理、自主自助、应对挫折、适应环境的能力，培养学生健全的人格、积极的心态和良好的个性心理品质
- 7 This scheme was developed by Jonothan Neelands for Marphy's Playhouse, a nationally influential drama company based in Cheng-du.

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## 16 ‘I never knew I had so many health rights’ – developing a health manifesto with young people living in Hillbrow

*Katharine Low, Phana Dube, Gerard Bester and Ben Gunn*

### Introduction

**THIS CHAPTER DISCUSSES** ways of assisting young people in articulating and determining what their health needs are and about the importance of a space to talk about sex as an ordinary, joyful activity. Questions about how best to create spaces for young people to speak with healthcare providers about their health needs, and specifically how the healthcare environments can be destigmatised to ensure they are suited to the young peoples’ needs, is a central concern of the chapter. The chapter shares some of our findings and approaches to the practice and offers our collaborative approach to the project as an example of an alternative way of working with healthcare workers (HCWs) in Hillbrow to develop ways of working with their young people.

The Outreach Foundation (OF) runs a series of after-school theatre youth groups with local schools in Johannesburg and Kat Low has worked with them since 2015. Following a series of reports on health concerns in Hillbrow,<sup>1</sup> the OF was keen to find ways of supporting their young people to access local healthcare services. This chapter explores how young people from OF responded to the practices in place at their local health clinic, Ward 21 at Wits Reproductive Health & HIV Institute (Wits RHI).

Our project in June 2018, facilitated by Kat Low, Phana Dube and Ben Gunn, was the first of four projects which formed part of a Global Challenges Research Fund collaboration between the OF and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. For this project, we partnered with Barnato Park High School, one of the OF after-school theatre groups. Working with these young people, over the ten days of the project, we explored and named the most pressing health needs facing these youth and considered the barriers to accessing health services and explored ways of bridging these barriers.

### South African youth and sexual & reproductive health (SRH)

The South African Constitution states that ‘[e]veryone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being’ (South Africa, 1996). While this right has support from the highest level, the impact of such an articulated right has little currency at the street level in an area surrounded by poverty and over-crowding. Furthermore, access to supportive and non-judgemental healthcare services for young people remains compromised. Indeed, in 2018, UNAIDS called for ‘bold leadership to tackle the [HIV] prevention crisis’ noting that ‘Women and girls must have the knowledge and power to protect themselves against HIV in safe and enabling environments and must be able to access services that meet their needs’ (UNAIDS, 2018). This is particularly true for the young women and men living in Hillbrow.

Hillbrow, in Johannesburg, is a high-density, high-rise inner-city area affected by the rapid influx of urban migration. According to the 2011 Census, with an area of just over a square kilometre and a population of nearly 75,000, Hillbrow has one of the highest population densities in South Africa. Consequently, there are high levels of crime, poverty, unemployment and urban decay. Living and working spaces and access to civic services are further stretched by high migration from Zimbabwe and further afield in Africa. The population density, tensions between 'religious and traditional values, and rapid urbanisation combined with unemployment, creates conflict and violence, including xenophobic attacks triggered by competition for scarce resources and employment' (Outreach Foundation, 2017: 2). In 2013, it was listed as the fourth most dangerous police district for common assault across South Africa (Matshediso and Wafer, 2015). A 2014 study found that 36.6% of adolescent woman in inner-city Johannesburg (which would include Hillbrow) had experienced intimate-partner violence (Decker *et al.*, 2014). The study concluded that witnessing or experiencing intimate-partner violence has a significant impact on young women's health, namely increased substance abuse, experience of mental health problems, transactional sex and unsafe sexual practices (Decker *et al.*, 2014: S65–66). While there has been a marginal improvement in safety levels in recent years, public spaces are affected by incidences of criminal activity, while violence against women and children is prevalent, but under-reported. More recently, a 2017 study reported that young people in Hillbrow commonly witness and directly experience violence, networks and resources are scant in the community and the Hillbrow Theatre (part of OF) is seen as a 'safe' space for young women (Rees *et al.*, 2017: 59).

### Our practice

Working with the Barnato Park learners, we began by asking them their ideas and understandings of health, using performative images and soundscapes. We then introduced a giant brown paper puppet. Working with the learners' suggestions, we created two characters, *Amanda* and *Vusi*, both young people living in Hillbrow and experiencing health issues and difficulties in accessing (or not) local healthcare services. Through improvised interactions and role-play, we observed the characters attempting to get assistance at their local clinics, with the learners performing the roles of HCWs, friends and parents.

We then moved into object work where, in small groups, learners discussed what *Amanda* and *Vusi's* needs were in terms of their health and then created artefacts to help the puppets reach their needs. These included a loudhailer, more information about negotiating sex, a safe and welcoming clinic. As a group, learners were able to safely discuss different lived experiences through the representation of the puppet characters and the artefacts they had created. This ensured the learners' anonymity in discussing health concerns and needs. Most notably, the learners spoke about their concerns about having access to 'good' activities (such as sports and theatre) in terms of health and well-being, the expense of healthy food and struggling to eat 'well', and not being able to talk about health issues without being judged. Part of this struggle included issues with access to clinics, in terms of both feeling as if they are being judged and the consequent challenge of navigating the space.

These fears are understandable. Young people in South Africa are often surrounded by colonial, moralistic codes of behaviour, crisis talks about HIV infection, and real threats of gender-based violence. Within this context it becomes stifling to discuss or consider what sex or sexuality might mean for young people now (Low, 2017 & 2020). Gaining the courage to access health services as a young person is needed, but the fear

of the reception such access may receive means that young people are choosing not to access healthcare service. As a result, they are not activating their health rights as well as potentially placing their health in jeopardy. As a recent study by Ann Strode and Zaynab Essack concludes: '[South African] adolescents are at risk of HIV, sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy owing to high-risk sexual behaviour, physical, social and structural challenges, and limited access to key primary SRH services' (2017: 741).

Furthermore, the South African Department of Health's 2017 National Adolescent and Youth Health Policy acknowledges that 'health does not result solely from individual behaviours. Structural, familial, systemic and social factors, including economic vulnerability, violence, victimisation, social isolation and harmful gender norms, affect health among youth' (2017: 1). While this is commendable, it should also be read against the fact (as stated in this same policy document) that 'South Africa has the largest national number of HIV-positive adolescents in the world, and [young women] are at higher risk' (Department of Health, 2017: 7). This is unfortunate given that South African youths have some of the best adolescent health rights worldwide.

### **Spaces of equity and different conversations**

In thinking about the impact of this project on the Barnato Park High School learners we worked with, we have identified two points that are vital to note. The first is the importance of facilitating and holding spaces of equity for young women and men to question, explore and challenge what they would like in terms of their health needs, their sexual desires and wants. Too often, these spaces are overlooked and rushed and patronising. What are fundamentally and urgently needed are spaces for South African youths to activate and own their health rights safely and also to be adolescents and play and laugh and learn together.

Secondly, there is a vital need for different types of conversations about sex and reproductive health concerns. As discussed by Kat Low (2017 and 2020) and by other practitioners (Cahill 2017; Durden 2011; Barnes 2014), there is something in the performative that allows for sideways conversations to occur, apertures or moments through which participants and facilitators glimpse different feelings and experiences of health, in essence indirect ways of discussing and tackling key issues around sexual health. As Low has argued elsewhere (c.f. Low 2020), when discussing sexual health, it is essential to create different ways for the young people to ask questions about sexual health and consider the topic for themselves. What is needed in theatre-making is a space in which to play and dream and a space where understandings of health can be expanded and challenged, in addition to a space in which to share and discuss what their health needs are with HCWs.

### ***The visit to the clinic: meeting on your own terms***

In preparation for the visit to Ward 21, we invited some of their HCWs to visit us at OF the day before. During the visit, the learners introduced them to *Amanda* and *Vusi*, and the HCWs were invited to interact with the puppets and help them in improvised scenes by giving the characters advice and guidance on how to meet their health needs. The HCWs also spoke about Ward 21's services, AYFS (Adolescent and Youth Friendly Services) and, most crucially, adolescents' health rights. The joy and enthusiasm the HCWs had for Ward 21 was evident. It was important to highlight the wide age range of the HCWs to the learners as one of the young people's concerns in visiting the clinic was that they worried about judgement from older workers. It was important for the learners to meet both

young clinic workers who they could relate to and older clinic workers who they could potentially trust, with one HCW noting "We are young, we understand, we are there".

### **Adolescent health rights and the Adolescent & Youth Friendly Services (AYFS) initiative.**

Adolescents in South Africa have the right to access a number of specific sexual and reproductive health services. These rights include the right to individually consent to HIV testing, contraception use and family planning from the age of 12; the right for a girl child 'of any age to consent to a termination of pregnancy' (Strode & Essack 2017: 741) and the right to be treated by a named professional.

In 2017, one of South Africa's main objectives was to 'Empower adolescents and youth to engage with policy and programming on youth health', acknowledging the importance of adolescents being 'included as primary partners' in the development and implementation of the new policy (Department of Health, 2017: 9).<sup>2</sup> In our view, as practitioners working in South Africa, AYFS is revolutionary. Strode and Essack have concluded that the South African legislation on sexual and reproductive health rights for adolescents is a world-leading model for other countries. They argue that 'legislating on the ages of consent to SRH services creates a framework within which youth-friendly services can be designed and implemented' (2017: 744).

While the drive for AYFS clinics to be established country-wide remains a key priority for the South African government (Department of Health, 2017), there are still significant barriers preventing young people accessing good health care and non-judgemental healthcare workers (c.f. Geary et al. 2014, James et al. 2018). Part of the challenge has been focusing on providing relevant AYFS training for clinics and health care workers and for the clinics to have the facilities within which to provide appropriate AYFS services, and there has been a lack of research into the success of the AYFS initiative across South Africa (James et al. 2018: 2).

### **The visit to Ward 21**

On the day of the visit, we began by reflecting on the HCWs visit where the learners focused in on what had been shared in terms of young people's health rights, with one learner noting 'I never knew I had so many rights'. From this, the learners then started to create poems in relation to their rights as young people. We then gathered to walk over to Esslen Street and visit Ward 21. At the clinic we were welcomed with open arms. The learners were given a full tour of the premises and the visit culminated with tea and cake and a breakout space to talk through any questions they had, which ranged from 'why do you think we [the youth] don't know about this place?' to 'why do so many girls have backstreet abortions?'.<sup>3</sup> The learners expressed huge excitement about the facilities at the clinic, noting:

*I've heard really bad stories about how people get treated, but they are so nice!  
Normally clinics are really small, this one is big!  
I love the place.  
I was worried but it makes me happy that you have support groups.  
Now I know what's available, I'll come here every day.  
This clinic is lit.*

Although the visit was deemed a great success by all, the learners were very conscious about how little they had heard of the clinic and noted what a marked contrast Ward 21 was to their usual experiences of clinics.

### **Healthcare provision other than Ward 21/Wits RHI**

For the young people we worked with, a major barrier to accessing their local AYFS clinic (Ward 21) was a lack of knowledge of the existence of AYFS and the location of their local clinic. For example, of the 22 students on our project, only four had heard of Ward 21 and only three knew where it was. One of the goals of our project was to make visiting a clinic routine so that the youths could go to these places when they needed to. However, adolescents are wary of attending clinics and from the questionnaire completed before they visited, they shared their fears and feelings about going to such clinics:

*Being judged and not being treated well.*

*It makes me feel sick.*

*Very scared. I used to feel like a rock.*

*Horrible. Small. People around the clinic look at you. Becoming shy.*

Aside from the logistical challenge of destigmatising the clinics, the other main driver for the project involved enabling young people to own their needs, desires and choices. Hillbrow is a difficult space in which to live and discussing sex can be problematic for the young people who live there, not solely because of cultural and religious norms, but also because of the difficulty of separating it from the potential of it being a violent or aggressive act, or as being a shameful activity. These factors became key drivers for our practice.

There is also the very pressing need to have different kinds of conversations with HCWs. A space where young people are not just told what to do in terms of their health issues, but are actively listened to and are seen and treated as having rights. What this project engendered was a space in which the leaders of the Ward 21 clinic and young people living in Hillbrow shared food and spoke with each other.

The conversations between the HCWs and the young people were extraordinary. The welcome, the tour given and the coming back together for tea and cake led to a series of informative and open conversations, especially around the question of back-street abortions and an emphasis on the health rights of adolescents, including the right to be seen and treated without parental consent from the age of 12. The young people were actively listened to and welcomed back and were repeatedly told by the healthcare workers that Ward 21 was their space.

### **Performative outcomes**

The clinic visit prompted a number of performative responses by the learners; one included the development of adverts for the clinic to promote the space more widely. A significant note emerged in that the young people wanted to promote the clinic more widely because it was so great and tuned in to their needs. The short adverts they created included heightened comedic portrayals of their perceived usual experiences of the clinic (dismissive attitudes, shouting and disrespect and so on) compared with their exaggerated, euphoric joy at all of the services Ward 21 offers, including free WIFI, homework club, someone to talk to and the right to be spoken to by a named professional.

Another group created the blueprints for their 'perfect' clinic, entitled 'The YOLO Clinic: You Only Live Once'. Learners first discussed ideas of what they liked from Ward 21 and what they thought was missing. From this they mapped out their clinic on paper. After this the group drew out their clinic as more of a life-size model on the stage. It contained amazing things: an in-house DJ, free WIFI, free nutritious food, welcoming and patient doctors and nurses. The objects which learners had made earlier in the week were included in the space to show the space in its openness and responsiveness to the needs of others. In asking the learners to step back and look at what they had created, responses were hugely positive: 'wow, I can't believe we made this' and 'this is our perfect space'. They then gave *Amanda* the puppet a tour of the space, before sharing the clinic with the rest of the group.

A final activity we did with the group was to invite each learner to write a letter beginning with 'Dear Young People of Hillbrow'. We gave no further instructions to this task feeling that it was important that this activity was not guided in any way so that there was room for individual interpretation. We then invited learners to read out part of their letters in a sharing which also included the performances of certain poems other learners had composed, including this one:

*I want to know more about my health*

*They talk of care, what is care?*

*Our care means a healthy lifestyle*

*I want to know more about my health*

*I've got the right to be treated and updated about my health*

*I want to know more about my health*

*I need some advice because I don't know much as a young person*

*As young people we've got the right to family planning*

*I want to know more about my health*

*I hope one day we can talk about our health more seriously as the youth of Hillbrow.*

A video/documentary capturing parts of these performative responses can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/36g4Tro5UMg>.

Concluding the project with the letters to 'Dear Young People of Hillbrow' was a key moment in the project. The learners shared ideals and dreams, as noted below:

*Dear young people of Hillbrow,*

*Do not let the negative side of Hillbrow be the path you chose. Yes Hillbrow is full of gangsterism, violence and over use of substance abuse.*

*Dear young person of Hillbrow,*

*As a young person, irrespective of age, race, religion, culture, social status, of mental and physical abilities, you have basic health rights which include the right to be treated by name.*

*I just want to tell you that you should believe in yourself and your dreams. And that there is only one you in this world. So you should live your life to the fullest.*

*Don't let your past determine your future, because the power is in your hands.*

We believe that it is vital to focus on both the shade and the light of people's lives in Hillbrow. Negative views, moralistic judgements and patriarchal ways of living are constantly surrounding young people in South Africa. The heightened gender-based violence for young people living in urban areas is also important to acknowledge. But we have an obligation not to focus solely on the negative when discussing health and ways of re-owning and naming the experience of urban living. Here the impetus for the work, the theatre-making together, is also about creating spaces in which we recognise and celebrate the options, the light and the joy. A rap video based on the one of the 'Letters to Hillbrow' is one such example. It depicts a young man throwing off the expectations of parental/societal pressures and celebrating the space to dream.

Finally, we believe it is fundamental to recall that while the participants may live in poverty, they are not impoverished. The letters exercise and the practice of reading each other's letters of dreams, hopes and guidance was a claiming and understanding of what they as individuals might need (at this particular point in their lives). This claiming of space in which to consider and think about one's own health needs is an action which is vital, not just for adolescents, but for all of us. Our health needs and concerns shift constantly. Understandings of health, especially sexual health (with all of the sexual conservatism, prudishness and stigma associated with this), need to be fluid and we need spaces in which conversations about health concerns can be fluid and responsive to what is needed in that particular space, time and context and for who is in the room. Sexual health conversations can never be a one-size-fits-all situation; just like contraception, they come in different packages and sizes.

In conclusion, this type of practice is all about equitable and respectful collaboration. This practice comes about through collaboration – without buy-in from all parties, none of this is possible. The establishment of the project and the conversations we held in advance of the project (with Wits RHI leaders and team members from Ward 21, OF staff and graduates of the OF afterschool theatre project) reinforced for us the fundamental step in making equal space and time to build relationships with our partners. Fundamentally, any project which aims to celebrate and promote better health rights for young people needs to work in a co-collaborative and collegiate manner with all those involved.

As a result of the project, the OF has begun to map an understanding of young people's health needs in Hillbrow with specific reference to sexual health needs. The organisation has gained an understanding of the support needs of the young people and has begun to make links with relevant organisations, most notably the local health clinic (Hillbrow Health Precinct). Through the process, as an initial pilot project, Hillbrow Theatre have built a connection with the Hillbrow Health Precinct and we are developing further practice together.

## Notes

- 1 c.f. the publication of BMC Public Health supplement, Urban Health on the Edge (2017). Full access to these articles can be found here: <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/supplements/volume-17-supplement-3>.
- 2 The mandated 'quality improvement approach' to delivering AYFS was initiated in the early 2000s following on from the publication of the National Adolescent-Friendly Clinic Initiative, which was established by a leading national adolescent health NGO (loveLife) and other like-minded NGOs in 1999.



- 3 For a short film discussing the process and the visit of our project – please see: <https://youtu.be/36g4Tro5UMg> or <https://katharinelow.com/digital/36-outreach-foundation-collaborations>.

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## 17 *Inside bitch*

### Clean break and the ethics of representation of women in the criminal justice system

*Anna Herrmann and Caoimhe McAvinchey with contributions  
from Lucy Edkins, Jennifer Joseph, TerriAnn Oudjar, Jade Small,  
Deborah Pearson and Stacey Gregg*

You've seen Orange is the New Black. You've seen Locked Up. You've seen Bad Girls. So, what have we got that's different? Well, for one, we've been to prison.

(Gregg *et al*, 2019: 69)

#### **An introduction to Clean Break**

**CLEAN BREAK IS** a UK-based women-only theatre company which celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2019. The company was founded by Jacqueline Holborough and Jenny Hicks in 1979 whilst they were at HMP Askham Grange, an open prison, led by a progressive governor, Susan McCormick. She supported Holborough and Hicks' initiative for a drama workshop and around twenty women participated, writing and performing their own work, both within and beyond the prison, during and after their sentences. The collective named itself Clean Break Women Prisoners Theatre and, for the first decade of its life, it was predominantly a company of ex-prisoners writing and performing plays rooted in their own experiences, often told with great humour and playfulness whilst exposing the assumptions of patriarchy and the mistreatment of women in the prison system. Having established the company as a charity in the mid 1980s, and securing public subsidy and premises for offices and studios, the founders made the decision to move on and arts professionals were employed as core members of the team. In 1989, Bryony Lavery was commissioned to write *Wicked* and, as someone without personal experience of prison, a new model of creating work was born, with plays written by professional writers and performed increasingly by professional actors. Alongside this, the early seedlings of an education programme were established with theatre workshops and courses being offered to women with experience of the criminal justice system to develop skills, confidence and creative expression. This dual function became a key feature of the company's practice for the next twenty-five years. Over sixty brilliant plays were produced and hundreds of women (identified during this time as Clean Break students) benefited from high quality learning and support, delivered in a safe, women-only environment by an all-female team, with strong partnerships and clearly designed progression routes into Higher Education, volunteering and employment.

A Clean Break commission was much coveted by female playwrights. It offered a rich period of mentoring, research and immersion into the world of women, prisons and criminal justice – an opportunity to tell stories of marginalised and mostly unheard voices on mainstream stages. For example, *Head Rot Holiday* (Sarah Daniels, 1992) exploded myths about the treatment of women, labelled criminally insane, at the hands of state; *Mules* (Winsome Pinnock, 1996) considered the complex worlds navigated by drug

traffickers in a network of unnamed, unseen power and control; and *Little on the Inside* (Alice Birch, 2014) offered an intimate portrayal of friendship between women in prison and the power of imagination as an act of resistance in the face of institutionalisation. The commissions were underpinned by an ethical framework which developed over the years and included:

- Making it transparent for the participants in prison workshops when the playwright was offering writing workshops for skills development and when she was seeking their input to deepen her own understanding and research.
- Committing to never dramatise individual women's own stories who the playwrights met during their research period.
- Acknowledging the women anonymously who contributed to the writers' research in the play text and programme.
- As often as possible bringing the produced work into women's prisons enabling women there to engage as audiences and participants.

However, a sometimes uncomfortable tension existed between the participatory and produced work of the company. Building on the pilot Clean Break graduate tour *Missing Out* (Mary Cooper, 2008), developed in partnership with Action on Prisoners' Families which toured women's prisons, an engagement programme was created in 2010 to bridge the gap between the two strands of activity. The premise was to create semi-professional performance opportunities for the women who had engaged with the education programme and tour the resulting short plays to conferences for criminal justice professionals and policy makers. Work developed within this programme includes *Sounds Like an Insult* (Vivienne Franzmann, 2013), with characters navigating complex mental health needs in a system that fails to address them, and *Spent* (Katherine Chandler, 2016), exposing gendered experiences of poverty, debt and domestic violence. This strand of work grew in success and revealed an appetite by audiences to experience work performed by women with lived experience of the criminal justice system, as well as a desire by the women themselves to be the creators of the work that represented their experiences. In 2017, with this in mind, and within a harsh economic climate following a number of years of 'austerity' and some tough decisions being required about the sustainability of the company's future, Clean Break made a clear and unambiguous decision to reimagine the way it achieves its mission, repositioning students, newly defined as 'Members', at the heart of its artistic output. By integrating its different strands of work, Members would work with artists to create theatre where their own voices were heard and where they would be seen, represented and empowered to tell stories that mattered to them and told their truth.

So where does *Inside Bitch* sit within this narrative? How did it become such a powerful first public manifestation of this reimagined mission of the company?

### ***Inside Bitch: process and production***

Clean Break had commissioned Stacey Gregg in 2013/4 in much the same way as previous playwrights: Stacey was invited to become its writer in residence, to work with women in Clean Break's Kentish Town studios, to participate in the theatre writing residencies in prisons and, ultimately, to write a full-length commission which Clean Break would produce. However, similarly to the company, Stacey was feeling a disconnect.

I was really out of love with theatre and I often felt very conflicted about being in the theatre world. I'm from a very working class non-artsy background so I think that I'm slightly plagued by, why? What's the purpose? How can I make work that has meaning? I didn't know how, but I just knew that I wanted to look at the actual mechanics of the theatre world and representation. There was something about work made with good intentions but then at a remove from the actual experience and voices of the women – what does that do? It was quite vague and abstract when I first said to Clean Break that I just knew I didn't want to go off and write a play. But it was definitely met with enthusiasm.

I've known Deborah Pearson for years. She works in an interesting way with autobiographical [material] and what you would call auto-fiction [...] I felt like she would be the perfect person to collaborate in a way that would help create this kind of work and also has the sensibility to work well with Clean Break.

(Gregg, 2019)

And in 2016, without knowing quite where it would lead, but having a strong conviction that they wanted to collaborate with women who had been to prison to create a piece of work which questioned the representation of women in prison in popular culture, Pearson and Gregg embarked on this journey; unconsciously influencing the company's own questioning of its organisational practices; the rehearsal room pushing the boundaries of the organisation and challenging, supporting and making room for change.

What were the key considerations for the artists and the organisation in a devising process which intended to provoke and disrupt culturally accepted representations of women prisoners by placing women who had been to prison centre stage? How would the organisation and the *Inside Bitch* company make sure that this work was non-exploitative and caring to those taking part? In interviews with the *Inside Bitch* company, we reflected on the building blocks of the devising and rehearsing process, and the implications of this work for the cast and for Clean Break's organisational processes, developing and producing work that foregrounds the experiences of its members through theatre and performance.

## Beginnings

In the Spring of 2016, Pearson and Gregg devised a project brief that was circulated to Clean Break Members:

### *WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT PRISON*

The idea of this project is to explore and challenge public perceptions of prison and women in prison.

To do this, playwright Stacey Gregg and Live Artist Deborah Pearson would like to work with Clean Break graduates with experience of prison. We plan to look at the stories we are told through TV, film and the news that may or may not represent a realistic experience of being in prison.

We will look at popular perceptions of prison through culture and the media. We will then discuss and break down these ideas, and devise together fun, truthful and

challenging ways to encourage an audience to think twice about the stories they are told about women in prison.

The process will be agreed with the team of performer/collaborators, and Deborah and Stacey will be in the room and on the floor as much as our Clean Break grads. Together we will find the best way to explore our subject with an audience.

[...] we will be meeting Clean Break grads for a chat [...] There is no need to prepare for the meeting, other than to think perhaps about the gap between your experience of prison and what other people may have got wrong or right about it.

(Gregg *et al*, 2019: 21)

We quote this project invitation at length because it sets out, from the very beginning, the tone and approach that informed the creation of *Inside Bitch* – a collaborative enquiry which prioritised Clean Break graduates’ lived experience of incarceration and their expertise in identifying the representational gaps of women and prison in the wider cultural landscape. Gregg reflected that the cast – Lucy Edkins, Jennifer Joseph, TerriAnn Oudjar, Jade Small – were self-selecting women,

who seemed to some extent to be at peace with the fact that [they had been to prison] whilst also wanting to talk about the unjust elements of it. [...] That made us feel confident and comfortable that they wouldn’t feel exploited by the experience and that also they would be the kinds of women who would speak up if they were to be uncomfortable.

(Gregg, 2019)

### Structured provocations

The idea of the prison film and TV series genres, with their stock characters, relationships and anticipated dramatic peaks, informed the concept for the performance. Stacey reflected, ‘I had the broad idea that we’d look at other shows that are out there and then we’d try to build a show of our own, and then we’d pitch it’ (2019). Gregg’s starting point was the internationally successful Netflix television series *Orange is the New Black* (2013–2019), set in the fictional Litchfield Penitentiary, USA: ‘my first question was, what do the women make of that show?’ (2019). A screening with the cast and staff from HMP Holloway, which was, until it closed in late 2016, the largest women’s prison in western Europe, generated considerable and heated discussion about the representation of prisoners, prison staff and institutional power-dynamics, some of which made its way into the final performance. Later workshops were both precise in the invitation made to the cast to consider their experience and playfully eclectic in the forms through which these accounts were presented: the cast reflected on their sensory experience of prison through poems in which each line started with ‘I remember...’ followed by a statement; using the British daytime TV chat show *Lorraine* as a frame, the cast imagined they were guests, selling their memoirs about their time in prison; and a provocation to imagine a new prison TV show generated an abundance of melodramatic scenes which, in turn, prompted the title for the performance: Pearson (2019) reflected, ‘it was so ridiculous, somebody was doing smack in the corner and somebody had a knife to somebody – it just was so over the top. And then we said, what is the name of this show and then TerriAnn said, “*Inside Bitch!*”’

### Non-hierarchical approach

The development process for *Inside Bitch* was genuinely exploratory and speculative in terms of the context examined and how the materials generated through this workshop process would inform the end piece. Gregg summarised the process:

from the first moment that we did those workshops we realised there was so much material that we didn't need to do any more, and in fact it was the opposite job, we had to find a way to refine it. I read some really interesting work that Deborah had created about beginnings, middle and ends [...] I was very drawn to Deborah's task-based exercises that allowed the women to be free, and also I had been working at the same time with a lot of improvisation around set beats. So very early on we knew that we were going to work in a way that was a combination of rehearsed improvisation alongside material that had come directly from the workshops.

(Gregg, 2019)

This structured approach – a combination of tasks, improvisation and returning to materials generated throughout the process – facilitated a non-hierarchical structure that runs counter to a model of theatre making which ladders authority between the writer, director and cast with separately delineated roles and ranked authority. In the context of *Inside Bitch*, Gregg and Pearson offered structured prompts, which generated material, and a curatorial eye in the identification of materials and the ordering of them, which was discussed with the cast who ultimately had the final say about what was and wasn't included. In the beginning, the company found this approach to devising unsettling and there was some suspicion. It took time for the company to trust the approach, to trust that Gregg and Pearson weren't 'there to mine them and steal their stories and run away with them' (Gregg 2019). Each cast member had a relationship with Clean Break which spanned between one and two decades. This fast-tracked some of the trust needed for the women to share their stories freely, further supported by the fact that the development phase took place in small bursts over two years which allowed relationships and rapport to build. Jennifer Joseph reflected on the process and its development over this time,

It's given me the ability to be a bit more trusting, because I definitely wasn't at the beginning. It's about trusting and believing in yourself, because you're being quite vulnerable when you're trusting someone. And I definitely had to learn that through this, one hundred per cent!

(Joseph, 2019)

This careful, playful and rigorous curating of fact and fiction informed the content, structure and aesthetic of *Inside Bitch*. The show was framed by a series of scenes, with elements of fixed-script, task-based performance, which invited improvised response from the cast and, at times, the audience. When the cast reflected on the devising and rehearsal process during the run of *Inside Bitch*, it was clear that the negotiated trust in each other, in Clean Break and the Royal Court, had allowed for considered risk taking. Lucy and TerriAnn reflected,

By the end of the rehearsal and technical process, I felt the play had been solidly put together, so I didn't feel I was exposing myself any more. We're out there saying things

which are true, but I know where I am and I didn't know where I was during the rehearsal process. I was just about holding it together.

(Edkins, 2019)

I love that, Lucy. Any play you put on, scripted or not, the first couple of nights, no one really knows what they're doing [...] To not know what you're doing outwardly, let alone your vulnerability and exposing yourself at the same time [...] I kept saying, I need the order, I need to have it set, I need to know where I'm going next. Because if that bit's secure, you can work with the rest. I was like a bloody swan underneath.

(Oudjar, 2019)

### Choice, control and care

The presence of choice, along with trust, enabled the cast to know that they were in control. And to be in a position of control as an actor, making work rooted in your own experiences and ideas, is an empowering act. Gregg reflected on the importance of this control, particularly in relation to how comedy was used in the production.

What is the tone of this? what is the voice of it? how are audiences responding? It's a sensitive issue because the women are so naturally witty, because comedy feels subversive in this context, because we're choosing our moments to drop the mic or get a dig in. There is a lot of laughter and good energy in the room. But [the cast] must never feel like they're not in control of the joke, they must never feel they're the joke. That's a tightrope that we have been walking for the duration of this project, and will continue to do so.

(Gregg, 2019)

The tightrope Gregg references was also sensitively navigated with the use of autobiography. Within the production, each of the four members of the company had a monologue that explicitly engaged with autobiographical material. These monologues were verbatim accounts that were shared at various moments in the devising process. For Jen, the inclusion of her monologue was not without considerable thought – for herself, her family and then, ultimately, for the audience,

My monologue, it's no secret, if I knew it was going to come to this, then I wouldn't have made it so personal and so long [...] I felt quite angry about having to keep doing it. [...] And then I realised the potential and the purpose of it, so sort of got used to it [...] It didn't matter how late it got for Deborah and Stacey, there was never any point where you couldn't pull out, they always gave you that option. So then it becomes your own personal gain to keep it in, because now it forms something.

(Joseph, 2019)

The process of engaging with autobiographical material was challenging for TerriAnn,

I struggled through the rehearsals, it brought up a lot of my trauma. I started to dream about prison. [...] I was told, TerriAnn, you don't have to do this. Even though [the show] was sold out [...] Because I've visited trauma, I understood the process [...]

I thought, I wouldn't [pull out], I wouldn't do it to myself and I wouldn't do it to others, but being told that I could was kind.

(Oudjar, 2019)

Throughout the devising and rehearsal process and the run of thirty performances, there was a continual process of checking in with the company. As Jade said, 'we all had a choice at any time to put what we wanted and [take out] what we didn't' (Small, 2019). Pearson reflects on working with autobiographical material,

It's difficult and sensitive work and that has to be handled to some extent [...] Everyone in the room checks in, everyone in the room checks out. It's a really important part of a process because it just makes us realise we're a bunch of human beings in the room together [...] It's a moment to remind each other of our humanity [...] It's also a moment for the cast, if they need to, to say whether or not they're feeling in a tricky place with what they've been doing that day.

(Pearson, 2019)

The line between the autobiographical and the fictional and imagined was constantly in flux. Within the field of live art and performance, this is something continually negotiated by artists drawing on their own lived experience and eloquently attended to by the artist Peggy Shaw of Split Britches. When asked, how do you draw the line between what biographical material you include and exclude in your work, Shaw (2003) responded:

We don't. When you draw the character from yourself you can come back and forth between the two. We do performance, we don't do theatre. There is a creative distance. Sometimes things are too close. Sometimes it is just an image, a detail. Our lives are political by the nature of the small detail.

This is precisely the terrain navigated by the company in *Inside Bitch*. Lucy reflected, 'I knew the intention. I knew that they wanted us to be ourselves on stage' and that ultimately the characters were 'elements of ourselves and a mishmash of bits of ourselves'. TerriAnn echoed this,

We're just people. That is a part of TerriAnn. You're not going to get the whole of me. I could have played Jade or I could have played Lucy, it was just, you play TerriAnn, I can do that. How can I not do that?

(Oudjar, 2019)

Jade concurred,

Same for me. I feel like it's a heightened version of me, but it's very easy to play because I don't have any characters that I hold throughout the whole time, building your character and keeping it on your body. [...] I feel it's great.

(Small, 2019)

### **Disrupting representation**

Richard Schechner refers to this sense of the real/not real in performance as a double negativity, a 'not me, not not me' quality. Carlson expands, 'within the play frame a performer is



not herself (because of the operation of illusion), but she is also not not herself (because of the operations of reality). Performer and audience alike operate in a world of double consciousness' (1996: 54). In *Inside Bitch*, the audience is constantly shuttling between its dual relationship with what is presented in the performance, the women in the cast are not themselves but they are also not not themselves. One of the audience members during the post show discussion articulated this deliberate erasure of the distinction between the individual and the character they played when she said, 'it's raw and fresh and real and I'm confused now as to whether you are actors or whether you are people' (*Inside Bitch Post Show* 12 March 2019). This playful blurring of fact and fiction, of individuals and aspects of their lives within the curated time and space of the live performance event, has serious social and political intentions. *Inside Bitch* exposes the constructions of representations of women in prison, offering a meta-theatrical consideration of theatre itself and the role of audiences/publics in the co-construction of limited and limiting tropes which insist that women in prison are fixed within a narrow representational field, echoed in the titles of television series and movies including *Bad Girls*, *Monster*, *Femmes in Prison*, *Barbed Wire Dolls* and *Women in Cages*.

### Thinking ahead

So what next after *Inside Bitch*? The process and the response from audiences has been hugely positive. The learning has been significant both for the company and also for the organisation – the company is better equipped moving forward to understand the nuances and the consideration needed to cast Members in its productions; better equipped to understand the support required during each transitional phase from R&D, to rehearsing, to opening night and beyond. But it still has further questions to interrogate moving forward. Where does autobiography live in the future of its productions? How does it embed the principals of its trauma-informed participatory model into the creation of professional work, both producing risk-taking theatre for its audiences and caring for its Members? And how does it ensure that the intersectionality of its Members is represented across all it does? These questions are not for Clean Break alone – the theatre industry is having a vibrant and urgent conversation about representation and voice, who is represented on its stages, and who gets to tell their own stories. Clean Break will continue to play its part in this debate and take action that creates lasting change and puts women's voices centre stage.

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## 18 The ethics of aesthetic risk

*Gareth White*

**WHEN WE TALK** about ‘creating a safe space’ in performance work with non-professional performers, we call on a deceptively simple concept but also a whole web of associations and assumptions. It’s a useful shorthand for the efforts we make to organise activity to allow participants to feel well-disposed to do things they don’t normally do, and to avoid things happening that are too ‘risky’, that are potentially harmful *in some way* to participants. But it merits some close attention, as misunderstanding risk brings hazards of its own; it is the aim of this short intervention to sketch some of what is at stake when we think about risk and safety in creative work, not to closely define the varieties of risk that need to be managed, but to propose a way of thinking about the need to ensure that some risk remains. Thinking about the idea of safe space in applied theatre inevitably happens in the context of an ongoing controversy, mostly focused on educational environments, that in popular discourse pits ambitions for non-discriminatory social relations against an ideal of free speech. More accurately the disputes are a power struggle about what kind of speech and what symbolic language is to be socially sanctioned. In a recent publication advocating for more robust practice, John Palfrey calls for educators to facilitate ‘brave spaces’ alongside safe spaces, where students seek the truth in ‘learning environments that approximate the world outside academic life’ (Palfrey, 2017, p. 21); this misses the point, at least in part, as brave space already exists in the often brutal discursive environment where these debates happen. There is plenty of bravery in evidence in (especially) young people’s determination to alter the terms of reference, whatever the merits of their argument in any given case.

In any context, when we use this phrase we are talking about space in a metaphorical way; though there may be literal spaces in question – women only rooms or queer venues, for example – their safety is social rather than truly spatial. The harm that we try to avoid is social, interpersonal harm, not physical, and the way we organise ourselves to avoid it is about framing the time we spend together as much as the space in which we spend it. Perhaps we have to consider if we’re also talking about risk and harm metaphorically. We should think about whether we are distinguishing between different dangers, and considering them appropriately, rather than imposing a blanket ‘safety’ over our work, which carries its own danger of smothering creative potential. What kinds of risk are we dealing with in participatory performance work? Simple health and safety concerns of course: the avoidance of trips, slips and falls, strains to un-limbered bodies or falling out of windows; with some groups we will pay attention to over-excitement, where participants may over-commit to physical activity and hurt others as well as themselves. But the elements of safety that are more often being spoken of when we talk about ‘safe space’ are about social and psychological well-being, and these are the areas that are most susceptible

to fuzzy thinking and over-caution. Gavin Bolton, an influential early theorist of classroom drama, writes about ‘protecting into’ involvement (Bolton, 1992, p. 128), rather than protecting people from harm. The protective work in this sense is a stage that takes us from one state to another. For Richard Hahlo and Peter Reynolds it is an ‘airlock’ that manages a change of atmosphere. What this might disguise is that what changes between these states and atmospheres is multi-layered and multivalent (Hahlo and Reynolds, 2000, p. 5). The ‘protecting into’ involvement is partly about helping people to get beyond their feelings of embarrassment at doing things they’re not used to. The social harm of embarrassment can be real – relationships and prestige can be damaged, especially where other participants are also unfamiliar with ‘doing drama’. But a ‘safe space’ is often – and perhaps most importantly – about something more than embarrassment, it’s about a stretch of time where we don’t fear censure, an environment for sharing thoughts and feelings, based on the expectation that we are respected for who we want to be. For some, the lack of respect conferred on them in everyday life is such that there’s no need to do anything to risk disapproval or disrespect: a safe space is the exception and not the rule. In this case the ‘airlock’ doesn’t take us from the relative safety of everyday life to the potential risks of drama, but from the threats of everyday life to a bounded time without the feeling of threat. Thus, the question of safe space becomes a question of privilege: of allowing some people access to a quality of experience that is an ordinary thing for many of us. Different experiences of social risk evidence how complex the interrelationship between these aspects of safe practice can be. As Alice O’Grady puts it, the term ‘at risk’ is ‘a catch-all for those who do not appear to fit within or conform to the prevalent logic of contemporary economics’ (O’Grady 2017, p. 14), but:

Participatory performance courts vulnerability in multiple ways and, in applied theatre practice for example, is often targeted at participants who might already be classified as ‘vulnerable’ or as being ‘at risk’. The idea that vulnerability can be mobilised as a critical tool offers a challenge to this perspective.

(O’Grady, 2017, p. xi)

Targeting those who are already vulnerable has a sinister ring, but, of course, the aim is to bring the vulnerable into a safe space to take risks of a different kind. Stimulating the capacity to ‘experience vulnerability critically’ (ibid.), as a positive disposition to learning about oneself and others as it is celebrated amongst artists, is how O’Grady frames one of her ambitions in applied theatre.

Mary Ann Hunter handles the idea of safe space in working with such supposedly ‘at risk’ young people very sensitively, in an influential article inspired by her work in a ‘peace building’ project which brought together people of differing ethnicities. Project participants included (indigenous Australian, Pacific Islander, Sudanese migrant, Australian-born Asian) who were often in conflict – sometimes through physical violence, and sometimes ‘symbolic’ violence (Hunter, 2008). By recognising the importance of symbolic struggle, Hunter directs us to one of the ambiguities in creating safe space: there was a need to negotiate a space where self-expression wasn’t interpreted as an act of aggression towards others with a claim on the space, but as a legitimate use of that space. Hunter’s enumeration of the risks is acute:

[...] the risk of expressing open emotion to ‘the other’; the risk of ‘the other’ belittling such emotion; the risk of prolonging conflict by addressing it inappropriately;

even the risk of resolving conflict and thereby losing the right (and perceived status) to be indignant.

(p. 9)

With this in mind the definition of the space as a collaborative act became important in this work. Hunter delineates four aspects to safe space in performance work: literal physical safety; metaphorical, time bounded space free from ‘discriminatory activities, expressions of intolerance or policies of inequity’ (p. 8); the feeling of safety that comes with familiarity and comfortable association; and the specific set of ‘rules of engagement’ that allow for risk taking and experiment, individually and together, that are ‘a product of the dynamic tension between known (safe) processes and unknown (risky) outcomes’ (ibid.). In this sense the relationship of safety with risk is ‘dialogical’, an exchange between the positions which are apparently opposed but not mutually exclusive, but the participants are also in dialogue with each other in their active role in defining and re-framing the work space, in an aspect of the work that is in itself risky. Recognising that there was nothing simple about the safety of the space, this flexible and collaborative approach to it facilitated ‘an increasingly malleable, performative, and sustainable safe space’ (p. 10). Borrowing from Henri Lefebvre’s idea of ‘moments of presence’ she celebrates the ephemeral possibilities that emerge in performance work where participants have been able to access ‘critical vulnerability’, in O’Grady’s words. I suggest that we might think of the potential for revelatory moments that might emerge from the experience of participation in more specifically aesthetic terms.

Theodore Adorno entertains this inviting analogy:

The phenomenon of fireworks is prototypical for artworks, though because of its fleetingness and status as empty entertainment it has scarcely been acknowledged by theoretical consideration [...] They appear empirically yet are liberated from the burden of the empirical, which is the obligation of duration; they are a sign from heaven yet artefactual, an ominous warning, a script that flashes up, vanishes and indeed cannot be read for its meaning.

(1999, p.81)

Fireworks might also be prototypical of the idea of safe space: their danger is undeniable, but a zero-tolerance approach to it denies us the joy of tilting our heads back and saying ‘ooh’. But what Adorno really intends about art experiences needs a bit more unpacking. A firework is an enjoyable flash of colour, fleeting and apparently empty. They appear empirically – in the material world of chemical reactions and fire, rather than any ideal or imaginary realm – but aren’t expected to last at all. Their ephemerality and inscrutability, for Adorno, are what make them like what he values in art: that it can’t be reduced to the definable and purposeful. But the point is that these things are linked, often paradoxically, each depending upon its opposite.

Adorno is an odd ally to call on in support of applied theatre. Though a theorist of emancipatory politics, throughout his writing he shows no patience for overtly political or instrumental art (he’s resolutely sceptical of Brecht for example), and we can guess that he would find much of what shelters under our umbrella tangential to the greatest potential of art, at best. But it is useful to stretch our conceptual muscles, and important not to simplify what we expect to happen through art processes. Adorno’s thinking is always about exploring unresolved contradictions, so when he writes about the autonomy

of art (its separation from the everyday world) he is rarely more than a paragraph away from telling us how inextricably interlinked and interpenetrated art is with the mundane and the practical. In applied theatre, heteronomy, that is the presence of real life concerns, becomes a question for us in two ways. We usually want real life to be in the rehearsal room with us, in the form of ordinary people working on and through things from their own lives; and to explore how theatre and performance can have a kind of aesthetic autonomy while working with concrete material would take more space than is available here. What is more relevant is how we work to separate ourselves from real life concerns, to facilitate a context where ‘concern’ doesn’t mean distraction, anxiety or trouble – or, in cases like Hunter’s, open conflict between participants. As Hunter has articulated, this kind of concern can never be entirely removed, and to imagine so might be to disavow the depth of such concerns. So in these terms autonomy and heteronomy are logically opposed, but never able to exclude each other: it is not so much that there is a continuum between the two, but that each always contains the potential for an irruption of the other. So, in the usual business of working on the concerns of everyday life, through performance, we will move across and around, closer to and further from those matters of concern (note how the spatial metaphor is working hard here). A safe space can’t be so safe as to exclude this difficult material. But just as important is the scope to allow something else, an experience of the transformation of the material of everyday life into something else, something that is independent of us, even as the people who have brought this material into the rehearsal room. What Adorno directs us to is the strangeness of what can happen in an art event, how it can transform what we bring to it and how it can take hold of us as active participants. This is something unpredictable and elusive: what comes out might be very different to what was put in, but has its own value that can be quite separate from the value of expressing ourselves, analysing our experiences or creating works of advocacy. It depends upon being able to surrender to something that has gained a life of its own, as a spectator, listener or reader; but we can quite easily read Adorno’s words to his students (from a lecture in 1958) from the point of view of the creative participant:

... either one is inside a work of art and aligned with it in a living sense, in which case the question of understanding the work or of the meaning of the work does not really arise; or, on the other hand, through reflection or development – possibly through something like disgust or an excess of artistic experience – one is now outside the sphere of influence of art and casts one’s gaze on the work; and then [...] one suddenly asks oneself abruptly: so what’s it all about, what is all this? The moment one is no longer inside it, where one is no longer aligned with it, art begins to withdraw in a certain sense, to close up, and assumes what I earlier called its riddle character.

(Adorno, 2018, p. 17)

Art is supposed to be strange, uncanny and inscrutable. It is also not meant, in Adorno’s theory, to be particularly enjoyable – references to the pain (ibid. p. 101) and shock (1999, p. 244) of the art experience, or the shudder (ibid. p. 118, p. 196) it provokes, are as likely as to the transient sensual pleasures that lead the way to them. However, these shocks are a sign of art’s potential: they happen because in recognising something true in a work of art, we see an image of what could be. In a more contemporary phrase, art shows us that ‘another world is possible’, not in a literal sense of telling us its story or the road to take towards it, but, in late capitalism’s ‘wholly reified, rationalised, administered regime’ (Eagleton, 1990, p. 369), which hems us in and shapes us in its image, this fleeting image

of another kind of truth gives a glimpse of what it's like to be free. Mapping out how this comes to pass in the instrumentalist and thoroughly heteronomous participatory art that Adorno scarcely lived to see is an argument for another day, but keeping open a space for it has to be a priority.

This may seem a very abstract, theoretical perspective, and it is, but it offers the beginning of a way to argue for something that has become unfashionable in applied theatre thinking: transformation. So, let's take the discussion to another level of abstraction. Slavoj Žižek, discussing the idea of the 'event', as a moment of irrevocable change, 'not something that occurs within the world, but is *a change in the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it*' (Žižek, 2014, p. 10, italics original), and among others the event of falling in love: 'when you fall in love, you don't just know what you need/want and look for the one who has it – the "miracle" of love is that you learn what you need only when you find it' (p. 133). This change, I suggest, where a realisation of new possibility makes the whole world appear re-framed, sounds like the firework-burst of experiencing our own actions and perceptions changed into something new, something with a life of its own; and this distinction between the fallacy of an instrumentalist search for love and its potential transformative event sounds a lot like the openness to the new, the uncanny and the uncomfortable that can be put at risk by managing away vulnerability, and facilitating too much of the wrong kind of safety.

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## 19 Transition and challenge – ethical concerns in prison theatre

*Marianne Nødtvedt Knudsen and Bjørn Rasmussen*

**IN 2017, THE PLAY** *Transition* was performed in Trondheim prison by seven prisoners and two teaching artists. It was part of a three-month collaborative project with the prison and the Probation Education School, including fourteen prisoners, prison staff, the teaching artists and staff from the school. The project was directed by the first author. Following the methodology of practice-led research (Rasmussen, 2012; Smith & Dean, 2009; Haseman & Mafe, 2009), the case was predominantly met by formal demands for ethical clearance from both the research institution as well as the applied context: the Norwegian Correctional Service, Ministry of Justice. However, an attempt to work democratically, in order to create a climate of reciprocity and inclusion, brought along a range of work ethics adding to the formal ethical requirements. Through experiencing several theatre projects in Norwegian prisons since 2007 as well as studying research literature in this field, we realized that applied theatre work in prison faces great vulnerability and reveals layers of ethical issues both on a social and an aesthetic level. This includes the social working process (building relations, trust, responsibility, system and personal collaboration) and the specific theatre work (creating and performing stage text, rehearsing, audience approach). This chapter offers an analysis of one applied theatre case in prison, dealing with the ethical issues that appear when a democratic culture is introduced in a non-democratic environment. It aims to share insights that may be helpful to the applied theatre artist-researcher-teacher in this particular context.

### **Project context**

*Teater Bak Murene*<sup>1</sup> (TBM) is an artistic enterprise that has been led by Knudsen since 2007. Since 2015 TBM has played six performances inside Trondheim prison for prisoners, staff and guests. The ongoing work is a collaborative enterprise, including the prison education program at Charlottenlund High School, Trondheim prison, dance artist Hanne Aalberg and prisoners. Through years of experience as a teaching artist,<sup>2</sup> Knudsen has evolved her prison theatre methodology based on improvisation, devising, performance and physical theatre.

Participation from prisoners is voluntary and prisoners will decide whether they want to be on stage or backstage, and also fully decide and control the eventual sharing of personal material. Volunteering and the control of material are ethical considerations present in the introductory meeting with prisoners and TBM.

TBM is a non-academic partner in the research project *Building Democracy Through Theatre (2018–2021)*,<sup>3</sup> which investigates theatre interventions in a democratic context. The particular democratic ambition in the case analysis below is evident in the concern

for participant-driven utterances, raising questions such as: How is a democratic culture possible in prison? What is important for the prisoner to communicate? What stories do prisoners want to share?

### **“Teater Bak Murene” and previous research on applied theatre in prison**

Prison theatre research is prominent in applied theatre literature (Hughes & Ruding, 2009; Thompson, 1998; Balfour, 2004; Prendergast & Saxton, [2009] 2016; McAviney, 2011).

Following Hughes & Ruding (2009), there is a need to “more assertively ask: applied to whom, by whom, and for what purpose: to return to questions of ethical and political commitment” (Hughes & Ruding, 2009, p. 223). In the Norwegian context, prison theatre is a marginal field of practice and research (Tonna, 2008; Berge, 2009; Nilsen, 2009) and the TBM enterprise is influenced by international experience and research on applied theatre in general, and prison theatre in particular. Context awareness and a wish to interact with participant’s issues and challenges through performances *with* the participants – not *for* them – are important points of departure (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p. 10). Furthermore, theatre inside the prison offers an opportunity for prisoners to apply theatre “as reflection of actual life” (Prendergast & Saxton, [2009] 2016, p.11). By learning how to communicate this “life” (which we think includes the imaginative life) through a safe performance mode, there is a focus on both their social and aesthetic expression and how this work may possibly generate social change.

Participant “transformation” is a frequently employed term in applied theatre literature (Balfour, 2009; Taylor, 2003), while the related terms of transportation and transition have long been debated in theatre anthropology (Schechner, 1985, 1988; Schechner & Appel, 1990). In order to avoid the “positive” ring of predefined goals of educational adjustment and achievements, we prefer the term “transition” to underline the temporary dynamics of theatre practice. This is a practice that, precisely in the prison context, should not bring along unethical promises and “absolute faith in... the inherent goodness of theatre” (Hughes & Ruding, 2009: 223). Transition also became the title and guiding topic of the performance.

Having made this reservation, we nevertheless think theatre work may affect the prisoner in many ways and, perhaps just as importantly, may also affect the institutional environment or the “performance of prison” (Thompson, 2004: 57), such as how the prisoner is conceived by staff, fellow prisoners and visiting audience, or how the prisoner both approaches and is approached differently after the theatre work.

We also take notice of the complexity of representations (Hughes & Ruding, 2009; Preston, 2009), considering the potential unethical display of social realistic repetitions, which aim to access emotions “buried by cognitive defenses”, quoted from a Texas Offender Programme (Thompson, 2004: 71). Listening to Thompson’s advice of attempting to reconstruct young people before we primarily “break open” young people (p. 71), we follow Hughes & Ruding’s call for a symbolic, metaphorical approach that recognizes a “hyper-reality that can be played with” (Hughes & Ruding, 2009: 221), offering unexpected connections between creative ideas and life experience. We are reminded that restored behavior (Schechner, 1985) does not depend on the realistic theatre genre.

At the same time, we align with Hughes & Ruding’s warning that replacing cognitive behavioral objectives with creative ones may help people to “adjust more effectively to an



oppressive reality” (Hughes & Ruding: 223). This is a risk when play and theatre becomes a compensatory liberal haven without any real influence and real power negotiation. It is a particularly relevant concern when there is a democratic, perhaps liberal, ambition such as in our case.

What we wish to investigate in the prison context is a pragmatic understanding of democratic practice, meaning the human engagement in everyday actions and meetings, one which may be measured by inclusion, built relations and explored ideas and meanings in a united effort (Rasmussen, 2017: 33). Such an engagement requires the possibility to talk and act freely without harmful consequences and it aims to build both trust and common meaning in the united work. A democratic ambition may sound both incomprehensible and unethical in an institution which is ultimately non-democratic. It is a community where dialogue and creative exchange have been deliberately “stolen” from citizens behind walls (O’Connor & Anderson, 2015: 35). It is a place where the prisoner has lost her right to make decisions, and where life is merely repressive routines (Thompson, 2004: 67). Here, theatre “provides the inmate an oasis... by creating a fictional world for them to occupy for a short while” (Tocci, 2007: 289). It reminds the prisoner of a larger society and provides the opportunity to “feel like a real part of their world, active and individually important” (Tocci, 2007: 294).

We wish to inquire if theatre may create a temporary democratic sub-community, one which provides a creative oasis for risk-taking (Hughes 2009, O’Connor & Anderson, 2015: 35), for raising uncomfortable and difficult questions considering imprisonment, humanity, social responsibility and for staging bodies and voices for impact and negotiations. Does theatre, within the democratic frame, build common values and at the same time individual respect? May disciplined theatre work actually reflect a democratic way of living together? Or, is risk-taking and the as-if democracy rather an unethical effort that risks false expectations, acts compensated by relieving distress, mitigating the punishment or even being instrumental in the system-punishing agenda (Thompson, 2004).

The present research case was documented and reflected through various methods: research journals, participants’ written evaluations, creative writing, reflective dialogue and written reports to the co-workers after each class. The co-workers include the dance artist, the head of prison education and, later in the process, a colleague from the high school working with light and sound. As practice-led research we wanted to improve both the practice and our theoretical understanding of the practice (Haseman & Mafe, 2009). The work process was influenced by the way the first author has facilitated this work over several years, her conscious participation in the group and the way both authors conducted the research. The collected data material is anonymous, and the participants have given their consent.

### **Transition: the performance**

*Transition* was produced in spring 2017 in Trondheim prison. Fourteen prisoners attended the work in longer or shorter terms, and seven prisoners completed the process by acting in the performance. The seven prisoners who did not complete were either released from the prison or transferred to another prison. The initial idea was the transition between people, transitions in life, as well as the mundane and concrete transition when we cross a street. Participants explored the concept of transition through physical theatre, dance and auto-poetic fragmentary texts. From the raw material, participants collaboratively

chose the material for the performance together with the teaching artists. The scenography design idea of fresh trees hanging from the ceiling and stubs placed on the floor was initiated by the teaching artist and transformed together with the prisoners. The chopping and cutting was provided by one of the prisoners. The transition from nature to scenography became part of the performance idea through the smell of fresh trees, the start of the decay process and the symbolism of capture and hanging elements. The intention was to create a space or waiting room for the performers with white template costumes, creating a parallel to the absurd universes of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. In this universe the performers played a performative and staged version of themselves, performing a "not-not me" character (Schechner, 1988). In some of the sequences they took roles as cartoon criminals with goggles and caricatured movements, criminal forensics, animals, astronauts and smokers. The performance had a physical approach and the performers worked with lifts, dance and rhythms.

The inclusion of the teaching artists as performers was a deliberate move to strengthen the aesthetic quality as well as creating safety and solidarity and modelling agency and courage. It is another and shared dimension of risk-taking by involving the "outsider" on the inside. The performers moved in a symbolic space between life and death, between inside and outside, between imagination and reality, which was also expressed through the participants' auto-poetic materials. The stage text was jointly created, working on "overheard conversations",<sup>4</sup> automatic writing about the theme and from personal accounts of transitions in life, starting with sentences such as "Everything is a transition...", "Transition for me is...", "Once upon a time there was a transition...". Furthermore, through improvisations and writing poems the work offered space for sharing thoughts, stories, opinions that became material for the stage. At the end of the process, the participants were offered another space for their own input and thoughts about the specific production, a space for expressing learning experiences as well as for discussing the future of theatre in this prison.

After three months, the work was performed by the prisoners and the teaching artists.

The performance was shown twice to other prisoners, staff and an invited audience from the local applied theatre researchers and practitioners. By sharing the theatre work, the group managed to unite different members of the prison and the field of theatre expertise in a common experience of paying respect to the prisoners and their achievements. This strategy was appreciated by the prisoners: "It is really important to have feedback from those who know the art form. It creates an extra driving force" (research journal, 16.06.17). The exchange between stage and audience happened after the performance, allowing comments, questions, appraisal, and also aiming at building a bridge between the inside and outside.

The leading teaching artists in our case aimed to show sensitivity towards the context, the prison community and the participants. They deliberately trusted the prison security system and the participants in order to model risk-taking themselves. This includes knowledge of prison and prisoner hierarchies, appropriate group composition as well as accepting moral standards that may be different from those of the artists. We find that the teaching artist has to be real and true and must commit to the rules of the context. Framing applied theatre as a democratic theatre making process (O'Connor & Anderson, 2015: 34) implies such commitment. In this way, realization of the human potential, creating values for reaching a common goal, along with the freedom to engage, talk and act freely, may be inquired as acts of democratic citizenship within a repressive system.

### The (un)ethics of theatre as prison democracy

In *Transition*, the auto-poetic stories reflected being a human and not just being a prisoner. A common intention of wanting to work with issues away from their everyday life inside the prison walls became a common value towards the performance. This common interest inspired the prisoner to think beyond the prison frame. The represented stories created a space for insight into the human, rather than the prisoner's, struggle. Coincidentally the representation of the "in-between-places" inevitably reflected the complexity of being a prisoner: being in a state between the prison and society; playing different roles as a husband, a father, a student; handling the different realities of paying the penalty and preparing for the societal reset.

When the atmosphere of exchanging felt experience was achieved, it came out of trust-building through theatre exercises, building relationships, collaboration and shared responsibility. This included the way the teaching-artist-researcher in her deliberate approach modelled sensitivity, dialogue, respect and intentions of reciprocity, and by inviting shared feelings and thoughts about the material created. However, the prisoners are not accustomed to sharing or naming their feelings behind the walls. There is no culture of trust since honesty and openness do make the prisoner exposed and vulnerable. The prisoner is able to speak for himself, but he does not have the opportunity to talk or joke about anything freely without consequences. We find trust to be one of the biggest challenges for applied theatre in the prison context. For example, the composition of prisoners is diverse and complex, with a variety of crimes and sentence time, a variety of personality types, various diagnoses and drug addiction. So, why facilitate trust in an uncertain environment? This dilemma reached its highest point when three prisoners left the group after sharing their different crimes, discussing moral standards and ultimately questioning the intentions and values of applied theatre. These members used their opportunity to talk freely and their decision was respected alongside all other decisions made in the aesthetic and social process.

Notwithstanding the ethical challenges and problematics of claiming trust where no trust exists, we found that all participants took personal risks by both sharing stories and also by receiving and containing stories of the others. Our research data reveal experiences of challenge, frustration and impatience, but also confirm a positive impact on the prisoner on a personal and social level: "I have learned to collaborate"; "I have become more social"; "I have learned to expose myself and express feelings in a better and different way"; "I have become more safe" (research journal, 16.06.17). For our main democratic purpose, we were interested in measuring if the aesthetic "oasis" became more than a compensatory break of routine punishment and was a way to influence prisoners' lives and their preparation for societal life as well as the institutional environment. One prisoner expresses that theatre became an arena where he could feel free and "be himself", also in the meaning "to get out of my 'gangster bubble' and my self-reproach of committed mistakes" (research journal, 16.06.17). For him, theatre became a sentence-free zone in difficult times, one where he could access other values such as acceptance of others and self-respect. This is also confirmed by others who claimed that they learned to trust each other, and became more self-secure from risk-taking, exposing and controlling themselves.

We do not have data on longitude consequences of the work, but a transfer of value is perhaps evident in the following reflection: "I joined theatre because I needed to challenge myself. So, when I am released I will approach life more safely knowing how

to expose myself, like in job interviews, public offices and such things” (research journal, 16.06.17). One prisoner realized that they all learned to transfer ideas to action, as she stressed the importance of fulfilling a task. This indicates a transfer of value beyond the workshops. This is also mentioned by the prisoner who, by “being himself” (in a different way), experienced a direct consequence in terms of a renewed positive goodwill from staff in the various prison blocks.

## Conclusion

By employing democratic standards through theatre making in a non-democratic institution (the prison), ethical challenges will appear. Voluntary risk-taking reveals vulnerability and a kind of exposure that is both wanted and feared. Trust building and reciprocity are also challenging where trust and reciprocity have reasons for not existing. The teaching artist carries no aim of rescue or moral transformation, other than the ambition of exploring an aesthetic space for the purpose of de-stabilizing and re-establishing values and work to maintain democracy in a non-democratic setting. This is work here and now, offering a set of play and life rules different from known prison rules. It offers a potential, but it may or may not affect the prisoner in positive ways after sentence or during sentence, and it may or may not reopen their emotional life and increase self-confidence. Our case does show that theatre did provide to some extent a liberal oasis inside the prison, albeit one which also can be felt too risky for those who feel too vulnerable to contribute and expose themselves in any way. We have no data that suggest that prisoners are accommodated to pre-given liberal values through theatre or are being prepared for being a repressed liberal citizen through theatre. In sum, we have no ethical concerns by providing the arena for making uncensored and real felt decisions and for generating values of inclusion, acceptance, courage, trust, tolerance, sensitivity and command.

## Notes

- 1 Theatre Behind Walls
- 2 A teaching artist is a professional artist with the competency needed to work in and through the arts in an educational and/or community setting. (Booth, 2009; Ulvund, 2015)
- 3 This is a collaborative project shared by Drama/Theatre, Department of Arts and Media Studies at NTNU, Norway and Drama For Life at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Rasmussen, van Vuuren and Nebe points out that one of the aims of the projects is to investigate theatre as humanistic education and arena for participant-driven communication and utterance (Rasmussen, Van Vuuren & Nebe, 2018).
- 4 Overheard conversations is a drama convention by Jonothan Neelands et al. (2000).

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## 20 Theatre for democracy

*Brendon Burns*

**IN THIS CHAPTER**, I intend to briefly outline the development of Theatre for Democracy in the UK, a practice that uses theatre and drama to engage citizens and local authorities as co-creators of ongoing political action with real world impacts.

### **Context**

Emerging professional practice always sits at the intersection of a range of economic, social and political imperatives. The drive to innovation may often come from ideology, but actualisation is unavoidably characterised by more fundamental, prosaic realities such as the need to pay practitioners and cover the costs of practice. Key to understanding the evolution of any new form or practice is the consideration of these material conditions, and this certainly is the case with Theatre for Democracy. From the mid-1990s to the early 2000s many rural touring/community theatre companies in the UK faced the challenge of managing the transition from what had become the standard tri-partite core funded model (Local Authority, County Council and Regional Arts Board) to an exclusively project funded paradigm. Rather than negotiating a three to five-year programme of work with key public sector stakeholders, companies now found themselves seeking funding on a project by project basis. Some twenty years on the project funded model is now, for most small companies, the norm, and the inherent challenges of operating on this basis are so well rehearsed that I need only briefly touch on them here. Firstly, and most obviously, is the danger of becoming a theatre company for hire, responding not to social need but to the availability of funding (and therefore, by default, the values of the funding body). Secondly, and at a more practical level, is the need to recoup the core costs of running an organisation when the funder only covers direct project expenses with perhaps a small contribution to overheads allowable. One solution to this, still artfully applied by companies all over the country, is to increase the number of projects undertaken with a view to overlapping management costs to cover the running of the organisation. However, the burden of running so many projects, each with its own administrative load of funding applications, day-to-day management and evaluation reports, often ties up key personnel within the organisation. This, in turn, leads to a need to employ freelance personnel to physically deliver the projects. With the company's work now comprising numerous short term projects, aimed at disparate communities, and increasingly delivered by freelance artists (who may well be working for other companies in the area), it becomes progressively difficult to maintain company identity; to locate the work within a coherent ethos embodying distinct values and expertise. This is not to say excellent project work cannot come about in these circumstances, of course it did (and continues to do so), but what is

potentially lost is the aggregate and strategic impact of a company's work within a specific region. Very few small-scale theatre organisations fell completely prey to what Michael Balfour (2009) identifies as a missionary/mercenary trap but, for most, embracing some form of well-meaning dilettantism was often the only means of survival.

As has been well documented elsewhere, this is little more than neo-liberalisation writ small (Harvie 2013, McGuigan 2005). All the trappings are present: the public sector funders are 'liberated' from inefficient long-term relationships and gain the potential to better target scant resources, whilst companies, no longer bound within their traditional role, are afforded freedom within a 'liberalised' subsidised sector to respond entrepreneurially to market forces. Also in attendance are the familiar supporting cast: the reliance on freelance labour, the transactional focus, with relationships recast within client/customer models, and the competitive 'tender' processes defined by 'service level agreements'. The result is a fundamental transformation in the potential dynamic between theatre company and their audience/participants. Long term, arms-length, funding, when it works effectively, enables the development of relationships between artists and communities: the funds allow the engagement to take place. Conversely, the free-market project funding paradigm, at its worst, reverses this dynamic leading the artist to engage with a community in order to access funding: the engagement occurs to enable the funding to take place. Of course, we are describing the extremes of the continuum here and, in reality, very few organisations operated, or indeed operate, in this territory. Furthermore, it must also be acknowledged the tri-partite funding model did/does not always enable the best, nor project-funding result in the worst, community theatre work. But the material impact of this transition cannot be ignored when considering the historical development of work over this period.

### **The umbrella project**

Solent Peoples Theatre (est. 1976) was a small scale theatre company serving Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton. My association with the company, beginning in 2003, came some years after the transition from core to project based funding. The transition had been difficult, due to the very pitfalls described above, and at the point of my involvement the company had just under nine months' operating costs. I was invited by the board to work with them to develop a plan to avoid closure and adapt to the new context. Working closely with the chair, Tim Prentki, we formulated a strategy that aimed to re-capture the company's ethos, return to producing theatre and re-establish artistic identity. Key to the plan was commitment to an 'umbrella project', a broad theme within which all the company's work would focus for three years. Each composite umbrella project would be organised into strands, each of which would be targeted at a specific audience. In turn each strand would comprise several individual projects spread out over the course of the three years. The theme would offer a means to maintain company identity and develop epistemic benefits in building and sustaining expertise in a specific area. In terms of funding, the segmented nature of the umbrella, comprising both individual projects and strands of work, offered opportunities for funding partners to engage flexibly, supporting the umbrella as a whole or a specific project or strand. Crucial, of course, was the choice of theme which had at once to be broad enough to allow a diversity of work but also relevant, in that it would allow the company to engage with the central, most profound realities of the time, involving audiences in dialogue about the things that matter to them.

### **Critical engagement: theatre for democracy**

The notion of ‘democratic renewal’, a shorthand term for increased civic engagement and political participation, received significant attention in the early years of the first New Labour government. Indeed, as Hugh Atkinson writes in his history of the period, efforts to reform and revitalise local government in particular gave rise to a ‘miasma of white papers, green papers, pre-policy announcements, press releases, symposiums, consultations, parliamentary bills and Acts of parliament’ (2017, p. 45). A similar dynamic was at play within education policy, most notably in the adoption of the recommendation of the Advisory Group for Citizenship 1998 report<sup>1</sup>: that the teaching of citizenship and democracy become a statutory requirement for schools in England and Wales. The policy drive gained further impetus following the Oldham, Burnley and Bradford riots of 2001 and a record low turnout in the General Election of the same year.

Thus, the theme for the first umbrella project revealed itself, though the thought process leading to its adoption was nowhere near as linear as described here. The project launched in 2004 entitled – Critical Engagement: Theatre for Democracy. The three-year programme aimed to encourage active participation in democratic processes by engaging the people of the Solent region in critical dialogue about local/national issues, developments in science/medicine/technology and the mechanisms of democracy by using theatre (and related participatory activities) in a wide variety of community contexts that attempted to:

- Provoke debate
- Demystify the processes and institutions of democracy
- Bridge the divide between politics and the realities of everyday life

These last three objectives, whilst common to all projects within the umbrella, were each the focus of a specific strand. The ‘Visions of the Future’ strand toured adaptations of classic dystopian literature to schools and community venues to provoke debate on current issues utilising interactive voting equipment as part of innovative post-show discussion formats. ‘Who Runs This Place? Vol 1–3’ was a trilogy of comic performances that sought to demystify the structure and processes of local, national and international democracy respectively followed by Backchat consultation events. Finally, the ‘Pubs, Parks and Precincts’ strand comprised a wide range of events that aimed to bring people and their representatives together in shared cultural spaces with a view to increasing dialogue; activities included Youth Select Committees, political speed dating events and bespoke longer term projects on community decision making.

Though the company had previously focused on regional work, partnership with the Local Government Association’s (LGA) Local Democracy Campaign led to nationwide delivery. By the end of the first three years of Critical Engagement the company had worked directly with over 75 local authorities and the communities they served across England and Wales and had developed work in partnership with a wide range of government departments and NGOs including the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Electoral Commission, Electoral Reform Society, Health Care Commission and the European Parliament UK office. Demand was such that the three-year project was extended a further three years until in 2010, after the financial crisis and resulting culture of ‘austerity’, the project entered a new phase moving, with me and Sharon Nash,<sup>2</sup> from Solent Peoples Theatre to the Applied Theatre and Community Drama department at the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA). The university/conservatoire setting necessitated a



move away from national touring and delivery but conversely enabled the development of longer-term projects and sustained relationships with communities. Since then over fifty projects have taken place in collaboration with the residents and local authorities of Merseyside, all led by final year facilitation students studying Theatre for Democracy as part of an undergraduate programme.

### Some examples of practice

**Margate, Thanet:** A small sum of money has been ring-fenced to improve a local park. Residents are invited to an event to decide how the fund should be spent. A children's drama workshop/creche runs alongside the event to encourage parents to attend. The day begins with a performance of 'Who Runs This Place? Vol. 1'. In the workshop that follows, the play is used as stimulus to discuss issues of democratic engagement, public space and the role of representatives. Residents then take part in a Political Speed Dating Session, a light-hearted opportunity for a range of representatives and officers to meet residents, one-to-one, for a series of two-minute chats. After a shared lunch, the afternoon session is focused on a 'WIBBI'<sup>23</sup> debate to explore the best use of the funding for the park. A range of proposals are presented, some by council officers, some by third sector organisations and some by residents. Each proposal is considered using parallel thinking techniques as part of facilitated discussions between proposers, audience (representatives and residents) and an onstage citizen's panel comprised of volunteer participants. Polls are taken throughout the event using electronic voting equipment and the day produces a list of prioritised proposals and a commitment on behalf of the local authority to organise another meeting to discuss progress on the implementation of the favoured plan.

**Swaffham, Breckland:** Youth Select Committee Day. Young people from schools across the district come together and watch a performance of 'The Rights Stuff'. Through a comic hero-quest narrative the play explores the potentialities and challenges of youth engagement with the democratic process. Following the performance, the young people are split into teams and each take part in a practical drama workshop to explore local issues focused on a specific theme (transport, leisure and safety). The session ends with the creation of a list of questions for each theme. The afternoon takes the form of a select/overview and scrutiny committee. Each team of young people constitutes a committee and direct their questions to a panel comprising an elected representative/portfolio holder, senior officer and representative from a relevant agency. Sketches developed in the workshop are used to introduce each committee session. The setting thereafter is formal with a horseshoe table, microphones and an experienced chair. The day ends with each committee reflecting on the evidence they have heard and summarising their response in a report. The local authority pledge to provide a written response to each report which will be distributed to participants individually as well as being made available to all young people in the area.

**Kirkby, Knowsley:** A group of older residents work with facilitators over six weeks to develop a performance that articulates their concerns and ideas on how to improve the local area. The performance of comic sketches takes place in a community venue and is attended by councillors, local authority officers and representatives of key services. One sketch highlights the problems the residents have attending bingo in the winter. The bus to the bingo hall stops on the far side of an unlit park and the residents feel uncomfortable walking across the park on dark evenings. The issue is discussed, the likelihood of council

installing lighting in the park is quickly dismissed on cost grounds. A representative of the local bus franchise contributes to the discussion, having not previously been aware of the issue. Within a month of the performance the bus company responds to the residents to let them know the bus will henceforth be stopping on the near side of the park.

### **Redefining material relationships**

Positioning the work within the field of existing practice is problematic. Politics were central, but it was not 'Political Theatre' in the traditional sense – there was no didactic message, only an ideological commitment to dialogue and democratic process. There were educational elements, and some projects took place in school contributing to the Citizenship curriculum, but neither was it Theatre in Education. Certainly, in terms of intention, there were overlaps with Boal's legislative theatre experiment in Sao Paulo, but the practice was distinctly different, with little or no use of forum theatre, and, whereas Boal was an elected Vereador with power to directly propose laws,<sup>4</sup> we had no such ability to engender legislation. Instead, projects came about in collaboration between the company, a local authority/government department and a body of citizens (who may, or may not, already exist as a constituted group). Initiation of the project/events could come variously from any of the above parties but commitment from all three would be essential to count as Theatre for Democracy (TDem).

In retrospect, this new 'tripartite' relationship shifted the balance of power significantly. Much has been written about the coercive impact of donor agendas within applied theatre in this period (Balfour 2009, Etherton & Prentki 2006, McDonnell 2005), most notably the increasing focus on funder-defined outputs and quantifiable outcomes: 'Funding comes with a promise of change' (Ackroyd, 2007:5). In TDem, however, no such promise can be made. The company or practitioner cannot guarantee 'change' as outcome/product to either citizen or political representative. What is offered, instead, is the creation of cultural encounters that engender the potential for 'change'. The donor objective, therefore, is restricted to the creation of dialogue rather than its content and must come with a commitment to consider the outcomes of the discourse – outcomes that can be neither predicted nor contained. Thus, the conventional hierarchy and linearity of the donor/practitioner/participant relationship is blurred in that all parties make contributions (funds, time, expertise), all engage in a democratic process and each facilitates the participation of the other. Asymmetries still exist, but the design of the events do much to ameliorate or compensate for them. Whereas conventional modes of public engagement favour the decision maker, who, familiar with public speaking and conversant with the structures and conventions of local government, is the 'donor' of their time and attention, the TDem event consciously inverts these dynamics. Gone are lengthy agenda items delivered by officials with a token slot for questions at the end. Instead, resident participants set the agenda and have time to prepare and organise their arguments in advance. The dissemination of information is still important but is achieved within a cultural rather than bureaucratic environment.<sup>5</sup> Where conventional forms are co-opted (such as the Youth Select Committee), they are done so to deliberately reverse the power dynamic – the young people set the agenda, sit at the top table and call on evidence from the representatives.

Our long-term commitment to this work also resulted in a redefinition of the company's relationship with local authorities. Within a year or so of intense delivery we found the cumulative experience of working with local councils all over the country gave us the opportunity to share examples of best practice between authorities who may not

otherwise have met. Our expertise meant we were well placed to advise on new engagement initiatives and strategies. Equally, our position as a disinterested, but experienced, 'outsider' contributed to the establishment of trust with all participants and allowed us to gently, but firmly, engender appropriately robust levels of discourse.

### Underpinnings

During the first phase of Theatre for Democracy the work was created artisan like, with little recourse to theory, beyond a commitment to critical pedagogy and Brechtian aesthetics. Development was an iterative process, focused on the empirical. Given the rapid expansion of the programme there was little time for ponderous theorising but an absolute need for reflective practice – this often taking place on the long drives and stays in motels that punctuated daily performances and workshops. With no pressure to publish outcomes the focus was exclusively on how to make each workshop or performance more effective in enabling participants' authentic engagement in democratic processes. However, as the demand for work expanded beyond that which could be delivered by the original team, it became necessary to train new practitioners in the methods and 'name' the concepts underpinning the practice both in terms of its position on democracy and the facilitation techniques that made it possible.

[...] conflict and division are inherent to politics and that there is no place where reconciliation [can] be definitively achieved as the full actualisation of the unity of the people.

(Mouffe, 2005, p. 16)

This assertion that conflict is an inescapable feature of the political sits at the heart of Theatre for Democracy practice. Together with Mouffe's distinction of antagonistic vs agonistic conflict,<sup>6</sup> accepting that consensus will not always be possible is an essential step in creating the potential for authentic democratic discourse. Disagreement is therefore not to be feared, nor sought for dramatic effect, but instead recognised as the legitimate expression of the contradictory ideas that exist in a pluralistic society. Thus, the event is the opportunity to 'agon-ise' over which actions would be best for the community, city or town. It is no coincidence that the term agonism is rooted in the ancient Greek *Agon* which refers to athletic competition but extends to include the ideological conflict at the heart of Old Comedy, and is embodied in key theatrical terms such as protagonist and antagonist – the actor as 'agonistes' the one who advocates or struggles. It is important to note also that the 'struggle', and indeed the identification of adversaries, is inherently impermanent – one may prevail today and lose tomorrow, an adversary yesterday may become an ally on another issue today.

Much of what we experience as 'politics', directly or through the mass media, is expressed as antagonism, rather than agonism. Participants or representatives are equally likely to take rejection of their idea or position as a personal slight (defending themselves rather than the idea). Simple participation, in the sense of turning up and having 'your say', is not enough if the discourse fails to transcend entrenched positions. Moving beyond this 'entrenchment' was a significant challenge and required the development of sophisticated facilitation strategies which blended Socratic maieutic with Freirean problematisation; using questions to draw out, refine and de-personalise positions before framing the resulting contradictions as an object of collective inquiry. What became clear,

and ultimately a fundamental part of the practice, was that the process-based work with participants needed to address not only the identification and articulation of issues but also the encouragement of rhetorical agency. At a very basic level this meant ensuring participants (and to a certain extent representatives) were able to make use of all three of Aristotle's means of persuasion – appealing to character (*ethos*), logic (*logos*) and emotion (*pathos*) (Rhetoric, 1356a) rather than relying on logic alone. Locating the process within a theatrical frame proved to be a significant advantage in achieving a more rounded approach to persuasion.

Performance is essentially prepared argument and was particularly useful in setting an emotional tone (serious or comic) within which the logic of the argument could be outlined. The possibility of appeal to character, ensuring the participant appears 'credible' and 'authoritative', was built into the design of the event either by ensuring there was time to practice and become familiar with a formal context or, more commonly, by creating a process that favours the less politically experienced participant and allows for means of expression that more naturally convey their authority. Once again, the ability of the practitioner to facilitate the discussion, making use of reframing and Socratic questioning, was key in creating generative dialogue and constructive deliberation.

### In summary

Democracy is, by its very nature, reliant on bureaucratic process. Equity and transparency can only be maintained through the adoption of appropriate mechanisms. But democracy is not just voting, it can also be a cultural pursuit in which participation both celebrates and enacts the values of dialogue, self-representation and agonism. The repositioning of democratic engagement within a cultural frame in the ways described above may be one way to use theatre in a deliberative context where the possibility for change exists. Furthermore, it does so in a manner that eschews the didacticism of traditional political theatre, yet equally steers a path between the potentially domesticating narrative of drama for self-development and the satisfying, though easily co-opted, disturbance of in-your-face protest. The changes may be humble: the moving of a bus stop, the provision of extra storage for a foodbank, perhaps nothing more than a simple re-appraisal of priorities, but democracy does not deal in *grand finales*. The end of the project need not be the end of authentic engagement, indeed, it may well be the very beginning.

### Notes

- 1 Commonly known as 'The Crick Report' after the chair of the inquiry Professor Bernard Crick.
- 2 Facilitator and creator of TDem Backchat Rapid Consultation strand.
- 3 Wouldn't It Be Better If?
- 4 Hence the term 'legislative'. Later projects by other practitioners using the same banner often lack a direct link to a legislative body, leading to the danger of processes taking place with no right to representative dialogue enshrined in the project itself.
- 5 Political Speed Dating is good example of this. Where numbers allowed, the community participants would remain seated whilst the representatives and officers would move table to table on each round – they were coming to the resident rather than vice versa. Furthermore, the community participants alone had a score card rating their interaction on the basis of the representative's knowledge of issues, approachability and ability to answer the question asked. Interestingly, whilst the scores were anonymised so only the representative would know which score was theirs, it appears that in areas we visited regularly anonymity was waived, with representatives keen to improve their engagement scores from one event to another.

- 6 **Antagonism**, the conflict between enemies in which the ultimate aim is the destruction of the other, and **Agonism**, the struggle between adversaries with the recognition that any victory is necessarily temporary.

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PROOF

**Part IV**

**Participation and inclusion**

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## 21 Introduction to participation and inclusion

*Nicola Abraham*

**INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY** are both important terms that relate to approaches to decolonising workplaces and educational curricula, addressing accessibility and promoting understanding of what phenomenology defines as Otherness. Though both terms are often used interchangeably there are important fundamental differences to consider: Diversity is arguably related to intention, whereas inclusion is an action. Why are these terms important to include in this second edition of the applied theatre reader? At the time of writing, the UK has left the EU, President Donald Trump has reversed gender equality law 50 years by changing definitions of domestic violence, and the WHO (World Health Organisation) is dealing with the worldwide pandemic ensuing from the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Racial tension and prejudice are at an all-time high with communities turning against Asian residents in outrageous acts of aggression and exclusion as if the virus itself was seeking to only discriminate, infect and transmit from one culture of people. A sense of protectionism is resulting from the UK's exit from the EU with extreme measures of exclusion related to who can claim they are skilled workers, based on pay rates that exclude nurses following immigration policies proposed by Priti Patel, Secretary of State. The unrest and 'blame' culture that has developed since the 2016 Brexit vote to leave has caused fractures in communities and an excuse for hate crimes. The lack of response from world governments to the climate change crisis and the lack of will to address profit over climate has fallen on the shoulders of 17-year-old Greta Thunberg instead of international leaders. Ignorance and resistance to change has fuelled devastating bush fires in Australia. Ignoring the voices of excluded groups clearly isn't an option. It is a responsibility and a necessity if we are to address the multi-layered disasters facing the world at present and the rising tide of discrimination and exclusion.

Discussing the potential for inclusive citizenship, Dina Kiwan (2008) proposed criteria to explain what might enable a community to feel included in decision-making processes as active citizens:

[...] understanding what motivates people to participate is crucial to developing an inclusive conception of citizenship. In order to actively participate, individual citizens from a diverse range of backgrounds must be able to *identify* with their community – the inextricable link between citizenship as 'practice' and citizenship as 'belonging'... necessarily central to an inclusive conception of citizenship.

(2008:111)

Kiwan's criterion sheds light on important elements that must be sought in applied theatre practice working within communities; the practice of a citizenship of belonging

to a group with a shared experience and/or a common goal. An inherent quality of applied theatre is to hear the voices of the community, to provide theatrical opportunities for exploration, response and critical questioning that invite, listen and represent the narratives of the community. Core qualities that applied theatre fosters are participation and agency. Both are intertwined as concepts that intend to enable one another. For example, it is usually the intention of an applied theatre project to provide space for participants to assert their ideas and make choices about what happens within a project but arguably only to an extent. This is, of course, partly governed and restricted by funding agendas, access to key community, government and economic gatekeepers and community capacity to action change.

The potential for encouraging participation to offer an outlet for communities to voice challenges they are facing that may contest the dominant government rhetoric is important, but it may only be confined to catharsis if it isn't heard by those who can make change. Robert Chambers (2010) elaborates on this point to indicate the limitations of participation by offering analysis that presents the assumptions we might make about the potential of a participatory process:

The way in which words are used in the rhetoric of self-reliance and participation encourages the idea that increased participation will mean a more democratic, egalitarian and equitable society. The idea that the participation advocated in plans and policy speeches reaches and benefits all the people is important for the reassurance of political leaders. But very often... participation means more influence and resources to those who are already influential and better off, while those who are less influential and less well off benefit much less, or do not benefit, or actually lose.

(Chambers 2010:167)

Chambers' discussion is related to the management of local participation in development processes, which presents a useful parallel for understanding power dynamics within applied theatre projects that offer a participatory intention. It is the responsibility of practitioners to think carefully about agency and participation and consider which forms are useful, and how to present realistic limits for what is offered that can help participants comprehend the boundaries of the work.

Another side of enabling and supporting participants to assert agency is the consequence of the form of agency that is enacted not adhering to project expectations and actually hindering applied theatre processes. For example, one might consider the provocation of debate as an act of agency that participants may choose to take. Equally practitioners may be pleased to see the impact of their work affecting the confidence of those who take part. However, what happens when agency is asserted through leaving a project, disrupting a process or opting out of workshops is equally important to consider, because these actions are also forms of agency. If we want to offer participants opportunities to assert agency, we need to consider resistance as a right, and as an expression of agency.

Taiwo Afolabi (2017) offers a useful distinction of a noun-orientated and verb-orientated notion of participation. Afolabi defines the noun-orientated notion of participation as a mean to give 'agency to individuals in various aspects of life. For instance, human history has always seen the need for participation' (2017:73). In this sense, Afolabi presents a useful reminder that applied theatre is not just about giving people participation but offering to hear and respond to an innate human need to relate ideas and

experiences communally. This distinction helps us to understand the verb-orientated notion of participation that applied theatre can offer, which is arguably to 'collectively create an atmosphere for self-expression that will make people exercise the participatory attribute they have' (ibid.). Afolabi's discussion notes the importance of presenting opportunities to participate and make decisions. It doesn't specify the level of the decisions made *per se* but does offer an insight into the importance of this process: 'Participation is therefore an essential element that is beyond a process or a goal, but a foundation upon which human existence rests' (ibid.). The importance of participation and the reciprocity inherent in being heard and actively listening must be inclusive of pluralistic narratives to ensure diverse communities are represented to enable a space, which Kiwan defines as a place of active citizenship, through supporting participants to feel a sense of connection and belonging in the practice of participation.

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## 22 Theatre of the oppressed

*Augusto Boal*

(trans C. and M.-O. Leal McBride)

*Theatre of the Oppressed* (trans C. and M.-O. Leal McBride), Pluto Press and TCG (1979, 2000), excerpt from pp. 120–42.

### Experiments with the People's Theater in Peru

**THESE EXPERIMENTS WERE** carried out in August of 1973, in the cities of Lima and Chiclayo, with the invaluable collaboration of Alicia Saço, within the program of the Integral Literacy Operation (*Operación Alfabetización Integral [ALFIN]*), directed by Alfonso Lizar-zaburu and with the participation, in the various sectors, of Estela Linares, Luis Garrido Lecca, Ramón Vilcha, and Jesús Ruiz Durand. The method used by ALFIN in the literacy program was, of course, derived from Paulo Freire.

[...]

The training of the educators, chosen from the same regions where literacy was to be taught, was developed in four stages according to the special characteristics of each social group:

- 1 *barrios* (neighborhoods) or new villages, corresponding to our slums (*cantegril, favela, ...*);
- 2 rural areas;
- 3 mining areas;
- 4 areas where Spanish is not the first language, which embrace 40 percent of the population. Of this 40 percent, half is made up of bilingual citizens who learned Spanish after acquiring fluency in their own indigenous language. The other half speaks no Spanish.

[...] What I propose to do here is to relate my personal experience as a participant in the theatrical sector and to outline the various experiments we made in considering the theatre as language, capable of being utilized by any person with or without artistic talent. We tried to show how the theatre can be placed at the service of the oppressed, so that they can express themselves and so that, by using this new language, they can also discover new concepts.

In order to understand this *poetics of the oppressed* one must keep in mind its main objective: to change the people – ‘spectators,’ passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon – into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action. [...] Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator

delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first place, a 'catharsis' occurs; in the second, an awakening of critical consciousness. But the *poetics of the oppressed* focuses on the action itself: the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonist role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change – in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but this is surely a rehearsal for revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action.

I believe that all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilize them. The theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it.

But how is this transference to be achieved? As an example I cite what was done by Estele Linares, who was in charge of the photography section of the ALFIN plan.

What would be the old way to utilize photography in a literacy project? Without a doubt, it would be to photograph things, streets, people, landscapes, stores, etc., then show the pictures and discuss them. But who would take these pictures? The instructors, group leaders, or coordinators. On the other hand, if we are going to give the people the means of production, it is necessary to hand over to them, in this case, the camera. This is what was done in ALFIN. The educators would give a camera to the members of the study group, would teach them how to use it and propose to them the following:

We are going to ask you some questions. For this purpose we will speak in Spanish. And you must answer us. But you cannot speak in Spanish: you must speak in 'photography'. We ask you things in Spanish, which is a language. You answer us in photography, which is also a language.

The questions asked were very simple, and the answers – this is, the photos – were discussed later by the group. For example when people were asked, where do you live, they responded with the following types of photo-answers:

A picture showing the interior of a shack. In Lima it rarely rains and for this reason the shacks are made of straw mats, instead of with more permanent walls and roofs.

In general they only have one room that serves as kitchen, living room, and bedroom; the families live in great promiscuity and very often young children watch their parents engage in sexual intercourse, which commonly leads to sexual acts between brothers and sisters as young as ten or eleven years old, simply as an imitation of their parents. A photo showing the interior of the shack fully answers the question, where do you live? Every element of the photo has a special meaning, which must be discussed by the group; the objects focused on, the angle from which the picture is taken, the presence or absence of people in it, etc.

[...]

One day a man, in answer to the same question, took a picture of a child's face. Of course everyone thought that the man had made a mistake and repeated the question to him:

'You didn't understand; what we want is that you show us where you live. Take a picture and show us where you live. Any picture; the street, the house, the town, the river ...'

'Here is my answer. Here is where I live.'

'But it's a child ...'

'Look at his face: there is blood on it. This child, as all the others who live here, have their lives threatened by the rats that infest the whole bank of the river Rímac. They are protected by dogs that attack the rats and scare them away. But there was a mange epidemic and the city dog-catcher came around here catching lots of dogs and taking them away. This child had a dog who protected him. During the day his parents used to go to work and he was left with his dog. But now he doesn't have it any more. A few days ago, when you asked me where I lived, the rats had come while the child was sleeping and had eaten part of his nose. This is why there's so much blood on his face. Look at the picture; it is my answer. I live in a place where things like this still happen.'

I could write a novel about the children of the *barrios* along the river Rímac; but only photography, and no other language, could express the pain of that child's eyes, of those tears mixed with blood. And, as if the irony and outrage were not enough, the photograph was in Kodachrome, 'Made in U.S.A.'

The use of photography may help also to discover valid symbols for a whole community or social group. It happens many times that well intentioned theatrical groups are unable to communicate with a mass audience because they use symbols that are meaningless for that audience. A royal crown may symbolize power, but a symbol only functions as such if its meaning is shared. For some a royal crown may produce a strong impact and yet be meaningless for others.

What is exploitation? The traditional figure of Uncle Sam is, for many social groups throughout the world, the ultimate symbol of exploitation. It expresses to perfection the rapacity of 'Yankee' imperialism.

In Lima the people were also asked, what is exploitation? Many photographs showed the grocer; others the landlord; still others, some government office. On the other hand, a child answered with the picture of a nail on a wall. For him that was the perfect symbol of exploitation. Few adults understood it, but all the other children were in complete agreement that the picture expressed their feelings in relation to exploitation. The discussion explained why. The simplest work boys engage in at the age of five or six is shining shoes. Obviously, in the *barrios* where they live there are no shoes to shine and, for this reason, they must go to downtown Lima in order to find work. Their shine-boxes and other tools of the trade are of course an absolute necessity, and yet these boys cannot be carrying their equipment back and forth every day between work and home. So they must rent a nail on the wall of some place of business, whose owner charges them two or three *soles* per night and per nail. Looking at a nail, those children are reminded of oppression and their hatred of it; the sight of a crown, Uncle Sam, or Nixon, however, probably means nothing to them.

It is easy enough to give a camera to someone who has never taken a picture before, tell him how to focus it and which button to press. With this alone the means of photographic production are in the hands of that person. But what is to be done in the case of the theatre?

The means for producing a photograph are embodied in the camera, which is relatively easy to handle, but the means of producing theatre are made up of man himself, obviously more difficult to manage.

[...]

### ***Third stage: the theater as language***

This stage is divided into three parts, each one representing a different degree of direct participation of the spectator in the performance. The spectator is encouraged to intervene

in the action, abandoning his condition of object and assuming fully the role of subject. The two preceding stages are preparatory, centering around the work of the participants with their own bodies. Now this stage focuses on the theme to be discussed and furthers the transition from passivity to action.

First degree: *Simultaneous dramaturgy*: This is the first invitation made to the spectator to intervene without necessitating his physical presence on the 'stage.'

Here it is a question of performing a short scene, of ten to twenty minutes, proposed by a local resident, one who lives in the *barrio*. The actors may improvise with the aid of a script prepared beforehand, as they may also compose the scene directly. In any case, the performance gains in theatricality if the person who proposed the theme is present in the audience. Having begun the scene, the actors develop it to the point at which the main problem reaches a crisis and needs a solution. Then the actors stop the performance and ask the audience to offer solutions. They improvise immediately all the suggested solutions, and the audience has the right to intervene, to correct the actions or words of the actors, who are obligated to comply strictly with these instructions from the audience. Thus, while the audience 'writes' the work the actors perform it simultaneously. The spectator's thoughts are discussed theatrically on stage with the help of the actors. All the solutions, suggestions, and opinions are revealed in theatrical form. The discussion itself need not simply take the form of words, but rather should be effected through all the other elements of theatrical expression as well.

[...]

This form of theater creates great excitement among the participants and starts to demolish the wall that separates actors from spectators. Some 'write' and others act almost simultaneously. The spectators feel that they can intervene in the action. The action ceases to be presented in a deterministic manner, as something inevitable, as Fate. Man is Man's fate. Thus Man-the-spectator is the creator of Man-the-character. Everything is subject to criticism, to rectification. All can be changed, and at a moment's notice: the actors must always be ready to accept, without protest, any proposed action; they must simply act it out, to give a live view of its consequences and drawbacks. Any spectator, by virtue of being a spectator, has the right to try his version – without censorship. The actor does not change his main function: he goes on being the interpreter. What changes is the object of his interpretation. If formerly he interpreted the solitary author locked in his study, to whom divine inspiration dictated a finished text, here on the contrary, he must interpret the mass audience, assembled in their local committees, societies of 'friends of the *barrio*,' groups of neighbors, schools, unions, peasant leagues, or whatever; he must give expression to the collective thought of men and women. The actor ceases to interpret the individual and starts to interpret the group, which is much more difficult and at the same time much more creative.

Second degree: *Image theater*. Here the spectator has to participate more directly. He is asked to express his views on a certain theme of common interest that the participants wish to discuss. The theme can be far-reaching, abstract – as, for example, imperialism – or it can be a local problem such as the lack of water, a common occurrence in almost all the *barrios*. The participant is asked to express his opinion, but without speaking, using only the bodies of the other participants and 'sculpting' with them a group of statues, in such a way that his opinions and feelings become evident. The participant is to use the bodies of the others as if he were a sculptor and the others were made of clay: he must determine the position of each body down to the most minute details of their facial expressions. He is not allowed to speak under any circumstances. The most that is permitted to him is to show with his own facial expressions what he wants the statue-spectator to do. After

organizing this group of statues he is allowed to enter into a discussion with the other participants in order to determine if all agree with his ‘sculpted’ opinion. Modifications can be rehearsed: the spectator has the right to modify the statues in their totality or in some detail. When finally an image is arrived at that is the most acceptable to all, then the spectator-sculptor is asked to show the way he would like the given theme to be; that is, in the first grouping the *actual image* is shown, in the second the *ideal image*. Finally he is asked to show a *transitional image*, to show how it would be possible to pass from one reality to the other. In other words, how to carry out the change, the transformation, the revolution, or whatever term one wishes to use. Thus, starting with a grouping of ‘statues’ accepted by all as representative of a real situation, each one is asked to propose ways of changing it. [...] A young woman, a literacy agent who lived in the village of Otuzco, was asked to explain, through a grouping of live images, what her home town was like.

In Otuzco, before the present Revolutionary Government, there was a peasant rebellion; the landlords (that no longer exist in Peru) imprisoned the leader of the rebellion, took him to the main square, and, in front of everyone, castrated him. The young woman from Otuzco composed the image of the castration, placing one of the participants on the ground while another pretended to be castrating him and still another held him from behind. Then at one side she placed a woman praying, on her knees, and at the other side a group of five men and women, also on their knees, with hands tied behind their backs. Behind the man being castrated, the young woman placed another participant in a position obviously suggestive of power and violence and, behind him, two armed men pointing their guns at the prisoner. This was the image that person had of her village. A terrible, pessimistic, defeatist image, but also a true reflection of something that had actually taken place. Then the young woman was asked to show what she would want her village to be like. She modified completely the ‘statues’ of the group and regrouped them as people who worked in peace and loved each other – in short, a happy and contented, ideal Otuzco. Then came the third, and most important part, of this form of theater: how can one, starting with the actual image, arrive at the ideal image? How to bring about the change, the transformation, the revolution?

Here it was a question of giving an opinion, but without words. Each participant had the right to act as a ‘sculptor’ and to show how the grouping, or organization, could be modified through a reorganization of forces for the purpose of arriving at an ideal image. Each one expressed his opinion through imagery. Lively discussions arose, but without words. When one would exclaim, ‘It’s not possible like this; I think that ...,’ he was immediately interrupted: ‘Don’t say what you think; come and show it to us.’ The participant would go and demonstrate physically, visually, his thought, and the discussion would continue. In this particular case the following variations were observed:

- 1) When a young woman from the interior was asked to form the image of change, she would never change the image of the kneeling woman, signifying clearly that she did not see in that woman a potential force for revolutionary change. Naturally the young women identified themselves with that feminine figure and, since they could not perceive themselves as possible protagonists of the revolution, they left unmodified the image of the kneeling woman. On the other hand, when the same thing was asked of a girl from Lima, she, being more ‘liberated,’ would start off by changing precisely that image with which she identified herself. This experiment was repeated many times and always produced the same results, without variation. Undoubtedly the different patterns of action represent not chance occurrence but



the sincere, visual expression of the ideology and psychology of the participants. The young women from Lima always modified the image: some would make the woman clasp the figure of the castrated man, others would prompt the woman to fight against the castrator, etc. Those from the interior did little more than allow the woman to lift her hands in prayer.

- 2) All the participants who believed in the Revolutionary Government would start by modifying the armed figures in the background: they changed the two men who were aiming their guns at the victim so that they would then aim at the powerful figure in the center or at the castrators themselves. On the other hand, when a participant did not have the same faith in his government, he would alter all figures except the armed ones.
- 3) The people who believed in magical solutions or in a 'change of conscience' on the part of the exploiting classes would start by modifying the castrators – viewing them in effect as changing of their own volition – as well as the powerful figure in the center, who would become regenerated. By contrast, those who did not believe in this form of social change would first alter the kneeling men, making them assume a fighting posture, attacking the oppressors.
- 4) One of the young women, besides showing the transformations to be the work of the kneeling men – who would free themselves, attack their torturers and imprison them – also had one of the figures representing the people address the other participants, clearly expressing her opinion that social changes are made by the people as a whole and not only by their vanguard.
- 5) Another young woman made all kinds of changes, leaving untouched only the five persons with their hands tied. This girl belonged to the upper middle class. When she showed signs of nervousness for not being able to imagine any further changes, someone suggested to her the possibility of changing the group of tied figures; the girl looked at them in surprise and exclaimed: 'The truth is that those people didn't fit in! ...' It was the truth. The people did not fit into her view of the scheme of things, and she had never before been able to see it.

This form of image theater is without doubt one of the most stimulating, because it is so easy to practice and because of its extraordinary capacity for making thought *visible*. This happens because use of the language idiom is avoided. Each word has a denotation that is the same for all, but it also has a connotation that is unique for each individual. If I utter the word 'revolution,' obviously everyone will realize that I am talking about a radical change, but at the same time each person will think of his or her 'own' revolution, a personal conception of revolution. But if I have to arrange a group of statues that will signify 'my revolution,' here there will be no denotation–connotation dichotomy. The image synthesizes the individual connotation and the collective denotation. In my arrangement signifying revolution, what are the statues doing? Do they have weapons in their hands or do they have ballots? Are the figures of the people united in a fighting posture against the figures representing the common enemies; or are the figures of the people dispersed, or showing disagreement among themselves? My conception of 'revolution' will become clear if, instead of speaking, I show with images what I think.

I remember that in a session of psychodrama a girl spoke repeatedly of the problems she had with her boyfriend, and she always started with more or less the same phrase: 'He came in, embraced me, and then ...' Each time we heard this opening phrase we understood that they did in fact embrace; that is, we understood what the word *embrace* denotes.

Then one day she showed by acting how their meetings were: he approached, she crossed her arms over her breasts as if protecting herself, he took hold of her and hugged her tightly, while she continued to keep her hands closed, defending herself. That was clearly a particular connotation for the word *embrace*. When we understood her 'embrace' we were finally able to understand her problems with her boyfriend.

[...]

Third degree: *Forum theater*. This is the last degree and here the participant has to intervene decisively in the dramatic action and change it. The procedure is as follows: First, the participants are asked to tell a story containing a political or social problem of difficult solution. Then a ten- or fifteen-minute skit portraying that problem and the solution intended for discussion is improvised or rehearsed, and subsequently presented. When the skit is over, the participants are asked if they agree with the solution presented. At least some will say no. At this point it is explained that the scene will be performed once more, exactly as it was the first time. But now any participant in the audience has the right to replace any actor and lead the action in the direction that seems to him most appropriate. The displaced actor steps aside, but remains ready to resume action the moment the participant considers his own intervention to be terminated. The other actors have to face the newly created situation, responding instantly to all the possibilities that it may present.

The participants who choose to intervene must continue the physical actions of the replaced actors; they are not allowed to come on the stage and talk, talk, talk: they must carry out the same type of work or activities performed by the actors who were in their place. The theatrical activity must go on in the same way, on the stage. Anyone may propose any solution, but it must be done on the stage, working, acting, doing things, and not from the comfort of his seat. Often a person is very revolutionary when in a public forum he envisages and advocates revolutionary and heroic acts; on the other hand, he often realizes that things are not so easy when he himself has to practice what he suggests.

[...]

Maybe the theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without doubt a *rehearsal of revolution*. The truth of the matter is that the spectator-actor practices a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner. [...]

Here the cathartical effect is entirely avoided. We are used to plays in which the characters make the revolution and the spectators in their seats feel themselves to be triumphant revolutionaries. Why make a revolution in reality if we have already made it in the theater? But that does not happen here: the rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality. Forum theater, as well as these other forms of a people's theater, instead of taking something away from the spectator, evoke in him a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theater. The practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfilment through real action.

## 23 Selections from the prison notebooks

*Antonio Gramsci*

*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (eds and trans Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith), Lawrence & Wishart (1971, 2005), excerpt from pp. 9–13.

**ALL MEN ARE INTELLECTUALS**, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals, that is, one has in mind the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether towards intellectual elaboration or towards muscular-nervous effort. This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals because non intellectuals do not exist. But even the relationship between efforts of intellectual-cerebral elaboration and muscular-nervous effort is not always the same, so there are varying degrees of specific intellectual activity. There is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*.<sup>2</sup> Each man, finally, outside of his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a ‘philosopher’, an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.

The problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals consists therefore in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain degree of development, modifying its relationship with the muscular-nervous effort towards a new equilibrium, and ensuring that the muscular-nervous effort itself, in so far that it is an element of general practical activity, which is perpetually innovating the physical and social world, becomes the foundation of a new and integral conception of the world. The traditional and vulgarised type of the intellectual is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist. Therefore journalists, who claim to be men of letters, philosophers, artists, also regard themselves as ‘true’ intellectuals. In the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual.

[...]

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer exist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical spirit); from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history,

without which one remains 'specialised' and does not become 'directive' (specialised and political).

Thus there are historically formed specialised categories for the exercise of intellectual function. They are formed in connection with all social groups, but especially in connection with the more important, and they undergo more extensive and complex elaboration in connection with the dominant social group. One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals.

[...]

The relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups but is, in varying degrees, 'mediated' by the whole fabric of society and the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the 'functionaries'. It should be possible to measure the 'organic quality' [*organicita*] of the various intellectual strata and their degree of connection with a fundamental social group, and to establish a graduation of their functions and of the superstructures from the bottom to the top (from the structural base upwards). What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural 'levels': the one that can be called 'civil society', that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private', and that of 'political society' or 'the State'. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of 'hegemony' which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of 'direct domination' or command exercised through the State and 'juridical' government. The functions in question are precisely organisational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government.

These comprise:

- 1 The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.
- 2 The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.

This way of posing the problem has as a result a considerable extension of the concept of intellectual, but it is the only way which enables one to reach a concrete approximation of reality. It also clashes with preconceptions of caste. The function of organising social hegemony and state domination certainly gives rise to a particular division of labour and therefore to a whole hierarchy of qualifications in some of which there is not apparent attribution of directive or organisational functions.

## Notes

- 1 Thus, it can happen that everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear in a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or a tailor.
- 2 i.e. Man the maker (or tool-bearer) and Man the thinker.

## 24 Participation

*Majid Rahnema*

'Participation', *The Development Dictionary – A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (ed. Wolfgang Sachs), Zed Books (1999), pp. 120–9.

### Popular participation

**ACTIVISTS STRONGLY FAVOURING** participatory development argue that they are fully aware of the reasons why politicians and development planners try to co-opt the concept of participation for their own ends. In their view, the types of interaction they propose are precisely intended to prevent all such hegemonistic and manipulative designs. They therefore believe the concept should be further refined – 'popular participation' being able to save development from its present crisis and give it new stamina for enabling the grassroots populations to regenerate their life spaces.

An UNRISD discussion paper defines popular participation as 'the organized efforts to increase control over resources and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control'.<sup>1</sup> For Orlando Fals-Borda, Anisur Rahman and many other PAR theorists,<sup>2</sup> the aim of such a participation is to achieve power:

a special kind of power – people's power – which belongs to the oppressed and exploited classes and groups and their organizations, and the defence of their just interests to enable them to advance towards shared goals of social change within a participatory system.<sup>3</sup>

As a rule, participation is advocated by PAR theorists as the only way to save development from degenerating into a bureaucratic, top-down and dependency creating institution. They do not question the validity of the institution, *per se*, which most of them consider could be a powerful instrument in the hands of the oppressed. They do insist, however, that, for development to play its historical role, it should be based on participation. Genuine processes of dialogue and interaction should thus replace the present subject–object relationships between intervenors and the intervened, thereby enabling the oppressed to act as the free subjects of their own destiny.

The assumptions underlying the popular participatory approach can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Present obstacles to people's development can and should be overcome by giving the populations concerned the full opportunity of participating in all the activities related to their development.

- (b) Participation is justified because it expresses not only the will of the majority of people, but also it is the only way for them to ensure that the important moral, humanitarian, social, cultural and economic objectives of a more humane and effective development can be peacefully attained.
- (c) 'Dialogical interaction', 'conscientization', 'PAR' and other similar activities can make it possible for all the people to organize themselves in a manner best suited to meet their desired ends.

When the concept of popular participation was initially advanced by its promoters as a key element in creating an alternative, human-centred development, it was intended to perform at least four functions: a cognitive, a social, an instrumental and a political one.

In *cognitive* terms, participation had to regenerate the development discourse and its practices, on the basis of a different mode of understanding of the realities to be addressed. It expressed the belief that the cognitive bases of conventional development not only belonged to an irrelevant *episteme*, representing an ethnocentric perception of reality specific to Northern industrialized countries, but were also no longer able to serve the objectives of a sound development. They had to be replaced by a different knowledge system, representing people's own cultural heritage, in particular the locally produced *techné*. Popular participation was to carve out a new meaning for, and a new image of, development, based on different forms of interaction and a common search for this new 'popular' knowledge.

The *political* function of participation was to provide development with a new source of legitimation, assigning to it the task of empowering the voiceless and the powerless and also, eventually, of creating a bridge between the Establishment and its target populations, including even the groups opposing development.

The *instrumental* function of the participatory approach was to provide the 're-empowered' actors of development with new answers to the failure of conventional strategies, and to propose new alternatives, with a view to involving the 'patients' in their own care.

Finally, in *social* terms, participation was the slogan which gave the development discourse a new lease of life. All institutions, groups and individuals involved in development activities rallied around the new construct in the hope that the participatory approach would finally enable development to meet everyone's basic needs and to wipe out poverty in all its manifestations.

### **The pitfalls of empowerment**

The new methodologies of interaction inspired by the PAR and conscientization approaches did initially create waves of enthusiasm and hope, mainly amongst fieldworkers engaged in grassroots activities. The rush for the rapid creation of a 'popular knowledge', aimed at destroying the pernicious monopoly of the dominant paradigm, served as a contagious incentive to promote often inspiring activities in such fields as literacy and regeneration of traditional know-how. Particularly in a number of technical areas, it succeeded in denouncing the often dangerous and inhibitive impacts, on people's lives, of imported and irrelevant technologies. Here and there, but mainly at the local level, it served to keep alive the population's resentment against the most visible aspects of political and social discrimination. It also helped some bright elements to be recognized as local leaders, and gain a wider perception of their communities' possibilities of action.

Yet, there is not enough evidence to indicate that a new kind of knowledge did emerge from the process, 'in such a way that the dominated, underdeveloped societies can articulate their own socio-political position on the basis of their own values and capacities.'

While participatory thinkers do admit that all knowledge systems carry a number of values and biases,<sup>4</sup> they seem to exclude the possibility that, as products of a certain knowledge born out of the economic/developmental age, they could be, themselves, the carriers of very questionable values and biases. Neither do they pay enough attention to the fact that traditional or local knowledge systems suffer, too, from similar, sometimes even more inhibitive prejudices. The fact that the latter have been distorted and confused by the processes of change in the colonial and development eras does not change the picture. As such, any attempt to realize a mix of the two knowledges,<sup>5</sup> represented by local and outside persons interacting with each other, is not only a conceptually reductionist and patchwork type of exercise, but also may turn out to be a strange mix of very heterogeneous biases. The exercise tends, finally, to disregard the following very basic principle of learning – that no one learns who claims to know already in advance. Reality is the unknown which has to be 'dis-covered' together, free from all the presuppositions and influences of the known.

The notion of empowerment was intended to help participation perform one main political function – to provide development with a new source of legitimation. As already made clear in the first part of this essay, the intentions of the pioneers of participation were, indeed, pure and noble. They were right to consider that the tremendous abuses of power by oppressors had to be stopped, and the victims be provided with new possibilities of defending themselves. Yet, in practice, the empowerment discourse raised a number of important questions, both at the theoretical and practical levels. As some of these issues suggest that the discourse can eventually produce opposite results, the matter deserves to be more deeply explored.

When A considers it essential for B to be empowered, A assumes not only that B has no power – or does not have the right kind of power – but also that A has the secret formula of a power to which B has to be initiated. In the current participatory ideology, this formula is, in fact, nothing but a revised version of state power, or what could be called fear-power.

The crux of the matter is that the populations actually subjected to this fear-power are not at all powerless. There is a different power which is not always perceived as such, and cannot be actualized in the same manner, yet it is very real in many ways.<sup>6</sup> It is constituted by the thousands of centres and informal networks of resistance which ordinary people put up, often quietly, against the prevailing power apparatuses. Amongst others, it manifests itself in the reality of 'tax payers cheating the state, young people evading conscription, farmers accepting subsidies or equipment from development projects and diverting them to their own ends, technicians or repairmen working without permits or licences, government paid teachers using the classroom to denounce government abuses of power.'<sup>7</sup>

As a result, there is little evidence to indicate that the participatory approach, as it evolved, did, as a rule, succeed in bringing about new forms of people's power. Instead, there are indications that the way many an activist interpreted their mission contributed to dis-valuing the traditional and vernacular forms of power. More often than not, they helped replace them with a most questionable notion of power, highly influenced by that of the leftist traditions in Europe. This vision of power did, in practice, prove useful to the development establishment. For it helps it to persuade its target populations that not only are economic and state authorities the real power, but that they are also within everyone's reach, provided everyone is ready to participate fully in the development design....

### **Participation: boon, myth, or danger?**

... Participation, which is also a form of intervention, is too serious and ambivalent a matter to be taken lightly, or reduced to an amoeba word lacking in any precise meaning, or a slogan, or fetish or, for that matter, only an instrument or a methodology. Reduced to such trivialities, not only does it cease to be a boon, but it runs the risk of acting as a deceptive myth or a dangerous tool for manipulation. To understand the many dimensions of participation, one needs to enquire seriously into all its roots and ramifications, these going deep into the heart of human relationships and the socio-cultural realities conditioning them.

As has already been noted, 'relating' is intrinsic to the very act of being and living. To live is to relate, or to participate in the wider living world of which one is only a part. To relate to that world, and to the human beings composing it, is an act of great consequence which cannot and need not be mediated. As such, one's inability fully to assume this vital necessity should only be *understood*. Only this understanding, by the subject and the others interacting with him, can enable one to overcome that predicament. No democratic or participatory panacea can give an ailing society of dead or conditioned persons what they individually do not have. Contemporary history is particularly rich in cases where induced participation in projects of an ideological national or ethnic nature had repeatedly led to frightfully self-destructive tragedies. After all, slogans of participation have accompanied the events which led to the physical or mental destruction of millions of innocent people in Germany, the USSR, Cambodia, India, Iran, Iraq and elsewhere.

All these difficulties point to a basic dilemma facing the participatory phenomenon. How to reconcile two facts: the fact that no form of social interaction or participation can ever be meaningful and liberating, unless the participating individuals act as free and unbiased human beings; and the second fact that all societies hitherto have developed commonly accepted creeds (religions, ideologies, traditions, etc.) which, in turn, condition and help produce inwardly un-free and biased persons? The dilemma is particularly difficult to resolve at a time when the old ways of socio-cultural conditioning have taken on new and frightening forms. The economization of life with all its implications (cultural, political and social) – is subjecting its participants, all over the world, to often invisible and structural processes of addictive manipulation. As a result, people are led to believe that their very biases, their conditioning and their inner lack of freedom, are not only the expressions of their freedom, but also of an even greater freedom still to be achieved.

### **Beyond participation**

In real life, the dilemma is addressed differently, according to the great diversity of situations and cultures. In recent years, a number of grassroots movements have demonstrated particular creativity, both in bringing up new forms of leadership and 'animation', and in combining the inner and outer requirements of participation.

In relation to the first achievement, the presence within such movements of sometimes very sensitive 'animators', able to listen to their own people, to the world at large, and to the roots of their common culture, has enabled them to cultivate the possibilities of action and self-discovery dormant in the 'common man'. To take only the Indian scene, the Gandhian, the Chipko, the Lokayan and Swadhyaya movements are good examples of the way such inspiring animators have interacted with their fellow countrymen. Drawing on the most enduring and inspiring aspects of people's traditions, some of them have



been able to use these as living instruments of socio-cultural regeneration. New ways of working, acting and hoping together have been found, which have also given new meanings and expressions to modernity, in its real sense of *belonging to the present*. The fact that specially trained change agents do not play a major role in these movements has not generally prevented them from being highly animated by their own members, most of them acting as their own agents of change.

In the second area of achievement, a new feature, common to most of these genuine grassroots movements, seems to be the substitution of various modern methodologies, project designs, organizational schemas and fund-raising constraints, by more traditional and vernacular ways of interaction and leadership. As a rule, the necessity for a spiritual dimension, and for the revival of the sacred in one's everyday relationships with the world, seems to be rediscovered as a basic factor for the regeneration of people's space. Wherever this spiritual dimension<sup>8</sup> has been present, it has, indeed, produced a staggering contagion of intelligence and creativity, much more conducive to people's collective 'efficiency' than any other conventional form of mass mobilization. In the above mentioned grassroots movements, this dimension has served as a most powerful instrument in reviving the old ideals of a livelihood based on love, conviviality and simplicity, and also in helping people to resist the disruptive effects of economization.

In that sense, to participate means to live and to relate differently. It implies, above all, the recovery of one's inner freedom, that is, to learn to listen and to share, free from any fear or predefined conclusion, belief or judgment. As inner freedom is not necessarily dependent on outer freedom, its recovery is an essentially personal matter, and can be done even in a jail, or under the most repressive conditions. Yet it enables one not only to acquire a tremendous life power for the flowering of one's own life, but also to contribute, in a meaningful way, to everyone else's struggle for a better life. As such, inner freedom gives life to outer freedom, and makes it both possible and meaningful. On the other hand, while outer freedom is often a great blessing, and a necessity to protect people from violence and abuse, it remains hollow and subject to decay, in the absence of inner freedom. It can never, *per se*, help alienated persons to flower in goodness, or live in wisdom and beauty. Anyhow, participation soon turns into a parody, and an invitation to manipulative designs, when it represents only a ritual amongst alienated persons acting as programmed robots.

To live differently implies, secondly, that change be perceived as a process which starts from within, and defines as one pursues one's creative journey into the unknown. It does not mean to conform to a preordained pattern or ideal designed by others, or even one designed by one's own illusions and conditioned ideals. For change to happen and to make sense, it should represent the open-ended quest and interaction of free and questioning persons for the understanding of reality.

In a situation where these crucial dimensions of change are disregarded, or artificially severed from it, organized forms of participation or mobilization either serve illusory purposes, or lead to superficial and fragmented achievements of no lasting impact on people's lives. Even when these seem to be beneficial to a particular group or region, their effects remain inevitably limited, in time and space, sometimes even producing opposite effects in many unforeseen and unexpected areas.

On another plane, planned macro-changes (which are generally the *raison d'être* of development projects) are more the indirect result of millions of individual micro-changes, than of voluntarist programmes and strategies from above. In fact, they often represent a co-optation of the unplanned micro-changes produced by others and elsewhere.

When these reach a critical mass, and appear as a threat to the dominant knowledge/power centres at the top, they are co-opted and used by their professionals as an input for planned changes, aimed at turning the potential threat posed to the top into a possible asset for it. Hence, major projects of change from above generally represent an attempt, by those very forces under threat, to contain and redirect change, with a view to adapting it to their own interests, whenever possible with the victims' participation. This is how the real authors of most revolutions are, sooner or later, robbed of the changes they have provoked, and ultimately victimized by the professional ideologues and agitators acting on their behalf. This is how the pioneering participatory mendicants of the early development years were also robbed of their participatory ideal, as the latter was transmogrified into the present-day manipulative construct of participatory development.

Should that mean that anything any free human being does for change, even in its genuine and holistic sense, will inevitably be countered and/or co-opted by vested interests? Or should such realities invite those who seriously want to remain free, to live and to relate as such, to continue partaking in the world, free from fears of all kinds, including the fear of co-option? If the participatory ideal could, in simple terms, be redefined by such qualities as attention, sensitivity, goodness or compassion, and supported by such regenerative acts as learning, relating and listening, are not these qualities and gifts precisely impossible to co-opt? Are they not, also, the same which always help flower, in others, their potentialities of inner transformation? To stay with this question could perhaps serve as a good companion to the activist looking for an answer to his or her life and to better ways of participating in other people's lives.

## Notes

- 1 In a document produced by Matthias Stiefel and Marshall Wolfe. 'The Quest For Participation', UNRISD, Mimeographed Preliminary Report, June 1984, p. 12, the authors conclude that: 'The central issue of popular participation has to do with power, exercised by some people over the people, and by some classes over other classes ...'
- 2 PAR – i.e. Participatory Action Research – is a methodology, or approach, to both action and research. It was introduced in the '70s, first in Asia and Latin America, by different groups of activists/theorists working in grassroots developmental activities. PAR seeks to set in motion processes of social change by the populations themselves, as they perceive their own reality. Orlando Fals-Borda, one of its founders, views it as 'a methodology within a total existential process', aimed at 'achieving power and not merely growth for the grassroots populations'.
- 3 Orlando Fals-Borda, *Knowledge and People's Power*, New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1988, p. 2.
- 4 'Any science as a cultural product has a specific human purpose and therefore implicitly carries those biases and values which scientists hold as a group'. See Orlando Fals-Borda, op. cit., p. 93.
- 5 The gist of this design can be found in the following statement by Orlando Fals-Borda: 'Academic knowledge combined with popular knowledge and wisdom may give, as a result, a total scientific knowledge of a revolutionary nature (and perhaps a new paradigm), which destroys the previous unjust class monopoly.' Ibid., p. 88.
- 6 The Gandhian movement was based on the assumption that Indian rural communities were invested with a much more forbidding power than that of the British administration. As such, Gandhi's persistent message to them was neither to oppose that illusory and corruptive power through violence, nor to try to seize it. Many of the present grassroots movements of India and elsewhere similarly believe that the narrow politics of capturing state power is often a last resort. For more on the question of power, see Majid Rahnema, 'Power and regenerative processes in micro-spaces', in *International Social Science Journal*, August 1988, No. 117, pp. 361–75.
- 7 Ibid., p. 366.

- 8 Short of a less controversial word, 'spiritual' is used here to express the following qualities: sensitivity; the art of listening to the world at large and within one, free from the hegemony of a conditioned 'me' constantly interfering in the process; the ability to relate to others and to act, without any pre-defined plan or ulterior motives; and the perennial qualities of love, compassion and goodness which are under constant assault in economized societies. The spiritual dimension has nothing to do with the so-called religious, atheistic or scientific perceptions of the world. It expresses mainly the belief that human beings, in their relations with the world, are moved not only by material, economic or worldly interests. It recognizes the sacred dimension of life which transcends the latter, giving a higher meaning to such awesome acts as living, relating and loving. The spiritual dimension, it may be said, is generally inhibited by fanatical beliefs in the superiority of one religion over another. As such, contrary to its promoters' claims, it is totally absent in religious fundamentalist movements based on hate and violence.

## 25 On arrival

*Sara Ahmed*

'On Arrival', *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Duke University Press (2012), excerpt from pp. 1–17.

**WHAT DOES DIVERSITY DO?** What are we doing when we use the language of diversity? [...] These questions can be asked as open questions only if we proceed with a sense of uncertainty about what diversity is doing and what we are doing with diversity. Strong critiques have been made of the uses of diversity by institutions and of how the arrival of the term “diversity” involves the departure of other (perhaps more critical) terms, including “equality,” “equal opportunities,” and “social justice.” A genealogy of the term “diversity” allows us to think about the appeal of the term as an institutional appeal. We might want to be cautious about the appealing nature of diversity and ask whether the ease of its incorporation by institutions is a sign of the loss of its critical edge.

...

I had previously written about questions of race and difference, although, thinking back, it took time for me to get to the point when I could write about race. My initial research was on feminist theory and postmodernism. When I was working on my doctoral thesis in 1993, I remember searching for an example to group the chapter I was writing on subjectivity. I recall actually looking around the room, as if an object, one that I might find lying around, could become my subject. At this moment of looking around, I recalled an experience, one that I had “forgotten.” It came to me as if it were reaching out from the past. The very reach of the past shows that it was not one I had left behind. It was a memory of walking near my home in Adelaide and being stopped by two policemen in a car, one of whom asked me, “Are you Aboriginal?” It turned out that there had been some burglaries in the area. It was an extremely hostile address and an unsettling experience at the time. Having recalled this experience, I wrote about it. The act of writing was a reorientation, affecting not simply what I was writing about but what I was thinking and feeling. As memory, it was an experience of not being white, of being made into a stranger, the one who is recognized as “out of place,” the one who does not belong, whose proximity is registered as crime or threat. As memory, it was of becoming a stranger in a place I called home.

Why had I forgotten about it? Forgetting has its uses; unpleasant experiences are often the ones that are hard to recall. I had not wanted to think about race; I had not wanted to think about my experiences growing up, as someone who did not belong. Allowing myself to remember was a political reorientation: it led me to think and write about the politics of stranger making; how some and not others become strangers; how emotions

of fear and hatred stick to certain bodies; how some bodies become understood as the rightful occupants of certain spaces.

...

The racialization of the stranger is not immediately apparent – disguised, we might say – by the strict anonymity of the stranger, who after all, we are told from childhood, could be anyone. My own stranger memory taught me that the “could be anyone” points to some bodies more than others. This “could be anyone” only appears as an open possibility, stretching into the horizon, in which the stranger reappears as the one who is always lurking in the shadows. Frantz Fanon ([1952] 1986) taught us to watch out for what lurks, seeing himself *in* and *as* the shadow, the dark body, who is always passing by, at the edges of social experience. In seeing the stranger, we are most certainly seeing someone; in some cases, we are seeing ourselves.

We can think from the experience of becoming a stranger. A stranger experienced can be an experience of becoming noticeable, of not passing through or passing by, of being stopped or being held up. A stranger can teach us about how bodies come to feel at home through the work of inheritance, how bodies can extend themselves into spaces creating contours of inhabitable space, as well as how spaces can be extensions of bodies (see Ahmed 2006).

...

It is certainly the case that responsibility for diversity and equality is unevenly distributed. It is also the case that the distribution of this work is political. If diversity and equality work is less valued by organizations, then to become responsible for this work can mean to inhabit institutional spaces that are also less valued.

We can get stuck *in* institutions by being stuck *to* a category. This is not to say that we cannot or do not value the work of these categories. But we can be constrained even by the categories that we love. I had experienced already what it can mean to be “the race person.” Indeed, both academic positions I held in the United Kingdom were advertised as posts in race and ethnicity, the first in Women’s Studies, the second in Media and Communications. In both cases, the experience felt like being appointed by whiteness (even if the appointment was intended as a countering of whiteness). There we find ourselves: people of color being interviewed for jobs “on race” by white panels, speaking to white audiences about our work. In both cases the experience was one of solidarity with those who have to face this situation. Whiteness can be a situation we have or are in; when we name that situation (and even make jokes about it) we recognize each other as strangers to the institution and find in that estrangement a bond. Of course, at the same time, I should stress that we do want there to be posts on race and ethnicity. We also want there to be more than one; we want not to be the one. Becoming the race person means you are the one who is turned to when race turns up. The very fact of your existence can allow others not to turn up.

...

In exploring the risks and necessity of speaking about racism, as both my starting point and conclusion, my aim is not to suggest that we should stop doing diversity, but that we need to keep asking what we are doing with diversity.

## 26 Mobile arts for peace (MAP)

### Curriculum for music, dance and drama in Rwanda

*Ananda Breed, Kurtis Dennison, Sylvestre Nzahabwanayo  
and Kirrily Pells*

#### Introduction

*SORGHUM SEEDS MADE* from scrunched up pieces of papers were cast onto the floor as other performers tilled the soil through the pantomime of heavy hoes. A cow, in the form of two men hunched over with the lead performer holding splayed fingers out in the shape of horns, lumbered across the hall. A dancer proclaimed poetic verses as a soundscape was created by performers behind him. The sights, sounds and environment of Rwanda emerged as performers from the Gicumbi and Huye districts of Rwanda presented their Regional Shares to welcome one another through cultural representations of their regions at the start of the MAP training of trainers.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter will examine the use of interdisciplinary, arts-based approaches to peacebuilding through the *Mobile Arts for Peace* project in Rwanda funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) through an overarching project entitled *Changing the Story: Building Inclusive Societies with and for Young People in Five Post-Conflict Countries*.<sup>2</sup> The authors of this chapter will provide an overview of the project design and research methodologies of MAP, serving as a reflection of creative approaches in conflict transformation processes to strengthen individual and community-level tolerance for paradox and ambiguity. We will be using this reflection process to inform our knowledge and understanding of how MAP might contribute to the subject of music, dance and drama in the National Curriculum Framework of Rwanda. The primary benchmarks of the national curriculum include: a) to improvise and act out role plays in Kinyarwanda; b) to improvise a range of situations and act out their own sketches; and c) to stage and present a short, clear and coherent performance for an audience. This paper was produced as a collaborative exercise, working across professions (academia, educationalists, psychosocial support and artists) and disciplines (performing arts, education studies, childhood studies and political science), with authors based in both the United Kingdom and Rwanda. In this sense, it is an attempt to extend the co-produced nature of the MAP project into the realm of publication while bringing together different forms.

MAP serves as an arts-based research method to inform a process of skills-based knowledge acquisition in the performing arts for adult educators and young people, alongside the reflection on cultural frameworks and indigenous knowledges that inform epistemological frameworks for dialogic processes in relation to peacebuilding approaches. Arts-based research can be defined as: ‘...a set of methodological tools used by researchers across the disciplines across all phases of social research, including data generation, analysis, interpretation, and representation’ (Leavy, 2015: ix). Performance can serve as a research methodology of data generation and analysis as well as a (re)presentational form

(Worthen, 1998) alongside providing a conceptual framework of the data within the rehearsal and play building process and dissemination of research through the performance (Saldana, 2005: 15). The curation of the project alongside the delivery of the information and dissemination of research follows a methodological framework that begins with the collection of information and needs-based analysis; followed by the rooting of the methodology in the cultural context in which MAP is operating and the exploration of practices that promote dialogic processes, including the building of trust and establishing a mixed-methods approach to conflict analysis and the sharing of stories. Within this context, there is also the consideration of how stories and memories are shared within the timeframe of post-genocide Rwanda and the articulation of arts-based approaches in relation to mechanisms of transitional justice.

Between 2004 and 2012 a transitional form of justice called *gacaca* (justice in the grass) was implemented in Rwanda to adjudicate genocidal crimes following the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi. During the information gathering phase in 2004, there were mandatory meetings to collect information concerning the events of the genocide in terms of who was living in each house, crimes committed during the genocide and the whereabouts of anyone who was no longer living in that community. Following the collection of initial information, the official *gacaca* courts were implemented. Every citizen was mandated to attend weekly *gacaca* court proceedings in their communities. Often, they were located in the grass under a tree, but they were also conducted in community halls, shelters made out of corrugated metal, or district offices, for instance. There was no age limit for those who attended these meetings. Thus, citizens from infants to elders were in attendance. During the *gacaca* proceedings, individuals were required to provide testimony concerning the events of the genocide including where the crime was committed, who was involved in the crime and any looting involved. The National Jurisdiction of Gacaca Courts had implemented a sensitization and mobilization phase to educate the population about the *gacaca* courts; theatre was one vehicle used to inform the nation about the *gacaca* courts through a performance directed by Kalisa Rugano concerning how the courts would operate. This chapter is situated in the wake of the *gacaca* courts in which over 1,958,634 cases were tried in over 14,000 courts. During initial research conducted by Breed between 2004 and 2012, which explored *gacaca* as a performative that constructed the concept of *Rwandanicity* alongside arts-based practices to inform initiatives related to justice and reconciliation, it was evidenced that there were numerous grassroots associations that used performance as a vehicle to provide an alternative space for perpetrators, survivors and the community at large to forge new relationships (Breed, 2014).<sup>3</sup> The MAP project seeks to build upon the success of the grassroots associations and potential for arts-based approaches to create a space of dialogue. In particular, members of a youth-based grassroots organization entitled AJDS are currently involved as Master Trainers and the former site of AJDS has been turned into a primary school entitled Friends of the Children International School, which actively engages over 500 young people in MAP activities on a weekly basis.

MAP operates across three core components: a) project design and delivery; b) research; and c) arts-based practice. Each of these core components operates alongside one another. Initially, a scoping visit was conducted to establish relationships with key stakeholders alongside the formation of baseline data and needs assessment through a curriculum workshop with cultural artists. Based on the generation of information from phase one, a manual or toolkit was developed. Education and cultural specialists reviewed the manual and toolkit to ensure that local and indigenous cultural frameworks were

Table 26.1

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Project Design and Delivery</i>	<i>Research</i>	<i>Practice</i>
Phase One	Scoping Visit	Needs Assessment	Curriculum Workshop
Phase Two	Manual/Toolkit	Cultural Frameworks	Training of Trainers
Phase Three	Curriculum	Conflict Analysis	Youth Camp
Phase Four	Digital Curriculum	Policy Impact	MAP Clubs

integrated through translation into the local language and through the integration of cultural concepts and key terms that establish epistemological frameworks. For instance, the Kinyarwanda terms for youth, memory, conflict and story have a range of meanings specific to the cultural context and situation. The specific cultural terms framed explorations of peacebuilding approaches. Curriculum materials led to the implementation of a residential week-long training of trainers conducted for adult educators, cultural artists and civic society organizations. During phase three, the adult educators from local schools who served as trainers implemented the methodology in their schools and community settings and conducted professional development workshops. Youth leaders were selected from each of the schools and a week-long residential Youth Camp integrated the young people as trainers as well, providing a framework for the young people to lead MAP Clubs in their schools and to help support the delivery of MAP as co-facilitators alongside the adult educators within the classroom environment. At this point in the implementation of MAP in Rwanda, we have achieved Phase One through to Phase Three (as shown in table 26.1). Upcoming activities will aim to implement Phase Four to advance the acquired knowledge into impact and to advance knowledge on a broader scale through the creation of a digital curriculum and policy briefs based on conflict analysis and communication structures, to both inform policy and receive policy responses through MAP Clubs. The MAP Clubs further disseminate policy-based themes through performances that establish dialogue about these issues in the local community and then feed their responses back to policy-making bodies.

The project partners who have actively been engaged with the design, delivery and implementation of MAP in Rwanda include a range of researchers, cultural artists, psychologists, government officials, non-profit organisation workers, educators and young people. MAP has been working in partnership with the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDPA) and the Rwanda Education Board (REB) to shape the national curriculum in music, dance and drama. REB is an agency of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) with a mission to fast-track educational development and grow the education sector (Rwanda Education Board, 2018). The following section provides an overview of the competence-based curriculum in Rwanda, followed by the implementation of MAP to meet this objective.

### **Overview of national competence-based curriculum in Rwanda**

In 2016, REB transitioned from a teacher-centered pedagogy to a learner-centered pedagogy through the introduction of a competence-based curriculum for sustainable development (CBC). This curriculum was introduced in public schools over the course of three years from 2016, going into full effect in 2018.



REB identified twelve competencies, including lifelong learning, critical thinking, creativity and innovation, research and problem solving, cooperation, interpersonal management, life skills and communication. The curriculum introduced cross-cutting issues to be taught in most classes, indicated in the curriculum framework. Peace and values education was one of these cross-cutting issues to better understand the root causes of conflict while also supporting students' development of values of peace (REB/MINEDUC, 2015: 23). MAP addresses the CBC for sustainable development goals through the integration of student-centered approaches in music, dance and drama and within peace and values education through conflict analysis, critical thinking and problem solving.

The subject 'music, dance and drama' was introduced nationally as an optional elective to promote a culture of peace and to emphasize Rwandese and universal values of justice, peace, tolerance, respect for human rights, gender, equality, solidarity and democracy (REB/MINEDUC, 2015: 8). In alignment to this objective, the syllabus for music, dance and drama states:

[Music, Dance and Drama] reflects and creates social conditions including the factors that either facilitate or impede societal change. It is powerful at the level of social group because it facilitates communication which goes beyond words, enables meanings to be shared and promotes the development and maintenance of group, cultural and national identities. Through music, dance and drama the learners share an emotion that sharing connects them with each other.

(Rwanda Education Board, 2015: 9)

The syllabus suggests the teacher acts as a facilitator in order to transform learning (Rwanda Education Board, 2015: 14). The noted syllabus from REB has observable challenges in regards to design, structure and required materials. The CBC framework included a report from the National Curriculum Conference that stated the need to develop a highly structured curriculum with details of lesson delivery. The report also noted the conditions of most classrooms as being low resource, without electricity and having overcrowded classrooms (REB/MINEDUC, 2015: 13). The syllabus expects trained teachers to interpret the outlined units into tangible lessons. The syllabus emphasized the need for both instructed theory and learner practice, but the lack of teacher capacity in the arts is an additional deficit.

MAP will address these challenges through the integration of arts-based methodologies to inform the subject of music, dance and drama while also assisting with the management of large classes, the lack of resources and the inclusion of peacebuilding within the curriculum. Additionally, the integration of student and youth-centered approaches enables learners to activate critical thinking and leadership through the development of facilitation skills. In terms of peacebuilding, MAP integrates exercises that enable learners to discuss community-based issues and their solutions through performance.

### **Stage and present a short, clear and coherent performance for an audience**

'These are stories from our lives that represent real problems in our community', commented one of the adult educators who served as an audience member of a forum theatre performance about poverty.<sup>4</sup>

The Mobile Arts for Peace project in Rwanda organized a training of trainers (TOT) from 20 July to 8 August 2019, consisting of two seven-day residential courses. A total of 80 high school teachers (20 teachers from each of the four provinces: Gicumbi, Huye, Rubavu, Kicukuru) attended the residential training, hosted at St André Hotel (Kabgayi) in Muhanga district (a southern province of Rwanda). Two provinces were paired over the course of each seven-day residential; Gicumbi and Huye in week one; Rubavu and Kicukuru in week two. One of the objectives of the training was to initiate participants to stage and present a short, coherent performance for an audience. This section documents the process through which secondary school educators were trained to stage and present a performance for a given audience. The training process comprised a number of stages. Firstly, trainers were divided into four groups and given a MAP master trainer, who was originally trained in the Eastern Province, to serve as their coach. The second stage involved making a choice of the topic for performance. Next, the group crafted the performance by distributing roles and responsibilities. Finally, the group presented the performance to a large audience. In this section, an emphasis is placed on the presentation phase. The choice of this phase is motivated by the fact that it might be considered as the dissemination phase of research since it encompasses, assumes and finalizes all other phases.

Three moments characterized the presentation phase. In the first moment, the group presented all the scenes of the performance based on a true story related to a community issue. The performance ended with the climax and the audience was invited to think about possible solutions to the staged problems. The facilitator of dialogue between the audience and performers asked the audience a host of questions in chronological order: Who is the protagonist—the person being oppressed? Who is the antagonist—the oppressor? What is the problem being highlighted in the performance? How can this problem be resolved at the family, community and national levels? In what ways could the protagonist have applied a different choice or action to create an alternative outcome to resolve the issue?

In paragraphs to follow we highlight a sample performance, focusing on a brief summary of the story, the noted problem or issue, and sample interventions proposed by audience members.

## **Theatre performance**

### ***School dropout leads to early pregnancy***

Summary: A high school girl named Mutoni (protagonist) experiences financial constraints to pay tuition fees and school materials. Since her family cannot afford to pay tuition fees and to provide necessary school materials, Mutoni decides to leave her family, located in a rural area, to try her chances in the city. The young girl goes to a pastor looking for a job. The pastor assigns Mutoni to prepare the bed that he uses for his siesta and asks her to accompany him during upcountry missions. In the long run, the pastor uses Mutoni as his private sex worker. When Mutoni tells the pastor that she is pregnant, he refutes the claim and lifts a chair to demonstrate gender-based violence during the final scene.

### ***Audience interventions***

Following the performance, the facilitator asked the audience a series of questions. Mutoni was unanimously identified as the protagonist and the pastor was identified as

the antagonist. Next, drawing on the performance, participants attempted to qualify the nature of the problem. To some the problem informing the performance was seen as poverty, fake religious leaders and lack of self-acceptance (on behalf of the young girl). According to others the real problem at stake in the play was lack of parental involvement in addressing children's problems and poor school leadership (limited or lack of contact with parents).

### **Possible solutions**

Audience members were asked how the problem could be solved at a family, community and national level. In relation to the family level, participants suggested the following actions: a) involving parents in the education of their children and having regular meetings with the school leadership; b) enforcing integrity in school leadership, as reference is made to the headmaster who kicked the young girl out of the school; and c) initiating education insurance so that students from destitute families can afford the cost of education. At the community level, suggestions included: a) involving parents in community saving groups (*ibimina*) to sustain their income; and b) putting in place education community workers to advise families with children who are likely to drop out of school or have dropped out of school. At the national level, solutions included: a) reducing the distance between the family and schools by constructing several schools in the community; b) establishing severe punishments for sexual violence culprits; c) adopting family planning; d) initiating income generation activities to fight against poverty; e) creating job opportunities in order to reduce unemployment; d) reinforcing the 'evening for parents' (*umugoroba w'ababyeyi*) where issues prevailing the community are addressed; and e) establishing a counselling room in schools for students to voice their concerns and to receive guidance and support.

### **Reflection**

In terms of engaging with the Curriculum Framework, MAP trainers were able to stage and present a short, clear and coherent performance for an audience. More importantly, it is worth noting that the staging created a safe space for participants to display some of the key burning issues in the current Rwandan community, which would not usually be discussed in other platforms. With this in mind, the researcher and evaluator for MAP, Sylvestre Nzahabwanayo, noted: 'The methodology illustrates immense potential to serve as an epistemological instrument to uncover social puzzles ravaging the current Rwandan society. MAP might be envisaged as a social investigation tool and a peacebuilding instrument.' The MAP performances allowed participants to reflect on and to foreground solutions to these problems. Embedded within the creation of the performances were exercises based on conflict analysis including Spectrogram, Across the Room, Story Circle, Director Sculpt and Obstacle Tree. In this way, MAP served to address benchmark criteria for the subject of music, dance and drama alongside cross-cutting values education in terms of peacebuilding through the identification and analysis of conflict issues and the development of critical thinking.

### **Stories and memory**

Stories are central to the MAP methodology. Varied frameworks for storytelling are employed within MAP, including the use of images and narrative to construct and

reconstruct experiences that can be used for peacebuilding processes in the community and more widely. Stories are shared during an exercise entitled story circle, which involves a small group of people along with a facilitator and co-facilitator. The facilitator guides participants to share a story of a personal experience in which an individual has had a goal, but where there were a series of obstacles that stopped him or her from achieving that goal, and for the story to relate to wider community stories that they want to resolve. The facilitator stresses the importance of deep or active listening and there is a counselor present to support any participants who become upset during the sharing of stories. Once all participants have shared a story, the group select one story to be used as a community story that the teller will provide as a framework to think through the issue, and fellow participants and the audience will become involved to find solutions. In Rwanda, since the concept of memory is often associated with the politically-charged Kinyarwanda term *Kwibuka* in relation to the anniversary of the 1994 Genocide Against the Tutsi, the team wanted to find a context-specific term that could engage with the transformative experience that MAP participants had noted; that once you told your story it often changed the teller and the listener simultaneously.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the past informed the present and the future. In this way, memory wasn't necessarily in relation to the past. During the discussion, the participants eventually agreed to the term *isangizanyankuru*, which connects the notion of stories and storytelling with that of memory. For example, master trainer Florence stated:

When we share, there are links to what people are telling others. This connects between past, present and future. This composes stories that can be sad stories, happy stories and connects to what is a story. A story is something that has happened in the past, present and future. [...] When we say *Isangizankura* it means to share with others.

Memories are therefore constituted as part of a shared encounter (Moss, 2010). As master trainer Jean-Marie commented:

When we share our stories or tell others our stories, we connect these stories to other stories that have been told. Of course, we will put these stories together. To connect, it is to make a link between these stories. When we share stories, we connect the stories.

In this context, memories are 'connective' (Hirsch, 2012; Hoskins, 2016), not only socially or collectively but also temporally, as expressed by master trainer Germain: 'This word [*isangizanyankuru*] connects to the future. What happens from the past to the present helps us to think of the future.' Moreover, *isangizankuru* expressed the sharing of memories not only through oral forms, but also through images and signs and symbols. Jean Marie stated, 'I can describe *Isangizankura* as a message that can be shared with signs or symbols' to which Esther added, 'It [*isangizankuru*] can be defined as a channel of ideas that can be past, present, and future. The way to tell the story can be written or spoken.'

Following this discussion, MAP participants devised a series of research questions that they are continuing to explore through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, adapting the MAP methodology to a practice-as-research project, focused on the term *isangizankura*. Some of the questions that they devised included: How can sharing memories/stories affect the individual or the community? What are the challenges of sharing your memories/stories? What kind of memories/stories can be shared with others and when? How can we know the memories of others, especially those coming from different

backgrounds? The PAR project is being led by the MAP youth facilitators and is using arts-based methods, including image theatre, Forum Theatre, photo elicitation, alongside methods such as observation, interviews and focus group discussions.

## Conclusion

The MAP project provided an opportunity for stakeholders, including cultural organizations, civil society organizations, peacebuilding organizations, adult educators, young people and the community at large, to think through the relevant structures that both inhibit and promote peacebuilding practices. In this way, the noted framework of MAP was delivered across the three core components including: a) project design and delivery, b) research and c) arts-based practice to co-produce the varied outputs, including a manual or toolkit, an impact documentary (produced by partner Kwetu Film Institute alongside a mobile film-making workshop that was conducted with MAP adult and youth trainers) and the dissemination of the research through practice, i.e. delivery of workshops through the training of trainers and youth camps and performances. This chapter serves as a reflective tool that was generated during the training of trainers conducted in Muhanga between 20 July and 5 August, thus illustrating the intention to ‘think through’ the project and to co-produce knowledge. The authors come from a range of disciplines including performance studies (Breed, Dennison), childhood studies (Pells) and civic education studies (Nzahabwanayo). One of the recommendations of practice for future MAP activities is the exploration of pathways to impact, including our project partners and cultural artists into the design of peacebuilding approaches that inform the use of culture for dialogic purposes working with and for young people in post-conflict contexts.

## Notes

- 1 The Regional Share was an exercise designed by Ananda Breed for training of trainer participants who come from a variety of geographic regions to share something about their culture from that region with their fellow participants. In this way, it provided an opportunity to explore how one might represent culture and how culture could be used as a dialogic tool to explore key concepts in relation to arts-based dialogue, including representation, symbolism, values, tradition, gender, age and other manifestations of regional and cultural specificity.
- 2 See <https://changingthestory.leeds.ac.uk/>.
- 3 Rwandanicity is the performativity of the new Rwandan identity post-genocide, devoid of the former ethnic identifiers of Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. The Rwandan newspaper *New Times* described it as ‘an idea and philosophy that guided the people’s conduct and perceptions. As an ideology, therefore, it is what the people of Rwanda understood themselves to be, what they knew about themselves, and how they defined and related to each other and their country as a united people (*Ubumwe*)’ (Rusagara 2005).
- 4 Augusto Boal created Forum Theatre in an effort to break down the ‘invisible wall’ between the actors and audience in theatre. The goal is for the audience members to develop action plans towards the resolution of actual personal conflicts through dramatic interventions. The spectator of the drama does not only watch the performance, but also acts – becoming what Boal called the ‘spect-actor’.
- 5 Based on experiences arising from the story circle exercise, in collaboration with another research project called Connective Memories (CM)<sup>5</sup> led by Kirrily Pells the MAP project explored how arts-based methodologies open up possibilities for understanding and exploring the dynamics and mediation of memories, particularly in the context of intergenerational relations (see Pells, 2018) and whether this might offer an approach to envisaging alternative futures in addressing

past legacies of violence. The connection of stories to past, present, and future events was used to explore the concept of memory with MAP Master Trainers and Youth Trainers in a combined workshop between the MAP and CM in April 2019.

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## 27 Lest all things be held unalterable

Brecht's message to 'zombie democracies'

*Marina Henriques Coutinho*  
(*tran. M. Herman*)

**BERTOLT BRECHT'S DEMAND** in the prologue to his play *The Exception and the Rule* has become widely known in Rio de Janeiro over the last couple of years.

We particularly ask you  
When a thing continually occurs  
Not on that account to find it natural  
In an age of bloody confusion  
Ordered disorder, planned caprice,  
And dehumanized humanity, lest all things  
Be held unalterable!

(Brecht, 1990, p.132)

The German writer's face, as well as these lines from his work, have been printed onto shirts, used by citizens and used repeatedly on placards present in numerous demonstrations set in the heart of the city – the Cinelândia. The square, almost always chosen by the *cariocas*<sup>1</sup> to be the stage of the debates surrounding important political discussions that have accompanied our history, has recently taken on, with boosted strength, its sense of a contemporary *agora*.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, during the months that preceded the Olympic Games, the Cinelândia was occupied by people who disagreed with the excessive public expenditure on the construction of monumental stadiums. In August of that same year, following the Olympics, other demonstrations broke out opposing the *impeachment* of President Dilma Rousseff. In 2017, Michel Temer's administration's proposal to reform labour laws and reduce workers' rights was motivation for more protesting. The following year, 2018, many gathered in the *carioca* 'agora' to mourn and share their grief over the assassination of city councillor Marielle Franco. It was also in Cinelândia that, in October of the same year, a new wave of protests referred to as 'Ele Não' (Not Him) took place against Jair Bolsonaro's presidential bid.

Brecht's invitation to indignation revealed itself in the glances exchanged by those who met in the square during those events. In the midst of the crowd, we felt we overcame the limits of individual powerlessness to find, in the collective, the necessary strength to keep moving. Nevertheless, whilst the playwright's words pushed us forward, encouraging us to be more active given the conjuncture, the perception that we waited in vain for our presence to be noticed, for our voices to be heard by the citizens who weren't there, newspapers, congressmen and government offices, increased. The symptoms of our already fragile democracy's illness worsened. The last gatherings at the Cinelândia before the election results demanded from us an attitude similar to that of a family member

visiting a terminally sick relative. While the presence of the ill body still comforts, it is disturbing to recognize that the vital organs have already begun to collapse.

Recent publications have dedicated themselves to investigating the crisis of contemporary democracy.<sup>3</sup> In *How Democracy Ends*, David Runciman states that:

An emptied version of democracy risks nurturing us into a false sense of security. We can continue to trust in democracy and turn to it for salvation, while boiling with rage at its inability to correspond to our expectations. Democracy can start to collapse even when it appears to be intact.

(Runciman, 2018, p. 10)

In a similar approach, Boaventura de Sousa Santos cites the demonstrations that took place on squares in various parts of the world between 2011 and 2013 (*Occupy* in the United States, the ‘Arab Spring’, Brazil, Greece etc.), a period he names “revolts of indignation”, defined, in most cases, by demands for “real democracy”. For Santos, this means that already by that time “democracy didn’t exist, or if it had existed it had been seized by anti-democratic forces which had distorted or emptied it of its popular essence” (Santos, 2016, p.7).

When democracy fails, Runciman affirms, we usually expect a spectacular fracture, such as the occupation of Rio de Janeiro’s streets by military tanks on 31 March 1964;<sup>4</sup> a successful coup d’état that delineates clearly the difference between what we lived yesterday and what we live today. While the classic coup works as an isolated event, exceptional, performative – acute illness – this new breed of coups operates in a gradual manner, camouflaged in the entrails of democracy: chronic illness.

In the case of Brazil, multiple factors contributed to the progression of the illness until its most serious prognosis, which culminated in the election of Jair Bolsonaro to the highest office in the Republic. It is not possible to deepen this analysis in this chapter; however, it is important to mention some relevant aspects of this process, as noted by Luis Felipe Miguel in *The Reemergence of the Brazilian Right*. The author examines the consolidation of three branches of the Brazilian extreme-right in the past few years: the “libertarians”, who preach the notion of a minimal state. The “religious fundamentalists”, who have gained political strength since the 1990s and are known as the *bancada evangélica*.<sup>5</sup> And the “radical right”, which has been recycling the idea of “red scare, a revival of anticommunism”. Moreover, the author reviews other aspects that could have contributed to this situation: “the ugly face of the middle class [...] that saw itself again faced with its everlasting dread of losing its disparity in relation to the poor” (Miguel, 2018, p.23).

On 17 April 2016, many Brazilians watched, on television, the vote on Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment in Brasília. The live feed, on a Sunday evening, gathered the nation around the big event. It was not a World Cup game, but we were all there, staring at the TV, spectators. The *right* revealed itself through speeches on the microphone. As congressional representatives presented their votes, many of us increasingly felt that very little was known about those characters, our ‘representatives’. With very few did I feel identification; for most, I felt repulsion and for some even fear. What kind of Brazil is this? I asked myself.

David Runciman argues that “in most functional democracies, the people almost always limit themselves to the role of spectator [...] the people limit themselves to watch



a performance where its role is to applaud or deny applause at the appropriate moments” (Runciman, 2018, p. 53–54). Still, according to the author, contemporary political science has coined various terms to describe this situation: ‘audience democracy’, ‘spectator democracy’ or, as he prefers, ‘zombie democracy’.

What is the diagnosis of this illness, which affects not only Brazil but also so many other countries? It is the incompatibility between democracy and capitalism. This illness is not new: it has been growing for a long while, allowing for structural situations of misery and social exclusion to proliferate in the system’s entrails – make-believe democracy. A perverse pact proposes the comfortable coexistence of neoliberal capitalism and a “low intensity democracy” (Santos, 2016), which serves the interests of those who hold social and economic power. Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world, controlled by narratives of the landowning oligarchies and racist political elites where the “historical injustices originated in colonialism coexist with the social injustices inherent to capitalism” (Santos, 2016, p. 150). The author affirms that we live in societies that are politically democratic but socially fascist. Our representative democracy already consented to living together with “social fascism”, in which the most powerful side (individuals or groups) exerts veto rights over essential aspects of the lives of the less powerful (Santos, 2016, p. 132).

The numerous occasions on which *carioca* citizens have occupied the Cinelândia ‘agora’ in recent years have revealed, through the echoing cries of the persistent struggles, an indignation with the low (or extremely low) intensity level of our democracy; on one specific occasion, an indignation with a zero level of intensity. The assassination of Marielle Franco,<sup>6</sup> a councilwoman elected by the city of Rio de Janeiro, prompted thousands of people to take to the streets in March of 2018. The crowd mourned Marielle, a black homosexual woman from the *favela*, a symbol for many struggles, who had earned a place in parliament. The assault against her life was also a blow to democracy and a landmark moment in the historical process we lived. That day there was more silence than outcries in the square. Even so, someone called at the microphone: “Marielle!” The crowd answered, “present”.

We live “In an age of bloody confusion, ordered disorder, planned caprice, and dehumanized humanity” (Brecht, 1990, p. 132); however, nothing should seem impossible to change. Brecht’s advice was always there to remind us. It is no wonder that his words were so coherent for us in those moments of protest. The aforementioned text is part of the prologue to *The Exception and the Rule* (1929–1930), part of the collection of the *Lehrstücke* – learning plays<sup>7</sup> – in which Brecht, following the direction of most of his work, exposes the main target of his critique: capitalist society.

The learning plays represent a particular chapter in Brecht’s work for radicalizing the spectators’ position, treating them as active participants. Although these experiments were interrupted,<sup>8</sup> Brecht’s appeal for a more critical spectator, capable of intervening in the social reality, underpinned the whole of his work:

If we want now to surrender ourselves to this great passion for producing, what ought our representations of men’s life together to look like? What is that productive attitude in face of nature and of society, which we children of a scientific age would like to take up pleasurably in our theatre? [...] The attitude must be critical.<sup>9</sup>

Here, it is worth raising some questions: how to mobilize spectators to be more active in facing these make-believe democracies? How to create processes that represent

advances towards the ideal of “high intensity democracy” supported by Boaventura de Sousa Santos? What role does theatre take in the face of this scenario?

In *Crack Capitalism* John Holloway (2013) states that we live in times in which it seems there is no hope. In which we ask ourselves: “How can we think of radically changing the world when this seems so impossible? What can we do?” The author’s answer to this almost inexorable world is already in development: crack capitalism, “create cracks and let them expand, let them multiply, let them resonate, let them flow together” (Holloway, 2013, p.14).

According to Holloway, millions of people around the world already take part in this movement. In the same way, Santos argues that: “Never has global capitalism and western modernity tried to snare so many people in the world, suffocating human rights and democracy; but at the same time never have so many identified the codes of the trap and attempted to use it against the trap-setters” (Santos, 2016, p.135). For Santos, radicalizing democracy means intensifying its friction with capitalism. He also adds that for this struggle to be credible it must not constrict itself solely to the political system, but must spread through the whole of social reality.

Holloway, as well as Santos, invites us to “refuse-and-create” alternatives in these times of dehumanized humanity. Both trust in the articulation of different movements and organizations – “constellation of resistances” (Santos, 2016), “confluence of cracks” (Holloway, 2013) – in order to transform unequal power relations. The author’s call is similar to Brecht’s, who during the Weimar Republic already believed in theatre’s potential to unravel the “trap’s code”. As clarified by Flavio Desgranges, the intention behind the learning plays was to:

[...] escape the means of production inherent to bourgeois theatre. To remove the label of commodity from theatrical production and encounter an audience that can establish a different kind of relation with the work of art. An audience for whom theatre is *necessary*, creating an important space for reflection and action in the face of the challenges of their time (our emphasis).

(Desgranges, 2006, p. 80)

Brecht’s proposition was to encounter another spectator, different in kind from the one who sought comfort in the seats of traditional theatres. His intention was to reach out to other audiences, such as children and young people in schools or workers and their unions. And the moment was ripe for this in that there were many workers’ organized theatre and choral groups as well as schools open to receiving theatre groups. Brecht explains that, “the learning play teaches when one acts in it, not when one watches it.”<sup>10</sup> By abolishing the separation between acting and observing, transforming passive spectators into active participants, the learning plays contribute with a perspective which views the theatre experience, the collective artistic act, as something capable of creating a critical outlook and political conduct.

There comes to mind the diversity of theatre practices that have crossed the confines of conventional commercial theatres to reach and act in different spheres, such as initiatives promoted by various social actors in the prison system, *favelas*, hospitals, schools or in the field of non-formal education, and in programmes regarding human rights and health. A set of experiences has proliferated worldwide in the past twenty years, which combine critical thinking and creativity, shaping, as Tim Prentki explains:

[...] social analyses that come from sectors of communities where the opportunities to express an opinion, yet alone act upon it, are often non-existent.[...] the theatre process develops spaces where alternatives can be posited, where, through the force of the dramatic narrative, the actors might be transformed from the objects into the subjects of their own development.

(Prentki, 2009, p. 26)

These are theatre initiatives that encounter specific social groups, involving the participation of common people, their stories, places, desires, priorities, and that are motivated by the political will to transform collective and individual realities through theatre. Are these theatre practices examples of time-space cracks? Spaces with strength to build processes towards social emancipation “transforming unequal power relations into relations of shared authority” (Santos, 2016, p.138)? To what extent do these actions make the world less comfortable for capitalism by inspiring autonomy, facing patterns of domination and preparing critically minded citizens and spectators in our zombie democracies?

With a proposal similar to Brecht’s in the period of his learning plays, are these contemporary actions not capable of combating the critical anesthesia of today’s citizens, helping to transform our democracies of spectators into *democracies of actors*? Or, as Boal puts it, into democracies of “spect-actors”, in which we are prepared to intervene?

The Saturday following Marielle’s murder, I was in the *Complexo da Maré*.<sup>11</sup> Accompanied by the undergraduate theatre students who participate in the Theatre in Communities Programme,<sup>12</sup> I entered the Maré Arts Centre.<sup>13</sup> I remember seeing a poster with childlike handwriting sitting behind the reception desk. The words read: ‘Marielle, present!’ We were still preparing ourselves to welcome the students from *Maré* who comprised our theatre group at the centre as we pondered on the best way to start the class. We were in Marielle’s territory. Many there had known her personally and had followed her trajectory championing human rights until her swearing in as councilwoman for the city of Rio de Janeiro. Before starting the activities, we stood in a circle around the poster. Silence. Some girls arrived late. I remember clearly the image of their arrival as I thought: *Marielles*, more *Marielles*! After the silence, the class progressed a little less cheerfully.

That year, the centre’s group had chosen to work with the theme of black heritage. The process was spearheaded by the undergraduate student Diego Marques, who shared with his group his research on “Jongueira Pedagogy”.<sup>14</sup> By way of the lessons taken from the manifestation of the afro-Brazilian tradition, which Diego – as *jongueiro* (jongo practitioner) – knows well, family stories brought by the young group members, along with objects and letters, were developed into a dramatic piece.

These elements were worked on through debates and diverse exercises and improvisations, which culminated with the staging of the performance *Maré Roots*. In one of the play’s scenes, the teenagers invited spectators onto the stage in order to build an image of a tree rooted in Maré. That cultural event was a response to the hard year of 2018. With poetry, we paid homage to Marielle’s continued presence. One of the teenagers, Ariane Macedo, wrote: “Maré, woman! She has phases, she has colours, she has speech; her name is history, surname resistance; her body is filled with blackness, strength, courage, persistence; this is *Muré*”.<sup>15</sup>

I ask myself if that group had not in fact created a time-space in which, through educational and artistic practices, it was possible (even if on the threshold of impossibility) to resist with critical thinking and creativity what Santos defines as the three types of

contemporary domination – capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy. To what extent does that initiative, as well as many others spread around Brazil and the world, contribute to the building of a high intensity democracy, explained by the author as:

The one carried out by real individuals with real stories [...] the real experience of a real wager in a future to be realized [...] in a remote village in the *Chiapas* or the *Andes* [...] in the big suburbs of Rio de Janeiro or Mumbai?

(Santos, 2016, p.157)

I write from afar. However, here, as a foreigner, I have also found examples of time-space cracks. “Have the courage to be happy”, says a quote from Augusto Boal painted on the entrance to Cardboard Citizens’ headquarters in London. Boal’s words reminded me of the Brazil I had left a couple of weeks before, in December of 2018.<sup>16</sup> The recollections came accompanied by a sadness but Boal, as always, summoned us to the struggle. His words were an excellent welcome for that cold English afternoon. I opened the door, curious as to what I would find inside.

That afternoon, Adrian Jackson worked with a group on a session of *newspaper theatre*.<sup>17</sup> The process had started the day before and would culminate in the acting of small scenes created from excerpts from mainstream newspapers chosen by the *cardboard citizens*. In the performance’s most memorable moment, the group members satirized an article on a luxuriously designed type of wardrobe. They reproduced on stage lines from rich women praising the piece of furniture. Richard, a black man and group veteran, was the last member to join the others in this sketch, portraying the wealthy owner of one of these wardrobes. It was a scene of pure contradiction: a group of homeless people acting the roles of the futile characters that had been given space on that news story. While the audience laughed, the scene cut to a reminder that homelessness was still rising in the UK and that in 2018 three hundred and twenty thousand people were registered in the condition.<sup>18</sup> The *citizens’* presence contrasted with the news pieces, which almost seemed fictitious, provoking laughter while, concomitantly, providing the audience with a sharp reality shock: discomfort in the face of the onstage criticism of social disparities present in that society.

As Boal used to say, newspapers are a work of fiction. In fact, what can be said of those articles which seemed to depict an alternate reality? What to do with them other than what the *citizens* did? Use them to reveal what is almost often purposely hidden.

In very different contexts, but with intentions similar to those found in actions present in Brazil today, applied theatre practices summon humanity in a dehumanized world and rescue values most crucial for human coexistence: “comradeship, dignity, amorosity, love, solidarity, fraternity, friendship, ethics: all these names stand in contrast to the commodified, monetized relations of capitalism” (Holloway, 2013, p.45).

I observe Brazil from a distance. It is Carnival. Amid news about those looting our democracy – those who attempt to filch our hope – I see *Mangureira* parade through the *Sapucaí* singing: “the history that history doesn’t tell, the inside-out of the same story [...] It’s time to hear the Marias, Mahins, Marielles, Malês”.<sup>19</sup> At that moment, the citizens, men and women, active participants and spectators, occupied the *Marques de Sapucaí* in order to express, with happiness and reproach, their anti-colonialist, anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist struggles during the most democratic and popular festival in the country. Finally, there are sufficient motives and will to wager that nothing is impossible to change. And if that bet is successful, I must agree with Santos: “I will feel accomplished for having

contributed to it. If not, I'll try to comfort myself with the idea that I lived in a time when all other choices were obstructed and wisely allowed myself to be fooled so as not to give my consent to barbarity, a barbarity without solution" (Santos, 2016, p.135–136).

## Notes

- 1 Demyonym referring to anything related to the city of Rio de Janeiro.
- 2 The *agora* was a central public space in ancient Greek city-states. The literal meaning of the word is 'gathering place' or 'assembly'. The *agora* was the centre of many aspects of the social life in the city and, in this sense, it can be compared to our Cinelândia square.
- 3 Runciman (2018), Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) and Santos (2016).
- 4 The 31st of March 1964 is regarded as the inception of the military coup that established the Military Dictatorship in Brazil, which lasted twenty-one years (1964–1985).
- 5 Luis Miguel is cautious about using the expression '*bancada evangélica*'. According to him, the wording ignores differences between various protestant denominations, and excludes minority sectors with more progressive stances. Translator's note: Brazilian representatives often create cross-party political groups based on their fundamental beliefs and main policy concerns. These coalitions receive the name *bancadas*, directly translated as 'benches'. The *bancada evangélica* (evangelical bench) is comprised of religious right-wing politicians linked to the country's main evangelical denominations.
- 6 Marielle Franco was *carioca* and a sociologist with a masters degree in public management, in which she defended a thesis on the work of the *UPPs* (Police Pacification Units). A mother at 19 years old, Marielle got involved with activism in social movements in 2000. In 2006, she was part of state representative Marcelo Freixo's campaign team, later becoming his advisor. Working for Freixo, she coordinated the Defense of Human Rights and Citizenship Commission at the Rio de Janeiro State Legislative Assembly. In 2016, in her first time running for office, she was elected councilwoman for the city of Rio de Janeiro, part of the coalition Change is Possible (PSOL and PCB parties). With 46 thousand votes, she was the fifth most voted for politician in Rio, and the second most voted for woman countrywide.
- 7 The Flight across the Ocean (1928–1929); The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent (1929); The Yes Sayer, The No Sayer (1929–1930); The Decision (1930); The Exception and the Rule (1929–1930); The Horatians and the Curiatians (1934). In addition to these plays, fragments from *Downfall of the Egotist Johann Fatzer* and *Baal*. The learning plays are the subject of various publications in portuguese, among them works by researchers Ingrid Koudela and Vicente Concílio.
- 8 Brecht was driven into exile by the rise of Nazism in 1933.
- 9 A Short Organum for the Theatre (1948), sections 21 and 22.
- 10 Brecht, B 1937, *Para um teoria da peça didática*, apud Koudela, I D, 1991, p.16, *Brecht: um jogo de aprendizagem*, Perspectiva, São Paulo.
- 11 The Complexo da Maré is a district that includes 16 shanty-town communities. It is located next to Guanabara Bay, between Brazil Avenue and The Red Line, two of the main access roads to the city of Rio de Janeiro. There are some 132,000 inhabitants in Maré, living in about 38,000 households. Maré has a history of abandonment by public powers. Such abandonment brings the population closer to the experience of other residents of the Brazilian urban peripheries, whose daily life is marked by the combination of numerous vulnerabilities: poor schooling, contact with criminal groups, frequent armed conflicts and prejudice.
- 12 The University extension programme, Theatre in Communities, has been realized and coordinated by Prof. Marina Henriques Coutinho since 2011. It runs in places located in the *favela* complex of Maré and Penha, poor neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro. The programme is the result of a partnership between the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), the Maré Development Networks (REDES) with Maré Arts Centre, the City Health Centre Américo Veloso and Arena Carioca Dicró. In these places, there are theater workshops for teenagers and

adults every Saturday morning that are facilitated by students of the undergraduate theater course at UNIRIO.

More information about the programme is available on the webpage <http://teatroemcomunidades.com.br/>.

- 13 The Maré Arts Centre hosts the Maré Free Dance School. It also serves as headquarters to choreographer Lia Rodrigues' dance group, and offers an intense schedule of artistic, cultural and political events. More information on the Maré Arts Centre is available on the webpage: [www.redesdamare.org.br/br/info/3/centro-de-artes-da-mare](http://www.redesdamare.org.br/br/info/3/centro-de-artes-da-mare).
- 14 "Jongueira Pedagogy" is the subject of Diego Marques' Scientific Initiation research project. Used as a methodological tool, the *Jongo* is a cultural practice originated in the southeast of Brazil. Diego's research investigates the *Jongo's* poetic discourse, dance and music and how, together with Theatre, it can create new narrative possibilities. Diego Marques' research was carried out in collaboration with Tamires Gomes and Christian Santos, his colleagues at the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro.
- 15 Translator's note: The word '*muré*' is a neologism by Ariane Macedo. It consists of the combination of the words *Maré* and *Mulher*, Portuguese for woman.
- 16 License of absence due to my post-doctorate in collaboration with Professor Tim Prentki at the University of Winchester's Centre for Performance Practice and Research, United Kingdom.
- 17 One of the methods created by Boal that: "consists of various techniques that allow the transformation of news or any other non-dramatic material into scenes". Cf. Boal, A 1980, p.165.
- 18 Richardson, H, 2018, At least '320,000 people homeless in Britain' BBC, 18 November, viewed January 2019 [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-46289259](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-46289259).
- 19 The *Estação Primeira de Mangueira* was Rio de Janeiro's 2019 Carnival champion, with a parade titled "History to lull grownups to sleep", created by Leandro Vieira, praising characters from Brazil's history often excluded from history books and narratives.

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## 28 Being imperfect

### Breakin' away from relating competitively in Singapore

Adelina Ong

**HE WAS HIDING** behind the pillar, trying to make himself disappear.

In July 2015, I organised a workshop for five young people at Lakeside Family Service Centre (FSC) in Singapore.<sup>1</sup> The free workshop was positioned as part of the FSC's outreach activities, engaging youths from low-income families in the neighbourhood. Although this was advertised as a 'breakin' x applied theatre' workshop, most participants came because they wanted to learn how to dance.<sup>2</sup> My co-facilitator, Felix Huang, began by teaching us some basic 'toprock' steps.<sup>3</sup> Z stood behind a pillar, hidden from Huang's line of sight. He was struggling with turning while dancing in rhythm. I moved to the back of the room. Z saw me approaching and hugged the pillar, petrified. I danced next to him at a slower pace so he could follow along. Z slowly let go of the pillar and started to try the moves. But every time a new move was taught, Z would vanish behind the pillar again. Extending Majid Rahnema's reflections on participation with the Japanese affect of *wabi sabi*, this case study will suggest that being imperfect with others can facilitate more compassionate ways of relating in a hypercompetitive place.

#### Dancing like a chicken

For development theorist Majid Rahnema, recognising that our ability to relate to other human beings who cohabit this earth is limited by our own biases and inculcated values is a first step towards being able to participate fully in the wider living world (Rahnema, 2010, p.139). This has resonance with the idea of *wabi*. In *wabi sabi*, *wabi* is an acknowledgement of imperfection despite doing all you can do to treat your guests well. In the context of a tea gathering (*chanoyu*), *wabi* is related to 'owabi' (おわび) which translates as 'I am sorry for the imperfections of my service' (Sen, 2010, p.59). *Sabi* is related to the idea of quiet 'enjoyment and appreciation of the lingering memory after some beautiful moment had vanished' (p.63). This idea of *sabi* evokes a contemplation of impermanence in quiet stillness. *Wabi sabi* is not an adjective, but an affect evoked in response to the beauty of imperfection that reminds one of the impermanence of life (Kempton, 2018, p.29). This appreciation of the imperfect and impermanent in *wabi sabi* is, I suggest, significant for applied theatre facilitators as we invite participation and listen to our participants.

In critiquing the manipulative way in which participation is used to legitimate foreign control over populations in developing societies, Rahnema suggests that instead of 'empowerment', this encounter between activists and participants of development programmes might be approached as an opportunity 'to live and to relate differently' (Rahnema, 2009, p.143, 145). Rahnema persuasively argues that participatory

relationships, motivated by the activist's desire to empower the participant, often displace existing power relationships by conditioning participants to embrace Eurocentric notions of power as liberatory (Rahnema, 2010, p.135). This is manipulative and nurtures a dependency on knowledge and services provided by the foreign activist instead of enabling the co-creation of new knowledge through the participatory process (p.129, 134). In extending Rahnema's reflections on participation to the facilitator-participant relationship in applied theatre interventions, this case study will explore the possibilities of relating and living differently that emerge from adopting *wabi sabi* as a way of being *with* participants. This appreciation of the imperfect and impermanent might, I suggest, be sustained by a way of living that constantly works towards recognising, and revealing, a new appreciation of our transient lives in the world and new understandings of our relationship to other living and nonliving beings.

After Huang had taught us a couple of freezes, he gathered us to form a cypher.<sup>4</sup> To create a cypher, participants form a tight circle in the centre of the room, and move together, stepping from side to side. As dancers enter the cypher, one by one, the participants continue dancing in sync to maintain the circular formation. The cypher is a place of improvisation where dancers 'instantly incorporate mistakes into a larger framework that re-characterises them as being correct' (Schloss, 2009, p.101). Huang demonstrated how one might take on a character and adapt the dance steps we had learned to fit this character. Although this may appear to distort the moves that one is meant to perform, Huang emphasised that portraying a character consistently through these basic steps is held in high regard, as a creative interpretation that gives each dancer their 'style'. He called his first character Angry Man, and stepped into the cypher with fists clenched and arms tensed, performing the dance moves as if he was fighting for justice. Then Huang performed The Thinker, arms swinging fluidly into various freezes that conveyed being deep in thought. Huang then invited the participants to enter the cypher with their own characters. I looked at Z and he had his arms crossed in front of him. He was not dancing. In fact, he was slowly retreating from the circle. Z kept retreating until his heel hit a stack of plastic storage boxes and he realised he could not step back anymore. I decided to enter the cypher with a character that would reveal how physically awkward and uncoordinated I really was. Entering the cypher with arms flapping like a chicken, I proceeded to do the 'running man'.<sup>5</sup> Z caught my eye and his eyes widened as he tried not to laugh. He chose not to enter the cypher, but Z started to step closer towards the circle and dance in sync with the rest.

The aesthetic of *wabi* has been described by tea master Sen So-oku as a 'minimal, egalitarian beauty ... seek[ing] harmony by creating equality ... a simple unpretentious beauty with which all participants identify' (Sen, 2010, p.33-34). For Sen, *wabi* represents a world of simple beauty that can be realised by and shared with anyone (p.35). A teacup that is worn with age is more beautiful than an ornate, perfectly painted teacup (p.34). Although I would not describe my running chicken dance as beautiful, there was a sense of *wabi* where my (imperfect) dancing had started to bring us just a little closer, as we experimented with silly and mischievous characters together. The other participants seemed to relax and enter the cypher, one by one.

Next, I invited the participants to create an abstract shape that represents their fears. I asked for a participant to help me demonstrate this. I gently guided the participant into a kneeling position, placing one hand in front of my eyes as the other hand stretched forward, groping while not being able to see. I decided to explain my fears to the participants, to challenge their perception of PhD candidates as people who do not struggle at all with



their studies. For Sen, '*wabi* invites humility. The self is negated by being absorbed in something else' (p.34). The contemplation of a broken (imperfect) vase holding a single bloom that has just begun to wither (impermanence) evokes 'compassion and aesthetic sensibility' that 'could open, for the first time, a new world of possibilities', encouraging 'quiet detachment' from the material desires of this world (p.156). In making my fears (imperfections) apparent to my participants, I problematise the competitive, academically successful self that I am conditioned to present in Singapore.

In Singapore, young people in formal education are presently assessed relative to one another. The Ministry of Education announced in 2018 that it will cease the practice of grading national examinations on a bell curve by 2021, but some parents have argued that 'such a system which measures children's abilities relative to their peers is vital training for the real world' (Jagdish, 2018). This belief in competition has created a hypercompetitive education environment where students learn to relate to their peers as competitors. Students have sabotaged their peers' work and high-scoring students who struggle to cope with the academic stress of maintaining straight As are told, 'if you keep up this way you are going to fail' (Chaw in Davie, 2018). Performing academic excellence becomes a form of competitive bluffing that is used to intimidate the competition. I told the participants that I am a slow writer, a mature student and, often, I feel like I am not smart enough to do a PhD. In making my struggles with academic expectations (imperfections) apparent, I sought to negate the expectation to perform perfection and assert intellectual superiority. I told the participants not to speak their fears out loud. That demonstration of my internal monologue was just to give them an idea of how they might acknowledge their own fears after they've created their shapes. Everyone was paired up, including myself and Huang. We then took turns to create our shapes and share them with the group. Huang was paired with Z.

Huang put both of Z's hands on the back of his head, and guided Z into a position where he appeared to be hunched over with worry. When it was time for Z to create a shape of his fear, Z put one of Huang's hands on his head, and the other hand over his eyes, and said, 'Shy. Got homework, don't want to do. Don't want to study'. One could choose to take Z's words literally, concluding that he is lazy or irresponsible, but I want to suggest that Z's shape of fear reveals a struggle to gain knowledge that remains incomprehensible and elusive, even though he tries. In her research on inequality in Singapore, sociologist Teo Yeo Yenn has noted that low-income families who cannot afford to send their children to preschool have found that not being able to read and write in English by the start of compulsory education at six years of age (Primary One) significantly disadvantages their child's ability to cope with English and Mathematics (Teo, 2017, p.4). This initial disadvantage can negatively impact the child's long-term experience of formal education. Parents who can afford to do so pay for private tuition and accelerated learning enrichment classes.<sup>6</sup> Teachers in formal education feel compelled to teach at a faster pace to engage these students, but this exacerbates the struggle to learn for children from low-income families. This accelerated pace in formal education normalises academic precociousness and validates the purchase of private tuition and enrichment classes in ways that reinforce inequality. Young people from low-income families may mistakenly form an understanding of themselves as not academically inclined. Z has identified studying as his fear. In distancing himself from his fear (by not studying), Z inevitably confirms the negative (undeserved) narratives that are imposed upon young people like him who are unsympathetically dismissed as lazy. They are not lazy, but their fear of studying leads to similar academic outcomes.

### ‘Battling’ inequality

Then I invited the participants to ‘battle’ their fears using the dance moves they had learned. In an interview with Schloss, Brooklyn b-boy Tiny Love asserts that ‘battling’ is ‘not like trying to kill each other. It’s more like topping the next one and going to the next level’ (Tiny Love in Schloss, 2009, p.108). The *dance battle* can be intensely competitive where dancers learn from each other by mimicking their opponent’s moves and trying to perform it even better than their opponent. For his *dance battle* with fear, Z chose a combination of martial arts moves, shadow boxing and then jumping in the air before forcefully landing an elbow inches away from Huang’s back. When it came to Huang’s turn, Huang chose not to perform any dance moves. Instead, he put one arm around Z’s shoulder, as if comforting a friend in need of some encouragement. Huang appeared to have interpreted Z’s ‘shy’ as ‘scared’ and was moved to allay Z’s fears, encouraging Z to persevere in his studies. Z’s admission of struggles appeared to somewhat diminish Huang’s impetus to compete, evoking a place of openness.

I suggest that it is in being imperfect *with* each other that we might begin to form new understandings of *us* in the world. In this hypercompetitive education landscape of Singapore, I suggest that admitting imperfection might open up non-competitive ways of being *with* each other that might lead towards a new understanding of *us* – one that offers more compassionate ways of living together in this place. For Judith Butler, being vulnerable encourages receptiveness to the experience of another body (Butler, 2015, p.211). In taking the shape of Huang’s fears, Z appeared to open himself up to understanding Huang’s worries. In doing so, Z may have recognised struggles that he could identify with and responded to Huang’s present vulnerability with a shape that revealed his struggle with academic expectations. Being vulnerable, in this exchange between Huang and Z, was expressed as an openness to experience each other’s fears. This openness can create moments of possibility where new connections might be formed. This openness is what prompts us to relate differently to each other. It creates new possibilities for being *with* our participants. Z may have perceived Huang as an outstanding, intimidatingly flawless, b-boy and facilitator. Being open to experiencing Huang’s fear may have shifted Z’s image of Huang, making Huang more relatable, and less intimidating, to Z. This relatability can, I suggest, begin to shift the power dynamics between facilitator and participant beyond the workshop. Z begins to understand that we, as facilitators, are not perfect.

The shape of fear created by Z conveyed a sense of loneliness, of being misunderstood as lazy and alienated for not studying diligently. This image of despair may have reminded Huang of his own struggles with his studies. After the workshop, I asked Huang why he chose to put his arm around Z instead of responding with dance moves. Huang said, ‘that move with Z was intended for both him and myself’. I suggest that the loneliness evoked by Z’s struggle with his studies prompted Huang to support Z. Instead of the usual admonishment received for not studying, Z found in Huang someone who listened with compassion and understood what it was like to struggle with academic expectations. In being *with* each other differently, we can open up possibilities for living together more compassionately.

### Ichi-go ichi-e (一期一会)

*Ichi-go ichi-e* literally translates as ‘one time, one meeting’ (Yasuhiko, 1989, p.27), capturing the essence of impermanence in *sabi*. Tea historian Murai Yasuhiko argues that ‘if

the aesthetic of *chanoyu* is to be sought in the relationship of people to things; its ethic is to be found in the relationship between people and people' (p.29).<sup>7</sup> The idea of *ichi-go ichi-e* encourages each participant in a tea gathering to cherish each meeting as transient, filled with unique conversations that will never be repeated again. This reminds both host and guest to set aside the preoccupations of the world to be in the moment, with each other. The tea gathering becomes an opportunity to care for each other. As host and guest immerse themselves in mutually attentive conversation, the ephemerality of vainglorious pursuits becomes apparent. Through these interactions, people form new understandings of themselves in the world.

In Ii Naosuke's *Chanoyu Ichi-e Shu* (Collection of Writings for the One-Time Tea Gathering) (1857), the passage 'Seated Alone in Meditation' describes how the host should enjoy a final cup of tea alone, 'reflect[ing] upon the fact that [this *chanoyu*] can never be repeated', after the guests have departed (cited in Varley, 1994, p.188). In similar ways, applied theatre practitioners might reflect on moments where our participants have opened up new understandings of the world, long after the workshop has concluded. Following Rahnema, these interactions can open up new ways of relating that trouble the way we think about participation. On this occasion, Huang and Z found ways of relating non-competitively in that moment where they chose to open themselves to experience each other's struggles. At the end of the workshop, we gathered once again to dance in a cypher. Z did not retreat this time. Instead, he surprised us by somersaulting into the cypher, executing a few kicks and ending with a back flip. Z appeared to have formed a different understanding of himself through his interactions with Huang during the workshop. In this moment that will never be repeated, Z's dance compelled me to live differently, in place. Being imperfect *with* Z has challenged me to relate differently, to participate more compassionately, in this hypercompetitive place called Singapore.

## Notes

- 1 Family service centres are welfare organisations set up to provide a variety of financial assistance, family counselling services and after-school programmes for youths from low-income families.
- 2 I have chosen the term 'breakin'" instead of 'breakdancing' as the latter term is perceived as a name imposed on the dance by the media (Huntington, 2007, p.54).
- 3 Felix Huang is a second-generation b-boy, leader of Radikal Forze and founder of Recognize Studios in Singapore. 'Toprock' refers to dance moves executed while in a standing position.
- 4 A 'freeze' is a pose that marks the end of a dance set (Schloss, 2009, p.86).
- 5 The 'running man' is a disco move where dancers stretch the hands forward and pull backwards as the knees come up.
- 6 A 2015 poll of 500 parents found that eight in ten parents send their primary school children to private tuition with 52% saying 'it was to help their children keep up with others' (Davie, 2015). One in two parents with children already enrolled in tuition spend more than SGD\$500 (₹279) a month, per child, on tuition (Blackbox Research, 2012, p.4). Accelerated learning enrichment classes typically offer more experiential learning and teach one to two terms ahead of that which is assessed in the national curriculum. These classes are typically more expensive than tuition classes.
- 7 '*Chanoyu*' literally translates as 'hot water for tea' in Japanese. It is understood as 'the Japanese tea ceremony'.

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## 29 The gratitude enquiry

### Investigating reciprocity in three community projects

*Sue Mayo*

**IN 2016 I LED** three pilot projects, in three London locations, using dance, visual practice, baking and storytelling to investigate the theme of gratitude with community participants. Here I will describe the thinking that led me to the theme and practice, and consider moments from each of the projects, with a particular focus on those that reflect the centrality of relationality within participatory arts.

In all of my community performance practice, over 30 years, I had become fascinated by the small and large transactions between participants; the ways in which people made connections, by helping one another, by challenging one another, by swapping skills and stories. I could see that there were two main provocations to engagement going on in the project space. One provocation is offered by the artists, engaging the participants in particular artistic activity, and guiding and supporting them towards the creation of art objects or performances. The other provocation comes from the desire for interaction between participants, both within the art making and in the informal, undirected times. Using the metaphor of traditional weaving, where the *warp* refers to the threads that are strung vertically on a loom, and the *weft* are the threads that are woven in and out of the warp horizontally, I understood the project and the artist's offer as providing the *warp*, and the lateral communication and activity to be the *weft*. Both are needed to create the fabric.

My interest in the detail of what was going on in the room during participatory and collaborative arts practice was fuelled by two important and growing understandings. Firstly, that the group of participants in any project is profoundly involved in issues of participation and inclusion. This is not solely the responsibility of the facilitator, even where they are actively committed to both. The participants themselves can and will contribute to one another's involvement through their enactments of connectivity, and through their curiosity about one another. This active connection-forming will be both enabled and challenged by all that participants bring into a project with them; experience, identity, fears, hopes and preferences.

Secondly, I could see that different art forms and different facilitation styles encouraged different ways of being together. A previous research project (in 2012) in which I reflected on a series of projects using photography, dance, song, instrumental music and puppetry<sup>1</sup> made clear that each art form encouraged different spatial relationships, opportunities for conversation, skill levels and relationship building. For example, the photography project foregrounded technical skills and looking, as an individual, to create images. The artists running this project added drama games and group work to their sessions to build in more opportunities for relationships to form in what was a dominantly individually based activity. The puppet making brought people into small groups, where the act of making, and getting messy together, coincidentally created opportunities for informal and

far-ranging conversations. Learning to manipulate the giant puppet together brought new modes of being together, highly focussed and without any talking, but still connected, and built on the informal (the weft) as well as on the structured skills-based work (the warp). The opportunity to analyse these art forms in practice led me to want to explore further how the warp and weft interact in creative projects, and how the opportunities within these activities can be harnessed to make space for relationship-building for all the people in the space, artists and participants.

Searching for ways to read these interactions, I looked into research by social psychologists into gratitude, a pro-social, other-focussed emotion. Tiffany Watt Smith (2015: 116–118) describes the progression from Adam Smith's understanding of gratitude as an emotion that engenders response, and therefore reciprocity, in the 18th century, through to American Psychologist William McDougall, writing in the late 1920s. McDougall saw gratitude as an emotion that could provoke complex and contradictory feelings, especially when operating within fixed hierarchies, which it could be used to reinforce. Watt Smith points to reciprocity in terms of rewarding good deeds (ibid), the thankfulness being expressed in a material way, but there is also evidence of a much simpler, affective movement, unencumbered by grades of reward. Monica Bartlett and David DeSteno (2006: 2) write about 'the reciprocal, prosocial behaviour between a benefactor and a recipient', and Jo-Ann Stang (2006:13) points to the fact that the one experiencing gratitude feels 'positive about the benefit and the benefactor'. Notwithstanding the complexity of this trait or emotion, the aspect that most forcibly struck me was that the feeling and the expression of gratitude, when authentic and not imposed, reflect a recognition that all of us need something from others. This, and its corresponding movement (that we all have something to offer others), seems to me to be at the heart of relationship-building in the making of art together.

I then set up *The Gratitude Enquiry* projects, to both explicitly and implicitly investigate gratitude in participatory arts work, and to test some of the understandings suggested by the social scientists. Each project explored the theme in different ways; *I live in it* investigating the question of whether and how women feel grateful to their bodies; *Bread* exploring baking together and for one another, and the stories that result from this exchange; *Fanmail* inviting participants to write public and private thank you messages on beautiful fans which they made, and choosing whether or not to deliver them.<sup>2</sup> I hoped that the projects would both explore and reveal the reciprocal gestures of give and take, in the warp and the weft of the collaborations. I brought together a team of seven artists to work with me,<sup>3</sup> and we met together regularly to reflect, to interrogate and to question our overarching theme. Our intention was not only to reflect on how the theme worked for the participants, but also to be alert to all the interactions that the group created themselves, and how these might tell us something about reciprocity. All three projects were rich and full of discovery. In this case study I will focus on how, in each one, the theme of gratitude was threaded through both the warp and the weft.

### The projects

The first project, which I led in partnership with intergenerational arts charity Magic Me,<sup>4</sup> was a dance project, *I live in it*, exploring the possibility of being thankful to one's own body. The participants were 16 women aged between 15 and 90, all from Tower Hamlets in East London. The project invited the women to think about their relationship to their own bodies. I called the project *I live in it* after hearing a young woman

responding to the objectification of her body, by herself as much as by others. “It’s me!” she exclaimed, “after all, I live in it”.

We met weekly, after school, and worked towards a public performance, with original live music. Initially the women shared stories of marks on their bodies, scars, freckles, birthmarks. They discovered that one person liked to interlace her fingers with her toes in the bath and that one of the young women had broken her arm boxing. A woman with years of nursing experience gave thanks for her liver, which powered her life, and another praised her flexible joints. Conversations took place across difference, of age, class, ethnicity and faith, but the shared territory, literally the territory where we all lived, our bodies, created a space of celebration and sometimes of sadness and anxiety. We created a giant figure of a woman on the floor, and placed our stories on her, either in words or in objects. At first all the markers ignored the area from neck to knees, but as the weeks progressed, and the group had both structured and unstructured conversations, but also as a much more non-verbal sharing of narratives entered the room, the body began to fill up with breasts and menstruation, a tummy and a womb. The room felt full of stories, swimming between people. Each belonged to one person, and because many were shared non verbally they weren’t taken up by others and collectively owned. What was engendered was not commonality, but support and empathy. One woman remarked that she had never danced before, but now she felt safe to, because she was in “the company of everybody”.<sup>5</sup> Everyone was included through the offer and acceptance of all sorts of stories, with no hierarchy of age and experience or youth and health. Konstantina Werner, project volunteer, noted that the informal times also contributed:

As Project roles were suspended, there was no differentiation between facilitators, Project managers and participants, in this space everybody was met on a very personal level. This quickened the process of getting familiar with the people and with the relations between them, which evoked feelings of comfort and safety also inside the project space.

(Werner, 2016)

The second project, *Fanmail*, was run in partnership with Sydenham Garden, a therapeutic garden in South London, offering horticulture, art, singing and mindfulness to adults dealing with mental health and physical health issues.<sup>6</sup> Meeting weekly, we learned how to make paper fans. We also thought about how to use the fans to carry a message, and in this project, I used a psychology experiment to help inform the way in which we worked. Philip C. Watkins et al (2003) were interested in the difference between thinking about and expressing gratitude. They conducted an experiment in which one group of participants thought about someone living to whom they were grateful; another wrote down their thoughts about a living person to whom they felt grateful; and another wrote a letter to someone living to whom they were grateful, which the researchers told them would definitely be sent. The researchers had expected this last exercise to be the one that produced the most positive affect, but in fact it was the thinking exercise that showed a stronger positive affect. The researchers’ conclusion was that social anxiety and worry about how the letter would be received might account for this score. This research gave us a lot to think about as we approached a project where we were clearly suggesting that people write thank you letters, although we had planned from the start that they could write a message that was never sent. I remember that, some years ago, I wrote a long thank you letter to an ex-teacher of mine, who had died of Multiple Sclerosis. I knew

she'd never see it, but I needed to write it. We therefore imagined, from the outset, that the writing of the thank you message was likely to be the most important part, not the delivery, but still wanted to offer the choice.

When the visual artists and I were experimenting with forms of fan, we discovered some interesting possibilities that afforded a variety of ways of expressing the thankful, reflecting some of the elements of Watkins et al's experiment. Any writing needed to be done before the fan was fixed. The writing could be done so that it was a public message. In another version of the fan it could be written beneath a fold, hidden from the general viewer, but known to the recipient of the fan. If the writing was done at the bottom, it would be sealed into the handle of the fan and known only to the writer. In the first week we settled down to learn the skills. Fans are not easy, because you need to be very precise and take your time. In the second week we tentatively introduced the idea of the writing. Visual Artist Anna Sikorska commented on her own worry, before we started: '*Are people going to get this link between fans, fan mail and letters and these objects. Is it going to be forced? I shouldn't have doubted, people responded really well*' (Sikorska 2016). In the second workshop one participant without hesitation wrote to thank her Dad, Granny and two pets, all of whom had died, because '*You held me Hi*'.<sup>7</sup> Another wrote to herself, in the section of the fan that would be completely sealed. She told us that she needed to remember to thank herself sometimes, especially when she felt down, and this fan would always stay in her bag and remind her to do that. Another woman hid her message behind the fold at the top of the fan, and then released it, tied to a helium balloon, while another created a network of numbers, in which she had hidden her bank pin number. What all the participants told us was that the activity prompted them to think about what they were grateful for. This provoked some sense of the pro-social and the other-focussed, but also some pretty salty conversations about the need to cut people out of your life if they bring you down, and a wonderful, provisional love letter: '*Darling, you make my heart sing.... Occasionally*'.<sup>8</sup> Sikorska's question, prior to the project, was a good one. Because we, the artists, are interested in a theme, why should it interest the participants? The majority of the group who came told us that they came because they wanted to learn to make fans. Our first session was dedicated to this skill. In the second week, when we opened up the theme many of the group were surprised that they would be allowed to talk. In another art group that they went to there was no talking. The conversation about thanking others then became quite fluid. Sometimes we were talking together, as a group, sometimes pairs chatted quietly, and once a participant wanted more time and went to a separate room to process difficult emotions with one of the artists. Individuals made choices – to share or not share what they wrote, to write to themselves, or to people who had passed on. The research theme became a malleable, dynamic element in the room, rather than a set of questions requiring answers. Through what the group told me and put into their fans, I was struck by how unsaid thank-yous could cause hurt, and also by the strong relationship between a beautiful aesthetic and a sincere, authentic expression of gratitude. Most of the fans were exhibited in an installation, hanging down from the trees in Sydenham Garden where they could be read by pulling on the elasticated strings before letting them bounce back upwards. But afterwards many of them were gifts, gifts to children and parents and friends, a thank you for which people were warmly thanked in return.

The third project, *Bread*, took place at Ovalhouse in South London,<sup>9</sup> where we worked with young emerging artists, in training with Ovalhouse, and older people from Stockwell Good Neighbours, a weekly club for African Caribbean Seniors. We had a plan that was in some ways very clear, and in others very sketchy. We knew that we were going to make



bread together. Bread making in a group is absolutely saturated with reciprocal gesture. One person holds the bowl for you while you mix the sticky dough; someone passes you the salt or helps you scrape dough off your fingers. When we all learned to pull the dough thin and see if it was the right consistency to have a 'window' everyone came to check. When there was silence it was very companionable, but often there was lots of chat. There were a great many stories of mothers, and, alongside an appreciation for home-made bread and organic flour, there was also an obsession with white sliced bread, hot and toasted. I remembered that many of the women in Stockwell Good Neighbours had been nurses at St Thomas's hospital, and they had told me about that first cup of tea and piece of toast in the canteen when they arrived at work at 5 a.m., and how they made toast for women who had just given birth. In a drama session we created scenes where bread was central, saving a life or a friendship, revealing an enmity or abandoned because of a breakdown in relationships. The sessions also brought up difficult feelings. For older people living alone there was the sense of having no one to feed. Everyone said they kept bread in the house in case a visitor called, but then often had to throw it out. One young woman thought about the kind of bread they ate at home and went home to her parents insisting that they taught her how to cook instead the breads from their different cultures of origin, which they did.

In the last baking session, everyone made six rolls for someone else. This meant asking what they liked and trying to follow their requests. Once the bread came out of the oven and was packaged up, people made short speeches when they handed over the bread. These were thank-yous, thank you for being such a lovely partner, thank you because I never would have met you otherwise and now my life feels different because I know you. I was surprised. We hadn't done ice breakers or name games or getting to know you exercises. But we had made stuff together, we had helped each other, we had fed each other. There was no hierarchy of gratefulness; everyone was saying thank you and being thanked. This was the shortest project, just four half-day sessions, and there was no outcome planned. But as musician Jamie McCarthy reflected: *'Focussing on gratitude as a subject did something about upping the awareness of interrelations and empathy and care. This as a subject matter infected the process in a really good way'* (McCarthy, 2016).

Looking back over these projects, I particularly like McCarthy's sense that the research question 'infected' the process. Preparing and framing the projects according to an investigation of gratitude, and then living them with a heightened sensitivity to this aspect of human interaction, made me even more interested in paying attention to the group's connections with one another in the participatory work. The social scientists whose work I read had turned to a study of gratitude with a strong sense of its importance in the building of relationship on a micro and a macro level. Making space for one another, in all our differences and disagreements, is crucial in work that is relational. In creative projects we can see the grittiness of these exchanges, when we like the gift but not the giver, when we might feel patronised or pushed, and also when we feel ourselves grow, in the knowledge that we have much to offer as well as much to gain. The small, dyadic moments of being thanked and being thankful, as well as the larger moments of thankfulness to the group, to the community, to the music or the dancing, can be a fundamental part of the delicate building blocks of human relations.

## Notes

- 1 <https://magicme.co.uk/resource/detail-and-daring/>.
- 2 Funded by Arts Council England.

- 3 Mia Harris, Mike Knowlden, Chuck Blue Lowry, Jamie McCartney, Surya Turner, Eleanor Sikorski, Anna Sikorska. Project Manager Sabrina Smith-Noble.
- 4 <https://magicme.co.uk/>.
- 5 Participant S. *I live in it* (Author's journal 2016).
- 6 [www.sydenhamgarden.org.uk/](http://www.sydenhamgarden.org.uk/).
- 7 Participant A. *Fanmail* (Author's journal 2016).
- 8 Participant D. *Fanmail* (Author's journal 2016).
- 9 [www.ovalhouse.com/](http://www.ovalhouse.com/).

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**Part V**

**Intervention**

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## 30 Introduction to intervention

*Tim Prentki*

**THE NOTION OF** intervention implies the arrival of some outside force to alter the dynamics of a static situation. Applied theatre, according to this understanding, is the agency of intervention forcing its way into closed worlds (schools, prisons, African villages, old people's homes, aboriginal communities) in order to provoke changes, such as dropping a boulder into a stagnant pond. The terms upon which the outsider enters the chosen community may well determine the response offered by participants to the proposed project or workshop. Many facilitators and companies only work by invitation as a point of principle, although this stance raises the question: whose invitation? For instance, prison theatre is normally undertaken in response to an invitation from the prison governor rather than the prisoners; TIE companies enter schools at the request of teachers rather than pupils; and international NGOs are typically invited by community-based organisations, which may or may not be representative of the participants in the applied theatre project. The very idea of intervention is implicated in issues of power and the right to speak on behalf of others. While practitioners may and, we would argue, should be bound by democratic principles whereby the voice of each participant has an equal right to be heard in the process, the context in which the practice occurs may have predetermined inequalities structured into the formation of the group or community. The playing field is never level but there may be some scope for practitioners to elect whether to attempt to flatten the slope, to exacerbate the incline or merely to accept the existing contours.

Despite these caveats, interventions on behalf of or with those whose voices are not normally heard in the societies they inhabit are a vital feature of applied theatre practice since they act as a counterweight to the myriad interventions of the dominant into the lives of all of us. The power and reach of the dominant, neoliberal, economic model in the lives of almost all the inhabitants of the planet is cogently attested by Noam Chomsky. A sample of his writing is included here to remind readers of the macro context into which micro interventions of applied theatre are made. Those who are squeamish about the right of applied theatre workers to make exogenous cultural interventions might spare a thought for the multi-national corporations, government agencies and global media organisations that intervene thousands of times per day to interfere with our actions, beliefs and desires without incurring moral outrage. As Wolfgang Sachs points out:

The worldwide simplification of architecture, clothing, and daily objects assaults the eye; the accompanying eclipse of variegated languages, customs and gestures is already less visible; and the standardization of desires and dreams occurs deep down in the subconscious of societies. Market, state, and science have been the great universalizing powers; admen, experts and educators have relentlessly expanded their reign.

(Sachs, 1992:4)

In the face of this onslaught the interventions of applied theatre practitioners appear as very small beer, yet they constitute an important contribution to the antidote of the counter-culture. As a participatory, collective form of artistic and social engagement, theatre resists the isolating, passive modes of the dominant forms of screen culture. One of the socio-economic forces at work to induce passivity is colonialism and its legacy of neo-colonialism. In those nations or sections of nations where the people have been victimised by hundreds of years of propaganda into believing that their culture – the ways in which they make meaning in their lives – is second-rate or worthless, it is naïve to suppose that a move to self-empowerment and autonomy can always be made without the external involvement of a decolonising agency such as the facilitator of an applied theatre process. The people may have the will to decolonise but the generations of oppression may have robbed them of the means. An example of such an instance is offered by Ngũ gĩ wa Thiong’o in the famous case of the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre, where the force of peasants and workers allying their own forms of artistic expression to theatrical communication – finding and using their own voices – was deemed too severe a threat to the neo-colonial regime to be allowed to continue. This *locus classicus* of applied theatre intervention demonstrated what could be achieved when the will for change (and the invitation) came from the community itself and when the applied theatre process took its place among a network of movements dedicated to the self-development of that community, until the government determined on its own form of violent intervention.

Where applied theatre projects espouse the aim of transformation or social change, it might be expected that the practitioners would seek to work with those who are best suited to bring about change. But all too often there is an almost automatic assumption that applied theatre practices are to be located in the territory of the victims of personal and social oppression; empowerment for the disempowered. Such practices may serve the participants well in terms of confidence building and social skills but are unlikely to make much impact in terms of wider questions of structural transformation. It is, for example, commonplace for applied theatre processes to be used with female victims of domestic violence who may leave the workshop with a heightened awareness of their rights and with the confidence of their new empowerment that puts them at even greater risk of abuse from unchanged men who were no part of the workshop process. Who needs to be changed? To whom should theatre be applied? In the next phase of its existence applied theatre needs to cast its net wider to include the power-brokers at both national and local levels if these are the people with the greatest opportunity to effect change. One innovative example of such a practice is the *Teatro di Nescosto* (Hidden Theatre), run by Annet Henneman from Volterra in Italy. Having researched and worked with the stories of refugees and asylum seekers, Henneman develops performances through a process called ‘theatre reportage’, in which members of the national and European parliaments and relevant professionals recite these verbatim stories alongside actors and refugees. The company has extended its work beyond the European context through a network of international actors. By bringing politicians into direct contact with the raw, very raw, material of actual stories, cases are transformed into people and the theatrical force of empathy is let loose upon those who have the power to make and unmake the legal framework.

There are many strategies for intervention; as many as the contexts into which a practitioner might intervene. ‘Optimum intervention’, to borrow Zakes Mda’s phrase, is not achieved through a fixed formula but only through a dialectical interaction of participants

and facilitators who are practising a co-intentional approach to self-development and social change.

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## 31 Profit over people

*Noam Chomsky*

*Profit over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*, Seven Stories Press (1999), excerpt from Chapter 1, pp. 19–40.

### Neoliberalism and global order

**I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS** each of the topics mentioned in the title: neoliberalism and global order. The issues are of great human significance and not very well understood. To deal with them sensibly, we have to begin by separating doctrine from reality. We often discover a considerable gap.

The term “neoliberalism” suggests a system of principles that is both new and based on classical liberal ideas: Adam Smith is revered as the patron saint. The doctrinal system is also known as the “Washington consensus,” which suggests something about global order. A closer look shows that the suggestion about global order is fairly accurate, but not the rest. The doctrines are not new, and the basic assumptions are far from those that have animated the liberal tradition since the Enlightenment.

### The Washington consensus

The neoliberal Washington consensus is an array of market oriented principles designed by the government of the United States and the international financial institutions that it largely dominates, and implemented by them in various ways – for the more vulnerable societies, often as stringent structural adjustment programs. The basic rules, in brief, are: liberalize trade and finance, let markets set price (“get prices right”), end inflation (“macroeconomic stability”), privatize. The government should “get out of the way” – hence the population too, insofar as the government is democratic, though the conclusion remains implicit. The decisions of those who impose the “consensus” naturally have a major impact on global order. Some analysts take a much stronger position. The international business press has referred to these institutions as the core of a “de facto world government” of a “new imperial age.” Whether accurate or not, this description serves to remind us that the governing institutions are not independent agents but reflect the distribution of power in the larger society. That has been a truism at least since Adam Smith, who pointed out that the “principal architects” of policy in England were “merchants and manufacturers,” who used state power to serve their own interests, however “grievous” the effect on others, including the people of England. Smith’s concern was “the wealth of nations,” but he understood that the “national interest” is largely a delusion: within the



“nation” there are sharply conflicting interests, and to understand policy and its effects we have to ask where power lies and how it is exercised, what later came to be called class analysis.

The “principal architects” of the neoliberal “Washington consensus” are the masters of the private economy, mainly huge corporations that control much of the international economy and have the means to dominate policy formation as well as the structuring of thought and opinion. The United States has a special role in the system for obvious reasons. To borrow the words of diplomatic historian Gerald Haines, who is also senior historian of the CIA, “Following World War II the United States assumed, out of self-interest, responsibility for the welfare of the world capitalist system.” Haines is concerned with what he calls “the Americanization of Brazil,” but only as a special case. And his words are accurate enough.

The United States had been the world’s major economy long before World War II, and during the war it prospered while its rivals were severely weakened. The state-coordinated wartime economy was at last able to overcome the Great Depression. By the war’s end, the United States had half of the world’s wealth and a position of power without historical precedent. Naturally, the principal architects of policy intended to use this power to design a global system in their interests.

High-level documents describe the primary threat to these interests, particularly in Latin America, as “radical” and “nationalistic regimes” that are responsive to popular pressures for “immediate improvement in the low living standards of the masses” and development for domestic needs. These tendencies conflict with the demand for “a political and economic climate conducive to private investment,” with adequate repatriation of profits and “protection of our raw materials” – ours, even if located somewhere else. For such reasons, the influential planner George Kennan advised that we should “cease to talk about vague and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization” and must “deal in straight power concepts,” not “hampered by idealistic slogans” about “altruism and world-benefaction” – though such slogans are fine, in fact obligatory, in public discourse.

I am quoting the secret record, available now in principle, though largely unknown to the general public or the intellectual community.

“Radical nationalism” is intolerable in itself, but it also poses a broader “threat to stability,” another phrase with a special meaning. As Washington prepared to overthrow Guatemala’s first democratic government in 1954, a State Department official warned that Guatemala had “become an increasing threat to the stability of Honduras and El Salvador. Its agrarian reform is a powerful propaganda weapon; its broad social program of aiding the workers and peasants in a victorious struggle against the upper classes and large foreign enterprises has a strong appeal to the populations of Central American neighbors where similar conditions prevail.” “Stability” means security for “the upper classes and large foreign enterprises,” whose welfare must be preserved.

Such threats to the “welfare of the world capitalist system” justify terror and subversion to restore “stability.” One of the first tasks of the CIA was to take part in the large-scale effort to undermine democracy in Italy in 1948, when it was feared that elections might come out the wrong way; direct military intervention was planned if subversion failed. These are described as efforts “to stabilize Italy.” It is even possible to “destabilize a freely elected Marxist government in Chile” because “we were determined to seek stability.” With a proper education, one can overcome the apparent contradiction.

Nationalist regimes that threaten “stability” are sometimes called “rotten apples” that might “spoil the barrel,” or “viruses” that might “infect” others. Italy in 1948 is one example. Twenty-five years later, Henry Kissinger described Chile as a “virus” that might send the wrong messages about possibilities for social change, infecting others as far as Italy, still not “stable” even after years of major CIA programs to subvert Italian democracy. Viruses have to be destroyed and others protected from infection: for both tasks, violence is often the most efficient means, leaving a gruesome trail of slaughter, terror, torture, and devastation.

In secret postwar planning, each part of the world was assigned its specific role. Thus the “major function” of Southeast Asia was to provide raw materials for the industrial powers. Africa was to be “exploited” by Europe for its own recovery. And so on, through the world.

In Latin America, Washington expected to be able to implement the Monroe Doctrine, but again in a special sense. President Wilson, famous for his idealism and high moral principles, agreed in secret that “in its advocacy of the Monroe Doctrine the United States considers its own interests.” The interests of Latin Americans are merely “incidental,” not our concern. He recognized that “this may seem based on selfishness alone,” but held that the doctrine “had no higher or more generous motive.” The United States sought to displace its traditional rivals, England and France, and establish a regional alliance under its control that was to stand apart from the world system, in which such arrangements were not to be permitted.

The “functions” of Latin America were clarified at a hemispheric conference in February 1945, where Washington proposed an “Economic Charter of the Americas” that would eliminate economic nationalism “in all its forms.” Washington planners understood that it would not be easy to impose this principle. State Department documents warned that Latin Americans prefer “policies designed to bring about a broader distribution of wealth and to raise the standard of living of the masses,” and are “convinced that the first beneficiaries of the development of a country’s resources should be the people of that country.” These ideas are unacceptable: the “first beneficiaries” of a country’s resources are U.S. investors, while Latin America fulfils its service function without unreasonable concerns about general welfare or “excessive industrial development” that might infringe on U.S. interests.

The position of the United States prevailed, though not without problems in the years that followed, addressed by means I need not review.

As Europe and Japan recovered from wartime devastation, world order shifted to a tripolar pattern. The United States has retained its dominant role, though new challenges are arising, including European and East Asian competition in South America. The most important changes took place twenty-five years ago [1973], when the Nixon Administration dismantled the postwar global economic system, within which the United States was, in effect, the world’s banker, a role it could no longer sustain. This unilateral act (to be sure, with the cooperation of other powers) led to a huge explosion of unregulated capital flows. Still more striking is the shift in the composition of the flow of capital. In 1971, 90 percent of international financial transactions were related to the real economy – trade or long-term investment – and 10 percent were speculative. By 1990 the percentages were reversed, and by 1995 about 95 percent of the vastly greater sums were speculative, with daily flows regularly exceeding the combined foreign exchange reserves of the seven biggest industrial powers, over \$1 trillion a day, and very short-term: about 80 percent with round trips of a week or less.

Prominent economists warned over twenty years ago that the process would lead to a low-growth, low-wage economy, and suggested fairly simple measures that might prevent these consequences. But the principal architects of the Washington consensus preferred the predictable effects, including very high profits. These effects were augmented by the (short-term) sharp rise in oil prices and the telecommunications revolution, both related to the huge state sector of the U.S. economy, to which I will return.

The so-called “Communist” states were outside this global system. By the 1970s China was being reintegrated into it. The Soviet economy began to stagnate in the 1960s, and the whole rotten edifice collapsed twenty years later. The region is largely returning to its earlier status. Sectors that were part of the West are rejoining it, while most of the region is returning to its traditional service role, largely under the rule of former Communist bureaucrats and other local associates of foreign enterprises, along with criminal syndicates. The pattern is familiar in the third world, as are the outcomes. In Russia alone, a UNICEF inquiry in 1993 estimated that a half-million extra deaths a year result from the neoliberal “reforms,” which it generally supports. Russia’s social policy chief recently estimated that 25 percent of the population has fallen below subsistence levels, while the new rulers have gained enormous wealth, again the familiar pattern of Western dependencies.

Also familiar are the effects of the large-scale violence undertaken to ensure the “welfare of the world capitalist system.” A recent Jesuit conference in San Salvador pointed out that over time, the “culture of terror domesticates the expectations of the majority.” People may no longer even think about “alternatives different from those of the powerful,” who describe the outcome as a grand victory for freedom and democracy.

These are some of the contours of the global order within which the Washington consensus has been forged.

### **The novelty of neoliberalism**

Let us look more closely at the novelty of neoliberalism. A good place to start is a recent publication of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, with survey articles on major issues and policies. One is devoted to the economics of development. The author, Paul Krugman, is a prominent figure in the field. He makes five central points, which bear directly on our question.

First, knowledge about economic development is very limited. For the United States, for example, two-thirds of the rise in per capita income is unexplained. Similarly, the Asian success stories have followed paths that surely do not conform to what “current orthodoxy says are the key to growth,” Krugman points out. He recommends “humility” in policy formation, and caution about “sweeping generalizations.”

His second point is that conclusions with little basis are constantly put forth and provide the doctrinal support for policy: the Washington consensus is a case in point.

His third point is that the “conventional wisdom” is unstable, regularly shifting to something else, perhaps the opposite of the latest phase – though its proponents are again full of confidence as they impose the new orthodoxy.

His fourth point is that, in retrospect, it is commonly agreed that the economic development policies did not “serve their expressed goal” and were based on “bad ideas.”

Lastly, Krugman remarks, it is usually “argued that bad ideas flourish because they are in the interest of powerful groups. Without doubt that happens.”

That it happens has been a commonplace at least since Adam Smith. And it happens with impressive consistency, even in the rich countries, though it is the third world that provides the cruelest record.

That is the heart of the matter. The “bad ideas” may not serve the “expressed goals,” but they typically turn out to be very *good* ideas for their principal architects. There have been many experiments in economic development in the modern era, with regularities that are hard to ignore. One is that the designers tend to do quite well, though the subjects of the experiment often take a beating.

The first major experiment was carried out two hundred years ago, when the British rulers in India instituted the “Permanent Settlement,” which was going to do wondrous things. The results were reviewed by an official commission forty years later, which concluded that “the settlement fashioned with great care and deliberation has unfortunately subjected the lower classes to most grievous oppression,” leaving misery that “hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce,” as “the bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India.”

But the experiment can hardly be written off as a failure. The British governor-general observed that “the ‘Permanent Settlement,’ though a failure in many other respects and in most important essentials, has this great advantage, at least, of having created a vast body of rich landed proprietors deeply interested in the continuance of the British Dominion and having complete command over the mass of the people.” Another advantage was that British investors gained enormous wealth. India also financed 40 percent of Britain’s trade deficit while providing a protected market for its manufacturing exports; contract laborers for British possessions, replacing earlier slave populations; and the opium that was the staple of Britain’s exports to China. The opium trade was imposed on China by force, not the operations of the “free market,” just as the sacred principles of the market were overlooked when opium was barred from England.

In brief, the first great experiment was a “bad idea” for the subjects, but not for the designers and local elites associated with them. This pattern continues until the present: placing profit over people. The consistency of the record is no less impressive than the rhetoric hailing the latest showcase for democracy and capitalism as an “economic miracle” – and what the rhetoric regularly conceals. Brazil, for example. In the highly praised history of the Americanization of Brazil that I mentioned, Gerald Haines writes that from 1945 the United States used Brazil as a “testing area for modern scientific methods of industrial development based solidly on capitalism.” The experiment was carried out with “the best of intentions.” Foreign investors benefited, but planners “sincerely believed” that the people of Brazil would benefit as well. I need not describe how they benefited as Brazil became “the Latin American darling of the international business community” under military rule, in the words of the business press, while the World Bank reported that two-thirds of the population did not have enough food for normal physical activity.

Writing in 1989, Haines describes “America’s Brazilian policies” as “enormously successful,” “a real American success story.” 1989 was the “golden year” in the eyes of the business world, with profits tripling over 1988, while industrial wages, already among the lowest in the world, declined another 20 percent; the *UN Report on Human Development* ranked Brazil next to Albania. When the disaster began to hit the wealthy as well, the “modern scientific methods of development based solidly on capitalism” (Haines) suddenly became proofs of the evils of statism and socialism – another quick transition that takes place when needed.

To appreciate the achievement, one must remember that Brazil has long been recognized to be one of the richest countries of the world, with enormous advantages, including half a century of dominance and tutelage by the United States with benign intent, which once again just happens to serve the profit of the few while leaving the majority of people in misery.

The most recent example is Mexico. It was highly praised as a prize student of the rules of the Washington consensus and offered as a model for others – as wages collapsed, poverty increased almost as fast as the number of billionaires, foreign capital flowed in (mostly speculative, or for exploitation of cheap labor kept under control by the brutal “democracy”). Also familiar is the collapse of the house of cards in December 1994. Today half the population cannot obtain minimum food requirements, while the man who controls the corn markets remains on the list of Mexico’s billionaires, one category in which the country ranks high.

Changes in global order have also made it possible to apply a version of the Washington consensus at home. For most of the U.S. population, incomes have stagnated or declined for fifteen years along with working conditions and job security, continuing through economic recovery, an unprecedented phenomenon. Inequality has reached levels unknown for seventy years, far beyond other industrial countries. The United States has the highest level of child poverty of any industrial society, followed by the rest of the English-speaking world. So the record continues through the familiar list of third world maladies. Meanwhile the business press cannot find adjectives exuberant enough to describe the “dazzling” and “stupendous” profit growth, though admittedly the rich face problems too: a headline in *Business Week* announces “The Problem Now: What to Do with All That Cash,” as “surging profits” are “overflowing the coffers of Corporate America,” and dividends are booming.

Profits remain “spectacular” through the mid-1996 figures, with “remarkable” profit growth for the world’s largest corporations, though there is “one area where global companies are not expanding much: payrolls,” the leading business monthly adds quietly. That exception includes companies that “had a terrific year” with “booming profits” while they cut workforces, shifted to part-time workers with no benefits or security, and otherwise behaved exactly as one would expect with “capital’s clear subjugation of labor for 15 years,” to borrow another phrase from the business press. [...]

[...] There is much more to say about these matters, but one conclusion seems fairly clear: the approved doctrines are crafted and employed for reasons of power and profit. Contemporary “experiments” follow a familiar pattern when they take the form of “socialism for the rich” within a system of global corporate mercantilism in which “trade” consists in substantial measure of centrally managed transactions within single firms, huge institutions linked to their competitors by strategic alliances, all of them tyrannical in internal structure, designed to undermine democratic decision making and to safeguard the masters from market discipline. It is the poor and defenceless who are to be instructed in these stern doctrines.

We might also ask just how “global” the economy really is, and how much it might be subject to popular democratic control. In terms of trade, financial flows, and other measures, the economy is not more global than early in this [*sic*] century. Furthermore, TNCs rely heavily on public subsidies and domestic markets, and their international transactions, including those mislabeled trade, are largely within Europe, Japan and the United States, where political measures are available without fear of military coups and the like. There is a great deal that is new and significant, but the belief that things are “out of control” is not very credible, even if we keep to existing mechanisms.

Is it a law of nature that we must keep to these? Not if we take seriously the doctrines of classical liberalism. Adam Smith's praise of division of labor is well known, but not his denunciation of its inhuman effects, which will turn working people into objects "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to be," something that must be prevented "in every improved and civilized society" by government action to overcome the destructive force of the "invisible hand." Also not well advertised is Smith's belief that government "regulation in favour of the workman is always just and equitable," though not "when in favour of the masters." Or his call for equality of outcome, which was at the heart of his argument for free markets.

Other leading contributors to the classical liberal canon go much further. Wilhelm von Humboldt condemned wage labor itself: "when the labourer works under external control," he wrote, "we may admire what he does, but we despise what he is." "The art advances, the artisan recedes," Alexis de Tocqueville observed. Also a great figure of the liberal pantheon, Tocqueville agreed with Smith and Jefferson that equality of outcome is an important feature of a free and just society. One hundred and sixty years ago, he warned of the dangers of a "permanent inequality of conditions" and an end to democracy if "the manufacturing aristocracy which is growing up under our eyes" in the United States, "one of the harshest that has ever existed in the world," should escape its confines – as it later did, beyond his worst nightmares. I am only barely touching on intricate and fascinating issues, which suggest, I think, that leading principles of classical liberalism receive their natural modern expression not in the neoliberal "religion" but in the independent movements of working people and the ideas and practices of the libertarian socialist movements, at times articulated also by such major figures of twentieth-century thought as Bertrand Russell and John Dewey.

One has to evaluate with caution the doctrines that dominate intellectual discourse, with careful attention to the argument, the facts, and the lessons of past and present history. It makes little sense to ask what is "right" for particular countries as if these are entities with common interests and values. And what may be right for people in the United States, with their unparalleled advantages, could well be wrong for others who have much narrower scope of choices. We can, however, reasonably anticipate that what is right for the people of the world will only by the remotest accident conform to the plans of the "principal architects" of policy. And there is no more reason now than there ever has been to permit them to shape the future in their own interests.

## 32 When people play people

*Zakes Mda*

*When People Play People*, Zed Books (1993), excerpt from pp. 177–89.

[...]

### **The efficacy of theatre in development communication**

**THE STUDY HAS ILLUSTRATED** that theatre can be effective as a medium for development communication. The work of Marotholi Travelling Theatre analysed in this study has confirmed some of the assertions made by theatre-for-development and development communication practitioners and scholars on the relative efficacy of the medium in conscientising a rural population, and in disseminating development messages. The work particularly confirms the findings of the Telu Workshop in Sierra Leone, of which the workshop director writes:

Today, Theatre for Development has been identified by many in the Third World as an effective two-way communication process predicated on dialogue and genuine participation on the part of the researchers and the researched. If properly used, it can perhaps be a most efficacious instrument for conscientising and enabling the masses and for propagating development messages using the people's language, idioms and art forms.

(Malamah-Thomas 1989)

It is significant that Malamah-Thomas adds the qualification 'if properly used' to his statement on the efficacy of theatre. Like all other media, theatre's effectiveness in development communication depends very much on the proficiency of the practitioner. In theatre-for-development the proficiency should not only be in the creation of highly polished productions of great aesthetic merit; the practitioner must also have clarity of what development and development communication entail. [...]

The plays that evinced efficacy were those that concentrated not only on the artistic product, but also on the process of analysis from the rural community's perspective. The practitioner must find the balance between aesthetics and function. This study has shown that the two are not in opposition. Indeed, it was clearly illustrated that those works which were of high aesthetic quality in the utilisation of popular performance modes such as *lifela* were the most effective in drawing people to participate in a critical analysis

process. In those plays, then, theatre-for-development was able to serve the following functions:

- 1 **Mobilisation in support of national development:** People were motivated into effective participation in programmes geared towards people's self-reliance.
- ...
- 2 **Conscientisation:** In all the plays where there was community participation and catalyst intervention, the villagers were able to question some of the contradictions in society. The villagers examined the contradictions at local level ..., at national level ... and at international level....
- 3 **A two-way communication process with inbuilt feedback:** Through the plays, dialogue was developed among the members of the community themselves, and between the community and extension workers from governmental and non-governmental agencies. Each side had an opportunity to express its views, and to learn the other side's perceptions and priorities. Government was able to have feedback on its policies, and the peasants had a say in their own development.
- 4 **Community discussion and community decision-making:** The plays gave the villagers the opportunity to discuss their problems, to decide solutions, and to implement the solutions.
- 5 **Intervillage and intravillage solidarity:** The performances fostered intravillage solidarity since community members were able to discuss their common problems, and to work out solutions together as a community, rather than as individuals. Intervillage solidarity was fostered with villagers from one village attending and participating in performances in other villages....
- 6 **Revitalisation of the people's own forms of cultural expression:** The plays provided a stimulus for the villagers' cultural activity....

This study's position is that of all these functions, the most important is that theatre-for-development gives the periphery access to the production and distribution of messages. It was shown that critical analysis, and therefore conscientisation, happens only when the periphery is able to produce and distribute its own messages.

...

### **Indispensability of mass media**

The study has made the following points:

- Live theatre is not mass communication.
- Some theatre is interpersonal communication, or has strong elements of interpersonal communication (for example, forum theatre, simultaneous dramaturgy, and to some extent participatory agitprop).
- Not all theatre is interpersonal communication (for instance, agitprop lacks the crucial characteristics of interpersonal communication. Agitprop can be best described as public address communication).

One major problem with theatre is that it is not multiplicative. Mass media, on the other hand, can multiply a message and make it available in many places. Radio, for instance, is much in use in Lesotho. Its advantage is that it can overcome distance and time.



Radio signals reach the widely dispersed homesteads in the remotest areas of the country. At 62.2 per cent, radio-set ownership is high for a developing country. This means that the majority of the people in Lesotho can be reached through the radio. Theatre, on the other hand, can only be performed in one place at a time. This means that, in spite of its advantages over mass media, theatre can never replace it....

### **Assets and liabilities of different methods of theatre-for-development**

*Agitprop*: Its major disadvantage is that it engenders little or no conscientisation since the audiences do not participate in producing and distributing the messages. The theatre is produced by an outside agent, but is oriented towards the people. It is either diffusionist or persuasive communication (market approach). But until constraints of time and manpower have been solved, agitprop will continue to have a role in theatre-for-development. It was noted that the other methodologies take time since catalysts have to live with the community and create plays with them. In agitprop the spectacle is presented as a finished product, and then there are informal post-performance discussions. The theatre group is therefore able to tour from village to village within a very short time. However, all they will be doing is disseminating messages from development agencies without creating any critical awareness of the objective situation from the villagers' own perspective.

Agitprop is also well-suited for packaging for radio and television. Indeed Marotholi have produced many television films on such subjects as AIDS, TB, and breastfeeding, all using the agitprop method.

*Participatory Agitprop*: Compared to agitprop, participatory agitprop engenders a higher level of conscientisation. This is because of the interpersonal element, albeit in a predetermined product. Kamlongera notes in his study the advantages of opening up dialogue within performance time.

The advantage of this is that issues are debated within 'play' atmosphere, while at the same time alternative courses are being looked at. The audience do not only sit to be entertained, but to participate in a debate for which theatre is only a catalyst. This dispenses with the 'cold' after-performance discussions common to more traditional uses of theatre.

(Kamlongera 1989: 245)

Like agitprop, participatory agitprop is easy to tour from village to village. Since it is more effective than agitprop, it is probably the best method in those instances where there are constraints of time and manpower, and the catalysts are unable to stay with the villagers and create theatre with them. Participatory agitprop can meet the immediate communicational needs of extension workers, while a long-term theatre-for-conscientisation takes place at its own pace in the villages.

*Theatre-for-Conscientisation (both simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theatre)*: Of all the methodologies identified and discussed, simultaneous dramaturgy and forum theatre are the most effective in conscientisation. The study has developed a new theatrical communication model explicating the interaction through messages between catalysts and audiences in theatre-for-conscientisation situations. In this method, the plays are produced by and for the people without spectators, since the spectators ultimately become actors.

Improvisation happens throughout the play, and the direction the play takes is never pre-planned. Etherton's assertion that people need to learn the conventions of what he calls 'the well-made play' before they can improvise and create theatre-for-development is shown to be a fallacy.

By presenting two strongly conflicting views, the catalysts provoke the people to participate. Ideally, community participation and community control should increase as catalysts pull out. The ultimate goal is that villagers take over until there is no need for catalysts. This will be a point of convergence of forum theatre and comgen theatre.

Theatre-for-conscientisation is, however, a time-consuming process, which works over a long period. It therefore cannot deal with immediate country-wide communicational needs since resources (of personnel, for instance, who must stay in a single village for some time) are limited.

An adaptation of this method should be used in electronic media. For instance, in a situation where there are radio forums, radio plays can be left unfinished, and radio forum participants can then discuss how best to complete the story. The information is fed back to the production unit, and the next serial will reflect the ending that has been determined by the listeners. The same technique may be used for drama on small-format media and on television.

*Comgen Theatre:* [...] local communities in the villages may have the means of producing theatre, but without the guidance of catalysts in analysing the problems, the theatre does not become a vehicle for conscientisation. Villagers isolated problems and treated them as inherent and internally generated, for which they themselves were to blame. This indicates that although comgen theatre is the least expensive method – it does not involve a touring group of performers, but is created and performed by the locals – it does not serve as a vehicle for conscientisation. For comgen theatre to serve as a vehicle for critical analysis, and therefore critical awareness, catalysts must visit the village from time to time to enhance the level of analysis. This can be done through workshop sessions using the simultaneous dramaturgy and the forum theatre techniques. In this way comgen theatre and theatre-for-conscientisation will ultimately converge, as the villagers themselves ultimately become catalysts. The process is a time-consuming one, and the catalysts will have to make many visits....

What Marotholi were doing, in order to have the theatre activity in all the villages of Lesotho, was to hold workshops for village health workers. All villages have village health workers, and workshops can be held only for a small group at a time. The village health workers then go back to their villages and create theatre with their fellow villagers. This becomes an 'each one, teach one' process, where those who have been trained in workshops train other village health workers from neighbouring villages. In this process catalysts should travel from village to village and work with the established groups there to enhance their level of analysis. In this way both grassroots control and grassroots participation will be maintained, while critical analysis will increase until comgen theatre becomes theatre-for-conscientisation.

### **Efficacy of popular and traditional media**

The study has, through the analysis of the work of Marotholi in this area, illustrated that popular and traditional media can be effective in development communication. However, some modes of traditional performance do not lend themselves well to such uses, since they would be out of their social context in a theatre-for-development situation.

The practitioner of theatre-for-development and of development communication must take great care to ensure that, if and when traditional and popular modes of performance are used, they are used proficiently. It must be remembered that among the villagers there are people who have attained a high artistic standard in the practice of these performance modes. People know a mediocre product when they see one, and they will only be attracted to watch and participate in an event that evinces a high level of artistic merit. It is therefore important to pay particular attention to the aesthetics of the performance modes for them to have any effect.

### **Intervention**

The study has shown that theatre is not a self-generative communication medium that automatically becomes effective. For theatre to be effective it needs informed intervention. Theatre-for-development practitioners may fall into the dangers of romanticising the democratic aspects of theatre-for-development, and the ability of peasants to identify and solve their problems. [...] Intervention by catalysts is essential in a theatre-for-development process. Peasants may identify their problems, but a solution will elude them if they have not gone through a process of critical analysis of the problems. It must be remembered that all forms of exploitation and domination have been heaped on the peasants – first by the colonialists, and then by the African ruling classes who took over from colonialists and perpetuated the structures of domination. As a result a number of peasants have internalised oppression and domination, and live in what Freire (1972) calls a ‘culture of silence’. Intervention helps to extract them from that culture of silence, and unleashes in them a critical analysis that will lead to a critical awareness.

The study has evolved a new paradigm of intervention. The paradigm explains the relationship between intervention and participation. The two variables are dependent on each other in that if one increases, the other decreases. The paradigm further explains the relationship between participation and conscientisation. It places the various methodologies of theatre-for-development that have been identified on a curve. The curve portrays the rising level of conscientisation with the rising level of participation, until optimal participation is reached, then the level of conscientisation decreases as participation increases. From this point of optimal participation more participation engenders less conscientisation until a stage of maximal participation-minimal conscientisation is reached. Another curve portrays the relationship between intervention and conscientisation. The picture that emerges here is that minimal intervention engenders minimal conscientisation. Maximal intervention on the other hand also engenders minimal conscientisation. Optimal intervention is the ideal balance between intervention and participation that engenders the highest level of conscientisation.

The study concludes that for catalysts to play an effective interventionist role they must have a higher level of critical awareness than the villagers.

### **Domestication and other constraints**

The study identified three traits of domestication: one is domestication that arises from an innocuous situation intended to liberate, the second is domestication that happens as a result of a conscious effort from an agent who seeks to domesticate, and the third happens through censorship and self-censorship. In all cases domestication’s vehicle is intervention or lack of it. Writing on folk media, Lent made these observations:

As Third World governments use folk media and interpersonal communication channels to transmit the developmental message to rural peoples, it becomes apparent that they have in their hands a truly grassroots propaganda machine capable of being harnessed to also promote non-developmental interests. Therefore, because the dividing line between developmental, governmental and political ends can be hair-thin, it is possible (and is happening) for folk media to be misused to promote the development of national policies and programmes. That, indeed, would be unfortunate in a world where governments already control so many mass media used to promote their own ends.

(Lent 1982: 15)

Lent is writing of a situation where the government consciously uses the medium for the purposes of the domination and exploitation of the oppressed rural people. Governments are capable of enforcing domestication also by preventing theatre-for-development from being a truly democratic vehicle. In Malawi, for instance, practitioners have to go through the ruling political party structures in order to carry out their work in the villages. There will therefore be constraints of both censorship by the party hierarchy and self-censorship by the theatre practitioners. It is all very well to talk of examining structural causes of problems. In some countries this may not be possible since it would invite the wrath of the rulers to descend upon the heads of the catalysts. Not many theatre practitioners and development communicators are prepared for martyrdom. Few of them have such a high commitment to social and political transformation that they would follow the path of exile taken by Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o and Ngũgĩwa Mĩrĩĩ of the Kamiriithu Educational and Cultural Centre. Others are just as highly committed as these two gentlemen, but prefer to explore various strategies that they can use in their theatre so that they may continue to work with the peasants while at the same time avoiding a confrontation with the ruling classes.

In the Kumba workshop (Eyoh 1987) a letter from the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon authorising the workshop warned the participants against the development of themes of a political nature. The participants had to design strategies to negotiate this. Eyoh does not say what these strategies were. It is possible that they involved self-censorship, since that was what was demanded by the Presidency. Kidd, on the other hand, reports that in Zimbabwe the situation is different:

Part of our success in this work was due to the particular political situation and historical experience of Zimbabwe and the receptiveness to this kind of work. The war's radicalization of the rural areas and the experience of people's theatre during the liberation struggle made fertile ground for the workshop. The Zimbabwe's government commitment to dialogue, consultation, conscientization, and mobilization provided a clear mandate and focus for the workshop.

(Kidd 1985: 198)

In Lesotho the work of Marotholi has not been restricted through either censorship or self-censorship. The theatre group has even undertaken assignments from government ministries with a clear understanding on the part of all involved that in their mobilisation of the peasants for participation in development programmes, political and social structures will be analysed. However, there can never be any guarantee that this state of affairs will continue. Perhaps Marotholi has been fortunate in that, although the

government often commissioned them to do campaigns in the villages, no one in the government really took a close interest in their work. Since some governments are not very pleased with a conscientised peasantry, theatre-for-development practitioners who want to avoid the wrath of the authorities should use participatory agitprop. In participatory agitprop intervention will qualitatively and quantitatively control structural analysis of the problems to the level that the catalysts may deem safe. Other practitioners may prefer to devise subversive strategies in participatory agitprop. Theatre-for-conscientisation, the experience of Marotholi found, will undoubtedly open up the proverbial can of worms.

Another constraint on theatre-for-development, which may also have overtones of domestication, pertains to financial support. Theatre groups such as Marotholi Travelling Theatre depend on international donors, and on government sources when they undertake work in support of government development campaigns. Such financial support may compromise the liberating quality of the work. One of the questions posed at the Kumba workshop was on this very issue.

Can workshops of the kind organised in Murewa and Kumba effectively take place without all sorts of support mechanisms from the state and international sponsors, and does the existence of such support mechanisms not compromise the liberating quality of the work, thus rendering the process domesticating?

Eyoh 1987)

[...]

## Evaluation

Communication programmes need to be evaluated to find out what they have accomplished and how they can be improved. The work of Marotholi Travelling Theatre was very weak on evaluation. [...] The Marotholi explored ways of using *formative evaluation*. In this method all evaluation is integrated into the normal project activities. This allows the planner to change the course of the programme if early evaluations show that something is not working as planned. Often a theatrical performance is used to evaluate previous performances.

Whatever method of evaluation is adopted, it is crucial that projects of this nature should contain a constant evaluative component.

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### 33 From the particular to the universal

*Dorothy Heathcote*

'From the Particular to the Universal', *Exploring Theatre and Education* (ed. K. Robinson), Heinemann (1980), excerpt from pp. 7–15.

**FOR A LONG TIME** I have known that I am an 'amateur' in educational circles. By this I mean that I always feel that, beside other people's thinking and talk, I stick out like a sore thumb. I read another book recently, however, and was immediately heartened by the realization that my 'amateurishness' comes from my never having learned the language of depersonalization. Perhaps that accounts for why I am so bad at explaining what I am about to do and afterwards why I did what I did. I always understand it very clearly but find it difficult to depersonalize it in explanations. So do we slowly grow into understanding and change our perspectives ever so slightly, inch by inch.

The following quotations illuminate for me three important aspects of the teacher's work. The teacher's reason for the work done is summed up for me by Josephine Miles: 'I think that an art gives shape and stability to the valued materials of life, in order that they may be stressed, attended to and preserved.' That is the root of the way I work.

The rights of all my students – children, adults and of myself – are clarified for me in De Quincey's words: 'It is the grandeur of all truth which can occupy a very high place in human interest, that it is never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds; it exists by way of germ or latent principle in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed but never planted'. I believe that every child I meet understands deep basic matters worthy of exploration but they may as yet have no language for them. One of the languages they may develop is through dramatic work. As yet we do not give this grace freely to all our students. Often we deny to others that which we value ourselves.

[...]

I can find no basic conflict between those teachers who prefer to make and show plays to others and those who prefer to base their work on games. Between these two there are many subtle shades of activity. The learning which might come about is not really to do with the activities themselves. It is to do with the quality of the experience for the group and the relevance of the activities to the underlying purposes of the teacher. I have struggled to perfect techniques which allow my classes opportunities to *stumble upon authenticity* in their work and to be able both to experience and reflect upon their experience *at the same time*: simultaneously to understand their journey while being both the cause and the medium of the work. My techniques embrace all the ways which enable classes to do what seems important to me. In learning these enabling techniques, I have neglected others.

The four faces of dramatic activity which I can see are:

1. *Making plays for audiences*  
This can be a meaningful experience for children, or adults, or for anyone doing it because they are interested, and not only because they wish to live in it and earn their money by it. Making plays seems to have gone out of fashion in education possibly because people did not learn to do it well with children who were not necessarily committed. When we ask this of children, we must treat them as the artists they can become. For too long in schools we have refused to let children function as artists. We make them learn *about* it.
2. *Knowing the craft, history and place of theatre in our lives*  
The study of the history of the theatre, of different styles of acting and playwriting in our own and other cultures is surely of great value. When they are placed in a sociological setting they stand with architecture and art: to help us to understand people in their cultural context. They help to reveal what all people and all cultures have, in their time, found to be significant.
3. *Learning through making plays*  
This uses the *materials* and *conventions* of theatre to build upon the children's reflective energies: to limit the world to certain agreed aspects freeing them of the burden of the future; taking out some of the change elements; being more selective in their responses and recognizing their reasons in doing all of this so that they may reflect upon what is changing in their perceptions of others and of themselves.
4. *Using the conventions of 'as if it were' to motivate study*  
A great deal of my work is concerned with this because I see it as one of the principal ways in which schools could be humanized. It is using the conventions of the depicted world to motivate study of the real world and of humanity, providing a framework of purpose for and within the school curriculum.

[...]

There are three ingredients to my growth as a teacher:

1. To remain accepting of the ways and present conditions of others while considering how best to interfere, and that I seek to bring about shifting perspectives and understanding. This includes me as well as those I am responsible for.
2. To be able to affirm and receive from others.
3. To remain curious.

It is in the spirit of the accepter of what children bring to the situation – always the receiver, the curious one, the playwright, the creator of tensions and occasionally the director and the actor – that I have to function.

## 34 Act smart

### Using C&T's prospero technology to shape efficacious theatre practices in the digital century

*Paul Sutton*

**IT HAS LONG BEEN** a pedagogic cornerstone of theatre education and applied theatre methodologies that “drama helps us explore what it means to be human”. (Barnard, 2013). From the early Theatre-in-Education manifestos of the 1980s (Big Brum TIE, n.d.) to the twenty-first century equivalents (Theatre and Drama Manifesto, 2020) applied theatre practitioners and theorists of all varieties have held up the arts as a method of divination of our humanity:

We have the extraordinary ability to imagine and innovate and to create works of art that elevate, expand and transform what it means to be human...this is the code that we believe depends on being human because it is a reflecting of what it means to be human.

(Du Sautoy, 2020)

This conceptualisation of ‘humanity’ usually proceeds from the assertion that theatre and the arts are a way of knowing and learning and that as such they sit in tension (if not opposition) with more scientific, empirical ways of interpreting the world and quantifying human knowledge. They offer, like the natural sciences, equally valid routes to notions of ‘truth’.

Such statements and commentaries are often compelling and powerful. Their rhetoric can chime with the values of many artists working in complex community contexts, as they, along with their participants, work to equalise social divisions, confront institutional prejudice or lift the fog of educational myopia. However, the digital revolution is challenging and changing the world around us in new and profound ways and increasingly the moral certainties underpinning such notions of truth and humanity are being questioned.

For example, Fueller argues for a reconfiguration of our framing conceptualisation of ‘what it means to be human’. He suggests that, alongside ecological and evolutionary theory, the digital revolution offers us new technological means of augmenting and extending the reach of our ‘selves’ and “... ultimately aspires to a digital incarnation of humanity, [aiming] for the enhancement, if not outright replacement, of the bodies of our birth” (Fueller, 2013). In other fields, the shockwaves of such reconfigurations are also readily to be seen.

In journalism, the defining, authoritative voice of the journalist, often seen as the conduit of ‘truth’, is being questioned. Their role as publishers and broadcasters to an audience framed as a ‘silent crowd, facing in one direction, absorbing information’ has been fundamentally challenged by social media dynamics, meaning that “the power of the original piece of writing or content [has lost] its primacy and may be even overruled”



(Speed, 2018). The rise of such citizen journalism – audience as author – may at one level appear to democratise newsgathering and distribution, but it also raises questions about the integrity of such processes: “Would you like a citizen brain surgeon for a tumour?” (Rusbridger, 2018).

In cartography, online mapping applications have questioned the notion that “the only map that can ever completely represent the territory it depicts would be on the effectively redundant scale of 1:1” (Bruton, 2014), challenging the notion of the map maker as editor, author and trusted guide. Suddenly, not only can we navigate landscapes with the electronic computer in our pockets, but we can also redefine the very features of the digital landscape itself, as we become the cartographers of our own lives, histories, tastes and neighbourhoods.

On the morning I write this, the BBC’s lead news story is that a paralysed man has ‘moved’ through a mind-reading exoskeleton, as “sophisticated computer software reads [his] brainwaves and turns them into instructions for controlling the exoskeleton” (Gallagher, 2019). Whilst a remarkable fusion of computational science, engineering and biomedical science, such innovations are not as rare as they might seem. The rise of experimental ‘flesh engineering’, cyborg experimentation and other forms of techno penetration (O’Connell, 2018) indicate that such orchestrations of our relationship with technology might not always be purely arm’s length but as much orchestrated by a desire to technologically augment our humanity, just as Fuller indicates. The popularisation of wearable technologies, such as smartwatches, shows a growing desire (and the health benefits) for digitally tracking our heartbeat and daily lived rhythms.

My company, C&T, sees this emerging digital landscape as rich, fertile territory for a school of efficacious applied theatre practice, encouraging our participants to not only act theatrically, socially, educatively and politically, but also to ‘act smart’, in tune with the digital devices in most of their pockets and homes. C&T seeks to operate at the nexus of applied theatre and technology, using the vocabulary of theatre to exploit the potential of these transformations: analysing, deconstructing and critiquing. Combining three skills sets – drama, pedagogy and digital – C&T operate as a team of theatre practitioners and technologists creating drama experiences that aim to be authentic, inspiring and inclusive. As well as exploring a range social justice themes, curricular and texts, the company aims to equip audiences and participants with the literacies that will shape the next generation of creatively and technologically literate citizens in an age of rapid, technologically driven globalisation. Fueller’s agenda resonates through the values and practice of everything C&T does.

At the centre of this approach is a web-based technology called Prospero. Prospero is a system designed, authored and coded by C&T. It innovatively attempts to marry theatre, learning and digital technologies in an online utility that anyone can access through a web browser, making the tools and resources of the digital revolution malleable and accessible to potentially anyone with a desire to shape participatory, kinaesthetic creative learning. However, the road to the full development and deployment of Prospero has been as long as the digital century itself, stretching back to the late 1990s and C&T’s growth from the UK’s Theatre-in-Education (TIE) movement.

Founded in 1988 in the rural county of Worcestershire, C&T developed along the ‘classic’ model of a TIE company: a small ensemble of actor/teachers devising performative and participatory drama programmes aimed at specific age and/or ability ranges, targeting specific curriculum areas or social issues. Very quickly, this practice evolved its own set of distinguishing hallmarks. Firstly, a pre-occupation with process drama methodologies as

a route to immersion. Secondly, an interest in the mass media and related cultural forms (news media, documentary drama, comic books, advertising) both as the content for TIE work and as alternative modes for creating distance learning resources in a rural area with disparate, isolated small school populations. Finally, an interest in engaging with forms of community beyond schools: communities of interest such as youth groups, learning-disabled people and young unemployed people.

By the year 2000, with the emergence of the internet as viable digital network increasingly accessible to the public and schools, the company experimented with a model of practice that sought to seamlessly integrate digital technologies, learning and process drama methodologies. For example, *the Livingnewspaper.net* attempted to re-invent the classic documentary drama form for the internet age, *Head Up* built synergies between conflict-resolution drama techniques and first person/third person video games, and *Stratar.net*, enabling the creation of performative, interactive cultural maps, was published for young people's smartphones.

These projects existed with a dual purpose. Firstly, they were discreet and self-contained projects, with content directed towards particular audiences and outcomes. In a sense, this purpose was to exist almost as a digital version of a classic Theatre-in-Education programme, with characters, a narrative, conflicts, challenges and embedded participatory theatre activities. These programmes mixed video, text, audio and images into highly orchestrated digital experiences that participants could immerse themselves within. The second function sought to abstract the distinctive techniques and methods each project scaffolded, offering them as sets of tools that could be applied into new contexts, or to address alternative challenges or content.

Over time, C&T recognised that through these collective projects the company could now chart an accrued, cumulative achievement, in the form of a common theatrical and pedagogic vocabulary – a set of literacies – that all these previous projects shared. Rather than continuing to focus on creating more of these siloed individual digital theatre projects, the company chose to focus on developing a unifying online platform based on this common vocabulary. This platform could deploy C&T's underpinning methodologies as a toolkit of techniques across multiple programmes and interventions.

Prospero is the technology and drama methodology that drives this approach. Using the paradigm of theatre as the rubric for its experience architecture, it enables the digital authorship and distribution of online distance learning materials, in the form of what are called 'Smartscripts'.

Smartscripts are interactive (smart) dramatic texts (scripts), populated with characters, conflicts and challenges that are designed to provoke 'players' into taking part in these digitally enabled dramas by creating and sharing theatre. These Prospero dramas can be overlaid with User Generated Content: video, images, audio and text created by participants, which shape these sequences into dramatic narratives, filled with characters, ethical dilemmas or creative challenges. They can be designed with branching narratives or alternative storylines, reflecting the choices and decisions of participants. Prospero can also co-ordinate collaborations between participants across remote locations, using the internet to build global collaborations between children, young people and often-marginalised communities.

To create a Smartscript in Prospero requires a user to take on a particular authorial role, becoming what is called a Producer. This role allows them to author these texts by assembling a set of malleable components into a carefully curated sequence of dramatic exposition and narrative, participatory tasks, reflection, critical analysis and evaluation.

Scenes are composed, directions ordered, actions framed. Interactive white boards or computer screens become contextual backdrops, smartphones become actors and tablet computers organise group and small ensemble activities, all within a preprogrammed timeline.

When the Smartsript is complete, the Producer can publish it discreetly or publicly to Prospero's library, allowing others to access and deploy it at scale and distance from the original author.

The explicit use of theatre terminology in the above description is not accidental. In its User Experience (UX) and architecture Prospero uses the vocabulary of theatre and drama to shape an overarching, accessible interface for the platform. Prospero aims to find parities between the digital and the dramatic, invoking theatre terminology as a set of productive constraints for organising learning and creativity in the digital realm.

This UX aims Prospero at two sets of users. Firstly, the platform locates itself in the realm of the theatre practitioner, attempting to make its interface as accessible as possible to its primary audience: theatre makers and drama educators. In practice, numerous theatre companies have used Prospero to extend the audience for their work in innovate new ways, for example China Plate, Contender Charlie and Theatre Company Blah, Blah, Blah. Secondly, C&T wants to make Prospero available as a toolkit for anyone who sees value in creative, kinaesthetic learning, whatever their context: health workers, development actors, youth centres, probation services, social justice advocates. In these contexts, the language of theatre may not be the typical vocabulary of stakeholders or practitioners, but it does offer a simple and easily understandable metaphor for how we learn in Prospero: a dramatic story with characters, actions, conflicts and challenges. Whilst some might consider Prospero technologically sophisticated or bewildering, its outward facing UX aims to demystify this complexity. It is as simple as a piece of theatre with a beginning, middle and end.

When deployed in a classroom or a workshop environment what does a Prospero experience look like? There is no singular answer to this question, as the process of authoring a Smartsript allows for a wealth of configurations, reflecting the diverse needs and settings applied theatre practices can be located within. However, a basic configuration requires an internet connection (by WIFI or mobile cellular data connection) with one computer connected to it. The user/facilitator/teacher logs into the Prospero website (<https://prospero.digital>), selects their chosen Smartsript from the online library and presses play. Prospero then automatically takes control of the computer and potentially many other linked devices (for example, students' smartphones) and thereby begins to navigate the audience/participants through the learning experience. Videos might illustrate dramatic scenes, tasks might organise practical activities in small groups and external websites might be re-purposed to provide contextual or background information to the content being explored. Techniques are modelled, pacing controlled, technologies blended, allowing the teacher to feel liberated from computer screens and concentrate on their crucial role, teaching.

It is important to stress that teachers and facilitators are vital to any Prospero experience. Prospero is a tool to support live, human facilitation, not replace it. The human being needs to promote discussion, reflect context, curate meaning and engender creativity. Prospero is a scaffolding tool, not a digital teacher.

Whilst Prospero is not a teacher, in common with good teaching its technologies are driven by a set of core pedagogic and creative imperatives. These are regularly refined and extended but three of crucial importance are:

1. Just as the circle is an open and democratic space for participation in drama, so the web browser is for digital engagement.

The web remains the nearest thing to an uncontrolled free space in the digital realm. Whilst smartphone apps are monopolised by the iOS and Android ecosystems, or gaming encircled by the Xbox or PlayStation ring fences, the world wide web remains a largely platform-agnostic space, available on handheld devices, conventional computers, games consoles and even televisions. Locating Prospero as a technology for the web, through browser interactions, means the platform can be open to comparatively low specification and cheap computers. Prospero will work equally effectively on a \$2000 Macbook Pro or a \$200 Chromebook. It attempts to bridge both the creative and digital divide. In the spirit of applied theatre, it attempts to be an open, egalitarian, equitable space.

2. Drama is a kinaesthetic mode of learning, and technology must serve these activities.

Screen-based devices are most commonly associated with passive consumption of mediated content such as Netflix, YouTube and Amazon Prime. Video games like *Fortnite* promote engagement and immersion, but I would contest that most commonly these games require the player to be static, staring at a monitor and wearing a headset. There is much to discuss about the opportunities such games offer the realm of educational drama, particularly with the rise of virtual reality, but for Prospero, activity primarily needs to happen in a space, between people and in groups. Sometimes this might be a physical space, at other times virtual, but regardless of where people meet, the primary instinct of Prospero is to make people move, act, respond and reflect together. Prospero aims to do this by blending shared, screen-based resources – via a laptop or desktop computer – with individualised content, cascaded out to personal smartphones or tablet computers. This can be text, group tasks, motion tracking activities, virtual reality content, audio or video instructions. Individual smartphones become personal scripts, directing participants to stand, move, question and collaborate. Prospero centrally controls all of these individual devices, what are called ‘Ariel’ units. The platform can control potentially limitless numbers of Ariels, which can be located in the same room, or multiple locations. Wherever they are, Prospero co-ordinates, organises and controls these Ariels, enabling the possibility of global, real-time collaboration between participants.

3. The physical and the virtual

In an age of internationalism and globalisation, a truly efficacious applied theatre practice needs scale and reach to achieve meaningful change. This is not the space to open up complex questions of what we mean by contentious terms as ‘empowerment’, ‘efficacy’ or change. However, if we can broadly except that a common imperative of all forms of drama education is the achievement of some kind of social or personal transformation, then for Prospero we need to ask how the internet can contribute to these goals. The internet’s power to organise, influence and manipulate are well documented. From the Arab Spring to President Trump’s ‘Fake News’ and Facebook’s Cambridge Analytica scandal, the internet’s power to exercise influence and control are well known. Prospero attempts to harness this potential for constructive efficacy, allowing the development and digital distribution at distance and scale of applied theatre and educational drama learning materials. It can enable collaboration and learning between cultures, generations and

political viewpoints, to all places and participants with free and unfettered access to the World Wide Web. The primary instinct of Prospero is to make people move, act, respond and reflect together.

Throughout the development of Prospero, C&T has sought to shape the system as a web resource that could be deployed by anyone wanting to engage audiences in programmes of creative, participatory learning, whatever their context, art form or desired outcome. To best illustrate this potential, here are two examples of how this approach has resulted in Prospero being deployed in contrasting settings and with different benefits.

### **Smiles Africa, Korogocho Nairobi**

Smiles Africa is a small charity that leads social justice projects with the children and young people of Korogocho, Nairobi. Korogocho (which means ‘Shoulder to Shoulder’) is a slum of about 150,000 people to the east of the Kenyan capital. Bisected by the highly polluted Nairobi River and bordered by a vast rubbish dump of largely western waste, Korogocho, as its name implies, is vastly overcrowded, with high levels of malnutrition, child mortality, contaminated water supplies, crime, abuse and civic corruption. A small number of state schools struggle to educate the large, young population, whilst a network of ‘informal’ schools provide basic education to the rest of the population in cramped, makeshift shanty-type premises.

However, whilst Korogocho lacks some of the most basic amenities, mobile phone usage proliferates. Internet infrastructure is not provided by fibre optic cables in the ground, but by mobile phone masts, facilitating services from cellular networks like Safaricom. Handsets and phones are more basic than in the developed world, with the market proving highly volatile and with new handset manufacturers like Infinix and Tecno producing cheap models that deliver value for money, if not high-end specifications.

Against this background, since 2008 C&T has partnered with Smiles Africa and other projects in Korogocho, leading a number of educational and social justice projects with local schools. Inevitably these interventions chose to focus on specific needs and outcomes, which, whilst valuable on their own terms, pale in comparison with the scale of the challenges faced by the local population. In 2018, C&T decided to adopt a new approach, using Prospero to attempt more strategic interventions, working closely with Smiles Africa and local schools and education agencies.

The central approach remained the same: using a repertoire of transferable and accessible drama techniques to enable young people to identify and respond to risks and challenges in their neighbourhood, particularly with regard to socially constructed barriers to achieving a successful education. For example, a range of image theatre techniques might be used to identify and prompt discussions around female genital mutilation in young girls. However, whilst previously this work would have been directly facilitated by C&T and Smiles Africa’s drama facilitators on a repeating cycle in different schools, Prospero offered a different mode of delivery.

First, these workshops were designed and piloted just as they might be in a conventional devising process, ensuring the content and the approach were appropriate, effective and sensitive. C&T and Smiles Africa chose to focus on two of the United Nations Global Development Goals (United Nations, 2017) as a framework for the programme, in particular Goal 4.1 (“By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”) and Goal 10.3.1 (“Proportion of population reporting having personally felt

discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law”).

Next, these processes were re-constructed within Prospero, effectively making the Smartscripts into interactive workshop plans. Photographs and short video clips were used to model techniques and practices and then these were embedded within the Smartscripts, providing illustrative examples of how to sensitively represent the often highly charged content (for example, by using distancing techniques). Alternative mitigation strategies or conflict resolution techniques could be offered within these Smartscripts, with participants able to select options that most helpfully correspond to the particular needs and circumstances. Similarly, links to other agencies or social justice groups could be embedded in the Smartscripts, offering progression routes for participants beyond the drama experience.

The resulting Smartscripts could then be offered at scale across Korogocho’s informal schools. Even though these schools had no IT infrastructure to use these Smartscripts as their counterparts in the developed world might, teachers could ‘run’ them on the smartphones in their pockets. This meant their own phones effectively became their own personalised facilitation device, allowing them to lead activities in their classrooms, supported by the media-rich learning resources. The teacher remained vital to this effective delivery: Prospero working to model best practice through videos and media content, enabling the classroom facilitator to feel more secure in their deployment of specialist drama techniques.

In this context, Prospero enabled C&T and Smiles Africa to resource and support efficacious programmes of work in far more schools and classrooms than would have been previously possible, achieving a scale and impact not possible by work solely led by pure human interventions.

### **Using Prospero to enable networked international collaborations to effect change**

Between 2017 and 2019, C&T undertook a major collaboration between schools and communities exploring the charged subject of migration. *Push/Pull* drew on recent vast fluxes of human movement across Europe and other parts of the world and the rising tide of nationalism fuelled by the election of Donald Trump in the USA and Brexit in the UK. The project was playfully inspired by migrants’ use and dependency on smartphones as tools to aid their journeys. These pocket-sized devices act as navigational tools, with GPS-activated maps showing safe routes of passage, messaging tools enabling communication between families and friends en route, and online banking apps providing ways to convert and transfer funds across currencies. As a consequence, *Push/Pull* took the form of a website that appears as a conventional travel app. However, its menu consists of a string of interactive journeys of migration, researched, dramatised and digitised by schools and communities in the UK, Vienna, New York and Kenya.

Participating schools and communities registered for the project through local supporting organisations, for example the University of Vienna in Austria and New York City Department of Education. Next, these schools accessed a series of Prospero Smartscripts that acted as tutorials to help them create their journeys. These ten Smartscripts navigated them, step-by-step, through the process of identifying people and families in their neighbourhoods who had stories of migration to tell and who were happy to have them told through drama and the web. Next, Prospero guided the process

of research, modelling interview techniques and providing guidance on how to capture this documentary evidence through video, photography and sound recordings.

Next, Prospero tutored the process of dramatisation, offering a template structure common to all journeys. This drew on simple techniques of psycho geographic storytelling, with each journey represented by a series of video scenes that showed key ‘stops’ on the migrant’s passage. These ‘stops’ were anchored in interactive onscreen maps, showing the progress route of the protagonist migrant. In between these stops, Prospero enabled the embedding of a range of other multimedia content, populating and fleshing out the texture of the journeys: text messages would ping in automatically, news alerts would offer context, video calls from relatives would add colour, mood and tone.

Prospero navigated participants through this process: part psycho geography, part documentary, part theatre, part blended learning. No two stories were the same. Example journeys included passages from Tibet to New York, as a family sought to escape Chinese oppression, from Damascus to Vienna against the background of the Syrian civil war and a Jewish family’s flight from Nazi oppression in Salzburg, escaping to England in 1939. The creations of these journeys were not only facilitated by Prospero-generated workshops, the system also provided the platform by which these dramas could be encoded digitally. Young participants were able to take the constituent parts of their journeys – video ‘stops’, text messages, news alerts, video calls – and curate them within a Prospero Smartscrip itself. Prospero thereby became not only the tool by which the drama process was facilitated, it became the mechanism by which the resulting work could be authored, published and shared online. To date, over 50 of these *Push/Pull* journeys have been created by young people, many of them as young as 11 or 12, their digital skillset proving synergistic with the content and efficacious outcomes of the applied theatre activities they shaped.

It is perhaps this final example that best models the aspirations C&T has for Prospero: an accessible online resource that not only uses technology in a way that chimes with the digital culture and values of so many young people, but also a space in which participants, almost entirely regardless of context, affluence or cultural opportunity can collaborate, learn and create with peers around the world. The notion of ‘acting smart’ clarifies this approach: mixing social action, drama and smart technologies to effect global collaboration. Over the coming years, C&T plan to remain open to these possibilities, building a communal space for artists, theatre makers, democrats and participants, which can take on the challenges of our globalised, mediatised world.

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PROOF



## 35 Unexpected resilience of the participant performance model for playback theatre

*Jonathan Fox*

**CONTRARY TO EXPECTATIONS**, recent findings suggest that playback theatre performances using minimally trained actors can create positive theatre experiences, even in challenging social contexts of civil and natural disruption where the level of civilian trauma is high. An approach called the participant performance model has accelerated this development. In this chapter, I will describe the model and some of its applications.

### **Two-sided start**

Playback theatre is an interactive approach in which actors dramatize personal stories of others present in classrooms, organizations, mental health clinics, and disaster recovery areas. It originated in 1975, founded by me and Jo Salas. From the start, playback theatre adopted a somewhat double-headed public face. Inspired by the experimental work of contemporary theatre ensembles in the USA, such as the Open Theatre and the Performance Group, it aspired to a level of dramatic art that demanded intensive skill building and theatrical values. Following the work of the original Playback Theatre company, which was located in upstate New York, today groups practice and perform playback theatre in cities and towns in over 70 countries (see, for example, Melbourne Playback Theatre and Houston Playback Theatre).

At the same time, influenced by the creative dramatics movement in the UK, playback theatre often takes the form of a workshop format, in which participants, without any training, improvise their own stories for each other. Creative dramatics also demanded that the experience be constructive for all concerned. Over the years, the performance format and the workshop format continued to be vibrant forms for the practice of playback theatre. Other guiding influences at the outset, in addition to experimental theatre and creative dramatics, were psychodrama, with its emphasis on spontaneity and an inclusive group process, and the student-centered pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Augusto Boal was also an influence, but his book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, did not appear in English until 1978, three years after the start of playback theatre).

The original vision entailed the simple idea of acting out the real stories of the community, simply because it seemed like a worthwhile thing to do. Unlike Boal and his followers, who focus on scenarios of oppression, we did not have a narrative agenda. Instead, we espoused an idealistic vision of the value of each person's story, no matter how ordinary. We offered "an empty space, where personal stories are mirrored with emotional resonance" (Dirnstorfer & Saud 2017: 2). However, while we did not seek intensely dramatic stories, at the same time we knew we did not want to avoid them. We wanted to offer a forum for *any* story, including those that many people chose not to hear, either

because the stories were harrowing or because their tellers were not normally given space. The exposure to psychodrama on the part of myself and many of the early performers of playback theatre helped convince us that people could reveal and see dramatized even the most painful experiences and emerge with a burden lightened.

As playback theatre slowly spread from the original group outwards through a combination of word of mouth and trainings we offered, audience tellers began to offer very serious stories, even though we did not explicitly seek them. One explanation was the respectful atmosphere the playback theatre groups engendered; it was clear to audiences that the requested narratives were not primarily mere stimuli to showcase the artistry of the actors, but rather as elements of a genuine community discourse. Another was the evident interest of the performers in listening. A third was the careful structure of each event, which we term the “ritual,” which offered a framework of safety. A fourth was playback theatre’s “gentle” approach. We enacted just what the teller said and had no need, in contrast to many therapeutic approaches of the time, or indeed Artaud-inspired experimental ensembles, to go to the “bone,” enacting in all its dramatic detail what might be barely hinted-at violence. Thus, we learned to be not surprised, even in a public setting, about stories of the death of a child, an accident, a shooting, or a fire.

### Meeting the crisis

The interest in big, life-changing stories was not just a one-way process. As playback theatre practitioners, many of whom were socially and politically minded, became used to enacting very serious stories, they began to express interest in “emergency” playback theatre. In 1999 at a global playback theatre conference, one participant suggested a kind of flying theatre squad that could travel to communities in crisis, such as the Balkan wars dominating the news at the time. In an article written in 2000 about bringing playback theatre to communities ravaged by forest fires in the Northwest USA, William Layman wrote of the “interest in Italy, Hungary and Washington D.C. for some form of a Playback Emergency Response Team to address community needs during a period of crisis” (Layman 2000: 4). Despite this growing interest, however, for a long time there was little progress. The practical obstacles were formidable. Performers would have to be ready to drop everything at a moment’s notice to travel to the site of the crisis. They would need to make onsite arrangements in contexts where basic communications were usually disrupted, and food and shelter was often scarce. Most decisively, such interventions would take considerable funds that would be needed immediately.

Intermittently, playback theatre practitioners, helped by the Centre for Playback Theatre, did mount occasional interventions, such as trips to Angola and Burundi in the early 2000s (funded by Search for Common Ground, a large conflict resolution NGO) as well as to hurricane-ravaged New Orleans in 2006. During this time, there was a general assumption among playback theatre leaders, including myself, that performing for audiences who were facing or had faced traumatic upheaval in their lives required a high level of skill and experience. Such stories tended to be complex as well as emotionally charged, posing an intense challenge for the improvisers.

Underlying this assumption was an ethical concern. As Susan Evans, a mental health professional involved in playback theatre, wrote: “It is not difficult to see that performances/ events of this nature would place a great weight and responsibility on conductors and actors alike as energies involved within an audience were likely to be considerable” (Evans 2002: 2). Following a major community crisis, the personal story often mirrored the

societal story, leading to highly emotional audiences as well as tellers. Performers who were shaken by what they were hearing and the intensity of feeling in the room could become overwhelmed and freeze. Or the opposite could happen; they could lose sight of their own boundaries and overdo the enactment. Tellers could indeed, to mention a concern often voiced by health professionals, become reawakened to their ordeal in a psychologically damaging way—retraumatization.

In addition, there was another ethical issue. Theatre artists from a far away place swooping in to “serve” suffering local inhabitants faced an issue of congruence. The visiting performers did not know the local culture, customs, or the deep background to the stories. They often spoke a different language. Most critically, they were sometimes white-skinned and from the global North, who could not avoid the shadow of colonialism when traveling the global South. Who was benefiting most in such cases was a valid question. As I admitted after a teaching trip to Burundi: ‘Personally, I get a trip to Africa, a tremendously stimulating new experience, and a new item for my resume. I even get paid’ (Fox 2003: 13).

For the visiting artists, the experience could also be profoundly unsettling. Researching visiting playback theatre trainers who undertook an intervention in post-conflict Sri Lanka, McCormick and Henry identified a significant “loss of self.” “Good intent” and the “itch” of an altruistic calling was not enough to overcome the “challenges of a naïve understanding of the inherent complexities of working within other cultures when individuals position self as ‘expert’ in an environment that has a colonial past” (McCormick & Henry 2017: 11).

### The participant performance model

In 1999, Hudson River Playback Theatre, a skilled group headed by co-founder Jo Salas, initiated a program in schools called No More Bullying! Inside of an hour, the team delivered to school children a presentation on the power of bystanders to curtail bullying, enacted stories from students using playback theatre, and role-played solutions. The role plays involved audience participants, in the manner of Forum Theatre. Highly isolated individuals often took the opportunity to tell some part of their story. Perpetrators occasionally also told. The group provided teachers with suggestions for pre- and post-visit lessons. The program was sought after by schools (Salas 2005: 79). In 19 years, Hudson River Playback Theatre performed for over 35,000 kids.

As a development to the No More Bullying! program, the group established an eight-week program involving 15–20 students, who undertook a weekly training session in playback theatre and then, at the end, performed playback theatre for other students along with the adult actors. Salas, who was naming an approach that had been practiced by playback theatre practitioners in different configurations since the first workshops in the 70s, defined this configuration as the participant performance model (PPM). It was based on “training a small number of members (ten to twenty) of a particular interest or population group to carry out performances *for other members of that same group*” (Salas 2011: 106). Salas was encouraged by the result, writing, ‘For the audience members, seeing their peers onstage increases the impact of the content’ (Salas 2011: 106).

The PPM idea also appealed to adult playback theatre practitioners who did not aspire to high artistic achievement based on extensive ensemble training. An example is the work initiated by Yuen Chun Chan in Toronto. Toronto was home to Toronto Playback Theatre, a professionally oriented group. In a new initiative in 2013, Chan and a colleague

invited “our friends and their friends,” all Chinese-speaking immigrants to Canada, to a four-week evening class to experience playback theatre. After the class, there emerged a group espousing the mission to “serve the people in the community where we came from” (Chan 2014: 7). This is an example of citizen actors, just one step away from their audiences, making themselves available to act out the stories of their own demographic community. Despite their self-professed lack of experience, they manifested the courage to take their work into the public sphere in order to reach less visible individuals, including “single mothers, empty nesters, unemployed people, and new immigrants” (Chan 2014: 7). Other instances of the PPM for playback theatre began to crop up around the world, including a group of mothers in Japan, with a mission of providing relief to the isolation of their own demographic, and a group of asylum refugees in the Netherlands, who performed for other immigrants.

In these examples, the PPM performers played for audiences whose readiness to share deep stories varied on a wide spectrum. For the most part, the performances had open themes (unlike the original No More Bullying program, which was sharply focused) and welcomed everyday as well as momentous narratives. Even so, the big stories came. An ambitious project in post-insurgency Nepal, called Enacting Dialogue, offers an instance of PPM in a context where most of the stories recalled the time of conflict. Supported with German funds and administered by a German NGO in partnership with Pro Public, a Nepali organisation, the project trained 12 theatre professionals from Kathmandu in playback theatre, who in turn trained 48 volunteer “dialogue facilitators” from areas still feeling the effects of the Nepali Maoist insurgency. Although the insurgency had ended, social devastation lingered, even a decade later. The six teams, comprised of ex-combatants and villagers of diverse representation, each in a different district of the country, performed 186 times in 2015–6 (Dirnstorfer & Saud 2017: 10). The traumatic experiences lived through by many audience members, generally unheard and unacknowledged, quickly rose to the surface in the playback theatre format, creating tests of skill and courage for the dialogue facilitators. Consulting with this project in 2016 and 2017, I observed many such narratives brought to the stage, including being wounded in battle and being sold as a young child to be an indentured servant to a violent master.

To ask the dialogue facilitators, previously untrained in theatre and themselves having lived through traumatic times, to perform playback theatre in public might seem like a recipe for theatrical disaster. One might expect frequent artistic failure and psychologically overwhelmed performers, leaving tellers and audiences either dissatisfied from stereotypical, shallow enactments or plunged back into their trauma. However, this is not what resulted. The performances, even upon a revisit to a specific location, were “well-attended” and received “positive feedback” from the audiences (Dirnstorfer & Saud 2017: 10). According to an external evaluation commissioned by the funder, the overall impact was “significant”: “When people sat together and engaged in the story of their own community member, their attitude toward the storyteller had changed. Through this process, audiences in many districts changed their previous antagonistic perspective and started sharing goods, foods and information” (IPRAD report 2016: 10).

The assumption was that “the actors’ open hearts and listening skills are conditions that make the telling for conflict-related stories *likely*. At the same time, the performers do also deepen their skills in listening and enacting with every process of theatre-facilitated dialogue” (Dirnstorfer & Saud 2017: 8).

An additional outcome concerned the growth of the dialogue facilitators, many of whom had previously lived socially isolated lives as ex-combatants in the conflict. At

the conclusion of the initial three-year funding cycle for the project, the originator of EnActing Dialogue, Anne Dirnstorfer, wrote: “[...] the most radical changes could be observed at personal level for those who were intensely engaged in the project for the period of three years ... In their role as ‘artists’ who engage their community, they were increasingly accepted” (Dirnstorfer 2018: 1).

### **Narrative reticulation**

Another approach to assessing the effectiveness of any playback theatre performance, including those using the PPM approach, is to note the level of narrative reticulation—the extent to which the individually emergent narratives are linked. According to narrative reticulation theory, a successful event will feature a spontaneous sequence of intricately connected stories that add up to more than the sum of its parts (Fox, 2020). Anne Dirnstorfer describes this process at work, noting that stories holding shared themes such as loss of trust and meaning created subconscious connections (Dirnstorfer & Saud, 2017:12).

### **Vulnerabilities**

The formal evaluation of the EnActing Dialogue project, as well as confirmation arising from my own observation of the level of narrative reticulation in observed performances, suggests that the PPM approach can deliver effective theatre in a post-conflict setting. Using PPM is practically easier. The performers are local and congruent, since they are of the same culture as their audiences. Arguably, despite lower levels of skill than more trained playback theatre performers elsewhere, their performances are more impactful than if a team of strangers flies in to act out their stories. We can be cautiously optimistic that PPM offers a way for playback theatre to expand farther in the world in every kind of circumstance. Salas suggests that “[t]he participant performance model—a reiteration of the original idea of the citizen actor—may prove a more portable model for Playback in the future [than the experienced ensemble concept]” (Salas, 2011: 123). For this to happen the trained experts in playback theatre need to identify as teachers rather than performing artists; they need to be content to be sowers of seeds rather than bright sunflowers waving in the field.

For PPM to work, especially in settings of social disruption, special attention must be paid to a few vulnerable areas. One is the training of the conductors, that intermediary who acts as an MC during the performance, inviting tellers and holding with them a very brief interview before saying, “Let’s watch!” and turning the focus over to the actors and musicians. The conductor is mainly responsible for guiding the dramatic ceremony, listening effectively to the tellers, helping the performers get just enough information, and intervening appropriately in order to contain emotions. “The Conductor requires sophisticated skills in any context,” writes Salas (2011: 98). How to teach those skills in a minimal time frame will remain a challenge for those designing PPM programs. Despite the special demands on the conductor, however, most of the same advantages that apply to actors and musicians apply here, too. For instance, in one of the PPM performances I witnessed in Nepal, the conductor was able to speak to the audience and interview tellers in the regional language; in a country with dozens of local languages, this is a distinct benefit.

PPM performers in post-conflict settings need special training in how to enact violence, because it is a frequent presence in audience stories and clumsy—often excessively

graphic—embodiments have the power to retraumatize. The performers need to learn to find the “right level” (Dirnstorfer & Saud, 2017:13). This task is a delicate one when the performers themselves, as members of the community, have experienced identity-shattering violence and may need psychosocial support along with their training. To be avoided is the kind of outcome where audience members run from the room, as happened once in Burundi (Fox 2003: 13), or an actor faints onstage, as occurred during a performance in Afghanistan (Salas 2011: 117).

Finally, the practical challenges of bringing playback theatre to remote regions and disrupted communities, while perhaps logistically easier and cheaper than sending a touring theatre company from far away, remain formidable. There is the need for effective administrative support under often-difficult conditions, and there is the ever-present issue of long-term stability, for while the PPM approach does not have the same pressure for continuity as a self-identified artistic ensemble, the PPM project itself needs ongoing support to survive. Even a self-started group like the one in Toronto faces the challenges of recruitment (attracting community members to something so different from their everyday cultural experience), continuity (members are constantly dropping out because of economic and social pressures), and finance (members cannot afford even minimal training and do not have the leisure for it) (Chan 2014: 12).

## Conclusion

Undoubtedly, some concerns about applying PPM in social contexts of civil and natural upheaval stem from the pervasive reach of the trauma concept, which emerged from a Western model of therapy that privileges the individual and private space. The contention that a PPM playback theatre performance is “risky,” in a context like a Nepali village, a Toronto neighborhood, or a school classroom undervalues the positive potential of communal discourse in the public sphere. It ignores what Salas terms the “unique potency of the arts, which invoke creativity, synthesis, vision, and imagination” (Salas, 2011: 105) and denies the capacity of a community to uncover their own sources of healing and resilience.

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PROOF



**Part VI**

**Border crossing**

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## 36 Introduction to border crossings

*Tim Prentki*

**SINCE THE PUBLICATION** of Henry Giroux' *Border Crossings*<sup>1</sup> there has been a growing interest in the concept, not only in the discourses of education but also among those who are concerned with cultural work in its broadest sense. The notion has powerful resonances for applied theatre which is itself frequently concerned with strategies of self-empowerment that enable communities and individuals to move from one place to another; a transition which may involve crossing one or more borders. These borders may appear in many guises: psychological; racial; sexual; sociological; professional; as well as geographical. Paradoxically, the border may be at once what provides us with some security about our identity, demarcating ourselves from others, while also being the barrier that prevents us from developing new capacities or trying on new identities. Theatre processes, on the other hand, depend upon the willingness of the actor to cross borders not only to impersonate the dress, manner and speech of another but also to achieve, temporarily, the ultimate expression of border-crossing, empathy.

But before the crossing can occur the border has to be recognised. Many of the research activities of applied theatre practitioners are directed towards enabling the participants in projects to identify where they draw their own borders; where they have erected the razor wire around their 'comfort zones' to keep out the threats to a stable, if fossilised, identity and to discourage adventurous attempts to stray onto the territory of another. Not all borders, however, are of our own making. In most situations where applied theatre is practised, the participants, if they wish to alter their starting position, have to negotiate their way across the borders designated by other people; people who organise the world either to suit their own ends or out of a desire to do what is best, according to them, for others. So the chief executives of multinational corporations ensure that there are no borders to interfere with the movement of their financial assets around the world while being at the forefront of pressure to restrict the movements of people, thereby guaranteeing the preservation of zones of cheap labour to maximise profit. It is part of a facilitator's role in applied theatre processes to assist the participants in distinguishing between those borders which have been created by the external world so that they can be controlled or oppressed (to use Freire's term) and those which they have put up around themselves out of fear, selfishness or lack of imagination. This is broadly the distinction which Boal makes between his Theatre of the Oppressed methods designed to combat external, social oppression and the devising techniques of *The Rainbow of Desire* that seek to liberate the individual from the guard-posts and search-light towers of self-consciousness. Without delving into the domain of the mind, however, there are a whole variety of external borders, some of which may be susceptible to change and others of which are beyond the scope of an applied theatre practice. For instance, an applied theatre

practitioner working with a group of peasants in an African village needs to distinguish between those of the community's material conditions which are susceptible to being changed from within the community, such as gender relations or local corruption, and those which are the direct or indirect consequence of the structural adjustment programme – the 'conditionalities' – to which their national government has subscribed in return for World Bank and International Monetary Fund loans.

When working with those groups who hold power in particular communities, police, politicians, doctors or whomever, it is often the border between the professional and the human being that is hardest to cross. The prospect of being stripped of the protective shell of the social role can induce fear and evasion among those for whom professional habits have shut off access to the wellsprings of imagination and creativity. The underlying principle in all these various applications of the theatre process is fundamentally the same: to enable the participants to (re)discover their innate capacities for play, for imagining, for creating, for relating to others by exploring the self in the other and the other in the self. Theatre is being applied to a world where being human has been reduced to a set of transactional economic relations. It is therefore an activity of resistance, of crossing the border between objectification and subjectivity. Participants are invited to recreate themselves in ways in which the daily business of economic existence constantly thwarts.

Where practitioners come into a community or context to which they do not normally belong, they also undertake an act of border crossing. They move temporarily into other, unfamiliar worlds where, as outsiders, they will see some things less clearly than the participants and others, perhaps, more clearly with the benefit of distance. They are guests or visitors who will do their work, then leave; recrossing the border back into their known worlds. Although qualities such as humility and sensitivity, combined with thorough research and preparation, can mitigate the dangers of misunderstanding and inappropriate actions, it is important that facilitators do not mislead participants into seeing them as bearers of solutions or messianic figures who can take away the sins of their world. Responsibility for acting upon the discoveries unearthed by the process rests with the community of participants and the decision about whether to cross a border, and which one to cross, belongs with them, not with the external agents.

A significant example of border crossing is furnished by the Italian company Cantieri Meticci, working out of Bologna. It operates through workshops and performances where the participants are intentionally drawn from the recently in-coming migrants to the city and the longer-established residents in order that each group, through the process of theatre, is afforded the opportunity to form empathic relationships with those whom the media typically depict as 'the other'. In the act of creating performance or devising around an improvisation, borders are crossed in order to deepen understanding and resist social fragmentation.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the border-crossing into and out of a particular community, the facilitators are also border crossers as part of the theatrical process. They are, in common with tricksters who inhabit all cultures and mythologies, the figures who move between two worlds, whether this be Boal's Joker who negotiated the stage fiction for the 'real' world of the audience, or Jesus Christ who commutes between the human and divine worlds. The application of theatre to the social realities of its audiences and actors is an ancient, popular tradition from which contemporary applied theatre draws its inspiration. The applied theatre facilitator, in the European tradition of the stage fool, is not only adept at crossing borders but also plays along the edges of art and life to expose contradictions and invite reflections upon the theatrical in life and the lively in theatre. In moving from

a *play to play* the foolish facilitator draws participants back into the carnival of the human senses. This is the process which Brecht depicts through the character of Azdak, the fool and facilitator of the play in which he is also a participant, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.<sup>3</sup>

Any applied theatre process is likely to involve multiple border crossings in which the facilitators assist the participants in making the transition without falling foul of the border guards whether actual or in their head. But the facilitators, themselves, are not exempt from the pitfalls of moving into unfamiliar territory. Crossing the border may well be liberating but is rarely accomplished without difficulty.

### Notes

- 1 Giroux, H. (1992) *Border Crossings*, London: Routledge
- 2 See Chapter 5 in L. Iannelli and P. Musarò (eds) (2017) *Performative Citizenship*, Mimesis International
- 3 Prentki, T. (2006) 'Fooling with Social Intervention: Azdak, Brecht's Dialectical Joker', in M. Balfour and J. Somers (eds), *Drama as Social Intervention*, Concord: Captus University Publications.

## 37 Border crossings

*Henry Giroux*

*Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, Routledge (1992), excerpt from pp. 168–176.

### **The politics of voice and difference**

**SO, IF YOU REALLY** want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex–Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself ... and as long as I have to accommodate ... English speakers rather than have them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. I will not longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, White. I will have my serpent's tongue – my women's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.<sup>1</sup>

Difference must not be tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security, which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes, which can bring that future into being. As women we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, not the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.<sup>2</sup>

**THE DISCOURSE OF DIFFERENCE AS USED** by both Gloria Anzaluda and Audre Lorde provides a glimpse of the multiple and shifting ground that the term suggests. Defined in opposition to hegemonic codes of culture, subjectivity, and history, a number of social theorists have begun recently to use a discourse of difference to challenge some of the most fundamental dominant assertions that characterize mainstream science. [...] Theorists writing in anthropology, feminism, liberation theology, critical education, literary theory, and a host of other areas firmly reject mainstream assumptions regarding culture as a field of shared experiences defined in Western ethnocentric terms; in addition, critical theorists have rejected the mainstream humanist assumption that the individual is both the source of all human action and the most important unit of social analysis; moreover, many critical theorists reject the view that objectivity and consensus are the privileged and innocent concerns of dominant social science research. Reading in

opposition to these assumptions, the notion of difference has played an important role in making visible how power is inscribed differently in and between zones of culture, how cultural borderlands raise important questions regarding relations of inequality, struggle and history, and how differences are expressed in multiple and contradictory ways within individuals and between different groups.

While theories of difference have made important contributions to a discourse of progressive politics and pedagogy, they have also exhibited tendencies that have been theoretically flawed and politically regressive. In the first instance, the most important insights have emerged primarily from feminist women of color. These include “the recognition of a self that is multiplicitous, not unitary; the recognition that differences are always relational rather than inherent; and the recognition that wholeness and commonality are acts of will and creativity, rather than passive discovery.”<sup>3</sup> In the second instance, the discourse of difference has contributed to paralyzing forms of essentialism, ahistoricism, and a politics of separatism. In what follows, I first want to explore the dialectical nature of the relationship between difference and voice that informs a discourse of critical pedagogy. I conclude by pointing to some of the broader implications that a discourse of difference and voice might have for what I call a liberatory border pedagogy.

It is important for critical educators to take up culture as a vital source for developing a politics of identity, community and pedagogy. In this perspective culture is not seen as monolithic or unchanging, but as a site of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle amidst diverse relations of power and privilege. Within this pedagogical cultural borderland known as school, subordinated cultures push against and permeate the alleged unproblematic and homogenous borders of dominant cultural forms and practices. It is important to note that critical educators cannot be content merely to map how ideologies are inscribed in the various relations of schooling, whether they be the curriculum, forms of school organization, or in teacher–student relations. While these should be important concerns for critical educators, a more viable critical pedagogy needs to go beyond them by analyzing how ideologies are actually taken up in the voices and lived experiences of students as they give meaning to dreams, desires, and subject positions that they inhabit. In this sense, radical educators need to provide the conditions for students to speak so that their narratives can be affirmed and engaged along with the consistencies and contradictions that characterize such experiences. More specifically, the issue of student experiences has to be analyzed as part of a broader politics of voice and difference.

As bell hooks has pointed out, coming to voice means “moving from silence into speech as a revolutionary gesture ... the idea of finding one’s voice or having a voice assumes a primacy in talk discourse, writing and action. Only as subjects can we speak.... Awareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives is one way [to begin] the process of education for critical consciousness.”<sup>4</sup> This suggests that educators need to approach learning not merely as the acquisitions of knowledge but as the production of cultural practices that offer students a sense of identity, place, and hope. To speak of voice is to address the wider issues of how people either become agents in the process of making history or function as subjects under the weight of oppressions and exploitation within the various linguistic and institutional boundaries that produce dominant and subordinate cultures in any given society. In this case, voice provides a critical referent for analyzing how students are made voiceless in particular settings by not being allowed to speak, or how students silence themselves out of either fear or ignorance regarding the strength and possibilities that exist in the multiple languages

and experiences that connect them to a sense of agency and self-for-formation. At the same time, voices forged in opposition and struggle provide the crucial conditions by which subordinated individuals and groups can reclaim their own memories, stories, and histories as part of an ongoing collective struggle to challenge those power structures that attempt to silence them.

By being able to listen critically to the voices of students, teachers become border-crossers through their ability to not only make different narratives available to themselves and other students but also by legitimating difference as a basic condition for understanding the limits of one's own voice. By viewing schooling as a form of cultural politics, radical educators can bring the concepts of culture, voice, and difference together to create a borderland where multiple subjectivities and identities exist as part of a pedagogical practice that provides the potential to expand the politics of democratic community and solidarity. Critical pedagogy serves to make visible those marginal cultures that have been traditionally suppressed. [...] Moreover, it provides students with a range of identities and human possibilities that emerge among, within, and between different zones of culture. Of course, educators cannot approach this task by merely giving equal weight to all zones of cultural difference; on the contrary, they must link the creation, sustenance, and formation of cultural difference as a fundamental part of the discourse of inequality, power struggle and possibility. Difference is not about merely registering or asserting special, racial, ethnic, or cultural differences but about the historical differences that manifest themselves in public and pedagogical struggles.

[...]

### **Resisting difference: towards a liberatory theory of border pedagogy**

[...]

To take up the issue of difference is to recognize that it cannot be analyzed unproblematically. In effect, the concept has to be used to resist those aspects of its ideological legacy used in the service of exploitation and subordination as well as to develop a critical reference for engaging the limits and strengths of difference as a central aspect of a critical theory of education. In what follows, I want to look briefly at how the concept of difference has been used by conservatives, liberals, and radicals in ways that either produce relations of subordination or undermine its possibility for developing a radical politics of democracy.

Conservatives have often used the term difference in a variety of ways. To justify the relations of racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation by associating difference with the notion of deviance while simultaneously justifying such assumptions through an appeal to science, biology, nature, or culture. In many instances difference functions as a market of power to name, label, and exclude particular groups while simultaneously being legitimated within a reactionary discourse and politics of public life, i.e., nationalism, patriotism, and "democracy."

[...]

Liberals generally take up a dual approach to the issue of difference. This can be illuminated through the issue of race. On the one hand, liberals embrace the issue of difference through a notion of cultural diversity in which it is argued that race is simply one more form of cultural difference among many that make up the population like the United States. The problem with this approach is that "by denying both the centrality and uniqueness of race as a principle of socio-economic organization, it redefines



difference in a way that denies the history of racism in the United States and, thus denies white responsibility for the present and past oppression and exploitation of people of color.”<sup>5</sup> In this view, the systems of inequalities, subordination, and terror that inform the dominant culture’s structuring of difference around issues of race, gender, and class are simply mapped out of existence. On the other hand liberals often attempt to appropriate and dissolve cultural differences into the melting pot theory of culture. The history, language, experiences, and narratives of the Other are relegated to invisible zones of culture, borderlands where the dominant culture refuses to hear the voice of the Other while celebrating a “white, male, middleclass, European, heterosexuality [as] the standard of and the criteria for rationality and morality.”<sup>6</sup> Under the rubric of equality and freedom, the liberal version of assimilation wages “war” against particularity, lived differences, and imagined futures that challenge culture as unitary, sacred, and unchanging and the identity, as unified, static, and natural.

On the other hand, radical educational theorists have taken up the issue of difference around two basic considerations. First, difference has been elaborated as part of an attempt to understand subjectivity as fractured and multiple rather than as unified and static.<sup>7</sup> Central to this approach is the notion that subjectivities and identities are constructed in multilayered and contradictory ways. Identity is seen not only as a historical and social construction, but also as part of a continual process of transformation and change. This position is of enormous significance for undermining the humanist notion of the subject as both unified and the determinate source of human will and action. As significant as this position is, it is fraught with some theoretical problems.

By arguing that human subjectivities are constructed in language through the production and availability of diverse subject positions, many radical theorists have developed a theory of subjectivity that erases any viable notion of human agency. [...] Lost here is any understanding of how agency works within the interface of subject positions made available by a society and the weight of choices constructed out of specific desires, forms of self-reflection, and concrete social practices. There is little sense of how people actually take up particular subject positions, and what the conditions are that make it impossible for some groups to take up, live, and speak particular discourses.<sup>8</sup>

The second approach to difference that radical educational theorists have taken up centers on the differences between groups. [...] In the most general sense, identity politics refers to “the tendency to base one’s politics on a sense of personal identity – as gay, as Jewish, as Black, as female.”<sup>9</sup> The politics of identity celebrates differences as they are constructed around the categories of race, class, gender, and sexual preference. [...]

Initially identity politics offered a powerful challenge to the hegemonic notion that Eurocentric culture is superior to other cultures and traditions by offering political and cultural vocabularies to subordinated groups by which they could reconstruct their own histories and give voice to their individual and collective identities. This was especially true for the early stages of the feminist movement when the slogan, “the personal is the political,” gave rise to the assumption that lived experience offered women the opportunity to insert themselves back into history and everyday life by naming the injustices they had suffered within a society constructed in patriarchal social relations. A number of problems emerged from the conception of difference that informed this view of identity politics. [...] To accept the authority of experience uncritically is to forget that identity itself is complex, contradictory, and shifting and does not unproblematically reveal itself in a specific politics. Second, the emphasis on the personal as a fundamental aspect of the political also results in highlighting the personal through a form of confessional politics

that all but forgets how the political is constituted in social and cultural forms outside of one's own experiences.

[...]

Another problem with the radical notion of difference is that it sometimes produces a politics of assertion that is both essentialist and separatist. [...] In this case, racial and class differences among women are ignored in favor of an essentializing notion of voice that romanticizes and valorizes the unitary experience of white, middle class women who assumed the position of being able to speak for all women. Moreover, forms of identity politics that forego the potential for creating alliances among different subordinated groups run the risk of reproducing a series of hierarchies of identities and experiences, which serves to privilege their own form of oppression and struggle. All too often this results in totalizing narratives that fail to recognize the limits of their own discourse in explaining the complexity of social life and the power such a discourse wields in silencing those who are not considered part of the insider group. [...]

Far from suggesting that critical educators should dispense with either the notion of difference or an identity politics, I believe that we need to learn from the theoretical shortcomings analyzed above and begin to rethink the relationship among difference, voice, and politics. What does this suggest for a liberatory theory of border pedagogy? I want to end by pointing briefly to a number of suggestions.

First, the notion of difference must be seen in relational terms that link it to a broader politics that deepens the possibility for reconstructing democracy and schools as democratic public spheres. This means organizing schools and pedagogy around a sense of purpose and meaning that makes difference central to a critical notion of citizenship and democratic public life. Rather than merely celebrating specific forms of difference, a politics of difference must provide the basis for extending the struggle for equality and justice to broader spheres of everyday life. This suggests the discourse of difference and voice be elaborated within, rather than against, a politics of solidarity. By refusing to create a hierarchy of struggles, it becomes possible for critical educators to take up notions of political community in which particularity, voice, and difference provide the foundation for democracy. [...]

Second, critical educators must provide the conditions for students to engage in cultural remapping as a form of resistance. That is, students should be given the opportunity to engage in systematic analyses of the ways in which the dominant culture creates borders saturated in terror, inequality, and forced exclusions. Similarly, students should be allowed to rewrite difference through the process of crossing over into cultural borders that offer narratives, languages, and experiences that provide a resource for rethinking the relationship between the center and margins of power as well as between themselves and others. In part, this means giving voice to those who have been normally excluded and silenced. It means creating a politics of remembrance in which different stories and narratives are heard and taken up as lived experiences. Most importantly, it means constructing new pedagogical borders where difference becomes the intersection of new forms of culture and identity.

Third, the concept of border pedagogy suggests not simply opening diverse cultural histories and spaces to students, but also understanding how fragile identity is as it moves into borderlands crisscrossed with a variety of languages, experiences and voices. There are no unified subjects here, only students whose voices and experiences intermingle with the weight of particular histories that will not fit into the master narrative of a monolithic culture. Such borderlands should be seen as sites for both critical analysis and as a potential

source of experimentation, creativity, and possibility. This is not a call to romanticize such voices. [...] There is more at risk here than giving dominant and subordinated subjects the right to speak or allowing the narratives of excluded differences to be heard. There is also the issue of making visible those historical, ideological, and institutional mechanisms that have both forced and benefited from such exclusions. It is here that the borderland between school and the larger society meet, where the relevancies between teachers and cultural workers come into play, and where schooling is understood within the larger domain of cultural politics. [...]

Fourth, the notion of border pedagogy needs to highlight the issue of power in a dual sense. First, power has to be made central to understanding the effects of difference from the perspective of historically and socially constructed forms of domination. Second, teachers need to understand more clearly how to link power and authority in order to develop a pedagogical basis for reading differences critically. Difference cannot be merely experienced or asserted by students. It must also be read critically by teachers who, while not being able to speak as or for those who occupy a different set of lived experiences, can make progressive use of their authority by addressing difference as a historical and social construction in which all knowledges are not equally implicated in relations of power. [...] Teachers and cultural workers must take responsibility, as Stuart Hall points out, for the knowledge they organize, produce, mediate, and translate into the practice of culture.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, it is important for teachers and cultural workers to construct pedagogical practices that neither position students defensively nor allow students to speak simply by asserting their voices and experiences. A pedagogy of affirmation is no excuse for refusing students the obligation to interrogate the claims or consequences their assertions have for the social relationships they legitimate. [...]

Fifth, border pedagogy also points to the importance of offering students the opportunity to engage in the multiple references and codes that position them within various structures of meaning and practice. [...] This suggests providing students with the opportunities to read texts as social and historical constructions, to engage texts in terms of their presences and absences, and to read texts oppositionally. This means teaching students to resist certain readings while simultaneously learning how to write their own narratives.

Finally, border pedagogy points to the need for educators to rethink the syntax of learning and behavior outside of the geography of rationality and reason. For example racist, sexist, and class discriminatory narratives cannot be dealt with in a purely limited, analytical way. As a form of cultural politics, border pedagogy must engage how and why students make particular ideological and affective investments in their narratives. [...]

[...] It is within this shifting and radical terrain that schooling as a form of cultural politics can be reconstructed as part of discourse of opposition and hope.

## Notes

- 1 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Anuntlute Press, 1987), 59.
- 2 Audre Lord, *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 111–12.
- 3 Angela P. Harris, 'Race an Essentialism in Feminist Legal Theory,' *Stanford Law Review* 42 (February 1990), 581 I am deeply indebted to Linda Brodkey for bringing this literature to my attention. Also see Linda Brodkey's excellent piece 'Towards a Feminist Rhetoric of Difference,' (University of Texas at Austin, 1990).
- 4 bell hooks, *Talking Back* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 12.

- 5 Paula Rothenburg, 'The Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of Difference,' *Hyppatia* 5:1 (Spring 1990), 47.
- 6 Ibid. 43.
- 7 Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn, and Valerie Walkerdine, *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation, and Subjectivity* (New York: Methuen, 1984).
- 8 Lawrence Grossberg, 'The Context of Audience and the Politics of Difference', 28.
- 9 Diana Fuss, 'Lesbian and Gay Theory: The Question of Identity Politics,' in D. Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 97.
- 10 Stuart Hall, 'The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities,' *October* 53 (Summer 1990), 11–23.

PROOF

## 38 Decolonising the mind

*Ngũgĩwa Thiong'o*

*Decolonising the Mind*, James Currey (1986), excerpt from pp. 34–61.

### I

**EARLY ONE MORNING IN 1976**, a woman from Kamĩrĩĩthũ village came to my house and she went straight to the point: 'We hear you have a lot of education and that you write books. Why don't you and others of your kind give some of that education to the village? We don't want the whole amount; just a little of it, and a little of your time.' There was a youth centre in the village, she went on, and it was falling apart. It needed group effort to bring it back to life. Would I be willing to help? I said I would think about it. In those days, I was the chairman of the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi but I lived near Kamĩrĩĩthũ, Limuru, about thirty or so kilometres from the capital city. I used to drive to Nairobi and back daily except on Sundays. So Sunday was the best day to catch me at home. She came the second, the third and the fourth consecutive Sundays with the same request couched in virtually the same words. That was how I came to join others in what later was to be called Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre.

### II

Kamĩrĩĩthũ is one of several villages in Limuru originally set up in the fifties by the British colonial administration as a way of cutting off the links between the people and the guerrillas of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, otherwise known as Mau Mau. Even after independence in 1963 the villages remained as reservoirs of cheap labour. By 1975 Kamĩrĩĩthũ alone had grown into a population of ten thousand.

[...] the peasants and the workers, including the unemployed, were the real backbone of the centre which started functioning in 1976.

[...] what is important, for our discussion on the language of African theatre, is that all the activities of the centre were to be linked – they would arise out of each other – while each being a self-contained programme. Thus *theatre*, as the central focus of our cultural programme, was going to provide follow-up material and activities for the new literates from the adult literacy programme, while at the same time providing the basis for poly-technic type activities in the material culture programme.

But why theatre in the village? Were we introducing something totally alien to the community as the Provincial Commissioner was later to claim?

### III

Drama has origins in human struggles with nature and with others. In pre-colonial Kenya, the peasants in the various nationalities cleared forests, planted crops, tended them to ripeness and harvest – out of the one seed buried in the ground came many seeds. Out of death life sprouted, and this through the mediation of the human hand and the tools it held. So there were rites to bless the magic power of tools. There were other mysteries: of cows and goats and other animals and birds mating – like human beings – and out came life that helped sustain human life. So fertility rites and ceremonies to celebrate life oozing from the earth, or from between the thighs of humans and animals. Human life itself was a mystery: birth, growing up and death, but through many stages. So there were rituals and ceremonies to celebrate and mark birth, circumcision or initiation into the different stages of growth and responsibility, marriages and the burial of the dead.

But see the cruelty of human beings. Enemies come to take away a community's wealth in goats and cattle. So there were battles to be fought to claim back one's own. Bless the spears. Bless the warriors. Bless those who defend the community from its enemies without. Victorious warriors returned to ritual and ceremony. In song and dance they acted out the battle scenes for those who were not there and for the warriors to relive the glory, drinking in the communal admiration and gratitude. There were also enemies within: evil doers, thieves, idlers; there were stories – often with a chorus – to point the fate of those threatening the communal good. Some of the drama could take days, weeks, or months. Among the Agĩkũyũ of Kenya, for instance, there was the *Itũika* ceremony held every twenty-five years or so that marked the handing over of power from one generation to another. According to Kenyatta in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, the *Itũika* was celebrated by feasting, dancing and singing over a six-month period. The laws and regulations of the new government were embodied in the words, phrases and rhythmic movements of the new songs and dances.<sup>1</sup> How *Itũika* came to be was always re-enacted in a dramatic procession. Central to all these varieties of dramatic expression were songs, dance and occasional mime!

Drama in pre-colonial Kenya was not, then, an isolated event: it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community. It was an activity among other activities, often drawing its energy from those other activities. It was also entertainment in the sense of involved enjoyment; it was moral instruction; and it was also a strict matter of life and death and communal survival. This drama was not performed in special buildings set aside for the purpose. It could take place anywhere – wherever there was an 'empty space', to borrow the phrase from Peter Brook. 'The empty space', among the people, was part of that tradition.<sup>2</sup>

### IV

It was the British colonialism which destroyed that tradition. The missionaries in their proselytising zeal saw many of these traditions as works of the devil. They had to be fought before the bible could hold sway in the hearts of the natives. The colonial administration also collaborated. Any gathering of the natives needed a licence: colonialism feared its own biblical saying that where two or three gathered, God would hear their cry. Why should they allow God above, or the God within the natives to hear the cry of the people? Many of these ceremonies were banned: like the *Itũika*, in 1925. But the ban reached massive proportions from 1952 to 1962 during the Mau Mau struggle when

more than five people were deemed to constitute a public gathering and needed a licence. Both the missionaries and the colonial administration used the school system to destroy the concept of the 'empty space' among the people by trying to capture and confine it in government-supervised urban community halls, school halls, church-buildings, and in actual theatre buildings with the proscenium stage. Between 1952 and 1962 'the empty space' was even confined behind barbed wire in prisons and detention camps where the political detainees and prisoners were encouraged to produce slavishly pro-colonial and anti-Mau Mau propaganda plays. [...]

## V

Kamĩrĩthũ then was not an aberration, but an attempt at reconnection with the broken roots of African civilization and its traditions of theatre. In its very location in a village within the kind of social classes described above, Kamĩrĩthũ was the answer to the question of the real substance of a national theatre. Theatre is not a building. People make theatre. Their life is the very stuff of drama. Indeed Kamĩrĩthũ reconnected itself to the national tradition of the empty space, of language, of content and of form.

Necessity forced the issue.

For instance, there was an actual empty space at Kamĩrĩthũ. The four acres reserved for the Youth Centre had at that time, in 1977, only a falling-apart mud-walled barrack of four rooms which we used for adult literacy. The rest was grass. Nothing more. It was the peasants and workers from the village who built the stage: just a raised semi-circular platform backed by a semi-circular bamboo wall behind which was a small three-roomed house which served as the store and changing room. The stage and the auditorium – fixed long wooden seats arranged like stairs – were almost an extension of each other. It had no roof. It was an open air theatre with large empty spaces surrounding the stage and the auditorium. The flow of actors and people between the auditorium and the stage, and around the stage and the entire auditorium was uninhibited. Behind the auditorium were some tall eucalyptus trees. Birds could watch performances from these or from the top of the outer bamboo fence. And during one performance some actors, unrehearsed, had the idea of climbing up the trees and joining the singing from up there. They were performing not only to those seated before them, but to whoever could now see them and hear them – the entire village of 10,000 people was their audience.

Necessity forced a common-sense solution to the issue of language. Ngũgĩwa Mĩrĩĩ and I had been asked to script the initial outline of a play that later came to be called *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I will marry when I want*). The question was, what language were we going to use? [...]

The use of English as my literary medium of expression, particularly in theatre and the novel, had always disturbed me. In a student's interview in Leeds in 1967 and in my book *Homecoming* (1969) I came back to the question. But I kept on hedging the issue. The possibility of using an African language stayed only in the realm of possibility until I came to Kamĩrĩthũ.

It was Kamĩrĩthũ which forced me to turn to Gĩkũyũ and hence into what for me has amounted to 'an epistemological break' with my past, particularly in the area of theatre. The question of audience settled the problem of language choice; and the language choice settled the question of audience. But our use of Gĩkũyũ had other consequences in relation to other theatre issues: content for instance; actors, auditioning and rehearsals, performances and reception; theatre as a language. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* depicts the

proletarianisation of the peasantry in a neo-colonial society. Concretely it shows the way the Kĩgũũnda family, a poor peasant family, who have to supplement their subsistence on their one-and-a-half acres with the sale of their labour, is finally deprived of even the one-and-a-half acres by a multi-national consortium of Japanese and Euro-American industrialists and bankers aided by the native comprador landlords and businessmen.

The land question is basic to an understanding of Kenya's history and contemporary politics, as indeed it is of twentieth century history wherever people have had their land taken away by conquest, unequal treaties or by the genocide of part of the population. The Mau Mau militant organization which spearheaded the armed struggle for Kenya's independence was officially called the Kenya Land and Freedom Army. The play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, in part drew very heavily on the history of the struggle for land and freedom; particularly the year 1952, when the Kĩmaathi-led armed struggle started and the British colonial regimes suspended all civil liberties by imposing a state of emergency; and in 1963, when KANU under Kenyatta successfully negotiated for the right to fly a national flag, and to sing a national anthem and to call people to vote for a national assembly within every five years. The play showed how that independence, for which thousands of Kenyans died, had been hijacked. In other words, it showed the transition of Kenya from a colony with the British being dominant, to a neo-colony with doors open to wider imperialist interests from Japan to America. But the play also depicted the contemporary social conditions particularly for workers in multi-national factories and plantations.

Now many of the workers and peasants in Kamĩrĩĩthũ had participated in the struggle for land and freedom either in the passive wing or in the active guerrilla wing. Many had been in the forests and the mountains, many in the colonial detention camps and prisons; while some had of course collaborated with the British enemy. Many had seen their homes burnt; their daughters raped by the British; their land taken away; their relatives killed. Indeed Kamĩrĩĩthũ itself was a product of that history of heroic struggle against colonialism and of the subsequent monumental betrayal into neo-colonialism. The play was celebrating that history while showing the unity and continuity of that struggle. Here the choice of language was crucial. There was now no barrier between the content of their history and the linguistic medium of its expression. Because the play was written in a language they could understand the people could participate in all the subsequent discussions on the script. They discussed its content, its language and even the form. The process, particularly for Ngũgĩwa Mĩrĩĩ, Kĩmani Gecaũ, and myself was one of continuous learning. Learning of our history. Learning of what obtains in factories. Learning of what goes on in farms and plantations. Learning our language, for the peasants were essentially the guardians of the language through years of use. And learning anew the elements of form of the African Theatre. [...]

They were also particular about language which, of course, is another element of form. They were concerned that the various characters, depending on age and occupation, be given the appropriate language. 'An old man cannot speak like that' they would say. 'If you want him to have dignity, he has to use this or that kind of proverb.' Levels of language and language-use and the nuances of words and phrases were discussed heatedly.

But what gives any form its tautness and special character and shape is the content. This is even more true in drama. Drama is closer to the dialectics of life than poetry and the fiction. Life is movement arising from the inherent contradiction and unity of opposites. Man and woman meet in a united dance of opposites out of which comes a human life separate from the two that gave it birth but incorporating features of both in such a way that it is recognisable at a glance that so and so is really a product of so and so. The



growth of that life depends on some cells dying and others being born. Social life itself arises out of the contradiction between man and nature. But man is part of nature. Karl Marx has said: 'He opposes himself to nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms, legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate nature's production to his own wants. By thus acting on the external nature and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.'<sup>3</sup> Drama encapsulates within itself this principle of the struggle of opposites which generates movement. There is in drama a movement from apparent harmony, a kind of rest, through conflict to a comic or tragic resolution of that conflict. We end with harmony at a different level, a kind of temporary rest, which of course is the beginning of another movement. The balance of opposing ideas and social forces, of all the contending forces is important in shaping the form of drama and theatre. [...]

The results of all this effort to evolve an authentic language of African theatre were obvious when the play opened to a paying audience on 2 October 1977. Once again the performances were timed for Sunday afternoons. Evenings would have been too cold for everybody. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was an immediate success with people coming from afar, even in hired buses and taxis, to see the show. Theatre became what it had always been: part of a collective festival. Some people knew the lines almost as well as the actors and their joy was in seeing the variations by the actors on different occasions to different audiences. There was an identification with the characters. Some people called themselves by the names of their favourite peasant and worker characters like Kĩgũũnda, Gĩcaamba, Wangeci, Gathoni. But they also used the names of such characters as *Kĩoi*, *Nditika*, *Ikuua*, and *Ndugĩre*, to refer to those, in and outside the village, who had anti-people tendencies. The Language of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was becoming part of the people's daily vocabulary and frame of reference. There were some touching moments. I remember one Sunday when it rained and people rushed to the nearest shelters under the trees or under the roofs. When it stopped, and all the actors resumed, the auditorium was as full as before. The performance was interrupted about three times on that afternoon but the audience would not go away. The people's identification with Kamĩrĩĩthũ was now complete.

Later they were driven away, not by rain, not by any natural disaster, but by the authoritarian measures of an anti-people regime. On 16 November 1977 the Kenya government banned any further public performances of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* by the simple act of withdrawing the licence for any public 'gathering' at the centre. I myself was arrested on 31 December 1977 and spent the whole of 1978 in a maximum security prison, detained without even the doubtful benefit of a trial. They were attempting to stop the emergence of an authentic language of Kenyan theatre.

But that was not the end of Kamĩrĩĩthũ's search for an authentic language of African theatre in form and content.

In November 1981 they regrouped for another effort, the production of *Maitũ Njugĩra* (*Mother sing for me*). Auditions were set for 7, 14 and 15 November 1981, almost as if Kamĩrĩĩthũ was resuming the search from the very date and month it had been stopped. I have narrated the fate of this second production in my book, *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya*. Here I would like simply to point out that all the elements of theatre developed in 1977 were employed and further extended. *Maitũ Njugĩra* depicted the heroic struggle of Kenyan workers against the early phase of imperialist capitalist 'primitive' accumulation with confiscation of land, forced labour on the same stolen land and heavy taxation to finance its development into settler run plantations.

Dance, mime, song were more dominant than words in telling this story of repression and resistance. The visual and the sound images carried the burden of the narrative and the analysis. The medium of slides was also introduced to give authentic visual images of the period of the twenties and thirties. And at every stage in its evolution more people from many of the Kenyan nationalities were involved. *Maitũ Njugĩra* (*Mother sing for me*), a drama in music, had more than eighty songs from more than eight nationalities in Kenya all depicting the joy, the sorrow, the gains, the losses, the unity, the divisions, and the march forward as well as the setbacks in Kenyan people's struggles.

Kamĩrĩthũ was due to put on the musical drama at the Kenya National Theatre on 19 February 1982 after more than ten weeks of strenuous work by what had now become an important alliance from all nationalities of workers, peasants and progressive teachers and students. By going to perform at the Kenya National Theatre the alliance was going to make the point that an authentic language of African theatre, no matter in what specific African tongue it found expression, would communicate to people of all nationalities. It was also going to prove that this trend had the support of people of all the nationalities. Where else to prove this than on the premises of the so-called Kenya National Theatre. It was booked to be the longest run ever even though it was during the off theatre season, at the beginning of the year after Christmas.

The peasants and workers were about to bring national theatre to the capital city. But this was not to be. This time the authorities would not even deign to give a licence, instructions were sent to the management to padlock the doors, and the police were sent to ensure public peace and public security. Our attempts to continue with open rehearsals at the University premises – the famous Theatre II – were again frustrated after about ten such 'rehearsals' seen by about 10,000 people! The University authorities were instructed to padlock the doors of Theatre II. That was on Thursday 25 February 1982. On Thursday 11 March 1982 the government outlawed Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre and banned all theatre activities in the entire area. An 'independent' Kenyan government had followed in the footsteps of its colonial predecessors: it banned all the peasant and worker basis for genuine national traditions in theatre. But this time, the neo-colonial regime overreached itself. On 12 March 1982 three truckloads of armed policemen were sent to Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre and razed the open-air theatre to the ground. By so doing it ensured the immortality of the Kamĩrĩthũ experiments and search for peasant/worker-based language of African theatre. [...]

There has been an interesting twist to the Kamĩrĩthũ story. In February 1984 President Moi made 'a surprise visit' to Kamĩrĩthũ and he shed tears at the poverty he saw around the centre: how can human beings live in such conditions? On 'an impulse', 'an unrehearsed' act of 'personal' generosity, he there and then gave a donation towards the building of a polytechnic where the open air theatre used to be. No mention of the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre. But the people were not deceived. A polytechnic was what they were hoping to build. They would welcome one built by the government for after all it was their money. But the regime had different hopes. By its wanton act of destruction of Kamĩrĩthũ Theatre in 1982, it had shown its anti-people neo-colonial colours and it had become further alienated from the people. Its intensified repression of Kenyans in 1982 – through detentions without trial or imprisonment on trumped-up charges, particularly of university lecturers and students – did not improve its image and its further alienation from the people. It hopes that people can forget the alternative vision, even though unrealised, but embodied in the Kamĩrĩthũ experience.

Kamĩrĩĩthũ must not be allowed to become a revolutionary shrine. People have to be taught the virtues of subservience and gratitude to a gallery of stars.

But can an idea be killed? Can you destroy a revolutionary shrine itself enshrined in the revolutionary spirit of a people? [...]

### Notes

- 1 Jomo Kenyatta *Facing Mount Kenya*, London 1938.
- 2 I am indebted to Wasambo Were for the comparison between *The Empty Space* of Peter Brook's title, and the practice of African literature during a discussion I had with him on Theatre in Kenya in London 1983.
- 3 Karl Marx *Capital*, Vol. I, Chap. VII, p. 177

## 39 Home, away and back again

*Jan Cohen Cruz*

**I FOCUS HERE ON** boundary-crossing between two epistemologies: knowledge instilled from one's home, geographically and culturally, e.g., what we know from the inside because we live/d there; and that which is acquired through study and exchange far and wide, e.g., what we learn from extending beyond our home base. Victor Turner articulated the value that such a trajectory may produce:

We [anthropologists] ... seek to be "thrice-born." The first birth is our natal origin in a particular culture. The second is our move from this familiar to a far place to do field work there. ... The third birth occurs when we become comfortable within this other culture ... [, have] found the clue to grasping many like it[,] turn our gaze again to our native land ..., and we see it with new eyes.

(Victor Turner, Foreword to Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days* (1978): xiii)

In US applied theater and in socially engaged art more broadly, I gather – from colleagues who teach such material in higher education and from those who support such artists in non-profit organizations and funding agencies – that, at least when starting out, artists are encouraged to facilitate work or do research with "their own" people. There is an understandable fear of "outsiders" objectifying, misrepresenting, and/or co-opting cultural groups that they don't deeply enough understand. At the extreme, working with a group that has less power structurally than that with which the facilitator is identified may be a form of colonialism, especially if the facilitator or researcher has not been invited there. Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff originally set out to research Chicanos and aging and got a lot of push back like "Don't Jews age? Study your own!", resulting in the book cited above. I turned down a funder's invitation to evaluate a short-term, socially engaged art project about identity and healing with a group of women of color because as a white person I could have been a detriment to trust building. As a woman, having female professors (including Meyerhoff), at a time when the majority of those positions went to men, was a way I felt affirmed and my own horizon of possibilities expanded.

But who are "one's own people?" Myerhoff worked with Jews but she was a generation younger; were they still "her people?" I did not feel that I was amongst "my people" in my small hometown of Reading, Pennsylvania, even though we shared a geographical community. Compelled by theater, I felt alienated from that place, which had no full-time professional company there at the time. Moreover, people do not know every social stratum in their home town. Extending oneself among people of different ages, circumstances, races, and classes, even in one's hometown, can feel more like being away. And strong bonds are sometimes created between ostensibly very different people. In

what follows, grounded in personal references, I muse on border crossings between the homegrown and that which we discover further afield, in the process unpacking Turner's notion of the thrice-born.

### 1) Home

I began life in a small town with received ideas that lacked critical analysis. One such idea was that if, like me, you were serious about theater, you'd have to move to a city as soon as possible. To stay in a small town would mean failure even before you began. I didn't realize that one could be a theater person not in the conventional sense of an actor in a play in a high-profile venue, but simply by having an appetite for a range of performance, from ritual to street demonstrations, that take place anywhere. That is a walk to the unknown: crossing a border within one's chosen field, bypassing its invisible hierarchy. However, it's hard to have confidence in an alternative vision without like-minded colleagues, who one may need to go elsewhere to find.

Issues cross borders, too, of consciousness. Small towns may appear to be homogenous in terms of race, nationality, political perspective, gender normativity, and more, but reveal deep conflicts between people with different histories, identities, and ideas, in some cases that have been present for a long time but were hidden or unspoken. Not only may certain topics go unspoken, but also ways of talking about them. Many of us go places so a full range of emotions can be part of the discourse. In a personal email correspondence, my applied theater colleague Bobo Leonard poignantly avowed, "I left my small town at break neck speed without any conscious intention except to run away from that towards anything else. Theater, as a form, was about as far away from my home as I could find – laugh, play, cry, feel in public. All prohibited in my home" (Leonard, 2019). Or we may be seeking contending viewpoints. One may well ask if generating open discussion at home is precisely a reason to stay, though, as a young person, I needed to learn how to even have such conversations.

### 2) Away

Scholar of human geography Yi-Fu Tuan suggests why one might need to go away in order to grasp the value of one's home, distinguishing sense of place from rootedness, in a surprising articulation of a downside of rootedness, which applied theater usually extols as a strength of creating in one's home place. He writes that sense of place "implies a certain distance between self and place that allows the self to appreciate a place" (Tuan, 1980:4) whereas rootedness is an "unreflective state of being in which the human personality merges with its milieu" (Tuan, 1980:5). Tuan avows that distance is a pre-requisite to appreciation, that the capacity to see one thing requires something different with which to contrast it.

So I left home, eventually settling in a large city, where I had access to ideas that were debated, not intended to be accepted whole-cloth. I became aware of diverse forms into which ideas can be shaped, and was drawn to both the academic tradition of evidence-based exposition and grassroots emphasis on story and personal experience.

Leaving home led to my second birth, catalyzed at the age of 21 by co-facilitating a drama workshop in a men's maximum-security prison. The draw to people I had somehow been taught to avoid was too great to resist, people on the other side of any number of impervious walls. I came to see systemic reasons that some people are stuck in

a place, bringing on a kind of desperation, an impulse to drop out, and give up on the possibility of attaining a meaningful life in ways I was taught were available to everyone but discovered were not. Had I only worked with “my own,” I would not have co-facilitated that workshop, which was among the most meaningful experiences of my life. The other participants and I appreciated both how we were different and what we shared – urgency about communicating inmates’ perspectives to the prison population, and fascination with the idea of multiple selves. Many of us experienced playing roles in everyday life and found our workshop an ideal place to explore that further.

Opened to new experiences that shook me emotionally, I began to recognize my biases. Someone might be in prison, or have an abortion, or drop out of school, not because they were “bad” or “lazy” but for more complex reasons. Meeting people I came to care about in those situations challenged what I had unthinkingly accepted. Leaving my natal home, I found a professional home, in applied theater, and a passport to the foreign lands that are other people. I facilitated and wrote about applied theater projects with people in a broader range of situations than I’d ever have known otherwise. These relationships were often surprising, insightful, and humbling.

My ideas about theater’s boundaries expanded. One particularly rich area is where performances can take place; applied theater performances rarely occur in conventional auditoriums. Sharing art in diverse venues, one is reminded how spatial arrangements structure human relationships. If you are part of a sea of people sitting in a dark auditorium, you might have a meaningful, private, reflective experience and feel a kind of communion with the others sitting in the dark with you, joined in the attention you all are bestowing on the performance that brought you there together. In open, lit spaces where viewers can move around, direct interaction with other viewers as well as with the art being presented is possible. There are times when that is important, when a performance is part of an ongoing effort that needs more from the audience than their attention.

It’s also important, if an artist wants to include people who do not attend mainstream art events, to situate a performance in a space where people feel at home. Applied theater, in contrast with conventional, auditorium-based performance, reminds us that the conditions of performance are essential to it, including the architecture and social conventions of the space.

I observed over three dozen projects in a wild array of venues as field researcher for *A Blade of Grass*, which supports socially engaged art. Ashley Sparks, for example, did a project in fast food restaurant parking lots where the people the play was about congregated – so-called good old boys, white and right-wing, including men in her own family, who she loved despite political differences. In the context of higher education and community partnerships, Anne Basting (2009) developed art techniques for being with people with dementia in the present, at nursing homes, even though moments later they would forget what they’d just done. Through seeing or participating in art projects in playgrounds, public parks, community gardens, a mobile hair salon, a greenhouse, a floating vegetable garden, a stable, and elsewhere, I discovered a clue to understanding spatial choices anywhere: make sure the places where socially engaged art happens align with the people intended to benefit and resonate with a project’s substance.

### 3) Back

After some 50 years, I returned to small town Pennsylvania because our son, at age 30, left the rarified world of New York City high-end restaurants in favor of a less stressful,

less competitive, less hierarchical culinary path, not unlike my own choice within the field of theater, recognizing that the “real thing” could be anywhere. We decided to launch a food truck as a family business on the country property we’d inherited near my birthplace. Perhaps because applied theater made me sensitive to any place’s cultural richness, I now saw a treasure trove of collective expression all around me, right there in rural Pennsylvania. Our food truck has been invited to vineyards, farmers’ markets, sports events, carnivals, micro-breweries, firework displays, people’s work places, and other events meaningful locally. From my perch making sandwiches and salads, I’ve witnessed what brings people in this region out into social settings. We serve people drinking local beers and wines as they enjoy live local music; riding homemade floats at a Jack Frost Parade; dressing as their favorite animated characters as they cheer on amateur wrestlers at a Comicon convention; observing cooking demonstrations at farmers’ markets; enjoying a free comedy show in a public outdoor amphitheater; at festivals created around fiddle playing, peppers, bacon, garlic, and in the town of Hamburg, Pennsylvania, hamburgers. That I’m seeing so much of this public activity for the first time, even events that have gone on for many years, makes me realize that my family and I were outsiders partly because my parents chose not to do the things that were part of being from that place, not always because they were socially excluded, which, being in the minority Jewish, was the story they told themselves.

Reading, Pennsylvania was hard hit economically in the years since I left, in 2011 being the poorest town in the US in terms of percentage of people living under the poverty line. There’s an effort to bring some oomph back to Reading, a typical applied theater goal. The truck plays a very small part to that end. Applied theater calls for an artist and a partner from some other expertise, and to the degree that good food is a culinary art, my son is the artist and my husband and I are the partners in the project that is the food truck. For it is both a business and a means of celebrating the local in my home county. Perhaps I bring a sensitivity to the local that I gained by leaving home and celebrating other people’s locals first – a way of looking that I was able to bring back.

The food truck has been a rich experience because applied theater taught me that expressive culture – the domain of anthropologists – and art – the domain of artists – are closer than I thought. Culture foregrounds the particularity of a group of people consciously connected in some way no matter where they are. Art more typically foregrounds the particularity of an individual, or of what makes a small group of individuals special and different from everyone else. Applied theater, between culture and art, draws on expressive means to uplift what is special about groups of people often in ways that connect them to everyone else. In the absence of a large menu of theater, tuning into diverse cultural expressions can feed the soul as regards both meaning making and aesthetics. There need be no separation between expressive culture and applied art; an applied theater person might draw as readily from an element of cultural expression, deepening and broadening conventional applied theater methods.

Seeing applied theater in the context of expressive culture as well as art is not a new phenomenon but one ripe for more exploration. Looking at art and culture as part of a continuum rather than separate entities brings to mind the plays I orchestrated as a child at our bi-annual cousin clubs, which were my way of contributing to the collective event on par with Aunt Millie’s brownies. If applied theater makers used all the cultural means at their fingertips, they might more comfortably move among all the senses, too. I think of the place of food in many of my favorite applied theater projects.

The implications of seeing applied theater as part of expressive culture rather than art *per se* is too vast to more than touch on here, but I also want to evoke the strong example provided by The In[heir]itance Project, a devised theater company that puts communities' lived experiences in conversation with their inherited sacred texts. That might be a religious text or it might be, say, a ground-breaking legal decision, like *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, or for the offspring of survivors, letters from the offspring of GIs who liberated concentration camps after WWII. The secular context of a theater company provides room for doubt and exploration; the religious or otherwise sacred source offers a depth of meaning to particular communities with whom the theater company interacts.

### Writing through (re)new(ed) eyes

Applied theater opened the possibility of bringing the personal/domestic into my writing, through the field's appreciation of everyone's experience. Whereas I embraced graduate school's emphasis on a high standard of rigor, I eventually had to recover from other expectations, like that all scholarship conform to conventional norms of objectivity, reference up-to-date theory, and take one's academic peers as one's primary audience. In contrast, applied theater writing often balances intimacy with objectivity, draws on whatever ideas are meaningful to the people involved whether or not the most up-to-date, and includes in one's audience the communities in which one works.

The meaningfulness of applied theater has made me want to elevate its place in the field of performance. I struggled with academic prejudices against local research – parallel projects I did in other parts of the world were respected by my university in a way that community-based projects at home were not. It's a kind of exoticization, a co-opting of other cultures, that don't get the respect they deserve until someone white or western does it, like Elvis's co-option of a particular genre of black music.

I was also bothered that people whose lived expertise informed applied theater projects often could not follow overly academic tracts about it. I wanted to write in a way for both those who contributed to and those who studied art and culture more broadly. I thus crossed a boundary in myself, straddling the worlds of firsthand experience and reflective writing. I strive to integrate the personal and the scholarly so as both to give a sense of the lived experience and to communicate something bigger than me. I "come home" to myself but bring a lot with me from elsewhere.

In graduate school the emphasis in writing was to become familiar with and build on a body of formal knowledge and foundational texts organized as general precepts, as theory, applicable to a whole set of particulars. In literary fiction, particular stories stand in for and point to big ideas, applicable to whole sets of particulars, but arrived at more personally, through lived experience and the imagination, and probably not referencing a "canon," writ small instead of large.

Some non-fiction writers tell stories as a way into big ideas, too. One of my favorites is anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff, she who Turner called thrice-born – returning to my starting place with this essay. *Number Our Days* is Myerhoff's account of her research at a senior center for old Jews with modest resources living marginally in Venice, CA. The people there shared stories with her and she with her readers, reflecting "the human need to be seen and the ways in which culture offers and withholds that visibility" (Prell, accessed 2019). The book is full of both these stories and Myerhoff's insights about them.



I think that authors who tell stories to get at big concepts want their readers to know that ideas live in the world in people's bodies and interactions; they want us to appreciate the people as much as the ideas. I try to cross that boundary in my writing, too – from an intimate particular to a general concept, and back to the particular, to lose neither the lives from whence the ideas flow nor the ideas that illuminate the lives.

For inherent in the idea of the “applied” is the pull to render ideas useful, to particular people in particular situations. Cornerstone Theater adapts classical plays for particular communities in just such a spirit. Their production of *Romeo and Juliet... in Port Gibson, Mississippi*, a racially divided town, was shaped to emphasize that the family feud that destroyed the young lovers came from the social divisions and discord there, in Port Gibson, not just in Verona. The act of making the play with people from “both sides of the track” made it not just an *expression* of the conflict but a step towards *healing* it. And it was directed by a white man, Bill Rauch, and developed with Cornerstone Theater, whose members were not from there. In the predominantly wealthy and white town of Bronxville, New York, at the Loft Film and Theater Center, Susan Ingalls' *Romeo and Juliet* spoke to overly-self-involved parents who had nannies raise their kids and serious communication gaps with their children. It opened up a conversation that had the capacity to bring families closer together. *Romeo and Juliet* may be performed in many times and places, with other resonances. Playing big ideas off of particularities is an applied theater endeavor, bringing the large and universal to specific people who are part of large human struggles no matter where they live.

The idea of usefulness brings me to what might be the most significant boundary that applied theater crosses – between the imaginary and the real. The imaginary is present both home and away. Even what we imagined as home is changed by what we learn when we are away. When we return and see home differently, has it changed or have we? When we make a space for the imaginary in our work with others, the limitations of the “real” world dissolve. We surprise each other by sharing the lives of our imagination. But until we come to know people who come from very different circumstances, we imagine who these “others” are; and we act on those imaginaries in the real world. Sometimes working with people who start out as “other” expands the very notion of who is “one's own;” making something together can bring out our commonality. When I assessed a dozen projects facilitated by US artists in as many countries, through Bronx Museum's “smARTpower” initiative, the US State Department, which supported it, wanted to know if the exchanges were improving how participants saw the US. The most common response was that the whole notion of nationality disappeared when the projects went well, in which case it didn't matter where anyone was from. We imagine “the other” until we come to know them; as my colleague Bob Leonard reflected in a personal email exchange, “Insight is what we learn when we understand more than what we see.”

Poet Muriel Rukeyser warns us of taking the imagined for the real: “Because you have imagined love, you have not loved: merely because you have imagined brotherhood, you have not made brotherhood. You may feel as though you had, but you have not” (Rukeyser, 1949). Rukeyser suggests that the imaginary is not enough in the face of the enormity of human struggle and inequality. That feels like a central precept of applied theater, that it is an active doing in the world. But here, too, the real is changed by the imaginary; as Boal says, theater is not the revolution but it may be a rehearsal for it. The imaginary sustains us when we can't have the real. Yet. Coming home after being away, with the insights thus gained, opens space for both the real and the imaginary in the very place that one started out.

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PROOF

## 40 Brecht in Sicily

### A dialogue between theatre and drama therapy

*Salvo Pitruzzella*

**WHEN THE CURTAINS** open, we see an empty stage, dimly lit, and an old woman in the middle of it, dressed in rags, hooked and dishevelled. Slowly, she raises her right hand as begging, and cries with a loud, shrieking voice: 'A puviredda cc'è!' (The beggar is here!). After three or four of these agonizing cries, suddenly a mass of ragged and hunched people enter onstage from the wings, shouting: 'I puvireddi cci sù!' (The beggars are here!); they invade the stage, and flood into the stalls, and gradually their cry becomes less a plea for charity and more an affirmation: poor people exist, they seem to say, and they are not far away, in distant worlds, but all around you, and, although you might try to ignore them, they will continue to exist.

This was the opening of a theatre performance we titled 'L'Opra d'i Puvireddi',<sup>2</sup> freely inspired by Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, realized in 2012 by a large group including Mental Health Service users, volunteers and members of medical staff. The idea of the opening had been suggested by Filippo, the eldest of the actors, who was going to play the role of Mr. Peachum. Filippo could be described as the wise elder of the group; he had been a psychiatric inpatient for more than twenty years, and now he was going to face ageing with a renewed energy, keen to put his own experience of recovery at the service of other people. He told us that in the small mountain village where he spent part of his childhood, every Sunday morning, when most of the people were getting ready for Mass, an old lady filled the streets with her distressing cry: 'A puviredda cc'è!', which sounded like a stern warning for people hoping to save their souls by going to the church.

In the end, the message that we wanted to convey was: we are here; we are working together and thinking together, and we have a story to tell; we are different, but we don't want to be unequal.

Furthermore, those were the days when Mr. Silvio Berlusconi still ruled Italy, arousing the worst part of Italian people with his claims that exalted accumulation of wealth at all costs. In this sort of hyper-liberalistic jungle, smart people can get rich, and those who can't, well, it's their fault. When we read Brecht's text as a group, the identification was so clear that it was not necessary to express it in words, just with grins and blinks, as people, notwithstanding their condition of mental health patients, were well aware of the great hoax that had spellbound Italy. In this regard, Filippo used to say 'We are mad, not stupid'. And he also invented, in a group improvisation on the characters, one of the funniest lines of our Mr. Peachum: 'Once we called them knaves, now we call them CEOs!', when Polly informs him that her fiancé Mackie Messer pretended to be a CEO.

We were also well aware that this self-proclaimed 'liberal' course was jeopardizing the whole health system, of which we willy-nilly were part, privatizing the good services and improving them by draining resources from the public health, which means: efficient

private clinics for the rich and the leftovers for the poor. In the mental health area, the funding cuts had mostly affected the community centres, which worked towards rehabilitation, while the residential ones, more aimed at ‘keeping people inside’, were supported. What remained of the glorious ‘Legge 180’, the so-called ‘Basaglia law’,<sup>3</sup> was being demolished.

Franco Basaglia had claimed that the psychiatric institution was not only incapable of healing mental disorders but was fated to aggravate them, as its occult programme is to eliminate from society those disturbing mad people, in line with the ‘Great Confinement’ that, according to Michel Foucault, had started at the beginning of the Modern Age (see Foucault, 1965). For Basaglia, the only way to heal mental diseases was starting to accept them for what they were: different perceptions of reality. The most profound sufferings derive not from the illness itself, but from the stigma. Thus, they should not be cured in secured enclosures, but within society. It does not necessarily mean that ‘mad’ people conform to the rules of normality, but it rather demands a mutual recognition and a mutual adjustment; a constant dialogue that may question our very notion of ‘normality’ (Basaglia, 1968).

Italians are very good at writing laws, but not as good at applying them: Basaglia did not live long enough to see that the law that took his name had been severely mutilated. Yes, the big psychiatric hospitals were gradually closing, but this was partly due to several scandals, when some daring photographer had reported the inhuman, concentration camp style conditions in which inpatients were constrained. However, in Basaglia’s vision they should have been replaced by a large net of small, community-based caring services that would offer people care and support in their sometimes difficult relationships with society. The result of the incomplete application of the law was that the therapeutic communities, intended as short-term residential projects, turned into small asylums, which induced the guests to a total passivity; while all the other services that Basaglia had envisaged, more connected with the real life of communities, had been neglected. Nonetheless, all around Italy, many brave psychiatrists, supported by equally brave teams, had created healing day centres in Basaglia’s spirit, often struggling against the indifference of the hierarchies.

‘L’Opra d’i Puvireddi’ had been the second project inspired by Brecht that I directed, culminating in a series of public performances involving no less than fifty people onstage, including a choir that sang a selection of the *Threepenny Opera*’s songs. This project was developed from a smaller one that had started in 2009, in a little day centre in Palermo called ‘La Zebra’ (The Zebra), and it is a story worthy of being told.

‘La Zebra’ was a peripheral mental health centre, situated in an area not far away from the old psychiatric hospitals but serving a totally different neighbourhood. It had around twelve patients, to whom it offered, apart from diagnosis, counselling sessions, drug administration and a series of group activities, including gardening, reading newspapers, cooking and, more recently, art therapy and drama therapy. People were also supported in finding and maintaining a job, and, when possible, there was a good alliance with the families. When I started working there as a drama therapist, I was struck by the life-size papier-mâché zebra standing in the hall, and I asked the head psychiatrist, Dr. Maria Magaddino, to tell me about it. It transpired that it had been made in the art therapy workshop after the patients had watched a biographic film about Basaglia, discovering the story of Marco Cavallo (Marco the Horse),<sup>4</sup> and had decided to make an homage to it. For many people of my generation, Marco Cavallo had been a symbol of creativity breaking down the walls of liberty-depriving institutions: I sensed it was a good beginning for a story.

I have been running a weekly drama therapy group for four years; the end of each year was celebrated with a residential weekend in Erice, a small medieval town on the north-west coast of Sicily, where people attended a joint art and drama therapy workshop, in which participants could recapitulate their journeys and share them in a creative way. In December 2008, the group decided to perform some of the scenes they had improvised in the drama therapy session in front of an audience. The audience consisted of the centre's staff and a few of those who attended the art therapy group, but it was enough to engender in the group the desire to realize a full performance for an extended audience. We discussed it a lot in a large group including patients and staff; someone was a bit sceptical, but in the end the majority decided to proceed, and they asked me to find a script and direct it. I accepted, but I could not help being dubious. Although my former experience had been largely in theatre, as a drama therapist I refrained from public performance: the personal material emerging in a drama therapy session, although expressed in a protective metaphorical way, was still too personal to be publicly exposed. Therefore, a play based on people's improvisations in drama therapy could be harmful for patient privacy, and thus counter-therapeutic. On the other hand, realizing a text-based performance could be challenging too, as the risk of the 'benevolent applause', expressing pity rather than appreciation, is always present. However, I was very curious about the creative aspect of the matter, including the ability to distinguish between process and product, and the use of dramatic language along the double register of expression and of communication. It is implicit in drama therapy, but in this case it needed to become clearer: while in drama therapy any personal expression is allowed, and is directly communicated to a group of people who know and accept each other, in theatre it must be reworked and turned into an aesthetic message addressed to an audience of strangers. Dr. Magaddino, more pragmatically, was concerned with the therapeutic aftermath of the experience: the value of being engaged in a shared project, meeting with external people and collaborating with them, and responsibility for the impact on the audience. Therefore, we decided to start a project, which, alongside the drama therapy and art therapy groups, would include a theatre workshop, performance-oriented, with a mixed group of clients, volunteers and workers from the centre. The workshop would be held in a studio outside the centre and, to underscore the very nature of a project turned toward the external world, we would explore the text and devise together the ways to stage it.

The main issue, then, was to find the right script, one that would match everyone's desire to perform a collective work, which could be meaningful for each of them and for the group as a whole, but would at the same time allow them to remain sufficiently distanced so as not to be overwhelmed by the meaning itself. It was at this point, as sometimes happens, that a signal came: I ran into Anna Seymour's profound inquiry on *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. She had started her inquiry from an autobiographic perspective, but had soon come to enlarge her view, enlightening the dynamics between affect and reason, justice and ethics, fear and courage that emerge from the story of the *Circle*. At the same time she enlightened the elements of Brecht's theatre that could help drama therapy, the major of which are his ideas of epic and estrangement, which pair with drama therapy's pivotal notion of aesthetic distance. According to drama therapy theory (Landy, 1993, Grainger & Duggan, 1997, Pitruzzella, 2009), a real catharsis occurs not when there is a peak of emotional discharge, but when emotion and cognition are at a good balance, implying a search for the right distance in playing roles.

Anna Seymour enrolled in the project, and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* became the inspiring text for the performance. We decided to stage only a fragment of the play; we

skipped the general frame and concentrated upon the first part of the story of Grusha, namely scenes 2 and 3 (from when she finds the baby to when she crosses the bridge, escaping the soldiers hunting her), which had been the most appreciated by the group. When I sat with Vanni, the art therapist who shared with me the direction of the project, to sketch out a plan of the theatrical production, only one thing was clear to us: we had to work on crossing borders. At first, borders between the arts, trying to refine the technique of dialogue among different expressive codes that we had experimented with in the previous workshops, in which the art products are used as cues to embodiment and dramatization, and the resulting performances inspire art. Then, between theatre and drama therapy, which, notwithstanding their common ground, can have aims and methods profoundly diverse, and sometimes opposite. Finally, crossing the borders between 'sane' and 'insane', 'client' and 'therapist', and other roles that mark the differences between people, and trying to foster a real encounter, with its burden of hopes and problems, mirrored by the themes of the text, which is about meetings and separations that change the lives of the characters.

The results were encouraging, both at an artistic and therapeutic level: the text became a screen onto which people could project their own feelings, which could be reworked within the drama therapy group, and this reworking fortified them, enhancing the right distance to engage with the characters, in a virtuous healing circle.

It was soon clear that this was a play with female protagonists. The character of Grusha was played by three different women in the group aged from thirty to fifty years. Each of them expressed different shades of the character, which mirrored their own issues and the feelings they had in facing them. For example Giovanna, who played Grusha's role in the crucial moment of finding the baby, felt the need to enact a story that mirrored her sense of guilt toward her son, who, many years ago, had been taken away from her by the social service, during her first crisis. At the same time, by playing the role of the courageous woman who, despite a thousand doubts and hesitations, took responsibility for the other, she was asserting her wish to be a new person, able to continue to struggle and grow up, as she stated. Santina, who was beginning to emerge from a crisis that had completely upset her life, had infused in her Grusha crossing the bridge hanging over the abyss her desire to cross a threshold toward a new life. Finally, Roberta, the third Grusha, the one who stubbornly persists in her painful journey, was rendering all her longing and fear to detach herself, at thirty, from a family treating her like a little girl. It was as if they could absorb courage and endurance from the character, or – better – they discovered their own courage and endurance in their dialogue with the character. As Roger Grainger suggested: 'It would be a mistake to suppose Brecht's aim was simple detachment, the critical as opposed to the involved point of view. What in fact he had in mind was real engagement with the problems confronting the character' (Grainger & Duggan, 1997, 73). Engaging with the character of Grusha offered them new possibilities for themselves.

The success of the experiment comforted me, and urged me to further reflections. Crossing the borders between theatre and therapy had been an exciting experience. In an article for a book on dialogues between theatre and therapy, I wrote: 'For theatre, a dramatherapeutic influence may help directors to increase their sensitivity to the psychic state of the individuals and groups, and to develop an empathic attitude towards them. (...) For dramatherapy, a theatrical influence may help therapists to restore their ability to address people's creativity rather than taking into account mainly their distress or their pathological sides' (in Jennings ed. 2009, 107).

But further borders were to be crossed by the project. In the blink of an eye, news of the performance spread all around the neighbourhood and reached the hospital, triggering curiosity among many people, including patients, staff members and volunteers of the therapeutic communities; the ensemble grew to twenty-four people. It became a big community. We were inclined to insist on Brecht, for reasons explained below, and proposed that this new company should work on *The Threepenny Opera*.

The first reason was the nature itself of Brecht's theatre: as Anna Seymour has written, 'Brecht's conception of "distancing" is entirely political in its intentions. The audience must judge what is going on, on the stage. Feelings will be engaged otherwise why would we care about the play, but in the end what is presented must invite scrutiny' (Seymour 2010, 4). And we realized that the group was eager to deliver a message concerning their own condition as mental health services users.

The second reason concerns the text in its own right. We were coming from the experience of the *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, where the protagonist – the maidservant Grusha, who finds an abandoned baby and protects him, risking her own life – was a positive character. What could happen if we had to deal with a text where not a single 'good guy' was portrayed? A text portraying a corrupted and unfair society, practically governed by criminal powers, impressively akin to Italy in that time? Would it be embarrassing or even anxiety-inducing for people who are defined as being emotionally unstable? We assumed that Brechtian distancing could help people to manage such complex and contentious topics. And it would be an interesting great challenge to explore them: this overt exploration could help people in dealing with some 'hot' themes, like aggressiveness, sex and deceit in relationships, which can have personal relevance. At the same time, we were playing with a 'dramatic world' that mirrored some collective issues: after all, we were living in Sicily, where the presence of the Mafia was still a social plague.

Even this performance was a great success. What is more, an enhancement in people's personal and social abilities has been observed, in terms of autonomy, skills in negotiating conflict, commitment and a renewed interest for what was happening 'outside' the confines of the mental health services. The experience also offered a significant opportunity to the staff involved, who consolidated their relationships as a group and were able to reflect upon such a complex process, in order to adjust and rebalance it according to the clients' need.

There is one more little story I would like to tell. The theatre workshop was hosted in a big hall within a therapeutic community, and sometimes one of the guests who did not attend the workshop would also unexpectedly attend. Aldo was a handsome young man, yet very untidy and messy; he had a complex psychiatric history that had started from childhood; he did not speak to anyone and refused any physical contact. He was considered an incurable case. However, his visits became more and more frequent, and eventually he even took a seat and watched the rehearsals. He never tried to join in, but when I announced that the next day the meeting would be at the theatre for a dress rehearsal, he jumped up and said in a quiet voice: 'Can I come too?' Everybody was surprised, including his friends, who had never seen him being so assertive. On the spot, I said yes, but then the trouble began. Unlike the majority of the other inpatients, Aldo was under the jurisdiction of the Mental Health Service. He could not decide to go out on his own, he needed to be authorized and accompanied in a special car with an approved driver. We wrote a formal request, but 'unfortunately' the head psychiatrist was too busy and, in addition, there were no available cars or drivers. Two days later, just

before the performance, one of the young doctors attending the group called me, saying that he had decided that he could do without the authorization, so he fetched Aldo to the theatre on his motorcycle; the young man had been screaming for joy all the way, and he was eager to join the show. We quickly found a costume that suited him, and he went onstage in a market scene, playing a salt seller, where he decided to utter the typical cry of these people, which everybody living in Palermo knows well: 'Quando mi cercate, non mi trovate!' (When you look for me, you will not find me!). He received a standing ovation from the audience, and even from his fellow actors. Another border had been crossed. Was it too much?

In modern psychiatry, there is a lot of talking about 'empowerment'. Patients are encouraged to make decisions and take on responsibilities for themselves. But what happens when empowerment shifts from individuals to a broader social group, and ends in defying the psychiatric institution itself? This raises a question first expressed by Foucault (2003): might therapy become an accomplice of an overall project of normalization? Whatever the answer may be, the fact is that the project was closed soon after, officially because of funding cuts. Gradually, the day centre, 'La Zebra', also started to be neglected, and they had to reduce most of the activities, limiting their action to medical care.

It happened in 2012. Since then, I have not worked in the Adult Mental Health Service in Palermo (nor have many colleagues from the different arts therapy disciplines). But at times I've spoken to Filippo on the phone, and we remember the tremendous power of that line: 'I puvireddi cci sù!'.

## Notes

- 1 In Sicilian, we do not use the word 'poviru' (poor) as a noun. We can say 'un poviru cristianu' (a poor man) or 'un poviru armalu' (a poor beast). As a noun, 'poviru' is used only in its diminutive form 'puvireddu', which means 'beggar' or 'homeless', or in the pejorative 'puvirazzu', referring to any unlucky person. 'I puvireddi cci sù', with a small difference in accent, can be read either 'Here come the beggars' or 'The beggars exist'.
- 2 It is worth noting that the word 'opra' does not correspond to 'opera', but refers to the 'opra d'i pupi', the traditional puppet shows that for a couple of centuries had been the only form of theatre attended by the lower classes in Sicily. 'Fari l'opra' (doing the 'opra') is used metaphorically to describe an exaggerated and theatrically devised reaction to any offense.
- 3 In 1978, the Italian Parliament passed a law that regulated public mental health care, according to which the big mental hospitals (which sometimes hosted more than a thousand people) should have been closed and replaced by a wide range of community services. It was inspired by the ideas of the psychiatrist Franco Basaglia (1924–1989).
- 4 In 1973, Franco Basaglia was the head of the psychiatric hospital of Trieste, where he experimented with his new methods. He hired a company of what we now would call 'applied theatre' in order to create a parade whose protagonist was a horse called Marco. A few years before, this horse used to pull the laundry cart and it had become a familiar figure for the inpatients, who gave him his name. When the horse was removed and destined for the slaughterhouse, they protested and asked the authorities for permission to adopt him. Surprisingly, the protest succeeded, and this event became a turning point in the process of recognizing rights for 'mentally ill' people. A magnificent blue horse was created, but, when they tried to carry it out of the hospital into the city streets, they realized that it was too big to pass through the gates. They tried and tried, until in the end they smashed the gate and finally came out. Some say that Basaglia himself took a pick and struck the wall.



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## 41 The TransActing project

Why trans, non-binary and gender diverse people value spaces without cisgender people when engaging in creative practices

*Catherine McNamara*

**EARLY IN 2015**, I had a conversation with artist, film-maker and actor Fox Fisher about creating a series of acting classes for trans and non-binary people. Fox is based in Brighton, England, and he took part in a mainstream television documentary series called *My Transsexual Summer*, broadcast on Channel 4 (Richards 2011), after which he co-created the *My Generation* film project, which celebrates trans lives and trans experiences. Fox raised the idea of creating acting and performance classes with me because I am an academic and Applied Theatre practitioner-researcher and my practice most often manifests through arts projects run with the charity Gendered Intelligence (GI). GI is a trans-led organisation that works with trans communities in the United Kingdom (UK) and all those who impact on trans lives.

In my capacity as co-founder of GI, I have carried out a number of arts-based projects and creative workshops in collaboration with arts and theatre organisations, with and for young trans people and, on occasion, also with young lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer (LGBTQ) identified people from across the UK, as well as LGBTQ people over twenty-five. Past projects have included The Sci:identity Project, 2006–2007 (Rooke 2010), Brief Encounters Theatre in Education project run in collaboration with Los Angeles-based Fringe Benefits Theatre Company, 2009–2012 (Greer 2012), the INTERarts intergenerational LGBTQ project in 2010 (McNamara 2018b) and the GI's Anatomy: Drawing Sex, Drawing Gender, Drawing Bodies project run in collaboration with London Drawing in 2013 (McNay and Stewart 2015). As Fox and I talked, the beginnings of the TransActing project began to form.

This chapter presents the TransActing project as a deeply trans-inclusive practice within the creative and cultural sector in the UK and beyond. The chapter articulates the ways that this project seeks to create opportunities for trans and non-binary people to access creative processes and networks. In this chapter, 'trans' is used to mean a broad spectrum of gender identities and gendered expressions and to include people who feel their gender identity does not sit comfortably with the sex they were assigned at birth, including but not limited to transgender and non-binary people. Not all non-binary identified people would identify as trans and, as an umbrella term, trans does not suit all people in the same way. Carrie Davis (2009, 16) writes specifically about language relating to trans identities as 'an evolutionary vocabulary that changes inter-generationally, geographically, and within a political context'. For further reading on trans identities see, for example, Bornstein (1995), Stryker and Whittle (2006) and Valentine (2007).

## **The organisational context**

Dr Jay Stewart and I were co-founders of GI and Stewart is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for the organisation. GI is based in London and was formally registered as a Community Interest Company (CIC) in 2008. A CIC is a specific type of company structure in the UK, which reinvests profits in the company for community and social benefit rather than for shareholders. The company became a registered charity in 2019. The aims of GI are to increase the quality of trans young people's lives and to raise awareness of their needs across the UK and beyond. In working towards those aims, we seek to contribute to the creation of community cohesion and strength across the whole of the trans community throughout the UK and to generate discussion and debate around gender inequality rooted in gender, misogyny, misandry and sexism. Our position is that gender is a construct and not a natural phenomenon. It is a system which presents challenges in everyday life for the majority of people, regardless of individuals' trans or cisgender status. Here, 'cisgender' is the adjective that relates to a person whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex.

At GI, we try to instigate and participate in discussions at all levels from the local to the national and international. In order to do this we talk about gender and trans identities in monthly trans youth group sessions and at annual conferences with academics and researchers from the UK and in other countries, as well as in our own publications (Rooke 2010; Greer 2012; McNay and Stewart 2015; McNamara 2018a and 2018b). It is within this context that I developed the first five-day series of classes that launched the TransActing project in July 2015. From this beginning, the project aimed to develop and deliver high quality trans-inclusive performer training with trans, non-binary and gender diverse participants and thus to nurture the creativity and talent of participants. A key aspect of the project also seeks to connect producers, directors and others involved in making TV, film, radio, theatre and other media to that talent. The project has operated across the UK since 2015 as well as in Australia and Brazil with approximately 350 people having participated in over twenty-five classes, panel discussions and workshops. Outbox Theatre Company became a partner in 2016 with a particular focus on providing masterclasses and workshops for younger participants. Funding for the first series of classes was awarded by The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (University of London) where I was, at the time, a member of staff.

## **Creating an alternative experience: the method or the conditions of training**

Formal performer training is one route towards a career in the acting profession. Other routes include approaching and being taken on by an agent directly or finding and making work independently, building up a portfolio of experience and connections with other creative practitioners. For people who want to learn particular skills and techniques of acting, voice and movement, performer training is a multi-faceted, densely packed and global field.

In the UK this education and training includes, for example, three-year undergraduate and Masters level conservatoire actor training programmes offered by specialist higher education institutions, as well as larger universities with degree courses in theatre, drama and performance. The extent to which these latter courses focus on performer training, as distinct from the study of theatre and performance as a subject, varies widely. Both of

these types of providers often offer short courses in acting and other performance disciplines. There are, in addition, a large number of private acting schools and education providers offering training and/or short courses and one-off workshops.

One idea that Fox and I explored in our early conversation about creating opportunities for trans and non-binary people to access performer training was to ask what holds people back from attending any of these training opportunities, if something is indeed holding them back. Participants in the TransActing project described this experience of wanting to enter into these spaces but feeling a lack of confidence to do so. In an email to me participant Jason Barker said:

Although I had performed in various ways I hadn't actually acted for many years and was really curious to give it a go. Curious and also quite nervous in that this was one of those things that I'd put off 'on account of being trans'. I had done acting courses at the City Lit years ago, when I first transitioned, where nobody knew I was trans. I found them stressful as it was like I was playing a character all the time – the character of a young (I looked younger than I was then!) man who was going to an acting class. So acting was something that I've always been drawn to but also put barriers up against.

(email, 1st April 2019)

Jason talks here about entering a mainstream learning environment and feeling like he was pretending to be someone, rather than being himself. City Lit is more formally known as the City Literary Institute in London, UK, and it offers evening, daytime and weekend courses for adults in art, design, science, technology, languages and more. In attending acting classes here when nobody knew he was trans, he articulates a feeling that he was not able to engage in the learning process in an authentic way. Being trans is both an irrelevance when signing up to an adult learning class and, at the same time, a significant and highly relevant factor of one's self when that class is about the body, the voice and the creative expression of participants. Zarrilli, Sasitharan and Kapur (2016, 337) write about acting and actor training, saying:

Ever since the seminal work of Stanislavsky, the dominant commonplace paradigm informing how Westerners usually think and talk about acting is psychology – a discipline invented in the nineteenth century at the same time as theatrical realism and naturalism focused attention on the individual self as understood in the West.

They are talking about the ways that twenty-first century contemporary theatre practices are being constructed in 'multi-, inter-, intra-cultural realities' (335) and modes of training need to be able to take account of these realities. Experimenting with and training the body and the voice directly involves cultural realities or lived experiences that are bound up with gender and gendered expression, and people who do not 'fit' with or into gender norms potentially feel they do not 'fit' this training. A trans or non-binary person may feel under scrutiny from a cisnormative social context. An acting class would be just as likely to be a cisnormative environment as any other social space. TransActing project participants described feeling vulnerable at the idea of trying to enter into these creative spaces and a perception that they were not accessible to them as trans people. There is a tension in the relationship between mainstream training and queer subjectivities.

Trans performer and academic Joshua Bastian Cole (2018, 14) talks about the ways that actor training does not account for non-normative experiences of embodiment such as those of trans men:

[...] the idea of bodily unification, which is so heavily enforced in performance training and practices, requires a new definition when considering trans men: a new definition that understands, prepares for, and factors in gaps, shattering, and disappearing, all of which are in opposition to ideas of bodily unity

Rather than attempt to re-define and re-shape the model of training, which is one very interesting approach, the TransActing project focussed on creating a trans only space and on the value of exclusive or separatist spaces for minority groups. In this sense, we were attempting to remove the sense of vulnerability created by a cisnormative social environment and create a 'safe space' in relation to queerness and trans identities. In separating ourselves as queer people because hegemony is suffocating, the idea was that participants would be freer to work creatively. In a special issue of *Borderlands e-journal*, Pascar, Hartal and David offer an interdisciplinary investigation of the ongoing discussion on queer safe spaces. In the introduction, they think about queer safe space construction practices and propose four points that characterise queer formation of space:

(a) the transformation of safe space from being a space of opposition to heteronormativity into a space of *resistance and subversion*; (b) shifting the focus from seclusion and isolation to a focus on *constituting a formative community and culture*; (c) a transformation from substantial and physical boundaries into *subjective boundaries*; and (d) a shift from safe space as a space of dissociation into creating a *new temporality*, which engenders a refuge and allows for the continuation of identity and performance.

(Pascar, Hartal and David 2018, 3–4)

The establishment of mainstream spaces that strive to create genuinely welcoming and respectful environments for all people is important but so too are trans inclusive spaces that exclude cisgender people. The TransActing project workshops were something of a refuge where participants could take respect for granted and know that they would be free from negative judgement on the basis of their gender. Matthew Chin (2018, 401) talks about this notion of creating spaces for marginalised LGBTQ communities, specifically communities of colour, and he highlights the hierarchy of power that functions within creative and cultural industries:

[...] safe space as a feelings-based mode of community practice is not necessarily commensurate with the logics of art production found in more mainstream environments. Although LGBTQ of color community arts organizations espouse a kind of creative egalitarianism in which everyone has the potential to be an artist and feelings-based measures must be taken to nourish this potential, hegemonic arts institutions are less interested in redistributing the means of cultural production.

The disjuncture between a community-based arts practice and a mainstream arts culture that Chin points to was one of the things we were trying to tackle in the TransActing project. In addition to experiencing classes in acting for camera, in movement and voice

for actors, the participants met with writers, casting directors and other industry-based professionals as a way of opening up conversations about all parts of the cultural production 'pipeline' and about representation of trans people in theatre, television, film and other mediums. We talked with these individuals about the ways that trans characters are written, the various attitudes towards casting trans actors for roles (trans and otherwise) and about the ways that creative spaces such as theatres, radio studios and television sets can be trans inclusive working environments, if trans people are to have positive experiences.

### ***Moving in to the creative and cultural sector***

Doing this work in a space free from potential judgement and hostility enabled people to focus on the creative processes and the skills development. They were able to set aside any labour required to navigate social spaces where prejudice and lack of understanding related to trans and non-binary identities can create tension and stress. The participants were more ready to work on body, voice and physical expression, as well as to think in concrete ways about how to network and connect with industry professionals in ways that would be positive and productive. Participants said:

Being trans has always been a bit of a sort of barrier to getting in to acting... in fact before I started doing this course I've always just crossed it off my list... very early on there was just no way that you can be trans and act. It was only after starting to do these workshops that I actually thought about getting back into performing and going to auditions.

(Noel in Fisher and Hancox 2015)

Being trans has held me back from going into a career as an actor to begin with because I felt I couldn't personally, at school, pursue it because I was female at school and I didn't want to play the roles. I personally didn't know who I was so I couldn't possibly play somebody else.

(Harrison in Fisher and Hancox 2015)

One participant expresses a new layer to his concerns. Connected to the idea of the safety gained from the inclusive space, his concerns about having a negative experience as a trans person were now not the issue. In a space where every participant was trans and the tutors were explicitly cognisant of trans-inclusive practice, this gave rise to a concern that perhaps it was his acting ability that might in fact be questioned and questionable:

I think for me being in a trans space was like a challenge – Ok, I thought my being trans was a barrier to this, what if we take that away? Can you do it? – so scary as well as exciting! To be honest, it was like a test. I knew I couldn't use being trans as an excuse in this course.

(Jason, email, 1st April 2019)

After participating in the initial five-day series of workshops, Jason continued with acting courses close to where he lives, at the Bristol Old Vic. He joined the Adult Company there, which is a group of over twenty-five year olds who work with different teachers and theatre practitioners each term. He has been in a short play at the Royal

Court and acted in a short film based on that play, as well as co-writing and acting in a radio drama for Radio 4. He told me that one of the things that has stayed with him from 2015 and had an influence on the way he has approached these prospective opportunities was a method acting class led by Head of Acting at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Professor Geoffrey Colman. In an email to me on 1st April 2019, Jason said:

I think that was the first time I actually ‘got’ what it means when someone plays a part – that they aren’t ‘becoming the character’ but are themselves, portraying the role. That was revelatory to me in that it made me realise that it wasn’t about me being someone else but being myself. So the thing I did when I first transitioned, of thinking I needed to be a particular type of man on the drama course, that just became pointless. It also made me think about casting, that it’s about you being what they want or not rather than a judgement on whether you are good or not at acting – without this I would NEVER have gone for any auditions!

Since the project began in 2015, several participants have been cast for roles in television programmes including *Emmerdale* (Independent Television (ITV)), *Boy Meets Girls* (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)), *EastEnders* (BBC) and *Casualty* (BBC). Participants have found opportunities with the National Theatre of Scotland, the Theatre Royal Stratford East and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, among others. People have secured work for radio and narration for audio books. Some participants have talked about using the confidence gained from the workshops in exam presentations and everyday life. By 2018 approximately 300 people had participated in TransActing workshops in the UK. I built connections with theatres across the UK, including the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, the Bristol Old Vic and London’s Royal Court Theatre. Project participant and BFI (British Film Institute) Flare 2016 Festival Programmer Jason Barker and I planned the panel event ‘Transform’, which brought together casting agents, film/TV-makers and actors for a discussion about trans representation on screen.

### **Translating to a new context: TransActing in Brazil**

In 2018, the TransArte Festival organisers based in Rio de Janeiro secured British Council funding to invite the TransActing project over to Brazil. The festival is a national artistic event about genders and sexualities, theatre, dance, visual works, film, performances, seminars, exhibitions and workshops. The political situation in Brazil is creating a very particular environment. Jair Bolsonaro was elected president in October 2018 and took office in January 2019. Since then, the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights has chosen not to include LGBT people as a legally protected group. Some politicians are pushing for a ban on talking about gender diversity and sexual orientation in schools. Bathroom laws pertaining to which toilet facilities trans people are allowed to use and bills defining what constitutes a family are under threat. As are same sex marriage and laws enabling trans people to change their legal name (McNamara 2019). Brazil has a reputation as one of the most violent countries in the world and Rio is known as the LGBT ‘murder capital’ of the world. According to the Trans Murder Monitoring research project, 167 trans people were reported murdered between 1st of October 2017 and 30th of September 2018 (‘TMM Update’ 2018). LGBT hate crime increased in the lead up to and since Bolsonaro’s election (‘Brazil Elections’ 2018). The TransArte festival brings trans

people and allies together in real time and space to exchange ideas, share work, make work and celebrate the strength and vitality of the community in the face of societal hostility.

The project team worked alongside the festival team and members of the LGBTQ communities in Rio, Nova Iguaçu and Niterói as part of a one-week residency. We were invited to share some of our own practice related to the TransActing project. Facilitator Barry Fitzgerald ran two TransActing workshops with thirty-five LGBTQ participants from the city and surrounding areas, all of whom were interested in developing their skills as performers. The sessions drew on Laban's Effort Actions and ideas of physical communication and focus in performance. We also met around thirty-five artists, producers and educators. We spent time in cultural centres and two university Art, Design and Performance departments, talking about community activism and art-making as resistance when the socio-political climate is increasingly hostile for trans communities. The values that underpin the TransArte festival are respect for differences, non-violence, access to cultural activity, equal rights and freedom of expression. We met staff and students at the only State Drama School in the city (Martins Penna). The staff at the school talked about wanting to be seen as welcoming and inclusive to LGBTQ people, but as far as they were aware they did not have any trans students in attendance. With them, we talked about the ways that we have shaped the TransActing project in partnership with a leading drama school in the UK to create opportunities for trans people who often feel multiple barriers to participating in this kind of work.

## Conclusion

The projects, festivals, events and collectives forged by people like the TransArte festival team members in Rio are places and spaces where community builds and strength is shared, just as the spaces of the TransActing workshops do in the UK. Art-making feels absolutely vital and necessary as a way to communicate and to connect with each other. Making a connection across continents through our residency enabled those of us from the UK to stand together in solidarity with the trans communities of Rio. In exchanging our experiences of using art to resist, whether we resist a far-right government led by Jair Bolsonaro or the oppressive anti-trans movements in Britain, connecting was a deeply powerful action in itself.

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**Part VII**

**Change**

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## 42 Introduction to change

*Nicola Abraham*

**THERE ARE CONTRADICTIONS** that are important to acknowledge within applied theatre practices that intend to create change. The idea of who might own change is important to consider, as is whether or not change is inevitable or sustainable; also subjects of much debate and dispute. The levels on which change operates offer further uncertainty about its location, nature and predictability. The 'form' that change might take also presents a problematic starting point. Funding agendas requiring proof that money allocated has been 'well-spent' also offer points of tension when one type of change may be aimed for, but another is found in the process. Change is necessarily complex, unpredictable and often involves some type of collaboration and agreement to implement meaningfully.

Eleanora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett (2010) discuss the social impact of the arts. Part of their influential account of the shifting landscape of what constitutes impact and value in the arts refers to a 2003 speech by then Minister of State for the Arts, Estelle Morris. Morris noted that she was unsure how to account for the worth of the arts, noting that finding a new language to evaluate the impact of the arts was necessary to achieve this (2010a:9):

I know that Arts and Culture make a contribution to health, to education, to crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being, but I don't always know how to evaluate it or describe it. We have to find a language and a way of describing its worth. It's the only way we'll secure the greater support we need.  
(Morris, 2003)

We may feel that this speech represents a call to recognise the value of our work, but it also calls for us to defend the existence of applied theatre practice, asking for the categorisation of value, and thereby justification of expenditure for public funds on arts practice aimed at the 'betterment' of society. This call for accountability in the arts assumes several key points:

1. Change *can* be captured and accounted for;
2. What constitutes change and value in the arts can be quantified;
3. Indicators intended to 'capture change' are applicable to all contexts;
4. Sustainability is essential to prove the worth of our practice.

Initial discussions about the potential, ethical dilemmas and limitations of change as an outcome of engagement within applied theatre practices have progressed to propose

questions of the validity of impact assessment in hierarchical, confined-settings and border-crossing projects. Tim Prentki and Michael Etherton (2006) debated the ethical challenges and power dynamics that may be at play when a practitioner asks participants to account for their experience. A useful illustration of this issue was inherent in an example of a practitioner asking for feedback to account for the impact of practice for a prison theatre project. The power of alleviating boredom on the wing through engaging in an arts project is strong motivation to offer a positive review of an experience, no matter the quality, in order to maintain this offer of support and respite from the potential volatility of a prison environment. This point suggests that the value of projects in environments with an unequal power dynamic, which are arguably all project contexts, are challenging to quantify and qualify. In contexts where a practitioner is an outsider, taking Paulo Freire's (1970, 2000) suggestion of cultural synthesis as an approach to understanding and integrating with a community to begin to break down power hierarchies is not enough to address the complexity of the issues of assessing change raised by Prentki and Etherton.

Michael Balfour (2009:353) suggests that 'change rarely occurs in the way any social architect plans', in which case it is perhaps too contrived to build agendas for change based on assumed outcomes proposed by both practitioners and funding donors to assert that money has been well spent. Indicators of change intending to use impact assessment strategies to capture change employ what Belfiore and Bennett term an 'instrumental rationality' (2010b:139) rather than 'a critical approach that aims at an open enquiry of the problems, both theoretical and methodological, which are inherent in the project of understanding the response of individuals to the arts and trying to investigate empirically the extent and nature of the effects of the aesthetic experience' (ibid.). Instrumental rationality as an approach to impact assessment and understanding the value of the arts doesn't take into account that 'the gap between planning, implementation and administration is far too vulnerable to a myriad of social, political and cultural influences' (Balfour, 2009:353). Therefore, change may well be an intention but it is also not a guarantee. There are many other factors at play that can interrupt processes of change as Balfour suggests.

It is the responsibility of the applied theatre practitioner to be mindful of the systems that they are working within. Agendas for change are often driven by neoliberal and capitalist ideas of social inclusion, often linked to conformist behaviours that prevent a young person being excluded from school, or centres on those termed 'at-risk' of offending who need interventions to avoid engaging with the risks that have been predetermined by assumptions made about their context, socio-economic status, education and employment. This destructive algorithm, based on a set of circumstances that equate to an assumption of non-conformist behaviours, boasts an underlying neoliberal agenda that Kelly Freebody et al. (2018) discuss, arguing that for applied theatre to exist there needs to be a 'problem' that needs to be 'fixed'. They describe applied theatre practitioners as 'social elastoplasts', noting the danger that if we take this position towards intending for change and 'fixing problems' we may be approaching our practice and participants from a 'deficit perspective' (Freebody et al. 2018: 6). This raises important points about the ethics of practice intending to 'create' change. How might we acknowledge our privilege and take a more radical position to work between what John Holloway (2010) terms 'the cracks of capitalism', and specifically neoliberal rhetoric of blame, shame and punishment that leads to interventions intended to 'fix' communities, towards a more realistic, meaningful and understanding approach to change?

Further debate from James Thompson (2011) suggests that by trying to capture evidence of change and focussing on sustained outcomes we are missing important affects

that can result from applied theatre practice. It may, in this case, be more effective to understand the potential of applied theatre practices to provide respite through offering activities that can provide space for joy in communities who face complex and devastating contexts in the midst of war zones, or in the face of deprivation and inequality. Perhaps then it is within the ‘messiness’ of applied theatre, in the unexpected, unanticipated moments of realisation where a seed has been planted, or a representation of an event has led to a realisation that has heightened a drive for change, that applied theatre exists. Whether applied theatre practitioners agree and appreciate the importance of the currently unrecognised moments of change that are context-specific and necessarily temporary, and find comfort in providing snapshots of joy to improve the well-being of their participants, or drive their intentions towards heightening political awareness with an intention to present applied theatre interventions for change, it is important to remember there are communities impacted by these choices.

The chapters in this section reflect upon, and articulate, ways of understanding and demonstrating impact in applied theatre practice, grappling with ideas that ‘call out’ the limitations of understanding the purpose and possibilities that emerge from applied theatre practice.

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## 43 Problem-posing situated and multicultural learning

*Ira Shor*

'Problem-Posing Situated and Multicultural Learning', *Empowering Education*, The University of Chicago Press (1992), excerpt from pp. 31–55.

**PROBLEM-POSING HAS ROOTS** in the work of Dewey And Piaget, who urged active, inquiring education, through which students constructed meaning in successive phases and developed scientific habits of mind. They favoured student-centred curricula oriented to the making of knowledge rather than to the memorizing of facts. Many educators have agreed with this dynamic approach, including Freire, who evolved from it his method of “problem-posing dialogue”. In a Freirean model for critical learning, the teacher is often defined as a problem-poser who leads a critical dialogue in class, and problem-posing is a synonym for the pedagogy itself.

As a pedagogy and social philosophy, problem-posing focuses on power relations in the classroom, in the institution, in the formation of standard canons of knowledge, and in society at large. It considers the social and cultural context of education, asking how student subjectivity and economic conditions affect the learning process. Student culture as well as inequality and democracy are central issues to problem-posing educators when they make syllabi and examine the climate of learning.

Freire (1970) used his well-known metaphor of “banking education” to contrast the politics of traditional methods with problem-posing. Banking educators treat students’ minds as empty accounts into which they make deposits of information, through didactic lectures and from commercial texts. The material deposited in students is drawn from the “central bank of knowledge”.

[...]

In contrast, problem-posing offers all subject matter as historical products to be questions rather than a universal wisdom to be accepted. From this perspective, the central bank is viewed as exclusionary rather than inclusive. From a critical point of view, existing canons of knowledge and usage are not a common culture; they have ignored the multi-cultural themes idioms, and achievements of nonelite groups ... The responsibility of the problem-posing teacher is to diversity subject matter and to use students’ thought and speech as the base for developing critical understanding of personal experience, unequal conditions in society, and existing knowledge. In democratic pedagogy, the teacher is not filling empty minds with official or unofficial knowledge but is posing knowledge in any form as a problem for mutual inquiry.

[...]



The problem-posing approach views human beings, knowledge and society as unfinished products in history, where various forces are still contending. Freire emphasized problem-posing as a democratic way for students to take part in the contention over knowledge and the shape of society.

[...]

By starting from the students' situation, problem-posing increases their ability to participate, because they can begin critical reflection in their own context and their own words.

In addition, empowering pedagogy is situated in the political climate of the agency, institution, or community in which the class is offered. It is not invented abstractly by the teacher accosting to what he or she imagines is good for the students or the locale. Instead, the empowering teacher researches her or his situation so as to develop as much critical learning as possible under the current conditions. Where the openings are for critical projects is an experimental question. Teachers find them through projects that aim at the limits of what is possible.

[...]

To teach children about social issues, Ooka Pang (1991) focused on situating the theme of justice in elementary curriculum. This is a good theme to choose, she wrote, because kids have a strong interest in this idea: "Children often can be heard saying 'But that's not fair.' They understand the importance of dealing equitably with each other" (190). Her approach begins by lifting the word "justice" out of the Pledge of Allegiance recited daily in class, a device that encourages students to extraordinarily reexperience the ordinary. When an everyday habit becomes the subject of unusual scrutiny, it can raise awareness about the meaning of experience. Ooka Pang then asked students for synonyms of "justice." Students responded with "being equal," "fair play," and "playing fair and square." The playground is one obvious place to go to next in a discussion of justice, Ooka Pang suggested, to ask children about the concept there, but since she wanted to situate it in society as well, she integrated a discussion of health care in the community with the concept of justice.

[...]

From this integration of health care and justice, Ooka Pang suggested, students can draw on their experience in their communities and examine "the extent to which justice is actually carried out, and how they could act on behalf of it" (190). They started from routine experiences such as the pledge and the playground, and then moved outward to apply the concept of justice to their experiences in society through health care. This illustrates one student-centred way to integrate a social theme with critical thinking at the elementary level.

[...]

Changing power relations in the classroom through problem-posing reduces the need for students to resist learning. More students can embrace education without fear of boredom or of a cultural invasion by an elite, remote curriculum. The empowering classroom can open their voices for expression rarely heard before. Their voices are an untapped and unexpected universe of words rich in thought and feeling. From it, students and teachers can create knowledge that leaves behind the old disabling education in a search for new ways of being and knowing.

## 44 Synthetic culture and development

*Renato Constantino*

*Synthetic Culture and Development*, Foundation for Nationalist Studies (1985), excerpts from pp. 33–43.

**MAN IS BORN INTO A CULTURAL SYSTEM** that is historically evolved. He is permeated by symbols, traditions, perceptions and value orientations that become mediating forces between himself and society just as society is the mediating agency between himself and his material environment. In much of the Third World today, this cultural heritage is in peril.

The transnationalization of communications has almost completely shattered the cultural defenses of developing nations. The very existence of indigenous cultures is threatened with massive modifications as Western culture is presented as the culture which every modernizing state must emulate. Aspects of indigenous culture are preserved in bastardized, “touristic form” to attract dollars while the local population consumes popular Western cultural fare or local films, TV, radio, and comics which ape the styles, techniques and content of Western cultural products. The incursion of Western informational and cultural commodities is constant and widespread. They are also technologically superior, therefore admired and enjoyed. In the course of the worldwide invasion of its cultural and informational infrastructures, contemporary capitalism has fabricated a synthetic culture that has become the matrix of perceptions and orientations of masses of people both in the industrial world and in the newly independent states within the capitalist orbit.

Indeed even the socialist world has not been spared from the incursion of some aspects of this synthetic culture.

Perhaps the most important feature of this synthetic culture is its consumerist ideology. That is not surprising since the capitalist dream society is one where everybody buys everything. While consumerism is directly promoted by advertisements, a more effective, because subtle, approach is the consistent presentation in media, particularly TV, of the concept of the good life in an affluent society. What should be regarded as luxuries in the Third World are perceived as needs – Western food and fashion, modern appliances, a TV set, a car, etc. – thus creating pressures for importation or local production and in the process distorting social priorities. Thus, we may see the latest car models in a poor country where public transport is woefully inadequate.

### **Reordering reality**

In industrialized states where the period of initial accumulation is long past, the emphasis on such values as “prudence, restraint, thrift and saving” has waned. In an economy characterized

by high productivity and ever threatened by the prospect of glut, the values which media nurtures are those of impulse buying and asset acquisition. Products are no longer bought for their sturdiness and durability but for their style or for some claimed innovation. In an economy that reaps handsome profits from planned obsolescence, the idea that certain articles could be bearers of tradition and continuity from one generation to the next would hardly be promoted. Instead, the highest value is attached to the newest and the latest....

### **Standardization of culture**

The standardization of popular culture provides the dominant classes with happy, exploited people whose minds are sedated with entertainment featuring comic strips, mindless music, and soap operas and comedies revolving around situations that distort reality and ignore basic problems of society. At the other end of the spectrum are the stories about sex and violence, the movie and TV mayhem, which brutalize and desensitize and hardly provide useful social insights because the emphasis is on individualistic solutions effected by cops, detectives, supermen and wonderwomen who are the equivalents of the cowboys of yester-years fighting bad guys in defense of the law, women, and private property.

Social relations are not dynamically presented. Instead, there is an atomization of society, individuals without relation to the society they live in. The hero fights the forces of evil as an individual. Social relations become abstract. This is hardly surprising since the fragmentation of oppressed classes – or better still, their unawareness of their status – is a condition of the hegemony of the dominating class.

### **Colonizing life experiences**

Reality is reordered and class conflicts and other political questions are glossed over. The ruling class colonizes the life experiences of other classes in order to give its own values and objectifies the appearance of universality. Thus, the culture disseminated is one that ignores class conflicts, and is not part of the political struggle. According to a study conducted in Venezuela, the “*marginales* or bottom segment of the population lost their perception of class differences. They think that there are, to be sure, rich and poor, but all have access to the same consumer goods they hear about on the transistor or see on the TV.”<sup>1</sup>

Today’s so-called popular music, in its various manifestations, reflects even more extremely both the emphasis on technology and the mindlessness that afflicts the majority of film and TV productions. Rock music with its ear-splitting volume, its empty repetitive lyrics, generates nothing more than a purely physical excitement. It is incapable of saying anything meaningful about human life. Instead, it simply erects ‘walls of sound’ behind which its consumers exist in an unreal world where the violence done to the senses becomes an opiate for the mind.<sup>2</sup>

It is said that when the generals took over in Chile they blasted rock music through loudspeakers into the streets of Santiago – cultural violence reflecting political and economic violence. Under Allende’s government, Chilean musicians had rediscovered indigenous music and developed it to express the people’s sentiments and aspirations. Song became a great mobilizing agent. The generals arrested and killed the artists to silence their music.

### **Means of social control**

Cultural domination is facilitated by the fact that Third World audiences have been reduced to passive recipients of inputs from information monopolies. Cultural experience

is limited to seeing, hearing, and to a lesser extent reading pre-digested and packaged products of the information industry that also controls entertainment. People now think that being informed is simply knowing the latest news: they are habituated to learning about the newest development or event and forgetting what happened the day before. This is especially true of a growing majority who rely on the TV news coverage rather than on newspapers.

In the Philippines, for example, the daily newspaper has become too expensive for most families. A TV set has higher priority since it provides both news and entertainment for a growing population of non-readers. But TV offers each day's events simply as a passing show: images flash on the screen, words assault the ear and fade away. Who, what and where are its staples; why is hardly its forte.

At least newspapers offer an occasional intelligent analysis, but a TV-habituated generation has no time or patience to be intellectually provoked – indeed, does not even miss such an experience. This does not imply that a non-analytical presentation is non-judgmental. Value judgments are incorporated in how news is presented, in what is considered newsworthy, in what is ignored. Unknowingly, most viewers will absorb these value judgments as part of the factual packages.

The extent of technological progress especially in the realm of communications has resulted, ironically enough, in the erosion of the individual's opportunity to arrive independently at an awareness of his environment. Instead, media, particularly TV, provide him with a mediated or synthetic environment which takes the place of personal sensory experience of the world he lives in. He is presented with a reconstructed world and his perceptions of the real world are defined and delimited by the images he sees on the TV screen from day to day, from one newscast to the next.

The viewer becomes a mere receiver, not only of the facts of the event but also of the value judgments implicit in the telling of the apparently factual account.

With information and opinion neatly packaged together and bombarding the viewer every waking hour, he hardly has the time to sort it all out and actively form opinions of his own. He has become simply a passive consumer of information and ideas in an environment recreated – one could even say manufactured – for him by the communications industry.

### **Ideological dependence**

The analytical mind is exercised and honed through interaction. Popular culture as dispensed by television and video tapes is generally consumed in isolation and has produced a fragmented, escapist, pliable, largely unthinking audience. The isolated individual who lives within the recreated environment is ready for mental colonization. New needs are implanted through the medium of advertising which is an important means for homogenizing people. It trains them to regard commodities as the be-all and end-all of life. Possessing or enjoying them becomes life's sole meaning. The individual is given new images of himself and pressured to live up to that image – one which places the highest value on his consumption capacity thus making him an asset to the corporate society in which he lives. While the upper and middle classes constitute the more faithful market for Western cultural commodities, the relatively inexpensive transistor is fast becoming an indispensable fixture in the countryside and doles out, though not as graphically and with a more local accent, more or less the same pap as the television set.

This is not to say that television and radio are a complete cultural wasteland but certainly, good, serious, solid programs are the exception rather than the rule. As for material

that addresses a problem in a people-oriented manner, that is scarcer than a hen's teeth on radio and TV. At least, the much maligned because administration-controlled newspapers manage once in a while to print research findings and exposes [*sic*] from a progressive, Third World perspective. True, the occasional talk-show sometimes tackles controversial subjects but time constraints and commercial interruptions usually preclude thorough discussion.

The communications industry is now the main agent in the manufacture of a synthetic culture which promotes the concept of a universal and permanent economic system that is not to be challenged in any fundamental way. With the monopoly control of the television networks, the information systems, the record industry, video recorders, etc., culture itself has become a commodity. It has also become a means of social control. While a variety of cultural products give the illusion of freedom of choice, practically all of them aim to standardize men and women into acceptable types of citizens and consumers who do not question the system.<sup>3</sup>

### Standardization of consumption and culture

The standardization of both consumption and culture begins with the adoption of new products and styles (cultural or material) for the consumer markets in the imperial economies. These are disseminated to and readily appropriated by the upper and middle classes of developing countries. However, since wider markets are needed for more profits, the product is further promoted either as is, or in a less expensive version to be consumed by a larger public. This destroys its value of exclusivity. The upper classes must then be provided with completely new products or the old ones are restyled. Thus begins a new cycle in the inexorable process of premature obsolescence and frantic modernization.

From the exclusivity of the centers of modernity, consumption items are adopted by the elite in the Third World. Eventually, they seep down (though in cheaper versions) to the mass, thus "democratizing" these items. This leads the elite to pursue new items of exclusivity which are dictated from the centers of modernity. Modernity is little more than changing the forms of consumption within an unchanging social structure. Thus the appearance of change masks the fact that there is no real change.

This standardized culture with its international appeal is essentially anti-nationalist. At a time when Third World peoples need all the resources at their command to help them attain economic and political independence, the cultural products they consume divert their attention from such goals and promote cultural dependence. The Trans National Corporations and the governments that represent them correctly regard nationalist movements as threats to their economic expansion and political control. Cultural penetration has proven to be an effective tool to impede such movements or at least to tame them....

### Notes

- 1 R. Barnet and R. Mueller, *Global Reach*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1974, p. 185.
- 2 Leon Rosselson, 'Pop Music: Mobiliser or Opiate?' in Carl Gardner, ed., *Media, Politics and Culture*, London, Macmillan Press, 1979, pp. 40–50.
- 3 Michele Mattelart, 'Notes on "Modernity": A Way of Reading Women's Magazines,' in A. Mattelart and S. Siegelau, eds, *Communication and Class Struggle*, New York, International General, France, IMMRC, 1973, pp. 158–78.

## 45 Child rights theatre for development with disadvantaged and excluded children in South Asia and Africa

*Michael Etherton*

**IN THE MID-1990S A NUMBER** of development agencies, whose work was intended to benefit children and young people, started to promote Child Rights as the basis for their aid and assistance. These agencies included UNICEF at its headquarters in New York and the Save the Children organisations in the UK, Canada and the Scandinavian countries. This new approach followed the drafting and acceptance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and its ratification in 1991.<sup>1</sup> The CRC is part of the UN's international human rights order.

It is often claimed that this international legal code of human rights is a concept of Western democracy that has been imposed on the rest of the world, in the interests of the affluent Western economies. The CRC has had similar charges levelled against it. However, it is increasingly seen that the UN rights system, despite flaws, protects individuals, including people in poor and failing states, against the harsh might of large corporations and powerful countries. This protection is generally at a macro level. At a micro level there are also many instances of the CRC protecting impoverished children from the institutions in their states, from their dictatorial and often violent governments and, in particular, from the pervasive patriarchal beliefs and practices. Paradoxically, while these institutions have power over impoverished individuals, the states are themselves often powerless to do otherwise within an unfair global economic order that favours large corporations and their affluent host states. Civil rights needs to work at the local and the global levels simultaneously. Rights-based initiatives are predicated on agencies such as the UN and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) ensuring genuine participation of local people in their projects. The basic principle is to do what unrepresented groups of people, including children, want. In order to achieve their aims – with the help and the 'clout' of international agencies – these disadvantaged groups also need to have control over their own local institutions and associations. Agencies often say that they want children's participation in 'their' projects, when they actually mean the agencies' projects. Young people want change for the better and they would like development agencies to help them achieve this. Ideally this should be a process in which young people mobilise adults, rather than vice versa.

Active participation in civil society needs to be responsible, enduring and measurable. Enabling active participation is sometimes hard to achieve and requires careful strategies, particularly in the case of children and young people.<sup>2</sup>

In 1998, when I was working for Save the Children UK (SC UK) in South Asia, we used a Theatre for Development (TfD) process to see if it would achieve active participation by young people in civil society in the countries where SC UK had programmes and projects, which was what the agency wanted. The choice of TfD was ours, and sprang

from the drama background of two of my Bangladeshi colleagues in Save the Children, Asif Munier and John Martin, and my own involvement in popular theatre in Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. Tfd, emerging from the initiatives of the popular theatre of the poor and oppressed in Africa, Asia and Latin America, seemed to us to be largely free of agenda and ideology. The methodology was, in effect, a vacant platform on which young people could express the injustices in their lives and then propose their initiatives for change.

The first workshop took place in Bangladesh in 1998, and was followed by workshops in Pakistan, Nepal, India and Ladakh in South Asia. Many of the South Asian facilitators of this Tfd process now run training programmes in and for some other organisations. I left SC UK in 2001. The organisation then used me to run Tfd Training-of-Trainers (ToT) workshops within their programmes in a number of African countries, between 2001 and 2005. The Tfd training was to be part of a wider SC UK initiative called 'Working better with children and young people', which aimed to increase the impact of projects on the lives of young people.

All these workshops showed that once young people had a platform, literally and figuratively, they unequivocally identified oppressive forces affecting their lives. These were invariably violent adults, dangerous places and hostile institutions. Participants also subtly challenged the direction of the NGO's projects and programmes. They wanted the cooperation of sympathetic adults to change things on their terms.

The aim of each of the Tfd training workshops in South Asia and Africa, therefore, was to give adult field workers some specific skills in enabling young people to find a collective voice for their aspirations, with which to speak to adults. The methodology uses drama to help children acquire devising skills, public performance skills, skills in articulating cause and effect and, finally, an ability to negotiate directly with adults.

The format for the training was to set up two consecutive full-time ToT workshops. The first workshop took the adults who wanted to work on an equal basis with young people through a four-day process that functioned at their own experiential level. Through a structured series of drama games and exercises, the Tfd process enabled them to articulate their problems and hopes.

The subsequent Tfd workshop was also four full days and gave adults from the first workshop the immediate opportunity to practise, under guidance, facilitating the games and exercises with a group of young people, by taking them through that same process they had just experienced: status games, the so-called 'hot-seat' and 'mirror' exercises, which are often extended into pairs improvisations and sometimes built up into wider improvisations showing contradictory behaviour. The problems of the young people, like early child-marriage, sexual abuse of children and hazardous near-slavery work by young people, are often stated simply. Hopes are often modest: girls want to continue with education after the early marriage; young people want to be able to negotiate better working conditions with their employers. Their overriding concern is for justice and 'fairness'. The two workshops constituted learning through experience.

In both workshops the participants – the adults on the first and the young people on the second – used imaging to collectively realise their problems, first in drawings and then through stories and devised dramas in small groups. The improvised scenes are always only part of the story; they are therefore deliberately uncompleted. These scenes are criticised by the whole workshop group. Are the characters interesting? Do we really want to know what happens to them as the story develops? The scenes are then revised in the small groups, extended, characters made more paradoxical, ironies introduced. These improvisations are further commented on and further revised, until everyone feels that

all the plays devised are communicating precisely the contradictory complexity of the problems that we all know, in our hearts, echo the truth in our lives. All the plays, however, end with the issues still to be resolved. Early child marriage is not going to be solved through a short improvised drama, but the issue can be opened up for constructive discussion. This is the case with most of the 'big' issues that the plays raise: in Sri Lanka the young people successfully raised the issue of pervasive alcoholism and what first steps might be taken collectively to deal with it and protect children.

The plays are intended to capture the human condition, rather than simply raise issues. The complexity of the problems in the participants' lives underlies the narrative structure. The reason for the emphasis on an evolving narrative, full of irony and paradoxes, is to escape from the prevalent NGO view of drama, which targets audiences with message-laden plays for pre-determined behavioural outcomes.

Within the four-day process of each of the workshops there is also an emphasis on negotiation. To start acquiring negotiation skills, participants are trained to conduct discussions effectively with groups of adults among the audience at performances of their plays. The substance of these discussions is left to the participant groups. The facilitators help each small group to structure an informed and responsible discussion with those officials whom the young participants want to meet in order to put their case. It is informed in so far as the young people have a grasp of the wider implications of what they are saying, of proximate and ultimate causes. For example, in Nepal the young people began their discussion with the District Governor and Head of Education with the question: 'Can you tell us what your budget is for education in this District?' They explained that if they knew the financial constraints they could suggest what expenditure mattered more to them. The discussion is responsibly conducted in that the young people are consciously unfrontational with officials: they remain polite, good listeners, reacting carefully to what adults tell them. The District Officials in this district of Nepal reacted positively in this workshop.

The training emphasises drama-devising and negotiation skills, a duality that defines this particular process of TfD with young people. It links the process to Child Rights because it enables young people to speak out, in ways they want to, against the violations and injustices they experience.

The dual aim was not, however, present in the first Bangladesh workshop. When we started, we concentrated mainly on adults and young people making good plays that were performed for audiences within the communities of the participants. We facilitated non-theatre people to realise a piece of theatre of their own devising in powerful performances before ad hoc and unplanned audiences drawn from their impoverished communities.

By the time we did the TfD training programme in Ladakh, in the Himalayas, in 2000, the emphasis had shifted. The facilitators were now combining adults and young people in both workshops, and the focus was on developing negotiation skills alongside drama skills. Furthermore, the participants themselves determined precisely who that audience should be. We went through a traumatic experience in Ladakh, in which it was made clear to us by the young participants that it was they, and not we the facilitators, who should determine an appropriate audience for the plays about education.

Adult staff and participants in the Ladakh workshop had intended from the start of the training that the process would culminate in the young participants performing their plays to the Ladakh Council, explaining to officials through discussions afterwards what the problems were in state education in Ladakh and how education could be improved. The young people devised some very good, but controversial, plays. They then discovered,



within the workshop process, that some of the adult facilitators did not in fact support their analysis or their plays, even when they said publicly they did. Ideological differences surfaced among the adults in the workshop, particularly on the issues of the language of instruction in the schools, and the problem of teacher violence.

The young participants felt that they could not, in these circumstances, successfully lobby officials if they were unsupported by the agency that had set up the workshop for them. They recognised the views of the dissenting adults; but at the same time they stood by their plays, which most of us thought were honest and thoughtful theatre. They told us in a meeting that they would not take them – yet – to the Council; instead they wanted to take them into a couple of schools and see if the students there agreed with what their dramas were saying. They did this, with considerable success, performing to over 400 students in each of the two schools visited. I believe that Child Rights and TfD have expanded in Ladakh and negotiation skills among the students have evolved.

Two other TfD training workshops, in Angola in 2003 and most recently in Sri Lanka in 2005, further modified the methodology and the process. The Angola training had an initial adult workshop, followed by three simultaneous workshops in different parts of the country. The TfD methodology was integrated into the work of the organisation and there were considerable additional resources that enabled the views of the young Angolans, in their dramas and discussions, to be transcribed, checked by the young people, owned by them and published in Portuguese, for wider advocacy with government. Furthermore, the dramas of the young people, which in other TfD workshops existed only in oral performances, now existed in written scenarios. Each scenario was in a version accepted as the most appropriate by the group of young actors who had developed it.

In 2005 in Sri Lanka the training operated in the Tamil district of Jaffna in the north and the Sinhalese district of Galle as the first stage of a comprehensive way for young people and adults to change society. The strategy specifically related the initial TfD methodology to the changes that young people in these districts wanted, enabling them to spell out ways in which they and the agency together might actually make this happen.

Each of the TfD training workshops succeeded in terms of its objectives. Good plays were performed and impressed the audiences. Young children as well as adolescents participated, and girls as well as boys. Some of the subsequent TfD workshops facilitated by newly trained South Asian TfD facilitators resulted in negotiations with officials, parents and adults in authority. In Nepal some young people developed TfD clubs which they set up and ran; and initiatives by a Nepali film-maker, Karna Maharjan, in the training programme there extended the methodology into enabling poor and excluded young people to use video for advocacy alongside TfD.

On the whole, however, these successes were not systematically developed within SC UK. The enthusiasm generated by the immediate success of most of the workshops has now been dissipated. It has left some good memories but an overriding disappointment in the absence of follow-up and further development of the methodology. We had personal experience of this when, in 2005, Asif Munier and I visited the young people who had participated in a notably successful workshop in north-west Bangladesh in 2000. They were now young adults, some of them married. We visited them in a personal capacity.

Why wasn't this work sustainable within the international organisation that had initiated it? One outcome of a lot of these training initiatives was the articulated opposition of young people to current strategies and projects. Any agency would, therefore, in its country offices or its Head Office, find itself in a corporate dilemma over the future of TfD within its programmes. On the one hand the policy-makers in an organisation might clearly

recognise both the validity and significance of what the young people were so clearly and so effectively telling senior staff through the training workshops, while on the other hand senior financial management in that organisation were aware that the way international NGOs are set up and the nature of their fund-raising would make it difficult to do what young people variously proposed as their alternatives. Put simply, donors would not, in the case of SC UK, continue to give the organisation the money for what, in shorthand, could be referred to as 'Rights-based drama by children'. It would seem too political.

The difficulty for an international development agency is that Tfd can seem unable to compromise with institutional corporate requirements. Some international organisations are therefore hostile to drama and tend to buy in drama expertise on a commercial rather than a collaborative basis. Because they are paying, they dictate the product and ignore the process. The Tfd process that SC UK pioneered in South Asia and in eight African countries between 2001 and 2005 was unique. It was a genuinely open-ended and empowering Tfd *process*, initiated within the programmes of an international NGO, and given support and resources. It always represented a considerable risk to the agency. However, in practical terms, children could not dictate policies and practice.

I understand this dichotomy within development organisations, so I have been prepared to compromise on the Tfd methodology. The overriding aim we share is to ensure that all young people achieve a recognised right to have a say in decisions that affect them. This commitment, when followed through in a Tfd process, has almost always resulted in dramatic improvisation that is humanist, impressing audiences as being more truthful than they had ever imagined it could be.

Can the impact of this Tfd process result, over time, in measurable social change in the tough lives of young people in poor communities? How can this impact be measured? Within development, *impact* differs from *monitoring and evaluation*. All the Rights-based Tfd workshops were evaluated and considered successful by all the participants. But SC UK did not follow up on this success; and so it missed achieving any longer term impact, either on those particular young people growing into adulthood or on their communities. Asif Munier and I found in our meetings with the young adults that it is difficult to separate measuring the impact from continuing to be involved in the facilitation of new drama skills within the process – that is, extending the process in new directions, which adolescents growing into adulthood say they want.

Save the Children's corporate mandate is to work for the mass of poor and abused children, and the agency cannot commit to extending drama skills with small groups of young people as they become young adults. Of course, five-day training programmes in drama improvisation are insufficient. Young participants need more drama facilitation, at intervals, as they grow up, by Tfd-trained adults.

What the young people can go on doing by themselves is to develop their negotiations with those in authority. Ironically, improvisations give them the confidence to speak to officials and parents in constructive ways that often achieve results. Young people trained in the first workshops need to be able to train the next generation of young people in these same drama skills. The ability to organise powerful performances gives them the organisational skills necessary to initiate their lobbying campaigns. They also need to be able to pass on these organisational skills to the next generation of young people.

Sustaining the link between drama and social change needs a shared sense that the drama element in this strategy is what brings young and old in the communities together through creativity, organisation and representation. These skills provide the young people with the best kind of platform to address change.

**Notes**

- 1 The text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is available at [www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text](http://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text).
- 2 For TfD initiatives in South Asia and Africa, I use the term 'young people' to include all children from about 9 to 20 years. The CRC uses to term 'children' to refer to those between the ages of 0 to 18 years.

PROOF

## 46 Opening doors, not filling boxes

Policy kinesis and youth performance with  
the Black Friars Theatre Company, Aotearoa  
New Zealand

*Molly Mullen and Michelle Johansson, with Ashlee Niuia,  
Bayley Johansson, Billy Revell-Siō, Carmel-Maria Savaiinaea,  
Faananafu Tofilau, Leonard Folau, Maria Ahmad and  
Viola Johansson*

**THE MENTOR TRAINING** for this year's Southside Rise project ended with shared kai (food) half an hour ago. The small early childhood centre, lent for free, is still filled with activity, music and talk. Friars and volunteers are casually, but purposefully, tidying away the remaining pizza, rearranging furniture, making notes and talking over colourful plastic cups of instant coffee. Some young mentors have left, but a small group settles on the edge of the sandpit outside playing guitar and singing. A call to the Friars and 'baby Friars' from Michelle and Billy shifts the flow. They gather around a small plastic laminated table. The music keeps playing outside.

Billy Revell-Siō, co-founder of the Black Friars Theatre Company, and Michelle Johansson, Creative Director and co-founder, call together a group of Friars who have agreed to talk with Molly Mullen, a Palagi (non-Samoan/New Zealander of European descent) applied theatre researcher. She is interested in the ways arts organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand experience and negotiate the funding and policy context as they work towards social justice with young people. The Black Friars collectively agreed to be part of the project, but have asked to begin the research with a talanoa<sup>1</sup> exploring their views on the company. This co-authored chapter developed out of that talanoa. It presents the Black Friars as a distinct example of Aotearoa New Zealand applied performance practice, with deeply contextualised and culturally intelligent intentions, values and forms of practice. It also gives a sense of how the company experiences its relationship to the wider policy and funding context as a struggle within systems that enable and constrain Pasifika<sup>2</sup> young people, communities and performance in particular ways.

The immigration of peoples from many Pacific islands is woven through the history of Aotearoa New Zealand, shaping its shifting national and cultural identity in significant ways, which cannot be fully explained here. Pasifika peoples currently make up a young, diverse and growing part of the New Zealand population, with cultural and linguistic knowledge from Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Tokelau, Tuvalu, Tahiti, I-Kiribati and Fiji (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2017, p. 10). However, Pasifika people in Aotearoa experience stark disparities in income, employment, education and health compared to other ethnic groups (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2017, p. 13). In 2017, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples argued these disparities were not being effectively addressed and called for critical, strengths-based, participatory and culturally engaged approaches to policy (Ministry for Pacific Peoples, 2017, p. 16). Some policy areas, and some private funders,

have responded to this call. But, the wider policy space is still ambiguous, with deficit discourses persisting.

Policy and funding systems can be understood discursively as governing Pasifika youth, and those making performance with them, by ‘defining the terrain’ of what it is possible or desirable to be and do (see Bacchi, 1999, p. 40; Freebody et al., 2019). This terrain of the possible is established through the production of particular ‘subjectivities, hierarchies, and taxonomies’ (Allan, 2010, p. 25). Historically, Pasifika young people have been represented in policy as vulnerable, struggling, at risk of poor social outcomes and, as a result, in need of targeted corrective interventions. More recently, there has been a recognition of Pasifika young peoples’ experiences of living and needing to ‘succeed’ in two (or more) cultural worlds (Ministry of Health, 2008) and that notions of ‘success’, socially and educationally, should be self-determined and reflect Pacific cultural values (Si’ilata, Wendt Samu and Siteine, 2018). Education Policy requires teachers to recognise and value the linguistic and cultural knowledge of Pacific students (ibid). Critics argue, however, that Pākehā/Eurocentric value systems and measures of success still often take precedence (ibid). For example, in the Friars youth production, *Revolution*, six young people in a detention room discuss what it means for them to succeed in the school system (Maia is in detention for ‘losing it’ at the adjudicator of a school debate):

TAI: But that’s not how YOU fight. People respect your word, that’s your power. YOU win by speaking your truth.

MAIA: Truth? The truth is, we were never meant to succeed. Not like this. Not as ourselves. How can we? The game is rigged. We’re done. I’m done.

TOA: Done? We haven’t even started.

*(Revolution: Southside Rise 2019, written by Marina Alefosio, Gabe Faatauuu, Bayley Johansson, Michelle Johansson, Viola Johansson, Billy Revell-Siō, Denyce Su’a, To’asavili Telea and Rewa Worley from stories collected in the schools of South Auckland)*

The focus of this chapter is on how the Friars understand their youth performance work as a way of knowing, challenging and remaking. We draw on Dwight Conquergood’s (1998) theory of ‘performance as kinesis, as a decentering agency of movement, struggle, disruption, and centrifugal force’ (p. 32). Within a particular ‘terrain of the possible’, the Friars are set fiercely on ‘breaking-down’ the categories, ‘hierarchies, and taxonomies’ they are subject to, ‘re-making’ them as creative fuel or ammunition, and igniting them in performance (Conquergood, 1998, p. 32).

### **What is the Black Friars Theatre Company?**

LEE: We’re a pan-Polynesian theatre company founded in 2006 by Michelle Johansson and the students of Wesley College, who are now our forefathers... [looks at Billy and Michelle] almost [laughs].

BAYLEY: The Black Friars tell Polynesian stories, or tell South Auckland stories. It meets at an intersection between youth mentoring, education and creative arts, with Polynesian culture underneath it all. We draw on all those elements to tell stories.

CARMEL: Personally, for me, Black Friars is that saving grace that comes into your life just at the right time.

NAFU: The Friars, to me, is everything.

LEONARD: It's a vibe. That's really all I can say. It's a vibe.

MOLLY: So, more than a theatre group?

VIOLA: It's hard to explain family. There's no way to step out of it and look at it.

BILLY: Going on what Viola says about family ... It's not just a thing that you can just switch on or switch off. Just as much as it's amazing to be part of, there's a responsibility that comes with being a part of it. If that makes sense.

MOLLY: What's the story of the Black Friars?

MICHELLE: The Black Friars was founded in a moment of crisis in the lives of its founders. Billy and his class had just left school but they wanted to continue doing some acting. I had been their drama teacher and was missing them and we had begun this reputation for Shakespeare in school. So, I pitched this idea to an external group, to produce Shakespeare with grown-ups. It was a dragon's den pitch with people around a board table. I was much younger, much less resilient and much less angry than I am now [laughs]. It was suggested that I couldn't find enough Polynesian people who could do Shakespeare. *Now*, if someone said that to me, I would go in guns blazing. But at that point I was like, 'oh shit, maybe we can't, I don't know'. Billy had a much better response which was, 'you know what? Let's just do it ourselves'. Out of that was birthed this idea to do *Othello*, but in reverse, with the one black character played by a white character (who wasn't even white because it was played by Billy) [Laughs]. We had no money and no reputation, so we spent the next year getting known and gathering some funding. Then, in 2008, we launched *Othello Polynesia*. I feel we should name the founders. There were 6 OGs. The founders of the Black Friars are myself, Billy Revell-Siō, Lauie Sila, Misipele Tofilau, Vau Atonio, Tana Aiono and Uini Atonio. That's how it came to be. The naming is a cool story too. Billy?

BILLY: The name has connotations with black friars, or people of colour and brothers. At the time it was mostly boys and we liked the idea of brotherhood. And also, we wanted to do Shakespeare in a new way. There was an understanding of... when the Globe burned down they performed at The Black Friar's Theatre... it was the idea of burning down ideas of what Shakespeare is and who can do Shakespeare and bringing it to a new place. So that's behind our name, burning down the institutions or ideas within society and showing them in a new light, I guess.

MICHELLE: We talk about building bridges and making mirrors. Building bridges is making bridges for our young Polynesian people to see the literature, the cannon of world literature such as Shakespeare, but including other things as well. And making mirrors is where we hold space for our people, particularly in South Auckland, our Pacific people, to tell their stories.

CARMEL: Yes, so the first show I ever watched was the *Merchant* one. I'd never been into Shakespeare or anything, apart from school. And I was like, 'holy shit!' I actually left the theatre like, 'These are brown people doing Shakespeare and I understood it'. I could relate to a lot of things. The costumes, the way they delivered the story, and everything.

LEE: ... I was one of the first classes to see *Othello Polynesia*, and for me it was very similar to Carmel. I was like, what on earth is this? These are my people on the stage, they're singing and dancing in ways that I understand. But, my brain couldn't quite process that my people, my culture, my stories, my heritage, and Shakespeare were all in one. Yeah, so I was at a cognitive dissonance. I was very confused but it was also quite cool, because I thought I hadn't seen this before, this is great, I would love to be a part of this.

MICHELLE: What about you Molly? How do you know us?

MOLLY: When I began teaching at the University I tutored a research class and Michelle, you were one of my students, finishing your second Masters and starting a doctorate? You invited me to a performance and I have seen most Friars productions since. The work always shakes my assumptions about theatre and identity in Aotearoa and Oceania, and it moves me. I like the politics to it and the way you fuse performance forms.

### **Making performance with youth: through doors, not into boxes**

MOLLY: What about the Friar's work with young people, is it a relatively new focus?

BILLY: I think from the get-go we've been a youth organisation. When we started, it was all of us under 20 trying to do this thing. And it's been, as Michelle talks about, opening the doors for the next youth to come through. We can only see so far because of the shoulders of the giants on which we stand. All of the ones here in the room have had to learn how to become those giants ... this idea of tuakana-teina, or our older ones making space and holding and pulling up our young ones, is also a process that we have used through the *Southside Rise* movement. The first year's young people coming through to mentor the second year, and again the first and second years coming through to mentor the third year.

MICHELLE: *Southside Rise* is a specific three-year project for young people that sits outside our general cannon of work. In 2016, we discovered organically that there weren't enough brown leaders for South Auckland coming through the system, and I thought, 'Hey! Wouldn't it be cool if we got the four schools we are connected with to come together and make a show?' I took it to the Friars and they were, like, 'Yeah!' And it has grown out of that .... This year we're going to 17 schools. And the why is because there ...

MOLLY: Why aren't enough Pacific leaders coming out of South Auckland?

MICHELLE: ...there's a failure – well, there's massive failures in our education system – but there is a particular failure in our education system that does not recognise Pacific leadership as leadership, and does not award Pacific leaders as achievers, despite the fact that they are the most extraordinary assets to their schools. And the schools know that. We asked the schools to give us their treasures, who were neither top scholars nor designated 'at risk', down at the bottom. We wanted the performers, who wanted to perform their stories rather than writing essays.

MOLLY: What is it that you see in these young performers that the school system is not valuing in the right way?

MICHELLE: One thing that *Southside Rise* combats, one of the other challenges, is that it's really easy for a Deputy Principal at a school to stand up and say, 'Oh yeah, my kids are doing this Polynesian performance, because they're *naturally* good at it and they're *naturally* talented', and allowing them one night in the year to do this 'cultural' performance. For us, stories are our lifeblood. The ability to do this storytelling in this way as Pacific people is so much more than what you might consider 'the arts' in the curriculum. It's way beyond that and way deeper than that.

BILLY: Yeah, and even just the experience or the spaces to tell story are not always offered. And we're giving opportunity for schools to interact with each other outside of competition. Students have got used to competing with each other and with other schools. With *Southside Rise*, they're not playing rugby, they're not dancing against each other,

they're not meeting at a train station and having back and forth with other schools, or competing at Polyfest.<sup>3</sup> It's an opportunity to come together, eat together, experience this thing with the Friars together, and form bonds with schools across South Auckland.

MOLLY: What do you think they take from this experience?

CARMEL: ... a lot of kids who come through care about their voices being heard and telling their own stories. Some of them never really bothered about it until going through the process and sitting back and being like, 'holy crap that was a mean show and actually, these things do matter. And I think I care about these issues as well.'

LEE: I think one thing for me is that they're not alone. In their thoughts, in their feelings, in the things they experience. It can be quite isolating. Especially, in a place where the Pacific student roll is at 10%, or something super minimal.

BAYLEY: Can I just say, some of my students are going to be in *Southside Rise* this year and one of the things that I hope that they get out of it is that they come to realise their own greatness and the greatness of our people, and the amazing places we come from and live in. Like Billy said, the Friars is generations of young people opening doors for other young people.

NAFU: For me, or for us young brown men, we don't really find it cool to make change or like open up. I just want to let people, or let these guys [gestures to the young men playing guitar outside] know that it doesn't have to be like it is. You *can* make change. This is the platform to do so. I think that's cool.

MOLLY: And what do you think it is about making theatre or performance that opens up the possibility for change?

LEONARD: We can use it to, like, do something positive... remake the story.

MICHELLE: I think there's a strength in being able to use your heritage literacy – that embodied understanding of your place in the world which, for Pasifika people, is sung, danced, chanted, spoken, not written on a page – to tell your story in your place, about your place to your people. There's real power in that.

VIOLA: It's kind of cool for kids to be able to come and express themselves in any form they want. I find that pretty powerful that they get to, and they know that it's okay to. What you have to say is valid. If that makes sense?

NAFU: Yeah, it's just wanting to express yourself. Another way to express yourself...

MICHELLE: And if you want to sing it, sing it. If you want to draw it, draw it. If you want to dance it, dance it. There's no compulsion for everybody to learn this particular thing. We're not a conservatory programme where you have to learn how to sing, and dance, and act. I had a kid who came in last year and gave me his art portfolio and said, 'Miss, I cannot tell my story acting, but I can do it like this'. So, we generated an art exhibition. Yeah, not pushing kids into boxes, because they've been pushed into boxes their whole lives and they know it.

SHEY: Wait, hey, did you say no more Polygroup? No more polygroup??

SAMU: That's right, my friend, no more Poly.

SEMI: Apparently we have more than enough culture already.

TOA: And it's just a distraction from our school work – you know – what's really important. Sticking the brown kids in the white boxes. So no more Poly.

(from *Revolution: Southside Rise 2019*. Alefosio et al.)

MOLLY: Why do you think you always struggle to fund this work?

MICHELLE: One reason is we all work full time in other jobs. No one has time to sit down and do proposals. ... And then there are certain agendas attached to funding remain a mystery to many. We don't necessarily agree with them and we don't fit into them.



BAYLEY: ...they ask us to provide evidence in a way that you can't... We can't see it. We can't put on paper the impact that we have in someone's life, or something like that. You can't capture the 'data' that we accrue and put it in a box.

BILLY: It goes against how we work. We don't want to capture a young Friar's life [Laugh]. You know what I mean? We don't want to have our young people scrutinised where they're held up to an idea of success that isn't created by them or by us.

MICHELLE: And that's the point of the project, so...

BILLY: I think there's a disconnect with the funding agencies. They don't see the value in what we're doing, don't understand the value that our kids see in it as well... I don't know how many of them are from our communities or have worked with us, or have any experience of how and why we do things.

MOLLY: What would you like them to know?

MICHELLE: Don't make decisions based on people's ability to fill in a form. Come to the show. Talk to the kids. Evaluate a different way. Pick any six kids from the whole program list and based on whatever those kids say, decide. I don't know. Rather than ticking boxes that mean nothing to us and our young people. Anybody got any other thoughts about that?

CARMEL: I'm just angry, aye.

### **'An art that is needed'**

MOLLY: Ten years on from the founding, what drives the Friars now?

CARMEL: I don't mean for this to sound prideful or anything, but I don't think anyone does what the Friars are doing, the way that the Friars are doing it. It's from the hood to the hood. It's not just the performance, it's the intentions behind it. The messages the Black Friars put out. It's to raise them up, not to put them down. It's to raise awareness. The Black Friars raise topics and cover them really well, I reckon. We don't just do surface stuff. ... The writers, and the people that deliver programmes, they take what they do seriously. They really care about what they do. It's not just the end product, it's the process as well.

MOLLY: What issues do you need to raise awareness of?

CARMEL: Southside brown people telling their own stories the way that we know how to. Just a lot of issues... [laughs] I'm trying to go deep here, man! [laughs]

BILLY: Things that matter to us, issues that are really important for the communities that we hold at our heart.

BAYLEY: It's just my two cents, ... but as well as being our love letter back to the places that have made us and raised us, I think our recent shows, our work with *Southside Rise* is an art that is needed. They're all about teaching our young people to fight. The different ways that we can fight, not just the negative, incorrect, misrepresentative stories that are being told about us, but all of the political and systematic things that are present in our lives. It's about teaching our communities, or arming our communities with the tools we need to fight that systemic injustice.

MICHELLE: And we can add a whole bunch of external factors that drive us as well. We can add in one in two kids in South Auckland living in poverty. We can add in one in four kids born in Auckland is Pacific, and those stats are not going to weigh out in those kids that are coming through. When they're becoming adults, what legacy are we leaving them?

In no way is it *just* a show, the things that we do. The show is the bit that everybody sees, but the actual work is happening now. The work is happening about 50 meters

from us right now with the young people who are, for some reason, still hanging around on a Saturday afternoon [laughs]. It's the 'Vibe' that Leonard spoke of, a Polynesian vibe, a Black Friars vibe. The work is here and the work is for them. And we've fought, the ones who are sitting at this table have fought, so that they don't have to. Every door that we've opened stands open because we want to keep it open for our people so they can have more. I'm going to stop evangelising now, thanks.

We've stood on the shoulders of giants  
 We're wise, we're woke, we know  
 That we can push further together  
 And we've got a long way to go  
 We are a better tomorrow  
 It's time to stand up and speak out  
 We are the change that is coming  
 We are the voice of the south.

CHORUS:

If not now, then when? If not here, then where?  
 The time has come, the moment's now  
 The revolution's here  
 If not this, then what? If not you, then who?  
 The time has come, the moment's now  
 The revolution's here

Welcome to the revolution...

(Music by Leonard Folau, Faananafu Tofilau, Punipua Lavea,  
 Tito Finau, Nathaniel Mafoe, Chamaney Lavea, Simi Kafoa,  
 Jasmine Cook; lyrics by Michelle Johansson)

## Conclusions

Policy and funding systems can be dispersed forms of governance, creating the 'terrain of the possible' for youth, communities and performance. In this chapter, however, we have focused on the 'performative cultural politics' of Pasifika youth performance within this terrain (Conquergood, 1998, p. 25). The Black Friars Theatre Company set out to shine a light on systemic injustices, social ideas and institutions that impact on the lives of Pasifika young people. In part, this involves explicitly taking on policy discourses and related interventions, in education for example, as material for their creative process and performances. It also involves trying to embody a participatory, self-determined, culturally intelligent process through which young people use story and heritage literacies to articulate what success, leadership and performance mean to them. In 1995 Conquergood proposed an understanding of performance as kinesis, a dynamic, disruptive and 're-creative' process (p. 32). We find this resonates with the Black Friar's focus on 'burning down' ideas and institutions and 're-making' them through performance. At all levels of the Friar's work, there is a struggle against the fixing of Pasifika young people, their performance practice and their futures into preconceived boxes. Instead the work involves ongoing processes of setting new possibilities into motion by: raising up each generation

to see new horizons; breaking down and holding open doors; and building bridges where there was previously a sense of disconnect, division or competition.

## Notes

- 1 Talanoa is used here to mean talk or discussion where people come together to share their views.
- 2 Pasifika is defined as a 'collective term used to refer to people of Pacific heritage or ancestry who have migrated or been born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pasifika include recent migrants or first, second and subsequent generations of New Zealand born Pasifika men, women and children of single or mixed heritages' (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 3).
- 3 Polyfest is a large event where students compete in Polynesian cultural dance, music, costume and speech giving.

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## 47 EducaSwitch

### Preventing bullying and advocating social and emotional literacy in schools for children and young people in Chile

*Nicola Abraham and Cristian Almarza*

#### Introduction

**THIS CHAPTER WILL** offer insights into EducaSwitch's approach and application of the practice undertaken by the company in its current iteration, which has recently been accepted by the Education Department of the Chilean government as a strategy that schools can implement in their classes. The potential for incremental changes in schools could have a radical impact on this generation of children and young people, who could now grow up with this methodology as part of their education into society if their school chooses to engage with the approach. Drawing upon Michael Balfour's notion of a 'theatre of little changes' (2009) and James Thompson's vision for the potential of 'affect' to lead to change, or a 'stirring to action' (2009), the EducaSwitch programme will be critically analysed to note the potential of the approach for societal change.

#### Cyberbullying in Chile

The increased use of social networking applications and online media platforms have introduced children and young people to alternative forms of communication that can, on one hand, enhance digital literacy skills through life exposure but can, on the other, also give way to more sinister forms of aggression and bullying. A study conducted by Jorge Varela et al. (2017) drew upon The World Internet Project (2010), which investigated the use of online platforms and social media by 12–64 year olds in Santiago, Chile. The study revealed that teens (12–17 yrs) reported that they used the internet for approximately 3.7 hours per day on average. Additionally, 63% of teenagers reported checking their email at least once per day, 66% used Facebook and another 64% used other social media platforms on a daily basis (Varela, 2017:1). Varela maps the consequences of cyberbullying, noting that there are severe impacts on both the victims and perpetrators who engage in this online form of aggression, such as increased stress, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation in addition to psychosomatic problems, 'including headaches, recurrent abdominal pain, and sleeping difficulties' (ibid:2). The impact of this on one's ability to learn and socially integrate within a school community can be impacted. Neurologist Judy Wallis (2014), discussing the *Neuroscience behind stress and learning*, argues that the affective filter, an emotional stress state commonly seen in students, inhibits the storing of new information and learning, a consequence that could easily be related to the outcome of cyberbullying.

A 2017 UNESCO report entitled *School Violence and Bullying: Global Status Report* also considers the importance of addressing physical violence in schools, noting that

efforts are being made in South American countries to improve teacher training and awareness around issues of bullying in its various forms to reduce the impact on students and their learning process. The report references provisions made by the Chilean government to address bullying in schools: ‘In Chile, the *Convivencia escolar* campaign for peaceful coexistence in schools was launched in 2010 to promote greater harmony in all Chilean educational institutions in response to an increase in bullying in schools, and the Peaceful Coexistence in Schools Policy was finalised in 2011’ (UNESCO, 2017:34). This investment in addressing bullying behaviours is part of the rationale for the Minister of Education calling upon companies and practitioners to offer interventions, guidance and solutions for schools to take a holistic approach to address detrimental behaviours. One of the large scale projects that the Minister of Education endorsed and promoted in 2019 was EducaSwitch, stating: ‘[...] it’s fundamental for us to have the support of organisations like EducaSwitch and other organisations from civil society because they have the experience, and the knowledge to prevent and fight against cyberbullying at school’ (Cubillos, Marcela, 2019). The approach taken by EducaSwitch is participatory theatre, role playing and group games as strategies to build skills of connection between children, their school community and their parents. This is essential to address the challenges inherent in Chile, which is currently experiencing the fifth highest level of bullying in the world.

### What is EducaSwitch?

EducaSwitch is an online platform that offers participatory theatre strategies and role playing techniques, for example forum theatre, through tutorial videos<sup>1</sup> to help teachers encourage personal, social and emotional learning for students from age 6 to 18 years in schools throughout Chile. EducaSwitch offers a plethora of intervention strategies addressing personal, social and emotional development in children and young people through drama in education. At the launch of the ‘Against Cyberbullying Day’ on 14 March 2019, teachers throughout Chile were given free access to a set of lesson plans and video tutorials/supporting resources to take action to address bullying and cyberbullying in their classrooms. Approximately 10,000 teachers accessed the online platform through the introduction of the programme developed by EducaSwitch announced by the Minister of Education. To support teachers in the delivery of the programme, the Minister announced a day off timetable for all schools across the country to allow them to deliver the content devised by EducaSwitch to astounding effect. Part of the motivation to offer this provision relates to the United Nations’ Global Education 2030 Agenda to eradicate poverty by 2030, within which access to education is a main goal to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (UNESCO, 2017:3). Finding a means to enable access and inclusion is essential to overcoming barriers to education.

Tony Booth (2008:53–64) offers three perspectives on inclusion that are important to consider within education: the importance of enabling access as a human right, diversity and the value orientation of a system. Offering a critical view of Booth’s third perspective, Andreas Hinz (2015) notes that that this includes themes such as ‘participation, equality, community, sustainability or non-violence. Equally, questions about the meaning of courage, joy and love play a role’ in inclusion discourses. Hinz notes that ‘every system is based on values – the question is how conscious they are and how far there’s a consensus’ (2015:21). The reach of EducaSwitch and its focus may, in this rare example of national reach, address the notion of consensus in what constitutes inclusion by taking

‘[...] a more humane education, promoting innovative and entertaining experiences so that together with children, young people and adults from all over the world, we can learn to live better, generating a more prepared and happy society’ (EducaSwitch, 2019).

An important aspect of EducaSwitch’s approach is the use of participatory theatre and drama in education strategies to promote inclusion and access to education through the development of empathy between students, parents and schools. Barry Freeman (2011) paraphrases prolific empathy researcher C. Daniel Batson’s multiple definitions of what might constitute empathy, several of which are useful for the purposes of analysing the impact of EducaSwitch’s approach:

Knowing another person’s internal state...coming to feel as another person feels... intuiting or projecting oneself into another’s situation.... Imagining how another is thinking and feeling...imagining how one would think and feel in the other’s place....

(Freeman, 2011:46)

Freeman offers categorisations for Batson’s list including physical (adopting), which may constitute mirroring or matching ‘neural responses of another’ (ibid), ‘affective (feeling) and analytical (knowing)’ (ibid). These categories offer useful frames of understanding to note the potential changes that have resulted from EducaSwitch’s launch. Affect, as discussed in relation to applied theatre by James Thompson (2009), is related to a ‘shock to thought’ that cannot be separated from the pleasurable and educational layers of engagement that accompany thought. These combined elements of affect work together as a ‘pre-condition’ for critical engagement, and can create a drive to take action; in this case affect can be seen as the prerequisite ‘propellant to a passionate commitment to social change’ (2011:135). Empathy is indeed political; understanding may lead to a shift in perception and in turn behaviours. This area will be explored in relation to recent dissemination of EducaSwitch’s online platform to schools through an analysis of their evaluation data.

### **Methodology of practice: promoting empathy and inclusion through theatre**

EducaSwitch offer a six-stage approach to engage children and young people in actions that can help address bullying and, more specifically, cyberbullying. These strategies are useful for the victims and the witnesses (bystanders). This interestingly isn’t a solo action expected to be performed by individuals but more a type of ‘allyship’ encouraged between peers to importantly implicate the bystander as an active participant who can affect change. This process involves the development of empathy for the victim of bullying incidents using a practice and rehearsal approach to understanding and implementing the six different strategies as listed below:

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S	Stop and think (before reacting)
W	Waaa! Speak Out (ask the bully to Stop)
I	Ignore them (Bullies want your attention, don’t give them the attention that they want)
T	Talk about your emotions (you feel better when you express your feelings)
C	Come out (go to a safe place)
H	Help yourself with an adult (for support look to adults and friends you trust)

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The methodology asks students to role play different scenarios of common incidents of bullying and cyberbullying and to apply the approaches above, which are taught through a range of interactive exercises to address complex experiences of bullying. Part of this process includes identifying and understanding the role of the victim, perpetrator and bystander as an ally. Performing short scenes and identifying the challenges and possibilities of different approaches to intervention are approaches to encourage an empathetic understanding of different perspectives within a bullying dynamic. Witnessing scenes and drawing out further examples of bullying that may be related to personal experience can enable students to develop an affective and analytical understanding of the harm that bullying can generate and the impact this can have on one's self-esteem, self-construction and relationship with others. Freeman (2011) develops this idea further, discussing the qualities that theatre can offer in the development of empathetic understanding:

[...] when theatre is at its most effective for us, we share in the actors' emotions and thoughts as though they are an in-group, regardless of whether an actor, a character or both are members of in-groups. To that end, a study of how mirroring is affected by the situation of group perception may also provide evidence supporting theatre's potential to effect empathy.

(Freeman, 2011:51)

Freeman's perspective notes that theatre offers a point of affective communication that may enable an audience, which in this case constitutes other students in schools, an opportunity to relate to the experiences of their peers even if they were not previously shared life encounters, i.e. not everyone has experienced or perpetrated bullying behaviour.

### **Analysis of the practice iteration in relation to change theory**

Approximately, 1.3 million children are estimated to have accessed and interacted with EducaSwitch's online offering, providing an opportunity for a large proportion of students to develop potential empathic attunement with the experiences and understanding of the negative consequences of bullying behaviours. In addition, students have had opportunities to learn and apply ways to intervene as victims of bullying and allies to victims of bullying behaviours as part of the country-wide online platform launch. It is important to examine how the online platform has been received by teachers and students and whether or not it has managed to achieve the intended aims of promoting empathy and enabling inclusion as a result of more positive peer-to-peer relationships in order to understand the efficacy of this type of applied theatre dissemination approach. Teachers who had used the online platform were asked to respond to a series of survey questions about each of six sample sessions (two sessions per level – level 1: four to eight year olds, level 2: 9 to 11 year olds and level 3: 12 to 18 year olds) that were offered to address cyberbullying. Approximately 1,860 of the 10,488 registered online users across 6,675 schools (which equates to about 50% of schools in the country) who accessed the online platform responded to the incentivised<sup>2</sup> survey, offering a sample rate of 18% for respondents. Some of the key findings from the survey revealed that this approach to practice offered opportunities for students to develop their understanding of one another or, as Batson described, their imagining of how others feel in the place of the victim:

[...] there's a lot of children that had a lot of questions – there were some debates and they have to understand the different terms the sessions proposed so we sacrificed more time to allow for the depth of the ideas rather than the amount of content.

(Teacher Respondent, 2019)

The above feedback suggests that the teaching staff were keen to allow students to develop their understanding of the concepts within the content to ensure they were able to process the ideas. This demonstrates a clear dedication from educators to follow through on activities that may lead to a change of perception and ultimately behaviour in students, but it may also illustrate a need for further clarity within sessions to develop comprehension through the given exercises. Clearly, a provocation that leads to questions and discussion also illustrates a keen interest and commitment to the topic explored through sessions. This, in itself, suggests that the students may have felt emotionally moved by the content in a way that arguably suggests that a 'shock to thought' (Thompson, 2009) could have occurred because of their interest and engagement with the sessions. Another teacher reported a more empathic response from their students, suggesting that the material also created connection through intuitive engagement between peers:

The activities were rich for the students, it was possible for the kids to connect with their emotions, they were really sensible and they empathised with their classmates. It was a moment when the kids could reflect about bullying and cyberbullying.

(Teacher Respondent, 2019)

The students love the sessions, they like the methodology, they like to represent stories and the sessions were a really good stimulus for the kids to share their real stories and it was really emotional for the kids to talk about these topics.

(Teacher Respondent, 2019)

The classroom was really participatory, the kids shared their own stories, and they have overcome different stories about bullying and at the end of the session helped to encourage the kids to develop respect and empathy with one another.

(Teacher Respondent, 2019)

In the example feedback above, each teacher has identified the maturity with which students were able to relate to the subject matter. This may further indicate a clear connection between lived experience and the topic. The use of theatre as a means to portray and explore a 'fictional' idea through the 'reality' of experiences, which are offered as scenarios for students to investigate and trial strategies for resolution, presents a 'safe' frame for playing with sensitive topics. Michael Anderson and Linden Wilkinson (2007) described the importance of hearing an authentic voice in an increasingly media-filled world. In this case they are discussing verbatim theatre and the potential it offers to reach audiences on an emotional and intellectual level as a means to provoke a move towards change. The addition of personal stories of bullying conveyed by the students who took part in the project may offer further insight into the potential for groups to feel moved to take action against this type of oppression within their school communities. The following response indicates such a move to action, with students being moved to take agency and autonomously change their school environment:



The session enabled the kids to be confident to share their own stories about bullying and everyone was conscious about the consequence of bullying. At the end, the kids created ideas about how to avoid bullying. Now, there is a group of students who organised, by themselves, to go to different classrooms to talk about this topic.

(Teacher Respondent, 2019)

We really like the strategies and we put them in practice and now there are more happy kids at school in the break times and there are more kids who now feel they are part of the class.

(Teacher Respondent, 2019)

These examples illustrate the ‘propulsion’ to take action, arguably as a result of an affective and simultaneously critical encounter, which Thompson (2009) suggests is an inseparable outcome of this type of interaction. Anderson and Wilkinson (2007) suggest that the authentic or verbatim narratives offer ‘an even more powerful transformative experience for an audience than the dissemination of narrative understanding [...]. This, we suggest, is because it tells authentic, credible and diverse stories, and has the ability to weave a drama steeped in empathic complexity; it has the capacity to connect with its audience’ (ibid:167). In this case, the teacher has noted that their students have acted to disseminate their knowledge to their peers as a means of spreading the strategies for addressing bullying behaviours. This autonomous act may be considered a type of promotion for inclusion from within the school environment in recognition of the need for this advice and engagement with the topic of bullying to support all students.

## Conclusion

The sample of feedback above relates to the identification of empathetic behaviours and resulting movements towards taking action as articulated by teachers who engaged with EducaSwitch’s online tutorial videos and materials. What is also apparent from this evaluative feedback is the outcome of allyship between students that offer more welcoming environments inside and outside of the classroom in addition to an indication of increased emotional literacy around the topics of bullying, and specifically cyberbullying. Priscilla Gibson (2014) discusses the application of the Ally Model within the practice of social pedagogy. She describes the model as ‘an approach to social justice built on social identity. It maintains that all have a role to play in promoting social justice, regardless of their social identities in oppressed and oppressor groups’ (Gibson, 2014:199). Allyship appears to offer an apt term to describe the data responses from teachers, which indicates that for each of the two sessions between 92% and 99% of those surveyed agreed that children were able to achieve the session goals, which involved identifying different conflicts related to bullying and cyberbullying, empathising with the victims, and both learning and practising strategies to prevent and stand up to bullying and cyberbullying. This methodology offered by EducaSwitch – and the offer of participatory theatre that allows room for students to incorporate their own experiences in combination with teachers who have allocated time for their classes to explore the topic of the sessions in depth – demonstrates a type of social pedagogy. Gabriel Eichsteller & Lieve Bradt (2019) define social pedagogy as a strategy to help us ‘understand how social issues are culturally constructed [...] [S]ocial pedagogy is not only focussed on resolving or preventing problems, but also emphasises the importance of community development, of building inclusive societies

in which every person feels connected, enabled to thrive and can make a meaningful contribution to their community' (2019:58). It is this holistic approach, which considers the complexity of the context and the urgency of this type of intervention, and the participatory nature of EducaSwitch's platform that offer a strategy for affective methods of engagement to increase emotional literacy and empathy to reduce bullying behaviours.

## Notes

- 1 A key part of the tutorial process is that the teachers show the videos to their class and the students follow the instructions from the videos. The teacher doesn't need to explain anything in this respect and so just facilitates and motivates the students to engage in the session.
- 2 Respondents who completed the survey were offered additional online content and further supporting resources.

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## 48 Planting dream-seeds in the wind when the point is to change

*Syed Jamil Ahmed*

**SURELY APRIL IS NO** longer the cruelest month in a world of fake news, quid pro quo and border walls, if only because lilacs (read economic growth rate, rising stock market index, and increment in nonfarm payroll employment) are bred out of an impeached president making America great again. For the wasteland lies elsewhere – in another world – where a radical historicist Karl Marx stands a lonely figure, counting the beads of a rosary as he chants the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach over and over again: “The philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it” (Marx, 2002). That should be some solace for me ‘trapped’ indeterminately in the current geopolitical defining binary that echoes, quite literally, B. V. Karanth’s (2012) autobiography *Here, I cannot stay, there, I cannot go*. But then, spring-time Bangladesh, brief though it is, spawns blossoms in tall, fleshy, rough-barked, spike-laden, and leafless Shimul trees, *Bombax ceiba* of the family *Bombacaceae*: large flowers that set the sky ablaze in flaming red. You could not miss it in the rural flat plains, standing majestically against a pale-blue sky. Now, besides the flower, the tree is of immense value in commercial terms, most importantly for coffins. But laying aside the coffin and concentrating on life and living, I may inform you that if you are fortunate enough to live near a Shimul tree in the rural areas, you will surely not miss the strangest sight when the buds pop open. At this time, wafts of wind blow Shimul seeds away – seeds enveloped in a gossamer of fine cotton tentacles – setting them off on an endless voyage across – I always thought after the tales of Arabian Nights I heard in my childhood – seven seas and thirteen rivers. As a child, I would often run after these wafting gossamer clouds as they floated, believing, in all earnestness, ‘they’ must be fairies. As I realized later in life, fairies are of course figs, twigs, and fiddlesticks.

Now, perhaps, you can guess why I had to weave this fragment of a figment of childhood memory in a reflexive piece of critical writing that hopes to open up a tiny bit of space in the domain of ‘applied theatre’. As I – a male, a non-practicing Muslim by birth, a citizen of Bangladesh, and a theatre practitioner cum academic – look back at this domain of applied theatre, having ‘traded’ in it for over three decades, the image of a child running after the gossamer of Shimul seeds wafting in the wind will not let me be. I realize it is the best metaphor of my experience of applied theatre: I had merely planted dream-seeds in the wind. And if the wry humor regarding Marx indicates my skepticism of ‘change’ in particular and applied theatre in general, I can assure you, it’s not without a pang of bitter taste in my mouth. I explain the taste, as I look back on the past three decades, with Marx’s radical historicist (if not revolutionary) insistence in the background. Hopefully, it will add an exotic-orientalist fragrance – if nothing else – to the domain of applied theatre.

In 1988, when I was first introduced to applied theatre, I was desperately looking for the *raison d’être* for engaging with theatre as a professional practitioner in the social

setting of Bangladesh, spelled mostly by hunger and poverty. At that juncture, applied theatre offered a chance to examine in praxis one's ideological commitment to theatre as a meaningful part of the society one lives in. It appeared to be most important as a self-critique – or, better still, as a dialogical deconstruction of the mystification of social 'reality' one may build and of the relevance one may seek in it. This juncture now appears to be way off – when I was still young and youthful – when theatre was my passion engrained with the belief that theatrics, the 'art' of theatre and not histrionics, could add meaning to life and, more importantly, change life. Living in the Third World, I passionately searched for valid reasons for theatre amidst all the poverty and gloom I witnessed around myself. In that gloom, what seemed most promising was the image of spectators joining the performers in a militant cry of 'Strike!' – as in Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* in 1935. The promise appeared around the corner as I worked through my MA dissertation at the University of Warwick under Clive Barker, who showed me innumerable doors leading to Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, Ross Kidd, Michael Etherton, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and more – doors which I opened and walked through with all the loneliness of a long-distance runner. Winter in England can be pitifully distressing for a person like me from a country where it rains and shines, never snows. However, when I had nearly finished my work, it was springtime. I cannot hope to explain what English spring after a terrible winter meant for me. Only Shelly's oft-repeated verse, well known and nearly meaningless, can suddenly come to life with all the force of the West Wind. Yes, the winter months were indeed worthwhile because I had transformed the loneliness into learning and living.

In 1988, soon after my return from England, I was given an opportunity by a left-leaning landless farmers' political party, to put my newfound pleasurable learning about Freire and Boal into practice. I visited the village of Tarakandi in Mymansingh thrice, staying there for about five days on each occasion. However, I failed to convince the party ideologues that Boalian forum theatre built on Freirean dialogue was a more viable option for rehearsing the revolution than agitprop theatre. Perhaps I was too late in seeking to enlist the support of the party: Mikhail Gorbachev's 'glasnost' had already set in and the fall of the Wall was imminent. Spurred by my failure, I looked for alternatives, and approached a mainstream Dhaka-based theatre group with left-leaning credentials, with whom I had a long working relationship. I proposed simultaneous dramaturgy-type performances, which the group could take to industrial belts near Dhaka. However, the group politely declined the offer. By this time, the fall of the Soviet Union seemed imminent.

Shrugged off by the Left, my other option seemed to be organizations that worked with the rural oppressed and could offer alternate economic bases to them. Only the NGOs fulfill these requirements. Therefore, when I was offered an opportunity to engage with an INGO in the early 1990s, I accepted with all eagerness. With it, I worked for three years in two major projects, the first one in Rajbari administrative district and the second in Tangail. In both these, I trained the local NGO field workers in Boalian simultaneous dramaturgy technique (Boal, 1979: 132–134) in two week-long workshops, followed by intensive field-level training with each of the NGOs, held separately at their field offices. A total of eleven local NGOs participated, mostly from Tangail and Rajbari. In each workshop, the field-workers devised an improvised play based on real-life incidents of oppression, which highlighted a specific problem (mostly oppression of women), utilizing music and songs to comment on each scene. The play ended at a climax, following which the performers entered into dialogue with the spectators and improvised scenes

of 'solutions' to the 'problems' posed in the play as suggested by the spectators. On some occasions, the spectators also acted out characters of the play.

I encountered two learning situations in these projects. The first of these was at a performance in a village some 20 kilometers north of Tangail town. It was an afternoon. A sizeable number of villagers had gathered to attend our performance. The performance space was under a tree, near a school. The spectators were seated in front of the performance space, the men on one side and the women on the other. We began our play with a song introducing the time, place and the principal characters, who were a farmer and his sick wife. There followed four scenes showing the farmer leaving home for town to sell his produce, the wife's condition deteriorating, for which she is taken to the hospital, the doctor examining her and giving her medicine, her return home, and the return of the husband. When he comes to know that the doctor has examined her in his absence, he gets excited and charges his wife with behaving immorally. A quarrel follows, which ends up showing the husband beating the wife. Finally, a song narrates the events again and asks the spectators to decide if the husband's action is justified.

When I began to facilitate the dialogue with the spectators, the males were vocal. They agreed that the incidents, especially the beating of the wife, were typical enough. They also agreed that the wife should not have been beaten for letting the doctor examine her because, after all, she was ill. However, I could clearly see that these were polite answers. Wishing to explore the issue from the patriarchal perspective, I decided to put my argument in favor of the husband, and justify his action. Immediately some men joined me and began to voice similar opinions, and they were gradually joined by the majority. Now, I thought, the women needed to be drawn in. So, I switched sides and began to argue in favor of the wife. No sooner had I finished than an old woman joined me. She said, "Why didn't the husband stay at home beside the sick wife and take her to the doctor himself?" Another said, "This is ridiculous. Do these men think that their wives are waiting to show their bodies to other men the moment they are away? They must be wishing to do that in their head to come up with such nonsense." These comments were enough to start a heated debate in which men as well as women participated. At one point, the question of religious binding came up. It was then that I felt uncomfortable because, at that time, I knew not enough about the Qur'an and the Hadith to quote freely and pose counter arguments. And so, the dialogue with the spectators ended with the males showing the 'Islamic' trump card. I had learned my lesson.

Obviously, there was not enough research before the performance. If I try to enter into dialogue with a community, I have to understand the dynamics of the community. Participatory research could have been one way of beginning the work. Because there was none, the dialogue after the performance failed to probe deep, although an excellent opportunity presented itself. On the other hand, I re-learned what it means to be 'dialectical', that is, to expose the contradiction by highlighting the argument of both sides without identifying one as a 'villain'. I realized that applied theatre is not a tool for revolution, *pace* Boal's oft-quoted claim that it is "a rehearsal for the revolution" (Boal, 1979: 122). It can leave revolution for political parties and hope to do something more difficult: establish dialogue between two antagonizing parties with respect for both, trusting that both must have valid reasons for their behavior. After all, no applied theatre activist would take responsibility for the beaten wife as the promised 'ideal' husband, if the opportunity presented itself. Instead of one who 'intervenes', an applied theatre practitioner can hope to be, after Freire, a teacher/student, who, in constant dialogue with members of the community (students/teachers), learns and re-learns as well as sharing

his/her skills and information, always prepared to modify or abandon his/her position if the student/teacher can offer greater insight. Theatre is but a catalyst, a forum, to begin a Freirean dialogue, leading to action.

The second learning experience was during the last of my field visits, which I made without prior notice. All the NGOs, which had produced quality work earlier, had slumped considerably. On inquiry, I found none had put in enough time to prepare. I continued to inquire and what emerged was that none of the NGOs had performed continuously. Performance was an on-off event linked to my visit. Nor were the performances integrally linked to other components in their program. There were too few field workers, each loaded with ten or more job functions. All the NGOs had possibly joined the Tfd program hoping funds would pour in from the INGO I was working with. Funds had not come as yet, and they were possibly losing interest. Apparently, an NGO is set up as a profitable enterprise where ideology matters little. Like mercenaries, they seemed ready to apply for any fund from any donor agency, tailoring their proposals according to the agenda-focus of the donor. In this intricate NGO-INGO relationship, Paulo Freire is a square peg, hammered to fit in a round hole.

However, the workshops were considered a huge success by the INGO I was working with. So much so that they rushed me into the next project: applied theatre with sex workers highlighting HIV/AIDS. After a field visit when we sat down to discuss the project, what struck me clearly was that the country head of the INGO was concerned to move immediately before other INGOs made their move. It was as though one was conquering new territories, not human suffering, and acquiring credit for being the first to work in the HIV/AIDS sector of Bangladesh, not working against the spreading of HIV/AIDS. I saw vultures in the country head's eyes. I hope he had good reasons – I suspect he was trying to increase commitment to Bangladesh from his head office – but these reasons had nothing to do with 'development'. Perhaps I should have understood that this was precisely 'development' at ground zero level, to most of the donor organizations.

That was the last straw, I thought. I had to make a choice: was it money that I wanted or was it putting my theatre skills at the service of others so that they could seek their dreams? I was sure it was not money that I wanted. So, I said goodbye to the world of NGOs and INGOs – the world of vultures and sharks.

After about three years of complete withdrawal from applied theatre practice, I was approached by a national NGO working on women's issues to facilitate a workshop designed for their fieldworkers and supervisors, to introduce 'alternate theatre' as a part of their development strategy. I began with theatre games and then moved to Boal's "image theatre" (1979: 135–139). Since their focus was on women's exploitation, I asked them to come up with images of exploitation that the participants were familiar with. They were quick but clichéd in their response: typical scenes of wife beating I had seen in my previous experience. Somehow I did not believe them so I asked them to portray images of what they considered to be a perfect family. In all the images, the males had dominant roles, even in those which were meant to be 'equal' partnerships. For example, in the image of a young couple, the male had a loving but 'protective' arm over the female's shoulder. My response was to ask the participants to reverse the roles: put males in female and females in male positions in all their images. In the above example, the female now had her loving but 'protective' arm over the male's shoulder. They did, and when they viewed each other's images, they roared with laughter. A woman never 'protects'. Even a woman participant found that unacceptable. Then we began to dialogue: why should one be funny (when the woman 'protects') but not the other (the man 'protects'). It took

a little time then to explore the questions of patriarchal hegemony, and transparency of gender discrimination in daily life. It made sense to them and sense to me that discrimination is an action that one person is allowed to perform but another is not. One could 'show' discrimination by reversing male roles with female roles and vice versa. As it later turned out, the theatre 'role reversal' was quite successful in the NGO's field-level activity – at least in generating a dialogue on patriarchal tools of domination.

A little after my engagement with the theatre of 'role reversal', I taught MA students at the Department of Theatre, University of Dhaka, a course on applied theatre, which included Paulo Freire. It was indeed a rewarding experience for me because the students immediately made sense of Freire's "dialogue" (1972: 53), "problem-posing education" (52), "education as the practice of freedom" (52), and "banking concept of education" (46). It was part of their immediate reality. Suddenly I saw their eyes sparkle and shine in a manner I had not seen before. Therefore, when I saw the opportunity for a DFID-funded higher education link program with King Alfred's College, UK, I agreed. The last workshop, held in January 2001 and conducted by Professor Tim Prentki from the college, was an enriching experience for the students. Thirty-two students, who were divided into four groups, worked for six days through a program which involved research, devising improvised plays, performing them to teachers and students and then entering into dialogue with them, revising their plays based on comments and criticism received from the spectators, and then going back to teachers and students. At the end, they had given a total of ten performances.

One of the plays was based on sexual harassment in teacher–student relationships, an extremely sensitive issue to say the least. However, what was interesting to observe was that the student-performers were beginning to see both sides of the picture and gradually moving towards a dialectical approach which did not make the distinction of the good guy and the bad guy but probed into social and psychological dynamics in human action. In one performance, a spectator expressed his horrified reaction: How can one wash dirty linen in public, especially if the linen belongs to a respectable member of society? I saw his concern and agony, but is it not better to wash the linen before the whole body rots? Some of the teachers were extremely agitated, for they said it was a tiny minority who engaged in sexual harassment. These comments merely demonstrate how powerful theatre can become as a tool for social protest. However, what was uncanny in the DU applied theatre workshop was its in-house quality. The students were not NGO activists collecting data on an issue which was not 'theirs' but that of the landless farmers. It was easy for me to go to a village, investigate their problem, create a play, and enter into dialogue. What happens if the community is my own? It is painful and shocking.

I could sum up by saying that the following image represents applied theatre in Bangladesh today. It is the theatre of the NGO activists, who are the new evangelical angels preaching the good words of our Lord of Development. The angels can preach any message: you name it and they will do it – as long as you provide them with 'proper incentive'. For the angels, it is a simple job. But ask them to do an in-house applied theatre in those developmental organizations that seek to develop the other – in Grameen Bank, the 'Save the Children' family, or BRAC – and they will end up passing the buck. However, this is not all that there is to be said for the application of applied theatre in Bangladesh – at least, so far as I am concerned. For it was perhaps the only platform where I could confront the socio-political reality of my country with the sole craft/art/tool I have learned to use, that is, theatre. It challenged me to constantly re-examine my ideological position, re-sharpen my analysis and perception, and reformulate the value of

my existence. It reminded me, often painfully, of the value of dialogue – which implies respect for the ‘other’. It unfolded to me the dialectical character of life and taught me not to value-judge but to try to uncover the dynamics behind all incidents. It deconstructed for me ‘monolithic’ structures and forced me to live in a field of dynamic crosscurrent – happenings – transience. It was a high-voltage wire that never let me take anything for granted. Even in my bitterness, I enjoyed each moment.

Today, applied theatre has metamorphosed itself to a stage where one does not necessarily need theatre – it can be any mode of performance that will move the spectators to take a fresh look at life – ‘de-familiarize’ the ‘known’ – and lead them to dialogue. Even if you engage in theatre, it matters little how you shape a play. It does not need to be constructed on European dramaturgy. It may not contain real-life stories. It may be a myth. What matters is how you probe with the ‘tool’ that you devise. What matters is dialogue. And, above all, it is important both to remember that the subalterns are always already engaged in infrapolitics (Scott, 1990: 19) and not to forget to examine the hidden agenda tucked up your sleeve that impels you to play the role of the evangelist. Maybe a happier time will arrive when dialogue will be as spontaneous as breathing, or when anyone can become an amateur in any situation.

The problem is, there are sharks out there – the multi-nationals, IMF, World Bank, and the INGOs – in a globalizing world spurred by the market-oriented principles of the “neoliberal Washington consensus”, where “the basic rules [...] are: liberalize trade and finance, let markets set price (‘get prices right’), end inflation (‘macroeconomic stability’), privatise” (Chomsky, 1999: 19–20). But don’t forget the new corollary recently added: if the economics does not work in favor of the US, Donald Trump may impose economic sanctions or raise trade tariffs to put the ‘rogue’ states in line. In such a world, a theatre practitioner motivated by the desire to ‘change’ and seeking to apply theatrics may inevitably realize, as exemplified by the NGOs in Bangladesh, that theatrics and applied theatre need to be coalesced into applied theatrics, such that the histrionics of applied theatre can veneer ‘change’ into ‘tricks’.

In thus saying all that I have said, and leaving unsaid what I have not said, and in engaging in the saying by abandoning an impersonal identity associated with traditional European academicism, have I said too much or too little? “And if the necessity of becoming breath or speech restricts meaning”, and if “writing restricts and constrains speech further still”, I have more reasons to fear than Derrida (1978: 9). For, it is not merely the “anguish of Hebraic *ruah*” (9) I should be terrified of, but it is also the panopticon constructed in the aftermath of 9/11 by the system mobilizing economic sanctions, trade tariffs, spy satellites, and drones. Today, the indeterminate third space is being erased from human perception so completely that it is either US or the terrorist ‘them’. At this juncture, as I struggle against the insufficiency of the signifiers and the elusiveness of the signified, I am confronted by a fractured terrain, where the inextricably linked signifiers and signified continually multiply into perpetual spirals of deficiency snowballs, and the implied beyond the spoken remains *excluded*. In that space of exclusion, how much of what I intended to say remains unsaid? Even in asking this question, am I not attaching “the greatest importance to the ‘person’ of the author” (Barthes, 1977: 143)?

As the author of this piece struggles with words, a child is still running after the wafting Shimul gossamer clouds as they float – drift – waft in the wind, believing, in all earnestness, they must be fairies. A few thousand miles away, in northern Syria, a young girl, Nada Fedullah by name, does not chase Shimul gossamer. Held in Roj camp, hijab-clad Nada is a lost child of the Islamic caliphate. Thousands like her are locked up and abandoned,



living literally nowhere. Nada is from Indonesia. She was fond of studies and wanted to be a doctor. Now, her life is in pieces. She is in tears when she says, of course she can forgive her IS father because, as a human being, he made a mistake (BBC, 2020). At that instant, an impeached president was merrily flouting all norms of the neo-liberal economic order in a globalized world to make America great again. Bring Nada Fedullah and Donald Trump to the wasteland where Marx chants the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, and that is the brand of applied theatre I subscribe to. But “because I do not hope to turn again”, “because I know that time is always time”, “because these wings are no longer wings to fly” (Eliot, 1970: 85–86), Nada Fedullah will never cease to cry.

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**Part VIII**

**Applied theatre and globalisation**

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## 49 Applied theatre in global meltdown

*Tim Prentki*

**THE CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS** *Reader* have ably demonstrated the breadth and depth of the kinds of processes that operate under the term Applied Theatre. Its reach is not limited by gender, race, age, disability, legal status or any of the other means by which people are categorised in the interests of social cohesion or political expediency. The chapters bear witness to the attempts of facilitators to support the self-empowerment of the groups with whom they have shared the possibilities arising from the application of theatre. Through all the barriers, frustrations, resistances, twists and turns, the conviction that theatre can play a role in improving the quality of life has sustained them in tasks for which the monetary rewards are typically slight. The work has often been about the restoration of dignity, the reclaiming of rights and the rediscovery of the person beneath the label.

This process is entered into with humility lest theatre is seen as a bandage to apply to the wounds of the social and personal fabric; a medicine dispensed by the healthy to the sick. Who needs applied theatre the most? Are paedophiles more in need of it than politicians? Criminals more than company executives? Drug addicts more than doctors? The tendency to work with those who are the victims of the way the world is run rather than with those who run the world can tempt applied theatre into the territory of the therapist, encouraging participants to adapt to the world, rather than nailing its colours to the mast of social change by encouraging analyses and actions aimed at adapting the world to the needs and rights of the majority. By going down the route of social inclusion, practitioners can easily find themselves operating as the 'soft' arm of government policy. Apparently democratic endeavours can quickly tip over into domestication in situations where the power to set the agenda and to act upon it has not been shared with participants.

There is a double-edged aspect to the practice of applied theatre, captured in the phrase 'a safe space', referring to the place where a workshop is happening. At worst it can be 'safe' in the same sense as a comfort zone is safe: a place where habit and identity are confirmed; familiar stories are retold; and ancient prejudices affirmed. At best it can be a place where it is 'safe' to speak the unspeakable and to imagine the unimaginable without fear of reprisal or ridicule; a laboratory from which new understandings emerge and new relationships are forged.

The context-specific nature of much applied theatre is at once its strength and its limitation. In keeping with its emergence in the postmodern period, it is a form which encourages personal rather than master (mistress?) narratives; a plurality of voices rather than a spokesperson for the group. Whether these narratives ever coalesce into social action may depend alike upon the interventionist strategies of the facilitator and the capacity of activist organisations to support the discourses developed by the theatre process.

Yet evidence is all around us that applied theatre is needed more now than ever before. It is needed because it can enable hitherto passive persons to transform themselves into active citizens; needed because it is by definition a collective activity in a world where the mass of people lead lives of increasing isolation and fragmentation. The global imposition of the neoliberal economic agenda has resulted in more and more aspects of life, such as health, education and even the function of parent, becoming reduced to business transactions. In the global 'free' market of buying and selling, people are defined by what they own, by the exercise of purchasing power. Those with nothing to sell and no means of buying are excluded not only from economic participation but also from participation in the spheres of culture, education and health. When business practices become emblems of worth, those whose pockets are empty, be they individuals or nations, are excluded from the transactions that make life meaningful; so much rubbish blown across the wastelands of neoliberalism's private property.

In this global context a version of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* becomes a prerequisite for applied theatre. Until participants are supported in efforts to make the familiar world of neoliberalism strange through finding other ways of seeing, it is unlikely that they can embark on a journey towards a new self-definition that is not framed by the dominant discourse. For example, it is customary to talk of international debt in terms of what 'poor' countries owe to the governments and financial institutions of the hitherto dominant Western nations, but this notion of debt is predicated upon a particular reading of history that ignores those aspects of the story that constitute 'an inconvenient truth':

This accumulation of debt has been accompanied by a massive transfer of natural resources from the poor world to the rich world. If these resources were valued according to their utility, the nations of the poor world would surely be the creditors, and the nations of the rich world the debtors. As the Native American leader Guaicaipuro Cuautemoc has pointed out, between 1503 and 1660, 185,000 kilogrammes of gold and 16 million kilogrammes of silver were shipped from Latin America to Europe. Cuautemoc argues that his people should see this transfer not as a war crime, but as 'the first of several friendly loans, granted by America for Europe's development'. Were the indigenous people of Latin America to charge compound interest on this loan, at the modest rate of ten per cent, Europe would owe them a volume of gold and silver which exceeded the weight of the planet.

(Monbiot, 2003: 157–8)

This turning on its head of conventional wisdom is part of the critical and curious attitude recommended by Brecht for those attending theatre performances. In attempting to employ applied theatre as a practical, critical tool of social analysis, it behoves the facilitator to offer alternatives, to ask questions and to provoke fresh insights. The great strength of the process is its ability to combine reality and fiction in previously untried ways but this strength can only be realised when participants release themselves from the habitual thought patterns of this information-saturated age; when information is transmuted through experience into knowledge and thence into wisdom.

Another element of applied theatre that forms an antidote to the way in which most lives are experienced is that of collectivity. It brings people together and requires them to listen to each other before engaging in a joint action. It reaffirms humans as social beings whose creativity and imagination is stimulated by the experience of working together; achieving more than each alone and undergoing a qualitatively different recreation from

that of the passive, isolated response to screens. The process is frequently built out of the stories told by participants, thereby ensuring that ownership of the material rests with the subjects of the material; not only ownership but artistry as well. In telling a story, the teller is an artist, ordering the events of her life into a coherent form that can be made meaningful to listeners and spectators. There is no mystery here; no separation of artists from those who sit back and admire the art. All participants are at once both artists and audience; critical and creative beings linked by a common intention.

Since writing the essay which concluded the first edition of this *Reader*, the world, as usual, as inevitable, has changed. The ten years which divide these editions from each other have been marked in particular by three phenomena that impact upon the practice of applied theatre: the reach of digital technology; the discoveries of neuroscience about the workings of the human brain; and thirdly and overwhelmingly the climate emergency.

The global village to which I optimistically and naïvely referred in 2009 has been superseded by the global surveillance superstate, supported by the supercomputing functions of big data which are to Big Brother what a satellite tracking station is to Galileo's telescope. Unless we have opted out of all forms of digital technology and do not stray into the territories of CCTV, we have all, in effect, been electronically tagged and are therefore vulnerable to being summoned to appear before the authorities to answer for our actions, our thoughts, perhaps soon even our dreams. Even those who escape this fate through good behaviour are finding that their former habits of lived experience by which they established their relations with the world and others are being eroded and replaced with virtual representations. Consider the example of GPS navigation upon which pilots, drivers and walkers are increasingly dependent. As Franco 'Bifo' Berardi has noted: '[o]ver the course of the next generation, the mental processes that consist in the internal mapping of territory might devolve by reliance upon geotagging machines, and the ability to identify our place in the world and to singularize our surrounding landscape might fade, and perhaps nearly disappear from our connective mind' (Berardi, 2015: 309). Our capacity for orientation, for seeing ourselves in relation to the physical geography of our surroundings, is only one aspect of intersubjectivity that is being eroded by the digital assault upon human cognition. Berardi continues:

In the meantime, a new device has appeared – a new, wearable interface between the mind and the world that represents a new step in the cognitive mutation underway. Google, the most revolutionary corporation, and the most perfect colonizer of all time, has paved the way to the ultimate obliteration of singularized experience, and therefore to the cancellation of singularized processes of living in the world.

(Berardi, 2015: 309)

The search engine has replaced many of the functions fundamental to the operation of human intelligence and, in doing so, has allowed the digital corporation to take over many aspects of what it is to be a person. In a bid to maintain many of these functions, applied theatre can play a vital role. It is a process which requires live contact and collective creation. Furthermore its material is the felt experience of life, not the virtual or simulated experience offered by another agency. The fuelling of existing prejudice, the reinforcing of attitudes already held, is the province of the algorithmic profiling which drives the search process. The applied theatre encounter, by contrast, is a forum for the challenging of attitudes and a place where the self seeks to find itself in the other and the other in the self. More broadly, digital hegemony is privatising public space through the ubiquitous

addiction to the mobile phone. On the street, on public transport, in the work-place and the home it is common to find individuals who are communicating with the virtual at the expense of the real. The space of applied theatre, however, is animated by live presence and its art derives from processes which occur relationally. For as long as we remain a social species, it will be important to maintain the relevant skills and neurological capacities that are exercised through live interactions. Use them or lose them.

The significance of these functions has been underlined in recent years by the work of neuroscientists who specialise in brain activity. From their work it is becoming increasingly clear that the neural circuits of the human brain operate in ways that confirm empathy as a fundamental feature which, though in-born, can be disrupted by trauma or enhanced by regular use. The discovery of mirror neurons shows how and why we respond to the actions and emotions of others, even when we are doing no more than observing them. Furthermore, we are endowed with the capacity to respond empathically to fictional characters as well as to physical presence.

We have to stop thinking in dualistic terms that assert the conscious logical rational mind in opposition against gut reactions. The body, brain, and conscious mind are partners, in permanent exchange. Many of the important processes for social cognition in particular occur inside the brain but outside the conscious mind.

(Keysers, 2011: 105)

These developments in neuroscience have profound implications for the ways in which applied theatre is understood and exploited in the years ahead, not least in the area of child development. The assumptions of Descartes and Leibniz about the isolated, monadic subject are wrong. The pre-linguistic, even pre-natal, capacity of an infant for interpersonal communion and learning has demonstrated the fallacy of Piaget's notion of the asocial, egocentric child. Bråten elaborates the stages through which recognition of the social environment occurs, locating the development of consciousness as a dialectical communication with actual and virtual others:

The shifting between dialogical competence and consciousness manifests itself in intersubjective attunement at various levels – from confluence of affect at the primary level to advanced self-other simulation and constructions at a more advanced level involving internal self-creative and dialogical circles of complementary self-other perspectives.

(Bråten, 2007: 23)

Here Bråten could be describing the stages of a drama workshop that moves incrementally outwards from a still point of reflecting upon the individual's virtual others, perhaps via a mirror exercise, to the dialogical modes of collective creation. This pattern does not offer an option for our growth but rather, as Daniel Stern expresses it, 'Mirror neurons sit adjacent to motor neurons. They fire in an observer who is doing nothing but watching another person behave' (*ibid.* 36). Not only is the human brain wired for dialogue and non-linguistic responses to another, virtual or actual, but it is also wired to be an audience; stimulated by the observation of action. Involuntarily we are actor, character and audience.

The Cartesian foundations upon which educational curricula have been built since the inception of formal schooling for the masses are now crumbling. Neuroscience shows



us that the mind/body split is false and that learning is a process involving mind, body and emotions with the latter often the most powerful force in determining whether that learning commits us to action. A curriculum that takes account of how our brains are wired is one which places a premium on providing spaces for empathic encounters; moments when the activity requires us not only to recognise but also to feel the other in ourselves and the self in the others. As I write this the UK awaits the full impact of the coronavirus and peers anxiously into an uncertain future. Paradoxically our self-isolation has brought home to us as never before the extent of our global interdependence. Our ability and willingness to turn this awareness into a force for kindness and mutual support rather than suspicion and selfishness will in future be largely determined by the exposure of the coming generations to the practice of empathy. Where better to start than the school curricula in every country? The capacity of our mirror circuits will, therefore, be enhanced by the dramatising of the school curriculum and by the creation, for adults, of spaces for play. This is not the traditional, perennially ignored, plea to restore performing arts to the timetable, but rather a demand for a fundamental change of understanding; an understanding of theatre as education. Drama and theatre are not subjects to be taught; they are the means by which learning is accomplished and, as such, are the core of any pedagogical enterprise that takes account of the contribution that emotions and somatic experiences make to understanding.

If a vital means of learning is embedded in the dramatic process, the content to which this means needs to be applied today is, overwhelmingly, the climate emergency. As is obvious from the contemplation of the global political landscape, scientific evidence does not guarantee popular understanding and, therefore, political action. Decisions are made and attitudes formed on the basis of feeling, direct experience and empathic connection. Consequently, the primary role of applied theatre for the foreseeable future is to engage all people in understanding and responding to this crisis. Rebelling against extinction is crucial. However, theatre can be mobilised not only to denounce the neoliberal agendas that have devastated the planet but also to announce actions that must be taken by individuals, community groups, local government, national government and international bodies to strengthen ecosystems and reverse those industrial processes that cause climate catastrophe. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the current and future generations of applied theatre practitioners to form alliances with the organisations that supply the evidence in order to engage participants at both intellectual and emotional levels with the struggle to save our planet.

Underlying the uses to which applied theatre is put lurks a contradiction that contains the source of its *raison d'être*. It is both a means by which people can try to make their worlds better places in which to live and a method of playing, of enjoying 'time off' from the 'real' world. Because applied theatre is associated with forms that were developed in the second half of the twentieth century, such as Theatre in Education and Theatre for Development within the broader community theatre movement, there is a tendency to focus upon its social functions and the efficacy of its interventions at the expense of the aesthetic pleasure to be derived from participation itself; from the exercise of the imagination in the context of collective play. There may be no clearly defined social purpose, no outcome expressed in terms amenable to a log-frame, and yet the act of engaging in these processes can make a profound impact on all those who participate. This engagement links the activity with origins in Carnival – time off for play – whose outcomes can be subversive or domesticating in relation to the dominant social formation. These twin impulses for social change, whether reformist or revolutionary, and for the licence to play meet in

the character of Azdak in Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The most exciting examples of applied theatre are those which manage to coordinate the post-Enlightenment notion of social improvement with the medieval one of community Carnival; a folly of social intervention. The social worker and the fool meet in the person of the applied theatre facilitator to offer alternative ways of being to the doomed agendas of neoliberalism. Through highlighting social contradiction and enhancing empathic capacity, they show that another world is possible and that, as citizen artists and human becomings, we are still treading that dangerously eroded, cliff-top path on the edge of possibility.

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