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Stepping Forward: An Exploration of Devised Theatre's Democratic Designs in an Actor-Training Setting

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Devised theatre offers an alternative set of practices to those used in standard actor-training. It invites participants to explore different forms of authorship and encourages the emergence of different collaboration dynamics and forms of agency. Using methodologies from theatre studies and education, I have explored how devised theatre devices can help trainee actors find and explore their agency inside and outside the theatre space. I write this essay from the perspective of the EU national who lives in the UK, who investigates how performance may help the trainee's expansion of agency and is also a political performer that creates work about European politics.¹ My contribution to knowledge is to theorise the devised theatre participant as a social and political agent and to analyse democratic designs in the actor-training space. I have looked at the role of the director/trainer and actor- practices that prioritise individual rights over popular sovereignty through Chantal Mouffe's concept of the democratic paradox. This essay is a response to the current interest in the politics of actor-training (see Kapsali et al.). I hope that my findings will raise directors' and educators' awareness of how participants from minority groups can experience symbolic violence in group devising practices.² Although this socio-political analysis of the democratic designs of devised theatre is pessimistic, if it is combined with the optimism of individual action, it may encourage participants to find, explore and potentially expand their agency inside and outside the theatre space.

¹ I wrote and performed *Caryatid Unplugged* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2013. The show was an on-stage exploration of my own identity as a Greek, a European, a cosmopolitan and an exile. I discuss in an essay how the specific performance helped me to expand my agency in theatre and beyond (Stamatiou, "Caryatid Unplugged: A Cabaret").

² Bourdieu claims that social inequalities are established through the subtle imposition of power relations on to individuals' bodies and dispositions. Bourdieu and Loïc JD Wacquant call the process of corporeal inculcation "symbolic violence". It is a form of domination "exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" ("The Practice of Reflexive Sociology" 167).

I consider the individual's agency echoing Amartya Sen's moral approach to the term (169). Sen refers to "agency freedom" as "what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important" (203). Considering agency within the training environment, one realises that the trainee actor's agency, or "what they are free to do and achieve", is tested not in a vacuum but in relation to actor-training practices, actor-training institutions and the acting industry. Even though agency is a general matter for each individual to judge, Sen stresses the importance of "careful assessment of aims, objectives, allegiances, etc., and of the conception of the good" (204). Sen implies that such an assessment is generally possible for all adults (204) but this article suggests that for a more focused consideration of specific social fields in which an individual operates, like the actor-training one, the individual needs specific reflexive tools in order to achieve a more holistic assessment of their agency and then act accordingly. Considering the individual agent as part of broader social groups, Sen also invites agents to act responsibly and be morally accounted by others (204). This idea of responsible agency works with and against the idea of the individual's well-being freedom, which Sen suggests that relates to "judging the opportunities a person has for pursuing his or her own advantage" (205).

Methodology

I critically reflect on a practical devised theatre project, in which I used Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social practices. It took place in an actor-training setting in the years 2013-14. I used Bourdieu's theory to enable the trainees to represent their political interests on stage, and consequently to find and explore their agency. Given that individuals have diverse interests, I used a devising method that prioritised the distribution of equal creative opportunities to the trainees. I assumed that, by doing this, each trainee was given equal opportunities to use their performance in pursuit of their own conception of the good. At the end of the process, the trainees were interviewed by email about what effect they felt the devising process had on their agency. After the project, I critically reflected on the process, the performance -- the trainees performed the show in the Berkoff Studio at Wessex Academy of Performing Arts in Somerset on 20 and 21 May 2014, just before the United Kingdom's (UK) component of the European Parliament election on 22 May-- and the trainees' interviews. My choices were led by my desire to promote a democratic culture in the devised theatre setting. Drawing from sociology, I used qualitative and quantitative discourse analysis to identify repeated words or words that suggested a democratic design in the participants' responses. I also used 'participant objectivation' -- a method in which the

researcher becomes both the subject and the object of their research – as an auxiliary methodological tool (see Bourdieu, “Objectivation” 282).³ I am not a sociologist or an anthropologist; I am a theatre director and actor trainer who aims to explore the democratic culture within devised theatre. I used the methodological tools that seemed most appropriate for this purpose.

The Frogs: The Trainee Actor as Social Agent

I chose *The Frogs* (405BC)– a play that Aristophanes wrote in response to the political issues of his time – because I wanted the trainees to use our adaptation to address current political issues. I chose as a theme the UK’s component of the 2014 European Parliament election, which was held on 22 May 2014, and I invited the trainees to express their own social and political opinions in the performance. The choice of *The Frogs* was not random, but it was considered ideal for inviting the trainees’ social and political agency. Aristophanes’ *The Frogs* was performed for the first time at the Lenaea festival in 405 BC, when it competed with two other plays. All three plays addressed the issues of how to save Athens and rescue tragedy, both of which were in crisis (see Sommerstein 1). Athens’ crisis was caused by the war, and its art was seen to be in decline. The main character in *The Frogs*, Dionysus, thinks the solution to both crises is to bring Aeschylus back from the dead (*ibid* 9). David Wiles in *Theatre and Citizenship* describes the Aristophanic world of *The Frogs* as one in which “artist and citizen were one and the same” (35) He sees the crisis of Athens and the crisis of tragedy as two related issues. He suggests that the main theme of *The Frogs* is Dionysus’ quest to find “a playwright to save the city in its moment of crisis, and political discourses merge with aesthetic discourses” (*ibid* 18). Drawing from Wiles’ analysis of *The Frogs*, I invited the trainee actors to participate in the performance as both artists and citizens who operate within power relations and power structures in theatre and beyond.

Bourdieu’s concept of ‘field’ relates to the power structures and power relations in the world around us. He describes the social world as a “series of relatively autonomous but structurally homologous fields of production, circulation and consumption of various forms of cultural as well as material resources” (Navarro 14). The process of constructing the

³ Bourdieu suggested this methodology in relation to anthropology. He writes that researchers should take account of their social origins, their position and trajectory in the social space, their social and religious memberships and beliefs, gender, age, nationality, and, most importantly, their position in the microcosm of anthropologists (see “Objectivation” 283).

devised piece created a micro-field in which the participants experienced power structures and power relations that worked with and against their agency. I invited them to think about their role as social actors in the micro-field, and encouraged them to use their conception of the good about the May 2014 European election to create the show.

The trainees were asked create a performance in the context of contemporary UK politics and power structures, and to think about specific political decisions or politicians. They were urged to use their ‘capital’ (their right to be in the show, their creative competences and the resources that the university made available for the show) to create a play that was grounded in the political field of the UK.⁴ They were invited to draw on their ‘*habitus*’ (what they have learned and experienced in relation to others) and ‘*doxa*’ (the social rules that they have learned to consider legitimate).⁵ They were also invited to position themselves in the field by thinking about power structures, political decisions and politicians from the perspective of their own conception of the good. As a consequence of my use of Bourdieu’s theory, I expected the participants to *act* according to their own *interests* (both material and symbolic). Bourdieu would regard this to be the conscious or unconscious aim of artistic agents.

I wanted to give each of the trainees an equal opportunity to maximise their capital and represent their interests, so they were given equal opportunities for authorship.⁶ I divided the script into seventeen sections of equal length, and asked each trainee to select a part. I chose a part for anyone who did not have a preference. In the process of creating the performance, each trainee had control over both the text and performance of their part. They were free to choose whether to adhere closely to the original text or write a free adaptation of the original script. This would make each trainee the author of their scripted part, and also the one to make the decisions about which theatrical elements would be used in the performance (for example, performance styles, music, video and songs).

⁴ ‘Capital’ is a key concept in Bourdieu’s theory, and can be described as an irreducible form of power. It can be material (for example, economic capital) or symbolic (for example, cultural and social capital) (“The Forms of Capital 81). Cultural capital and social capital are immaterial forms of capital. Cultural capital comprises the individual’s cultural goods and cultural consumption, whereas social capital is their social connections (*ibid* 81-93).

⁵ ‘*Habitus*’ and ‘*doxa*’ are two other key concepts in Bourdieu’s theory. *Habitus* are dispositions inherited from the family and class to which the individual belongs. They change as the individual’s position within a field changes (Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* 53). *Doxa* “roughly speaking means common sense” (Navarro 21).

⁶ The author in a devised work that has an output in the form of a script is the individual who creates or writes the script. Sarah Sigal offers an overview and analysis of the different modes of collaboration between a writer—who can also be one or more of the performers-- and a company during devising. Under UK copyright law, even if a director or other ‘creatives’ contribute ideas, the individual who writes the script is its sole author

In this project, the trainees were assigned by and had to liaise with the director/dramaturge, who decided on the main concept and relevant research, led workshops and was present in most of the rehearsals. I took on the role of the director/dramaturge, whose job it was to edit the trainees' scripts and performances into a coherent piece.

The Problematic Part of the Script: the 'Step Forward'

A problem arose during the adaptation of Aristophanes' theatrical device of the *parabasis*, or the 'step forward' (from the Greek verb *παραβαίνω*). In the middle of *The Frogs*, the chorus leader steps forward, takes off his mask and speaks directly to the audience, delivering Aristophanes' political opinion.⁷ Although his political opinions are evident throughout the play, in the 'step forward' Aristophanes openly expresses his views to the audience. He even interrupts the action of the play in order to underscore his message. Trainee Nina⁸ was assigned the 'step forward' part⁹, for which she chose to use the Green Party's 2014 UK component of the European Parliament election video. She expressed her political views in the performance agonistically and this could have created tension between those in the group who support the Green Party and those who do not. As a way of avoiding tension without undermining Nina's clear political voice, everyone was asked to 'step forward' at the end of the video and express their own political opinions to the audience.

The 'step forward' also has a metaphorical meaning: the invitation to authorship in devised work enables individuals to step forward from the group and make a decision for themselves, lead a process or make a suggestion for the group to consider. The trainees were

(Equity 3). Copyright disputes are very common in devised work and for this reason "the key to sharing the authorship of a text and production while creating an efficient collaborative process is inherent in the clarity of the initial agreement between collaborators regarding delegation of roles, the hierarchy of the company and its effect on the decision-making process and an open discussion of the expectations of the collaborators involved" (Sigal 303-304). What Sigal implies in the above quote is that the automatic copyright of the writer can be bought out by the commissioner of the work, however their moral rights of authorship remain. In the actor-training setting that I analyse in this article, the oral initial agreement between participants was that each trainee would lead the rehearsal process for a specific part of the script and they would be the sole author of this script, which they would write in text form.

⁷ In extract of the parabasis the chorus leader states: "In the first place, accordingly, we think all citizens should be made equal and their fears removed; and if someone went wrong at all through being tripped up by the wiles of Phrynichus, I say that those who slipped up at that time should be given the right to clear themselves if any charge and wipe out their previous errors" (Aristophanes 687-691).

⁸ All participants' names are fictional for anonymity purposes.

⁹ I assigned the 'step forward' part to Nina. I assume that none of the students chose it because it is a political speech that seemed to lack any dramatic action.

invited to think about their agency both inside and outside the theatrical space. Considering the European elections for devising purposes in the theatre space worked both with and against the trainees' political participation and agency in the outside world. Their response to the invitation to authorship in the devised theatre micro-field—which in the particular case involved the agonistic expression of their political opinions about the specific elections-- and their response to the invitation to contribute in the political field—their voting behaviour in the specific elections-- seemed interconnected.

Critical Reflection on the Trainees' Interviews

After the final performance, the trainees completed an email interview. Using email for the interviews seemed less intrusive. It also seemed less likely that my expectations would unconsciously lead the participants' responses. When evaluating the responses, I focused on repeated words and words that reflected democratic designs. The participants' reflections on the democratic designs in the devising process seemed to be affected by their power relations with the actor trainer/director (the author) and the rest of the trainees. The trainer-trainee relationship seemed to embed symbolic violence, and the relationships among trainees seemed to be challenged by the democratic paradox. These observations lead to two questions. First, what is the role of the director in devised theatre settings, and how can the 'step forward' enable participants to make theatre that is based on their symbolic interests and choice of representation? Secondly, what challenges to participants' symbolic interests does the group devised setting present? I will reflect on these two questions separately in the two sections below, which are titled *Trainer-Trainee Power Relations* and *Trainees-Trainee Power Relations*.

Trainer-Trainee Power Relations: The Intimate Dialogic Swap

By selecting the 2014 European election as the theme of the adaptation, I removed the trainees' ability to choose an issue that was meaningful for them. The trainees' compliance to the limitation of their agency in the educational setting was a form of symbolic violence. Bourdieu has written that such symbolic violence is a major challenge in education and the actor-training space it links to the trainees' dispositions about following the educator's suggestions. I realised that I had limited the trainees' agency after reflecting on the trainees' responses to the questions that aimed to evaluate their agency. This observation led me to look at myself as another active participant in the project and to reflect on my role.

The questions that the trainees were asked included "Do you feel that your political

views were part of the performance? Why?” (Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes” Question 8), “What did you enjoy most during the making/performance?” (*ibid* Question 9) and “What did you learn/get from the whole process of making/performing this performance?” (*ibid* Question 10). As may be seen, the first part of Question 8 was a closed question about whether the trainees considered their individual political interests to be part of the performance. The second part invited them to think about why this was the case. Ten participants responded “Yes”, and six responded “No” to the first part of the question (Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes 22 May 2014). The ten who responded “Yes” said that their participation in the ‘step forward’, in which they expressed their opinions about the election to the audience, enabled them to include their political opinions in the performance. The six who responded “No” said that it was difficult to relate to the theme of the European election. They also demonstrated their feeling of having limited agency during the ‘step forward’. Their address to the audience during the performance-- “Hi, I am Alice and I wish I knew more about politics”, “Hi, I am Charlie and I should probably get my mum to vote for me”, “I am Tom, I do support UKIP and I disagree with everyone who calls them racists”, “Hi, I am Harry, and I don’t give a fuck about politics”, “Hi, I am Lynne, I don’t know much about politics but I want to learn more about the Green Party” and “Who is UKIP?” (Annie et al. 24) -- indicates that the theme was irrelevant to the trainees’ conception of the good and therefore their agency was limited. Most of the trainees had little knowledge of the European election, but they were nevertheless invited to make a performance about it and discuss it in an open forum.

The above six trainees’ statements in the ‘step forward’ indicated that they did not want to make a performance about politics – in particular, about the European election. In my attempt to enable them to explore their agency in devising, I imposed my *doxa* that all individuals should be active in the field of European politics. In attempting to get the trainees to explore their agency, I forced them to create a show about the European election – even worse, I asked them to speak to the audience about what they consider meaningful, and they accepted this without any negotiation. Bourdieu would describe this as symbolic violence.

At the time, I considered my actions to be legitimate, because I thought that that is what directors do in a devised theatre setting: they choose the theme, stimuli and rehearsal process; they divide up the tasks and responsibilities; and they respond to what is created. Often, if a participant does not make a suggestion about the part of the script or performance to which they are assigned, the director fills the gap with their own creative input and thereby becomes the author of the work. In an actor-training setting in particular, such input from the director

is usually considered to be welcome help to the trainee, rather than an act that serves the interests of the director. In both professional and training settings, time pressure can legitimise such input. Such ‘help’ can prevent participants from exploring their agency, and yet they often consent to it.

Our shared *doxa* that the trainer is the leader of the artistic vision and that the trainees should follow them put me in a position of power. I assumed this position without question, even though it undermined my aim of expanding the trainees’ agency. I assumed not only that European politics had the same significance for the trainees as it did for me, but that creating political performances is simply what artists do. I thereby exposed my own bias for overtly political art.

The realisation that my role in the devising process was a prime determinant of the trainees’ experience led me to think about my own position as a researcher in this process. This links to Bourdieu’s idea of reflexivity. He writes that “for a sociologist more than any other thinker, to leave one’s thought in a state of unthought-of is to condemn oneself to be nothing more than the instrument of that which one claims to think” (*In Other Words* 238). Simply acknowledging my subjective interests as a researcher would not be enough to be grounded in Bourdieu’s theory of practice project. How could I set myself up in the training space as the master of an objective truth, when I believe only in my subjective, experienced truth?

My *habitus* –the EU national who lives in the UK and investigates what can help the actor to expand their agency in theatre and beyond— led me to believe that the most appropriate theme for a performance whose purpose was to expand the trainees’ agency was the field of European politics. Bourdieu writes that “the sociology of sociology is a necessity, not a luxury” (*In Other Words* 254). Although the performance was not a sociological project, if I had thought about my own subjective position in the project at the time, I could have avoided subjecting the trainees, consciously or unconsciously, to ‘symbolic violence’. Bourdieu’s concept of ‘participant objectivation’ is a fruitful tool for reflecting on the project.

I reconfirmed how my reflexivity could be supportive when I evaluated the application of the ‘step forward’ in another actor-training project that was not associated with my research purpose of investigating the trainee actor’s agency in theatre and beyond. The Cabaret Solos is a training project of 23 Level 6 Performing Arts trainees that I taught at Wessex Academy of Performing Arts in the UK during the academic year 2013/2014. The trainees seemed better able to represent their own interests: the issues that they explored in their shows included race, gender and sexuality, and it was clear that they were drawing on

their own ‘capital’ and their own ‘choice of fields’, and that the work was meaningful for them. The training model for the Cabaret Solos was more flexible: I did not direct the devising process or edit the scripts, but I led a seminar on how the theatrical device of the ‘step forward’ inspired me to create *Caryatid Unplugged*, which premiered in August 2013. The trainees requested that I coach them individually in a small number of rehearsals. I did not choose the subjects of the shows, and I did not attend the majority of the rehearsals.

It might be assumed that in the Cabaret Solos I did not subject the trainees to my symbolic interests in the field of European politics. Interestingly, I did, but in a different way, which the flexible structure of the teaching model allowed. I used myself and my performance, *Caryatid Unplugged*, as a paradigm, and explained to the trainees how I devised the show as a means of finding my own agency in both the cultural and the political field. I informed them that I made *Caryatid Unplugged* as a response to the symbolic violence that I experienced in the field of European politics. I did not lead any workshops, so the trainees had to draw on their own training *habitus*, and they were not obliged to perform the ‘step forward’ in the way that is done in the original Aristophanic version where the actors speak the poet’s political opinions directly to the audience. Consequently, the trainees could avoid speaking directly to an audience about their own political opinions.

When talking about how I drew upon my life experience and concerns when devising *Caryatid Unplugged*, I used phrases like “it is meaningful for me” and “it is a representation of my own frustration” (“Teacher’s Notes” 14 January 2014). Without realising it, I was displaying to the trainees my social origins, my position and trajectory in the social space, my social and religious memberships and beliefs, my gender, my age, my nationality and, most importantly, what was significant to me as an actor and trainer. This process functioned in a similar way to what Bourdieu describes as “participant objectivation” in sociology, as referred to above (*Participant Objectivation* 283).

Evaluating the Cabaret Solos, I noted that, although the trainees did not use the ‘step forward’ in their performances their themes were clear and were drawn from their own ‘capital’, and represented their interests similarly to how *Caryatid Unplugged* did mine which I used as a paradigm. I observed that there was a ‘swap pattern’, or an exchange of gifts, in this training relationship. I presented myself and my show as an object of study, and talked openly with the trainees about my ‘capital’ and ‘*habitus*’. Although much of this was unconscious at the time, the trainees were able to identify the subjective symbolic interests that drove my narration. By making myself an object, and putting myself in the position not of a more powerful leader but as an equal agent/actor who uses their ‘capital’ for their

devised work, I created a sense of intimacy in the training space. This seemed to have functioned as an invitation. The trainees drew on their own ‘capital’ and offered as a gift their performances, which were based on what they considered to be symbolic violence in their social world and their field of choice. They became my intimates. I did not assume that the European politics field would be useful also for their own exploration of agency. Instead, I unconsciously invited them to have a conversation about things that mattered to me and what I considered to be symbolic violence and therefore I showed them how I explored my own agency as an example.

Charles Taylor writes that “opening a conversation is inaugurating a common action” because the listener sustains the conversation with their reactions and at times the conversation moves from one participant to the other (200). In the intimate environment that I created, the trainees were able to choose how to participate, act and interact. They often responded by drawing on their own ‘capital’ and their experience of ‘symbolic violence’ and used these experiences as central themes for the performance. I call this an ‘intimate dialogic swap’. My sharing of the devising process of *Caryatid Unplugged* did not aim to direct the trainees into specific designs (‘Do as I do’). Instead, I used it as a paradigm to reveal the embodied artistic and research schemata of my *habitus*. My coaching method was to share my ‘feel for the game’ (‘This is what I would do’). This is similar to Bourdieu’s method of supervising scientific projects (“The Praxis of Reflexive Sociology” 223). My gift was to tell the trainees how I ‘stepped forward’ in *Caryatid Unplugged*, which functioned as an invitation.

Trainees-Trainee Power Relations: The Democratic Paradox

The trainees were invited to reflect on the group dynamics during the process. In the email interview, they were asked the following: “Regarding the decision making in the creative process, did you think that there was a good balance in distributing responsibilities and creative decisions? Why?” When reflecting on the responses, I observed that some of the repeated words implied democratic designs. The word ‘balance’ was used when the trainees were asked to describe their interpretation of the group dynamics, but only trainee Essie used the word ‘balance’ in their answer. Nina implied it, and the others used words that suggested power relations and democratic designs, like “fair” (Maria, Alice and Tom), “unfair” (Fred), “equal” (Maria, Leto, Sophia, Annie and Bob) and “even” (Sophia and Fred). When reflecting on the power relations in the rehearsal room, the trainees did not relate their democratic schemata to the director/trainer; they only discussed the group’s internal

antagonisms.

Lynne said that she had been overpowered by another trainee. Lynne stated: “*she* had an attitude during some rehearsals that brought the mood of the group down” (emphasis added) (Lynne qtd. in Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes 22 May 2014). Lynne’s use of the word “*she*” indicated an antagonism within the group. Harry used the word “clash” to describe the same antagonism: “the idea of distributing responsibilities, had as a result the “clash” in the studio” (Harry qtd. in Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes 22 May 2014). The above quotes indicate how the agonism of the individuals who aimed to pursue their own conception of the good in the group setting, even though probably served their own agency, it also dynamically affected the agency of the rest of the group, and vice-versa.

Considering Sen’s stated above definition of agency, some of the trainees’ reflections indicate that they had agency freedom within the group setting. For example, Tina stated: “It was an ideal opportunity to have creative input about how *we* want something to be explored and created” (Tina qtd. in Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes 22 May 2014). Tina’s use of the word “*we*” suggests that not only she experienced agency freedom in the process but also that she observed her peers having similar experiences. Charlie used the word “*our*” in a similar way: “great to have ideas coming from all angles as it shows “*our passion*” (emphases added) (Charlie qtd. in Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes 22 May 2014). Charlie’s statement also indicates that she both experienced and witnessed agency freedom within the group setting, because she implies that the trainees pursued goals in devising that they regarded as important. However, the plurality of the voices and the different angles of the opinions imply antagonisms. Charlie’s word “*passion*”, combined with all the previously italicised words above, suggests that there were antagonisms in the group.

The fact that every member of the group focused on the internal dynamics of the process, as shown in the above statements and also in other parts of their responses¹⁰, invites a reflective analysis that draws on Mouffe’s idea of the democratic paradox. I aimed to reflect on the question, what are the challenges for the individual trainee’s symbolic interests in a

¹⁰ More examples of implied antagonisms in trainees’ statements are Essie’s statement that “I had authority and ability to create my own composition” (qtd. in Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes” 22 May 2014), Leto’s statement about “the different views everyone had” (*ibid*), Maria’s observation that she found it “hard to work in a large theatre company with people shouting out their individual opinions over the top of each other” (*ibid*), Charlie’s complaint about “too many overpowering opinions” (*ibid*), Tina’s wish that “working as an ensemble can be very enjoyable when everyone has the same goals and intensions” (*ibid*) and “Tom’s observation about how his “own personal ideologies” related to the ideologies of other group members (*ibid*).

group devised theatre setting? The specific question works with and against the broader question, what type of democracy regulates collaboration in different group devised theatre settings?

Mouffe suggests that the aim of democratic politics should be to transform antagonism into agonism. She does not overlook the conflictual nature of democratic politics, but proposes the concept of ‘agonistic pluralism’ as an alternative. Mouffe writes that “for agonistic pluralism the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards democratic designs” (16).

Mouffe’s work relates to the political arena, but her ideas can be applied to the micro-field of the devised theatre project and the training setting. The idea of distributing creative responsibilities in the rehearsal process with the aim of inviting each of the trainees to find and explore their agency resulted in internal conflicts, which Harry described as a “clash in the studio”. Some of the trainees celebrated the agonistic expression of passion during the rehearsals, but others saw it as antagonistic and problematic. Maria said that it could often delay the rehearsal process:

We struggled at some points to make decisions due to the fact that our group contains a lot of individual characters and opinions and therefore we all struggled to agree on certain things. I also found some rehearsals to be rather draining as a lot of the time people would talk over the top of one another and voices struggled to be heard. (qtd. in Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes” 22 May 2014)

Mouffe writes that if passions are to be integrated in the democratic process, rather than eliminated in favour of rational argument, it is necessary to provide “a safety valve for highly controversial standpoints that might otherwise move towards more violent forms of expression: an explosion of antagonisms that can tear up the very basis of civility” (17). An example of a controversial standpoint is participant Tom’s statement that he felt like he was being victimised and that his was a minority voice. In response to the question about whether he felt that his political views were part of the performance, he said:

I feel that *my own personal political views were overlooked* to a degree, as well as represented in a bad light. I understand this would be the case, given that my political views are currently in the minority, but I also believe this is a reflection on the ensembles political views or lack thereof. I feel that the representation given to my political views was that of the bad guy, the villain character so to speak (emphasis added). (qtd. in Stamatiou, “Teacher’s Notes 22 May 2014)

After Tom revealed that he was a United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) supporter, the group decided that he should play the part of Charon (the death deity from ancient Greek mythology who carried in his boat the souls of the newly deceased to the

Underworld). The group's shared *habitus* caused the other students to disapprove of his ideology, and so they felt it legitimate to give him the villain's part. Tom's case illustrates the democratic paradox: the democratic ideals of equality and popular sovereignty legitimised the group's decision to make him play the villain. Tom, however, regarded the 'villainisation' of UKIP's ideology to be an act of 'symbolic violence'. He felt that the group was pushing him to misrepresent himself.

Tom's feeling of victimisation is controversial under the umbrella of the liberal ideology of modern democracy, which prioritises individual liberties and human rights over equality and popular sovereignty (see Mouffe, 2). However, the purpose of the 'step forward' device in the adaptation of *The Frogs* was to prioritise individual liberties. When the trainees were invited to say anything they wanted about the European election to the audience, Tom expressed his agonism. He said: "My name is Tom...and I vote UKIP and I believe that UKIP are not a racist party and it is too easy to believe the tabloids". The pluralistic 'step forward' undermined the group's decision to suppress Tom's voice for supporting UKIP. The 'step forward' enabled an agonistic pluralism to emerge, which directly acknowledged the antagonistic nature of politics by emphasising rather than ignoring the role of affect and passion.

The agonistic pluralism that emerged in the 'step forward' challenges established ideas about the theatre group as a community and about communities outside the theatre space. When asked about what they enjoyed about the process, many of the trainees used the word "ensemble" in their answer, and some used the alternative terms "team work" and "working in a group" (Stamatiou, "Teacher's Notes" 22 May 2014). This observation led to a fruitful consideration of the democratic design of what would be an egalitarian template in devised theatre that allows the emergence of agonistic pluralism, in relation to the political design of the ensemble. John Britton writes that ensembles are characterised by their longevity, organisational structure, prior training and common purpose (see "Introduction" 7). This devising democratic design was based in an educational setting, and so its duration was limited and determined by that institution. It had a particular organisational structure: each trainee was given an equal opportunity to lead the group, regardless of whether the other trainees considered them capable of doing so or not. The trainees had roughly the same amount of prior training. It was distinguished from an ensemble by what Britton calls a "common purpose" (*ibid*).

This project was different from ensemble work because it used a notion of alternating leadership to allow all voices to be heard. We did not negotiate over ideas, make

compromises, or aim for unanimous or majority decisions. If the leadership model is clear between trainees, there is no need for shared training, interests or purposes. Longevity – a typical characteristic of the ensemble, according to Britton-- was not a requirement for the project. The intimacy that I established at the start of the process was a means of ‘warming up’ the participants.

Britton classifies ensembles into those that are more individualistic, such as Strasberg or Stanislavski, and those that are more collective, for example, Peter Brook or Grotowski (see “Afterword 413). In order to theorise the suggested devising design from a sociological perspective and locate it as a model for the “more individual” or “more collective” ensembles, I will consider Taylor’s thinking on the liberal-communitarian debate (195).

Taylor writes that the communitarian and liberal positions in social theory are not necessarily opposed. Rather, they share many aims. He says that the confusion in the debate is caused by the fact that ontological and advocacy, or moral, issues are blended together. There is a range of positions between individual rights at one end of the spectrum, and community life at the other. Taylor describes this positioning as more or less individualist or collectivist. I consider the ‘step forward’ to be positioned among the practices at the individualist end of the spectrum, as it aims to prioritise individual rights. It requires a libertarian ensemble, in which each individual is able to express their views and represent their own interests in the performance.

Considering that the ‘step forward’ invited trainees to relate their own conception of the good in devising and beyond within group collaboration, the specific devising framework recognises individual agents only as part of bigger social structures and not as single units. Therefore, from an ontological perspective, it is closer to the holists than the atomists. My proposed way forward, which would enable actors to explore their agency in the devised theatre setting, resonates with a holist individualist social design. The trainees should be encouraged to engage with the idea that they are a part of a bigger social structure. At the same time, they should collectively agree to support the individual interests of each member of the group in rotation. The willingness to support each participant’s plans in rotation would be the shared *doxa* of the group members and individual plans would further determine the process.

Conclusion: The Radical and the Egalitarian Actor-Training Model

Synthesising my critical reflections on how trainer-trainee power relations and trainees-trainee power relations in devised theatre can affect the individual trainee’s agency,

the ‘step forward’ can be a means of understanding where the actor’s creative input and decisions originate. It can be used in rehearsal and performance to raise the awareness of the actor that they often explore opinions and interests of the writer and the director in devising and enable them to explore their opinions and interests instead. According to Bourdieu’s theory, in each part of the performance there are underlying power structures that serve the dominant ideologies through the agents’ representations (“The Production of Belief” 261). The writer and the director may represent the dominant ideologies consciously or unconsciously. Even when this process is unconscious, the representations are embedded in the writer or director’s ‘capital’, *habitus* and *doxa*. It therefore serves their symbolic or material interests and, consequently, the symbolic and material interests of the social group that they consciously or unconsciously represent.

Given Ridout’s observation that the actor is a “sign and referent of the wholly alienated wage slave” (40), it might be assumed that when they deliver the words of another individual in an acting setting, they become an ‘involuntary agent’ of someone else’s agenda. Therefore, it might be expected that allowing an actor to speak their own devised words is a way of overcoming such subjection. However, this ignores the unconscious culturally constructed assumptions that are embedded in the individual’s *habitus* and ‘capital’, and the way that they reproduce social and power relations. The mechanisms that underlie actor-training and devising do not necessarily reveal the cultural assumptions of the agents of the acting field. This makes them mechanisms of subjection. These mechanisms can be described as the shared rules – Bourdieu calls them *doxa* – that are unconsciously embedded in the *habitus* of most trainers and trainees. Using a device such as the ‘step forward’ and prioritising individual rights in devised theatre cannot alone protect agents from involuntary subordination. The way forward that I propose is to complement the ‘step forward’ and the democratic design of prioritising individual rights with specific tools that further encourage participants to explore how their capital affects the devising process. The participants should be encouraged to consider their false consciousness during the devising process and to think consciously about what they want to represent on and off the stage.

Even though further steps are required that will further reveal hidden ideologies in devising practices, Aristophanes’ ‘step forward’ can be used as a contemporary actor-training device as a first step that encourages trainees to find and explore their agency. It places the trainees’ symbolic interests, ‘capital’, *habitus* and *doxa* at the centre of the devising process and invites them to explore how the symbolic representation of their own conception of the good in devised theatre affects their agency. The ability to identify and analyse how their

biases in social life affect their artistic production helps trainees to think about how symbolic interests may be invested in any form of production – not just artistic production. This understanding enables them to act as actors, inside and outside the theatre space, who are not subjected ‘involuntary agents’ of unconscious symbolic interests but subjective ‘voluntary agents’ of the symbolic interests that they choose. Since this training model suggests raising awareness and destabilising established notions in the actor-training field, it is a radical actor-training model.

There are also several findings to take forward from the reflection on the democratic paradox in *The Frogs* in 2014. It is important to establish early in the devising process where a specific model is positioned among other group training models or ensembles. This positioning establishes the ‘rules of the game’, or the trainees’ shared *doxa*. The focus of this suggested egalitarian actor-training model is the individual trainee and how they wish to act in the social world, both in and out of the rehearsal room. Training actors to use the ‘step forward’ can establish such a focus early in the process. The group in which the individual is trained is expected to function as an agent of the ontological and advocacy issues – the shared *doxa* – that frame and support the individual’s findings and exploration of their own agency.

Britton writes that “we cannot train an ensemble, it is an illusion. But we can train individuals to create and sustain that illusion” (“Afterword” 413). This highlights the romanticism that is embedded in the more collectivist ensemble structures. It is claimed that a trainer can surpass the individual and train something beyond it: the collective. In the suggested egalitarian training model, what would be expected to sustain the group work is the illusion that the particular holistic individualist nature of the democratic design itself, is framed and sustained by the driving forces of individuals, who agonistically ‘step forward’ to represent their interests inside and outside the theatre space.

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