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ARTSPRAXIS

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ARTSPRAXIS provides a platform for contributors to interrogate why the arts matter and how the arts can be persuasively argued for in a range of domains. The pressing issues which face the arts in society will be deconstructed. Contributors are encouraged to write in a friendly and accessible manner appropriate to a wide readership. Nonetheless, contributions should be informed and scholarly, and must demonstrate the author's knowledge of the material being discussed. Clear compelling arguments are preferred, arguments which are logically and comprehensively supported by the appropriate literature. Authors are encouraged to articulate how their research design best fits the question (s) being examined. Research design includes the full range of quantitative-qualitative methods, including arts-based inquiry; case study, narrative and ethnography; historical and autobiographical; experimental and quasi-experimental analysis; survey and correlation research. Articles which push the boundaries of research design and those which encourage innovative methods of presenting findings are encouraged.

ARTSPRAXIS Volume 6, Issue 2 engages members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice on theatre and heath.

An aging population, increasing climate and politically-motivated displacement, unstable housing, the rise of depression and anxiety, and the challenges of providing comprehensive healthcare amongst other concerns make health a significant challenge for our times. With this in mind, we invited authors to explore how theatre, including improvisation, performance, and other drama processes, contribute to psychological, neurological, physical, social, civic and public health. Teachers, drama therapists, applied improvisation practitioners, theatre-makers, performance artists, and scholars were invited to share vocabularies, ideas, strategies, practices, measures, and outcomes.

Article submissions addressed one of the following questions:

- What understandings of health and wellbeing inform improvisation and theatre-making?
- How can theatre, including performance, improvisation and other drama processes, be used to address specific health concerns and promote wellbeing?
- How can we assess health outcomes related to theatre?
- How are artists, educators, and therapists using improvisation and performance in

health related research?
- How do health-related contexts inform aesthetic choices and social considerations?
- What factors contribute to the therapeutic benefits of theatre?
- What practices facilitate accessibility and participation in therapeutic theatre?

We encouraged article submissions from interdisciplinary artists and scholars across the many fields engaged in performance as activism. Our goals were to motivate a dialogue among a wide variety of practitioners and researchers that will enrich the development of educational theatre in the coming years.

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Cover image from NYU's Program in Drama Therapy 2018 production of "Living with...", written by Joe Salvatore in collaboration with four long term survivors of HIV and three newly diagnosed adults based on months of group therapy sessions.

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Editorial: On Mindfulness

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Of late, mindfulness remains a ubiquitous buzzword, generally having much to do with self-awareness and self-care. It is timely given the uncertainty that pervades our cultural consciousness—whether here in the United States or around the world. With so much instability, we artists and educators find ourselves filling critical roles for our audiences and students: we reflect society; we interrogate the world as it is; and we provide a window into the possible. As such, our mindfulness must extend beyond our personal lives, tasking us with thinking through the import of our work and the impact it has on our constituencies.

In August 2019, I brought a class of graduate students to the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) conference in New York City. The theme of the event was *Activate.* The organization stated that theatre artists and educators are "uniquely poised to be a force for action and empathy building at this pivotal moment when the need for self-expression and dialogue is so palpable" (AATE, 2019). With this mission in mind, I endeavored to scaffold an experience for my graduate students that would allow them to connect with the community, explore opportunities to critically

engage with their own work and the work shared in the diverse slate of presentations, and come away with a plan of action—concrete applications informed by their time at the conference. As a support, I created a scavenger hunt for the students. They were to:

- Connect with an unlikely new acquaintance
- Connect with a leader in the field
- Find someone with whom they fervently disagreed
- Find something aspirational
- Find something inspirational
- Find something worthy of putting in print
- Something to reinforce their work or beliefs
- Something to challenge their work or beliefs

Additionally, they kept a conference journal with entries that tracked each session they attended documenting key takeaways that they could apply to their own work.

While these tasks allowed the students to attend to the conference with a focus on application, I was mindful that they would need an opportunity to process their experience as they went along. To that end, I made myself available to them throughout the conference in a scheduled place so that they could come to me as needed to reflect on their experiences, vent, get some needed encouragement, or otherwise just be there for them should they need it. In addition to these structures that I implemented, the conference planners also instituted a variety of processing opportunities for participants. Chief among those opportunities, Paul Brewster and Jennifer Katona (co-chairs) scheduled breakout discussion groups to follow the keynote presentations. These breakouts were meant to parallel Kayhan Irani and Lizzy Cooper Davis' discussion frame that they developed for Anna Deveare Smith at the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) as part of the initial run of *Notes from The Field: Doing Time in Education* (2016). At A.R.T., Irani and Cooper Davis served as facilitation trainers for audience discussion groups that played an integral part of each performance. They developed and instituted a similar training module for the keynote discussion facilitators at AATE prior to the breakout sessions. Here too, mindfulness played a key role as the facilitation plan included discussing key takeaways, something we would like to learn more about, and something we could do tomorrow to begin the

process.

As you venture into this issue of *ArtsPraxis,* I would like you to consider employing similar strategies as you read. Let the articles in this issue serve as provocations; allow yourself the space to critically engage both with the work the authors describe as well as with your own praxis. In a moment when the necessity of our work is heighted, this is our call: activate; aspire; be inspired; challenge the writer; challenge yourself; reinforce; reinvigorate; be encouraged. If not now, when? If not here, where?

IN THIS ISSUE

Our contributions in this issue come from artists, educators, and arts therapists focusing on theatre and health.

The first collection of articles highlight reflective practice. **Lawrence Ashford** explores interactions between professional performers and young people in Australian hospitals. **Bianca C. Frazer** looks at the deconstruction of stereotypes about diabetes on stage. **James Webb** reflects on the personal impact of writing, acting, and sharing his autobiographical play, *The Contract,* detailing his struggles as a gay man in the Black Church in the United States. **Faith Busika** and **Zandile Mqwathi** discuss drama processes employed to address mental health and promote wellbeing in South Africa. Finally, **Yi-Chen Wu** unpacks her experience collaborating with a woman with cerebral palsy and the woman's performance of her autobiographical memory.

The second section features a pair of critically reflective articles with recommendations for practitioners and researchers. **Alyssa Digges** advocates for a mental health and wellness curriculum for students in actor training programs. **Teresa A. Fisher** analyzes failures in a theatre for health project, specifically looking at the facilitator's role in such a project.

The final pair of articles look to examine existing practice and repertoire. **William Pinchin** connects Jung's collective unconscious theory and Lecoq's understanding of a universal poetic sense, reevaluating the neutral mask. Finally, **Majeed Mohammed Midhin** and **Samer Abid Rasheed Farhan** interrogate the healing power of theatre through a discussion of contemporary prison theatre praxis and the representations made in Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good.*

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue (Volume 7, Issue 1) will focus on articles under our general headings (drama in education, applied theatre, and theatre for young audiences) looking to engage members of the Educational Theatre field who may or may not have been present at the Forum yet want to contribute to the ongoing dialogue: where have we been and where are we going? That issue will publish in early 2020. Thereafter, look to the Program in Educational Theatre at NYU for the 2020 Forum on Humanities and the Arts, the Verbatim Performance Lab, and Volume 7, Issue 2 of *ArtsPraxis* which will feature articles on Humanities and the Arts (both from the forum and wider Educational Theatre community).

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American Alliance for Theatre and Education. (2019). AATE 2019 Conference: August 1-5, 2019.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan P. Jones is a graduate from the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University, where he earned both an M.A. and a Ph.D. He conducted his doctoral field research in fall 2013 and in spring of 2014 he completed his dissertation, *Drama Integration: Training Teachers to Use Process Drama in English Language Arts, Social Studies, and World Languages*. He received an additional M.A. in English at National University and his B.A. in Liberal Arts from the NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Jonathan has conducted drama workshops in and around New York City, London, and Los Angeles in schools and prisons. He is certified to teach English 6-12 in the state of California, where he taught Theatre and English for five years at North Hollywood High School and was honored with The Inspirational Educator Award by Universal Studios in 2006. In 2008, he was awarded a fellowship through the National

Endowment for the Humanities and participated in the Teaching Shakespeare Institute at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. Currently, Jonathan is an administrator, faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at NYU Steinhardt. In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, he teaches Fundamentals of Speech and Introduction to Theatre at The Borough of Manhattan Community College.

Jonathan's directing credits include *Hamlet, Twelfth Night, Julius Caesar, Elsewhere in Elsinore, Dorothy Rides the Rainbow, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Bye Bye Birdie, The Laramie Project, Grease, Little Shop of Horrors*, and *West Side Story*. Assistant directing includes *Woyzeck* and *The Crucible*. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, Bord Gáis Energy Theatre in Dublin, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Production credits include co-producing a staged-reading of a new musical, *The Throwbacks*, at the New York Musical Theatre Festival and serving as assistant production manager and occasionally as stage director for the New York City Gay Men's Chorus since 2014, most recently directing *Quiet No More: A Celebration of Stonewall* at Carnegie Hall for World Pride, 2019.

Recent publications include *Paradigms and Possibilities: A Festschrift in Honor of Philip Taylor* (2019) and Education at Roundabout: It's about Turning Classrooms into Theatres and the Theatre into a Classroom (with Jennifer DiBella and Mitch Matteson) in *Education and Theatres: Beyond the Four Walls* (edited by Michael Finneran and Michael Anderson; 2019).

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The Flexible Performer in Applied Theatre: In-hospital Interaction with Captain Starlight

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Australian non-profit organisation the Starlight Children's Foundation employs professional performers to play the role of Captain Starlight in order to distract, entertain, and interact with children and young people in hospital. Drawing from the author's experience working for the organisation, it will provide an overview of Starlight's programs, before locating the Captain Starlight program within the field of Applied Theatre, and then describing how theories of clowning, improvisation, and theatrical performance are conceptualised and practised within that program. It then presents an account of a moment of performance, before arguing that the approach adopted by Captain Starlight bears much in common with the process of 'flexible performance' identified by Tim Fitzpatrick in the commedia dell'arte*. Ultimately, this paper finds that by generating performance in this manner, Captain Starlight creates an interactive space for children and young people to exercise their agency within the hospital setting.*

INTRODUCTION

Every year, approximately 3.8 million children access hospital services in Australia (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). Of these, almost 1 million will face lengthy admissions with invasive, and often painful procedures, separation from familial and social networks, and limited opportunities to exercise their freedom and independence (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). Such experiences have been shown to be traumatic for children and young people, with outcomes such as separation anxiety, sleep disturbances, emotional disorders, hyperactivity, and aggression observed to persist for months, and even years (Mazurek Melnyk, 2000).

In Australia, the Children and Young People's Rights in Health Care Services Charter[1] has been developed to provide guidance to service providers, in order to ensure that 'children and young people receive healthcare that is both appropriate and acceptable to them and to their families' (Children's Hospitals Australasia & The Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare, 2017). The Charter recognises that 'children and young people experience illness, injury, and disability in a different way from adults' and as such, are 'entitled to special care and support' (Children's Hospitals Australasia & The Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare, 2017). It recognises that every child has the right to 'consideration of their best interests[,] to express their views[,] to respect for themselves as a whole person[,] to participate in decision-making and, […] to participate in education, play, creative activities and recreation' (Children's Hospitals Australasia & The Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare, 2017).

It is this latter point which is addressed through the work of Australian non-profit the Starlight Children's Foundation (Starlight). This article will explore how Starlight uses professional, costumed performers known as Captain Starlight to entertain children, with the aim of improving their hospital experience. It will argue that through a unique approach to interactive performance, these performers recognise the agency of children in an environment where they traditionally have very little.

[1] Henceforth referred to as The Charter.

THE STARLIGHT CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA

The Starlight Children's Foundation was established as a registered charity in Australia in 1988 with the aim of 'brightening the lives of seriously ill children and their families' (2019). Like its namesake organisations in the United Kingdom and North America, in Australia Starlight runs a range of programs that cater to the needs of children in healthcare services, including a wish granting program for children who are seriously ill, one-of-a-kind experience programs, and making entertainment devices available in major paediatric hospitals. However, unlike its UK and US counterparts, Starlight in Australia delivers two major programs that utilise trained performers.[2] The first of these, the Starlight Express Room, is a dedicated non-medical space within each major paediatric hospital in Australia (nine in total), that children and families can visit to play with toys, video games, participate in arts and craft activities, watch movies and music videos, and interact with Captain Starlight. The Captain Starlight program, the second major program and focus of this article, uses trained performers to lead the activity in the Starlight Express Room seven days a week, to deliver a daily television program through an internal hospital channel, and to visit children on wards and in clinics who are too sick, or otherwise unable to come to the Starlight Express Room.

The work of the Captain Starlight program can be located within the field of Applied Theatre, defined broadly by Baxter and Low as 'theatre-making with, for and by particular groups of people and in locations that are not traditionally associated with theatre' (2017, p. 5). In this regard, Applied Theatre shares much in common with Community Performance, described by Petra Kuppers as a mode of performance that is

> not individually authored: the end product, if it comes into existence, is not predetermined by an artist who directs people toward this goal. Instead, the outcome is (relatively) open, maybe within a thematic field opened up by the facilitator, but full of spaces and times for people to create their own expressive material. (2019, p. 4)

[2] The Starlight Children's Foundation (UK) conducted an 18-month pilot of the Captain Starlight program using Australian Captains, ending in 2018. This pilot is currently under review.

Several recent studies have highlighted the benefits of using Applied Theatre in health care settings (Baxter & Low 2017; Brodzinski 2010), with Sextou and Hall in particular identifying theatre as 'a specialized input into hospital life', providing children with 'entertainment, distraction from the experience of illness and relaxation as an important strategy of their well-being' (2015, p. 81). Such benefits reflect the aims of the Captain Starlight program, as I will now explain.

Figure 1. Captain Starlight in the Starlight Express Room. Courtesy of the Starlight Children's Foundation.

WHO IS CAPTAIN STARLIGHT?

Captain Starlight is a carefully developed persona with an associated mythology; an alien from outer space who flies a rocket ship down to Earth every day, parking it on the roof of metropolitan paediatric hospitals in order to capture the imaginations of sick children and to help to create a 'healing environment filled with entertainment, fun, laughter and joy', distracting children from 'the pain, fear and boredom that hospitalisation brings' (Starlight Children's Foundation, 2019a). Captain Starlights are usually recruited to work in specific teams, operating out of individual Starlight Express Rooms located in major

paediatric hospitals in Australia's capital cities. It is not uncommon for an individual Captain Starlight to work in the same hospital day-in, day-out, which means they are more likely to have repeat interactions with children experiencing lengthier admissions. As such, the repertoire of material performed runs the risk of becoming familiar or stale to children who encounter Captain Starlight every day. This challenge, of bringing a fresh performance to the same audience every day, coupled with the responsibility of running the Starlight Express Room space, makes unique demands of the performers who play the role of Captain Starlight.

Whilst the first Captain Starlight employed in 1991 was a teacher, the organisation quickly became aware that additional skills were required in order to deliver the program as it had initially been conceived. Today, Starlight employs over 180 Captains Australia-wide, and when recruiting, seeks individuals with training or experience in theatre and performance. The process includes standard recruiting practises such as phone interview, psychological evaluation, and face-to-face interview. However, in order to be successful in their application with Starlight, would-be Captains also have to pass through a series of auditions which require them to deliver a prepared performance, lead a child-appropriate activity, as well as participating in paired and group improvisations. Such a process is designed to assess applicants against criteria such as 'performance expertise, […] sensitivity and excellent interpersonal skills [and] ability to work as part of a cohesive team' (Starlight Children's Foundation, 2019a).

HOW IS PERFORMANCE UNDERSTOOD WITHIN THE CAPTAIN STARLIGHT PROGRAM?

Once an individual is successful in their application to become a Captain Starlight, they participate in an education process that augments on-the-job training with specific, intensive skills development. This training is designed to prepare Captains to execute the 'Performance Matrix' (Figure 2), an approach to performance in hospital spaces, such as wards or clinics, which ensures that each moment of performance is aligned with the aims of the Captain Starlight program, and the goals of the organisation (Starlight Children's Foundation, 2019b). The elements comprising the

Performance Matrix are 'Performance Fundamentals', 'Sensitivity', 'Child Centred Experience', 'Positive Disruption', and 'Pair-

Figure 2. The Performance Matrix. Courtesy of the Starlight Children's Foundation.

work', with each of these composed of individual sub-elements.

The Creative Director of the Captain Starlight program, Jono Brand, explains that any Captain Starlight performance may include 'in

particular clowning—simple, naïve clown—improvisation, and theatre as well. With the Captain Starlight program, we borrow a lot of our philosophies from those particular styles of performance' (personal communication, February 27, 2019). This is reflected in the Performance Fundamentals node of the matrix, with concepts such as 'accepts offers' and 'finds the game' (Starlight Children's Foundation, 2019b) familiar to the style of improvisation attributed to pioneers Viola Spolin and Del Close and practiced at well-known schools such as Upright Citizens Brigade and Second City in the United States, whose influence has spread to training institutions and improvisation communities all over the world. Similarly, concepts such as 'naivete' and 'the flop' (Starlight Children's Foundation, 2019b) are drawn from clown theory, particularly as practised by Jacques Lecoq:

> The clown is the person who flops, who messes up his turn, and, by so doing, gives his audience a sense of superiority. Through his failure he reveals his profoundly human nature, which moves us and makes us laugh. (Lecoq, 2018, p. 156)

The use of this style of performance is a cornerstone of Captain Starlight's approach and assists Captains in achieving the aims of the Child-Centred Experience node of the Performance Matrix. Brand explains the importance of the flop in the hospital environment: 'It's empowering for a child to feel like they've got more knowledge than an adult, especially given their interactions with doctors, where they're often at quite low status' (personal communication, February 27, 2019). Indeed, on my first day as a Captain Starlight some seven years ago, Brand—who trained me—explained that most of what he did as Captain Starlight was (simply) play low status, and said that whenever he was in doubt, he would just take his glasses off and pretend they were a telephone. By drawing upon the principles of clowning, particularly on the concept of naivete, Captain Starlight is also able to achieve the goal of Positive Disruption in performance. Brand explains that this concept of naivete

> fits really well with the mythology of Captain Starlight. The character themselves comes from Planet Starlight, they're here on earth with not that much knowledge, trying to figure out how the

> world works with optimism and positivity and curiosity. (personal communication, February 27, 2019)

Although Captains have individual nicknames for ease of identification—such as Captain Gigantor, Captain Side Pony, or Captain Dash—and possess unique traits and characteristics, all Captains share a common mythology that, as I will argue later in this paper, is one of the key elements drawn upon in their generation of performance.

The influence of improvisation and clowning techniques is also evident in the way Captain Starlight observes the Sensitivity node of the Performance Matrix. This is of vital importance in the hospital setting, for obvious reasons. On any given day a Captain Starlight might encounter in excess of a hundred different children and their families, from diverse backgrounds, at different stages of treatment for innumerable illnesses or injuries. As such, their performance environment is constantly in flux, with audience needs changing on a moment by moment basis. Like the clown who must establish contact with her audience and allow her performance to be influenced by their response (Lecoq, 2018, p. 157), Brand explains that in an environment such as this, Captains must maintain a constant connection with their audience, and one another:

> They're watching very keenly for any cues from the audience, as in the child, but they're also staying really connected with each other. Which is really important in a hospital because you've got two sets of eyes there, one of you might see something that the other doesn't see that might lend itself to a change in interaction, or even to think, "I probably shouldn't be here right now". (personal communication, February 27, 2019)

Here Brand also touches upon the final node of the Performance Matrix, Pairwork, which requires Captains to be 'sensitive to their fellow performer[,] open to new ideas and just running with it' (personal communication, February 27, 2019). Perhaps the most profound influence on Captain Starlight's approach to pairwork is the concept of 'major and minor' attributed to the teaching of Philippe Gaulier, and reflected in LeCoq's teachings on the relationship between the 'whiteface' and 'Auguste' clowns, described by de Fallois:

> The beautiful dialogue between the white face and the auguste does not set at each other's throats the superior and the inferior, the executioner and the victim, the exploiter and the exploited. The two partners are at the same level. They are two equal forces, two principles one as positive as the other. The white face is no more superior to the auguste than thought is to action, or serenity to emotion. (as cited in Davison, 2008)

In practice, this 'beautiful dialogue' sees Captains maintaining a delicate balance from performance to performance—and within individual performances—as they routinely swap roles between major and minor, with the major taking the lead in an instance of performance, and the minor stepping back or creating space in order to provide support. Never explicitly stated, this balance is enacted and maintained through Captains' sensitivity to their audience and environment, and informed by what they interpret as most appropriate for any given situation.

Having provided an overview of how performance theories are conceptualised and practised in the Captain Starlight program, I will now provide a brief description of a Captain Starlight performance, in order to illustrate how this Performance Matrix is enacted.

A VISIT FROM CAPTAIN STARLIGHT

Captain Starlight carefully enters Leila's bay and whispers "would you like a visit?"

Leila nods, "yes."

"Oh, great!" Captain Starlight tiptoes over to Leila's bed. "Can I use this chair?" she asks, looking to Leila for permission.

"Mmm-hmm," Leila replies.

"And can I use this curtain?" she asks again.

"Mmm-hmm."

"I can?" Captain Starlight smiles and tiptoes over to the curtain. She gently draws it across to separate Leila's bed from the adjacent bed, where another child is resting.

"Look at this beautiful backdrop," the second Captain says.

"It's amazing," Captain Starlight replies, "but I think it needs a Captain in this chair. May I?" she asks Leila.

"Mmm-hmm," Leila replies.

"Thank you," Captain Starlight slowly, gently, sits down in the chair. "Oh gosh, Earth chairs are so comfy" she remarks, a warm smile spreading across her face. "We're from Planet Starlight" she says to Leila, "and our chairs are made of things like marshmallows, which are very comfy, but sometimes a bit sticky."

"Yes," concurs the second Captain, nodding his head in solemn agreement. "Hey, what's on your beautiful backdrop Captain?"

"Oh," says Captain Starlight, sitting back and taking in the view (of the hospital curtain), "well, I'm pretty sure it's a …" she turns her head back to Leila, looking for approval "tropical … island … sunset?" she ventures.

"No," Leila replies.

"No, it's not a tropical island sunset. At all," says Captain Starlight, with a serious shake of the head. "I'm pretty sure it's … a palace."

"-Yeah," Leila interjects.

"It's a beautiful palace," states Captain Starlight.

"Oh, amazing," says the second Captain, "and you're the Queen, on your throne?"

"Am I the Queen?" Captain Starlight asks Leila.

"Yeah."

"I am the Queen, obviously. And you're the … ?" she looks to Leila, leaving a gap for Leila to fill.

"Princess," Leila replies.

*"You **are** the Princess. And Captain is the … ?"*

"Can I be the donkey?" the second Captain asks.

Leila giggles.

"Is Captain the royal donkey?" Captain Starlight asks her.

"Yep!"

“Oh yes, I’ve always wanted to be a royal donkey!” he exclaims with delight.

Captain Starlight stiffens her back, adopting a regal pose, and turns to face the second Captain. “Royal donkey, may I have my instrument please?”

“Oh yes, here you are your mad-” he stumbles over the word as he rushes to hand over the ukulele, “-madamejest, madamejesty.”

“Madamejesty,” Captain Starlight nods in approval. “Thank you very much your…”

“-Eeyore!” he erupts, seemingly involuntarily.

“-Donkeyness.”

Leila giggles again.

“Princess, I have a song that I have written just for you,” announces Captain Starlight.

“Well as the Royal Donkey I have to play along.”

“As does the Princess, of course. I’ve got your royal shaker here, you’re familiar with a shaker?”

“Mmm-hmm,” Leila replies.

“Of course she is, she’s a Princess,” states Captain Starlight. “There you go.” She reaches out and hands a shaker to Leila. “Ready?” she asks the second Captain.

“Ready,” he replies.

“Ready?” she asks Leila, who nods.

Captain Starlight then proceeds to play ‘A Banana Is A Banana’ by Australian children’s entertainer Justine Clarke, singing the lyrics as the second Captain and Leila keep the beat with egg-shaped shakers. Captain Starlight is smiling, her kind eyes wide as she watches Leila, making sure the performance is okay. Her voice is bright, but soft enough so as not to disturb the child in the adjacent bed. When the song finishes the Captains and Leila give each other a gentle round of applause, with Captain Starlight applauding Leila’s “amazing shaking”.

Figure 3. Captain Starlight interacts with Abbey, aged nine. Courtesy of the Starlight Children's Foundation.

ENACTING THE PERFORMANCE MATRIX

In this brief excerpt from a Captain Starlight performance,[3] we can identify elements from each node of the Performance Matrix, as outlined in the Captains' Playbook. Examples of these include:

- Performance Fundamentals: Throughout the performance, the Captains *accept offers* from one another, and from their audience, and constantly *check in* with the child, Leila, to ensure that permission to continue the performance is still in place.
- Sensitivity: The Captains demonstrate *spatial awareness*, and awareness of the *hospital environment* through their gentle movement and lowered voices and, recognising that this child

[3] This particular performance continued for some time, with the second Captain eventually adopting the role of major and generating a performance in response to a book that he found next to Leila's bed.

is perhaps shy, *tailor the performance* to her needs, as they interpret them.

- Child Centred Experience: The Captains facilitate *child-led engagement* by creating space within the performance for the child to contribute, allowing her to decide the setting of the performance, and her own role within that performance.
- Positive Disruption: Captain Starlight *positively reframes the hospital experience* by reimagining a hospital bay as a beautiful palace, inhabited by interesting characters.
- Pairwork: The Captains demonstrate exemplary awareness of the *dynamics of pairwork*, creating a performance around one Captain's proficiency with a ukulele, thus adopting *major and minor* roles, which they observe throughout the duration of the performance. (Starlight Children's Foundation, 2019b)

The above examples represent just a handful of elements from a performance that—although apparently simple—is complex, and deeply nuanced. Whilst there is no denying Captain Starlight provides a source of distraction from the trauma of the hospital environment, is a source of fun and excitement to the children who encounter them, and ensures that—as per The Charter—children have the right to 'participate in education, play, creative activities and recreation' (2017), I argue that the benefit of Captain Starlight goes far beyond this. Through their unique approach to performance—combining elements of clowning, improvisation, and theatre—Captain Starlight creates an interactive performance that makes space for children to contribute, and exercise their agency over the event itself, which has important consequences in an environment where the agency of children is often diminished. In order to demonstrate how Captain Starlight is able to create such a performance, I'll now introduce a model for analysing performance that I have found to be particularly useful.

THE ELEMENTS OF A FLEXIBLE CAPTAIN STARLIGHT PERFORMANCE

I have written previously (Ashford, 2018) about the suitability of the model of 'flexible performance' developed by Tim Fitzpatrick (1995) in his analysis of *commedia dell'arte*, to the task of understanding how

performance might be generated in interactive theatre. Fitzpatrick's model outlines 'a performance characterised by somewhat flexible accessing of prepatterned material stored in memory' (1995, p. 47), and as such, has much in common with that of a Captain Starlight performance, as I will now demonstrate.

Central to the Captain Starlight approach is the understanding that no two children are alike, and therefore, that no two performances should ever be the same. This requires that Captains are constantly generating performance in response to their audience, their environment, and any offers they might receive, as has already been explained. As such, Captain Starlight performances are not—nor could they ever be—scripted, but rather, are generated in the moment of performance. That is not to say that individual elements of a flexible performance such as this cannot be scripted. The use of the song 'A Banana is a Banana', by Captain Starlight is one such example. Like Henke, who observes the 'interaction between oral and literate media to be a hallmark of the commedia dell'arte' (2002, p. 31), Fitzpatrick does not locate flexible performance within a practice of 'free improvisation', pitted against 'tightly-scripted and directorially controlled performance', but rather in the 'mid range' between these poles, with the freedom to oscillate between the two (1995, p. 48).

Fitzpatrick defines flexible performance as:

> A mode of performance in which the performer, given the limits and possibilities concomitant with his/her role in the context of situation and the more or less explicit goals which he/she brings to this situation, has both the liberty to generate with some flexibility actions and words appropriate to the context, and also the resources to do so in a coherent, pertinent and acceptable way. (1995, p. 48)

Fitzpatrick stresses that flexible performance such as that observed in the *commedia dell'arte* should therefore not be considered 'a *type* of theatre, but a *process for generating* theatre, a process quite different to text-based processes' (1995, p. 59). Unlike tightly-scripted performance, where the degree of flexibility available is comparatively limited, the performer in the *commedia dell'arte* has the freedom to generate their performance through the 'structural interplay' between

the three performance elements available to them—role, resources, and goal—and is able to ‘roam around the triangle’ formed by these elements, leaning more heavily on any individual element—or combination of elements—based on their interpretation of the audience’s response to the unfolding performance (Fitzpatrick, 1995, p. 59). Such a schema can be applied to the performance described above, whereby the interplay between the elements of role (Captain Starlight, the mythology), personal resources (ability to play the ukulele), and outline (to create instances of positive disruption within the hospital environment), allows the Captains to generate a performance in response to their audience (Leila) (Fitzpatrick 1995, p. 59). In fact, this brief example is illustrative of the benefit of such a method of generating performance, in that it creates space for others—in this case the child, Leila—to contribute.

From the beginning of the performance, Captain Starlight ascertains that the child is shy, or not particularly responsive, and opts therefore to lean into the role point of the triangle. This allows the Captain not only to introduce herself, but also to introduce the mythology, which establishes the opportunity for curiosity and exploration, and invites the child to occupy a position of higher status within the interaction over the Captains, who appear to be impressed by a simple chair. The second Captain then uses a resource, the (presumably) stock line ‘what’s on your beautiful backdrop Captain?’, which leads to an interaction between Captain Starlight and Leila that allows the child to have input over the scene of the performance, in this case a palace. All the dialogue that follows is thus informed by this input, as the Captains work to generate their performance in response to Leila’s offer (they could never have envisaged before the performance commenced that they would be playing the role of a Queen, or donkey), and oriented towards achieving their goal: positive disruption. The song that follows—as has already been stated—is a prepared and rehearsed resource, however, again, Captain Starlight may not have known before she entered the room that she would be using it. Had the child the Captain encountered been boisterous, or more responsive, she may have opted instead for a different resource altogether, such as a magic or slapstick routine.

CONCLUSION

By generating performance in this manner—through the interplay between the elements of role, resources, and scenario—and in response to their audience's reaction, Captain Starlight creates a space for children and young people to contribute to the performance, and thus exercise their agency. Defined by Janet Murray as 'the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices' (1998, p. 126), Captain Starlight's recognition of the agency of children and young people in the hospital setting makes possible the realisation of 'the potential for experience in the aesthetic realm to have an influence on individual and community life' (Brodzinski 2010, p. 157). In a 2013 Social Return on Investment study of the Starlight Express Room program commissioned by Starlight and undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers, a number of key benefits to children, young people, their families, and the broader community were identified, including increased entertainment, reduced anxiety, less missed appointments, increased socialisation, and an improved workplace environment for services staff (2013). Further, PwC found that for every dollar invested in the Starlight Express Room program, the social and economic benefit to the community was more than quadruple that amount (Starlight Children's Foundation, 2013). Whilst it must be noted that this study did not explicitly focus on the Captain Starlight program, particularly the ward-based performance which has been analysed in this paper, the presence of Captain Starlight is instrumental in the success of the Starlight Express Room space, and in the organisation's ability to improve the experiences of children and young people accessing hospital services in Australia.

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"Where's Your Imagination?": Using the Social Model to Deconstruct Stereotypes about Diabetes on Stage

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ABSTRACT

Theater makers and educators often overlook harmful comments about diabetes that appear on stage or in dramatic literature. Artists and teachers do this because such comments express the normalized, yet stigmatizing, stereotypes about diabetes embedded in U.S. culture. These conflate individual behavior, obesity and inactive lifestyle with diabetes (Bock 2012) and overlook the important social forces that impact the diabetic body. This paper argues that to expand our view and to help us better understand the lived experiences of people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes, we need to include social forces in our narratives. To this end, I analyze two case studies, a 2018 production of Robbie McCauley's Sugar and the published script for Irma Mayorga and Virginia Grise's The Panza Monologues (2014). I demonstrate how these theatre makers point to the social structures that have influenced diabetic bodies in their communities. Theater educators can use these

performance texts in the classroom for a more nuanced exploration of diabetes on stage. In the discussion section, I encourage artists and educators to engage historical context, economic factors, and the voices in the room to encourage critical thinking around this specific chronic illness, and around health in general.

INTRODUCTION

In January 2018, I was the teaching assistant for a musical theater course at the University of Colorado Boulder. After ten days of online instruction, the class met in New York City to study musical theater on Broadway. One of the shows on our schedule was *Waitress*, a musical about a woman working in a diner who dreams of leaving her abusive husband. In one scene, the elderly owner of the diner visits her in the hospital. He says, “I bought you a card in the gift shop downstairs. It’s silly and flowery and almost gave me diabetes” (Nelson, 2016, p. 94). Maybe it was because I was already writing my dissertation on representations of diabetes in U.S. theater, but when I walked out of the show, I was eager to discuss this remark with students. Much to my surprise, no one else had even registered the mention of diabetes on stage.

Later that spring, I taught a course on American Theatre. I had assigned Lynn Nottage’s award winning drama *Sweat*, a play about economic decline in a U.S. steel town between 2000 and 2008. In Act One, two characters discuss their future careers at the steel factory. One intends to leave the mill to become a teacher. The other criticizes this dream and shares his intentions to stay and eventually “buy a condo at Myrtle Beach, open a Dunkin’ Donuts” (Nottage, 2015, p. 32). The first character responds, “Punch in, punch out, and at the end of the day you end up with a box of donuts and diabetes. My man, where’s your imagination?” (Nottage, 2015, p. 32). Since I have type 1 diabetes, this comment immediately stood out to me. It flattened any distinction between types of diabetes. The comment implied a link between diabetes and an unimaginative, economically stagnant life. However, my students needed guidance to consider this statement worthy of analysis.

The two scenes from *Waitress* and *Sweat* are examples of the preconceived notions and oversimplifications of diabetes that commonly appear in our dramatic literature. My encounters with these texts took place in educational contexts, where conversation and critical analysis could have taken place. But stereotypes about diabetes are so deeply embedded in our culture that it can be difficult to point them out and ask students to think critically about them. As theater artists, we have a role to play in adding specificity and nuance to our inclusion of diabetes on stage. As theater educators, we have a responsibility to add cultural and historical context to disrupt the transmission of harmful stereotypes and misinformation perpetuated by these scenes.

To demonstrate how theater artists can deepen our understanding of diabetes, this essay analyzes two examples of diabetes on stage, Robbie McCauley's solo-performance piece *Sugar* (2018) and Virginia Grise & Irma Mayorga's *The Panza Monologues* (2014). Both encourage us to re-imagine our theatrical expressions and our classroom discussions of diabetes. Such awareness is imperative if we aim to understand and express the humanity of people with this condition and to deconstruct the stereotypes of diabetes that abound in U.S. culture.

DIABETES 101

The World Health Organization identifies diabetes as a chronic disease, which manifests in four different ways: type 1, type 2, gestational, and pre-diabetes. Diabetes has to do with one of our most fundamental human needs: to eat food and convert that food into energy for our cells to function. When we eat carbohydrates, protein, or fat, these chemical compounds become sources of growth and energy. When our bodies break down carbohydrates, they turn it into sugar in the blood stream. Our pancreas has cells called beta cells which sense a rise in blood sugar levels and release a hormone called insulin. Insulin opens cells to store or use the glucose as energy.

All types of diabetes result from a combination of genetic and environmental factors that cause something to go wrong with insulin production and blood sugar regulation. For the person with type 1 diabetes, the environmental factor is usually a virus that causes the

immune system to go into action. The genetic factor is the coding that tells the immune system to go into overdrive and destroy the beta cells that make insulin. Once the immune system has destroyed the beta cells, the body of a type 1 diabetic does not produce any insulin on its own, which means their cells cannot access glucose to use for energy. In order to stay alive, this person must intake insulin from an external source.

People with type 2 diabetes are also concerned with blood sugar regulation. The problem for people developing type 2 diabetes is that while their cells still produce insulin, their bodies are not sensitive to the message insulin delivers. The term for a decrease in insulin sensitivity is “pre-diabetes,” which is measured by a slightly higher-than-average blood glucose level. If a person’s cells are not sensitive to the message insulin is delivering, their body will begin to overproduce insulin to get the message to the cells to open and intake glucose. When a person’s beta cells become exhausted, their function declines, blood sugar levels remain high, and then a person develops type 2 diabetes. Again, a complex interplay of genetic and environmental factors causes type 2 diabetes. The genetic component refers to the family history of type 2 diabetes. Environment factors often include weight, diet, and exercise habits.

KEY TERMS: THE MEDICAL AND SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The above explanation of diabetes, which focused on the biological events, is a medical model view of diabetes. The medical model of disability views an impairment in body function as a biological issue that deserves a cure. In seeking a cure, individuals who view impairment through the medical model typically become hyper-focused on the individual, their biology, and the perception of biological malfunction. Chronic illnesses have a fraught relationship with the medical model. For example, some disability rights activists often criticize the medical model for thinking of disabled people as “sick, diseased, ill people” (Wendell, 2001, pp. 18) when they argue that they do *not* need a cure. However, some people with disabilities like chronic illnesses do identify as “sick, diseased, and ill,” and sincerely desire a cure (Wendell, 2001, pp. 18). I argue that people with diabetes are in the latter category, and would benefit from medical intervention. Yet, I

contend that narrowly viewing diabetes through the medical model has resulted in the negative stereotypes we encounter about diabetes.

Physicians in the 19th and 20th century, before and after the discovery of insulin in 1921, framed all types of diabetes as a disease that one must manage through careful behavior regulation. Disciplined regulation of behavior, including taking insulin doses, has the most direct impact on the otherwise malfunctioning biology. In this logic, the impact of diabetes in one's life is primary an issue of self-control. The individual who has chosen to be "out-of-control" is understood to be responsible for the negative consequences of their behavior. Frequently, theatrical depictions of diabetes on stage frame the narrative in terms of control with sugar, a person getting out of control, and a non-diabetic person's role in saving them in a crisis (Ferguson 2010).

This view--that one's individual behaviors and issues with self-control associated with diabetes--does not recognize the myriad social and systemic factors that impact the diabetic body. While environmental factors like weight, diet, and exercise habits often appear to be determined by personal choice and self-control, the medical community is recognizing the complex social and cultural forces that also shape these areas (Black 2002). For example, the American Diabetes Association (2018) reported that from 2002 to 2013, the cost of insulin nearly tripled. While insurance coverage varies, not every person with diabetes has insurance. Additionally, while physicians typically recognize diet and exercise as the primary factors influencing blood sugar levels, new research suggests that "any number of circumstances and situations can raise blood glucose levels, such as the lived experience of social stratification and its emotional dimensions" (Rock, 2005, p. 480). Rather than thinking of diet and exercise as voluntary failures of self-discipline, qualitative social scientist Melanie Rock suggests "the underlying causes behind suboptimal diets and physical activity levels vary greatly, many of them boil down to the historical structuring of inequality" (p. 480). Epidemiologist Sandra Black (2002) confirms that type 2 diabetes impacts a higher rate of women, people of color, elderly, and low-income U.S. adults (p. 543). These are only a small sample of the social factors at play that are overlooked when portraying diabetes in terms of the individual's behavior and poor lifestyle choices.

I contend that theater artists and educators must make and teach theater with an awareness of the social forces that impact people with diabetes. I employ the “social model of disability,” which views disability not as a biological fact, but as “a culturally and historically specific phenomenon” (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 195). The primary goal of the social model of disability is to view disability not as a biological impairment in need of a cure, but rather to critique the social world which makes certain impairments disabling (Shakespeare 2010). The social model focuses on bias in institutions, policy, and the built environment that excludes participation from individuals with impairments.

Some scholars have reservations about applying the social model of disability to chronic illnesses. The fear is that focusing on the built environments and prejudices would “reduce attention to those disabled people whose bodies are highly medicalized” (Wendell, 2001, p. 18). In the specific example of people with diabetes, our bodies are under the threat of death or serious long-term consequences without medical intervention. Still, we undoubtedly overlook significant factors that impact medicalization when we do not utilize the social model. In so far as social and cultural stigmas shape our understandings of diabetes (Bock, 2015), media messages, including those found in theater, impact whether a person seeks and continues treatment for a chronic illness (Stanhope and Henwood, 2014). This reality means the works of artists like Robbie McCauley and Virginia Grise & Irma Mayorga are necessary to expand and shift our dialogue about diabetes on stages and in classrooms.

CASE STUDY #1: ROBBIE MCCAULEY’S *SUGAR* AT NEW YORK LIVE ARTS (2018)

Sugar is a one-woman show written and performed by Robbie McCauley, a black woman who has type 1 diabetes. McCauley began developing *Sugar* in 2006 at Ohio State University after a colleague suggested she write about her experience with diabetes. McCauley resisted talking about her diabetes, which in her style of working was a sign to go towards it: “I feel that if I’m resisting something, it must be something I need to attend to. I tell my students, if you’re resisting, then go towards it. And I thought, ‘I’m doing the same thing’”

(McCauley and Brookner, 2017). It was not long until McCauley drew a connection between her own relationship with sugar and sugar's historical legacy in the modern world (Mintz, 1985). Sugar was responsible for a surge in the transatlantic slave trade when demand for sugar in Europe increased (Mintz, 1985). Visual artists like Kara Walker point to the "unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World" (Als, 2014). As a theater artist, McCauley used her voice and her body to explore the role of sugar in her experience with type 1 diabetes, the role of sugar in her community, and the larger historical context of sugar's role increasing the transatlantic slave trade.

Like much of McCauley's previous work, *Sugar* is a continually evolving performance text that has changed other the years and changes based on specific audience responses (Nymann, 1999). There is a published "Work-in-Progress" version of *Sugar* in *Solo/Black/ Woman* (2014), which educators can use to invite students to engage with this work into their classrooms. In February 2018, McCauley presented *Sugar* at New York Live Arts. I was able to attend two performances of that production, and I rely on that viewing for the following analysis of a few specific scenes in the performance.

In one passage that explores the impact of diabetes on her community, McCauley shared a story about a family member. McCauley said that this person was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, and then fell in love with Krispy Kreme donuts. McCauley has taken a towel and was wiping chalk marks off the ground. She paused to shout, "A fucking Krispy Kreme! With all the sugar and grease. Who puts that in poor neighborhoods?" McCauley's outburst implicated the social system known as food oppression. Andrea Freeman (2007) writes that food oppression occurs when "targeted marketing, infiltration into schools, government subsides, and federal food policy each play a significant role in denying inner-city people of color access to healthy food" (p. 2221).

In another scene, McCauley strategically used her body to create images that link her personal experiences with diabetes to the historical brutalities of slavery. This climactic scene began shortly after the story about a family member and Krispy Kreme. McCauley went over to a bundle of sugarcane on the ground. She tried to lift the sugar, but struggled do so. Chauncey Moore, the piano player on stage with

her, came over to lift the bundle and place it on her back. Once the sugar was there, McCauley moved across the stage while trying to deliver a set of lines. Scenes like this allow for “the traumas of history [to] become implicated in the traumas of living with a chronic illness” (Bock, 2015, p.130).

This image placed McCauley’s body within two narratives: her own journey carrying the burden of diabetes, and the labor that black bodies endured when enslaved and working to produce sugar. McCauley’s body carried the weight of her diabetes in the historical context of the transatlantic slave trade, of which sugar was a staple. Given the Krispy Kreme reference, McCauley also placed diabetes in the context of contemporary capitalism where low-income communities cannot access or afford to spend more money to avoid cheap, abundant high-fructose corn syrup and fast food (Gritz 2017; Freeman 2007). McCauley challenged the narratives of personal responsibility and blame in relation to diabetes, instead framing it within historical context and socioeconomic structures. She helped the audience understand that sugar's history is carried in the bodies of people with diabetes today.

CASE STUDY #2: *THE PANZA MONOLOUGES* BY VIRGINIA GRISE & IRMA MAYORGA (SECOND EDITION, 2014)

Grise and Mayorga structured *The Panza Monologues* (2014) similarly to Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*, with each monologue articulated from the viewpoint of a specific body part. Instead of giving the vagina a voice as Ensler does, Grise & Mayorga focus on the “panza,” the Spanish word for “belly” (Grise, 2014, p.xxiii). In the Introduction, Mayorga describes how this piece developed though conversations with co-workers, namely other Tejana women, who were working together at the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in San Antonio. In Mayorga’s reflection of their time together, she recalls looking:

> down our center’s street lined only with fast-food options and thought about the composition of the city’s working class neighborhoods, usually Mexican American or African American residents (where fast food corporations flourished) …we realized,

> we had panzas, lots of *panzas*, but other factors were also implicated in how they came to be. We each tried to break it down, sort it out: personally, systemically, racially, culturally, and historically. (Grise, 2014, p. 9-10)

The issue of body composition and health status is far more complex than individual poor choices. While all the monologues examine the conditions of the Tejana body, two monologues specifically discuss diabetes.

These monologues titled “My Sister’s Panza” and “Noticias” do not use diabetes as a shortcut to signal other discrediting qualities of the character; instead, they explicitly critique the economic and historical construction of San Antonio that produces Latinx bodies with diabetes. The theater artists put diabetes in a new context that complicates the oversimplified conflation of type 2 diabetes, obesity, and poor lifestyle (Bock 2012).

“Noticias” is not a monologue *per se*, but a scene during which multiple headlines from the *San Antonio Express-News* rotate on a screen while a woman dances the *zapateado* in the foreground. *Zapateado,* meaning “heel work,” is a section of the *son,* which is a combination of the waltz and fandango (Royce, 1998). Another way to describe the *zapateado* is as an individual dance where one keeps their feet close together and “literally jumps side to side” (Tiburcio, 2018). The stage directions of “Noticias” describe a dancer moving center stage to perform a “*traditional* zapateado- *a percussive dance, the heartbeat of Mexican son*” (pp. 65). According to the stage directions, the dancer “*pounds out rhythms with her feet on a wooden* tarima *(platform) that echo throughout the theater*” (p. 65). After this introduction to “Noticias,” then the headlines from the *San Antonio Express-News* rotate across a screen in the background during the dance (Grise, 2014, p. 65).

The statistics rotating across the screen reveal the interconnectedness of economic and racial disparities when it comes to topics like weight and type 2 diabetes. The screen display facts like “Study shows 31.1% of Alamo City residents are obese” and “More than 30% of Hispanic children across the country are overweight, compared with 25% of Anglo children” (Grise, 2014, p. 65). Some statistics point to economic disparities: “In 2000, more than half of

Texas Hispanics had less than a high school education. Less than 9% had a college degree, and the income for Hispanics . . . was two-thirds what it was for Anglos” (Grise, 2014, p. 66). Other statistics critique the lay out of the city itself, “Living in sprawl can increase your spread—those in compact counties weigh up to 6 pounds less” (Grise, 2014, p. 66).

This scene encapsulated the conundrum these Tejana women experience in the context of these problematic realities in San Antonio. In the Introduction to the text, Grise and Mayorga point to a contradiction they experience between having agency over their bodies while also being influenced by social forces that impact their weight. Mayorga writes that “as smart women, we could have made better choices all around,” yet, “the intense pressure of time, geography, economics, and the structure of our working day often derailed our best intentions” (p. 9). The image of the *zapateado* dancer pounding her heels while these statistics rotate across the screen illustrates the efforts these women apply to their bodies to change their weight, while unfair contextual realities exist in the background.

The main goal of this monologue is to deconstruct the assumption that type 2 diabetes is merely the result of the moral failings of an individual. This scene depicts a community affected by many complex socio-economic factors that contribute to health issues. Mayorga describes the complex choices that she, her co-workers, and other Latinx people in San Antonio make around diet as situated in multi-layered geographical and economic structures. In fact, weight specifically “come[s] not only by way of personal choices but also by way of generations of struggle to negotiate racism and discrimination that have forced people to make choices that are driven by adaptations to survive” (p. 125-126). As Mayorga states, it is in the broader understanding of contributing factors afforded by the incorporation of the social model of disability, rather than purely biological, that we engage in meaningful conversation about diabetes and its impacts on people’s lives.

DISCUSSION: MAKE IT INTERSECTIONAL

These two pieces of theater demonstrate a more complex engagement with diabetes than the stereotypical comments about diabetes that we

are accustomed to hearing. These artists use the presence of the body to locate diabetes within broader historical, economic, and cultural histories that influence people with diabetes. I suggest three ways that artists and educators can encourage an intersectional perspective towards diabetes when they engage it on stage or in the classroom.

Historical Context

Artists and educators cannot understand diabetes in a contextual vacuum. In the spirit of intersectionality, we must consider the time, place, and identities that impact a person's experience with diabetes. For example, as situated in the history of the slave trade and sugar cultivation. While physicians have recognized the biological symptoms of diabetes since the sixteenth century B.C. (Feudtner, 2003), the experience of people with diabetes has changed over time. This has happened as physicians learned more about diabetes, and the available treatments for diabetes have changed radically over time.

Economic Context

The issue of a person's food choices, weight, and exercise routines are all profoundly related to their class status (Freeman 2007). In order to deconstruct classist stereotypes, artists and educators must consider the relationship between diabetes and socio-economic class. Class and income have a broad influence on issues such as access to health care, food, and food choices. This truth also influences the global conversation about diabetes since "diabetes is strongly associated with socio-economic transition; the prevalence of diabetes in the developed countries (6.2%) is almost double that in the developing countries (3.5%)" (Black 2002). As other countries across the globe, namely India and China, face rising rates of diabetes, we must consider the relationship between income, class, and diabetes.

Fighting Racism: Voices in the Conversation

It is significant and intentional that both performance texts in this paper were created and performed by women of color. When diabetes has a disproportionate impact on people of color (Black 2002), their voices are imperative in shaping narratives about diabetes. While stereotypes about diabetes emphasize "poor lifestyle," these artistic expressions

point to the broader racist contexts which also contribute to the existence and experience of diabetic bodies. This racism can be difficult to see even within the medical community. For example, the Mayo Clinic includes “race” in their list of risk factors for type 2 diabetes, yet they also observe that it is “unclear why, people of certain races—including black, Hispanic, American Indian and Asian-American people—are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes than white people are.” Since race itself is not a biological fact but a social construction of the modern world (Haney-López, 1996), systemic racism is relevant in our understanding why there are higher rates of diabetes in marginalized populations. These artists encourage audiences to look consider these factors while also utilizing aesthetics from their cultural heritage to examine diabetes in their communities. This action is in line with physicians’ recommendations that conversations about diabetes be culturally appropriate (Black 2002). These aesthetic choices and vernacular theorizing (Bock 2015) about diabetes are vital to represent and communicate with different communities in an appropriate way.

CONCLUSION

These case studies are examples of theatrical strategies that represent a non-visible illness, usually steeped in stigma, in new ways. These techniques can assist artists and audiences to go beyond the typical stereotypes about diabetes, which usually imply that diabetes is the result of individual and voluntary poor choices. McCauley places her body in a historical landscape, while in the monologue “Noticias,” Mayorga & Grise use the presentation of facts and dance to challenge the beliefs held by the audience. As artists and audience members, we need a robust and careful use of both the medical and social model of disability to understand diabetic bodies and reimagine our discourse about them. Otherwise, we are left with incomplete pictures and dehumanizing stereotypes. Let us learn from these women and reconsider our stories and theatrical expressions of people living with diabetes.

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A Critical Autobiography: Examining the Impact of a Theatre-Making Process on a Theatre Practitioner's Identity Development

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article was to self-reflect on my process of writing, acting, and conversing with audiences about my full-length play, The Contract*, and to examine how this experience affected my personal attitude towards being gay. I am a playwright, actor and educator, with over twenty years of professional and educational theatre experience. I describe myself as Black, Christian and gay. Moreover, I wrote a play that explores the struggles of being both gay and Christian in the Black Church. Using critical autobiography as a research methodology, along with Paulo Freire's* Pedagogy of the Oppressed *as a theoretical framework, I explored the following question: While engaged in the theatre-making process for my play,* The Contract*, how was my identity as a gay man affected? As a result, I found the theatre to be a sacred space, where I could combat personal fear and internalized homophobia. Furthermore, the theatre-making process was*

instrumental in helping me come to terms with my sexuality, come out to others, and explain the dichotomy of being both gay and Christian.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2012, in Tallahassee, Florida, I was interviewed by a television reporter on the campus of Florida A&M University (FAMU). I agreed to this interview to promote my play, *The Contract*, which was being performed there in a black box theatre. The reporter, a middle-aged Black man, asked me my reasons for writing and presenting the play. Rather assuredly, I responded, "I wanted to 'come out.' I wanted to be able to have a venue to help explain to people the complexities of being gay and also being in love with God." Seven years later, watching a YouTube clip of that interview, I recognize that that level of awareness about my initial impetus for writing my play was not always consciously present throughout the theatre-making process. My level of conviction and confidence in outing myself on public television had come from a long journey. Being public and open about my sexuality, especially to a southern Christian audience, was not something—prior to developing *The Contract*—that I was prone to do. Something within me had changed, and for that reason, I wanted to know why.

The purpose of this article is to self-reflect on my process of writing, acting, and conversing with audiences about my full-length play, *The Contract*, and to examine how this experience affected my personal attitude towards being gay. I am a playwright, actor and educator, with over twenty years of professional and educational theatre experience. I describe myself as Black, Christian and gay. Moreover, I wrote a play that explores the struggles of being both gay and Christian in the Black Church. Using critical autobiography as a research methodology, along with Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as a theoretical framework, in this article, I shall examine the following question: While engaged in the theatre-making process for my play, *The Contract*, how was my identity as a gay man affected?

LITERATURE REVIEW

For decades, theatre has been strategically used as a means to fight

oppression (Boal, 1985; Bowles & Nadon, 2013), bring awareness to LGBT issues (Halverson, 2005; Paul, 2006), and reduce homophobia (Mulvey & Mandell, 2007). For example, in Susan V. Iverson and Christin Seher's (2014) study, "Using Theatre to Change Attitudes Toward Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Students," they investigated theatre's influence on a college campus, using pre- and post-show surveys to measure the impact a performance had on college students' attitudes towards LGBT issues. They found significant positive change in students' attitudes and the potential for inspired action. In Brad Vincent's (2005) study, he used questionnaires and interviews with college-aged gay men to learn about their experiences in elementary, middle and high school, and from his participants' narratives, Vincent crafted a performance script that he used as an educational tool to help school teachers, counselors, and administrators better understand how school policies, curriculum, and instruction affect homosexual students. Multiple researchers (Elsbree & Wong, 2007; Mulvey & Mandell, 2007; Pincus, 2001) have used Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project,* an interview/verbatim theatre play that describes a town's reaction to the 1998 murder of gay University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepherd, as a tool to discourage homophobia, embrace dialogue, and create awareness and acceptance of the LGBT community.

Theatre has been used to encourage audiences to imagine "how the world could be different and what our lives could be like if we acted in different ways" (Edmiston, 2000). To this day, contemporary playwrights, such as Geoffrey Nauffts (*Next Fall**)***, Cheryl West (*Before It Hits Home*), and Chris Urch (*The Rolling Stone**)***, continue to challenge the status quo with storytelling that breaks stereotypical narratives and digs deep to unearth hidden humanities. As Boal (1985) states, "Theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution" (p. 122).

As a theatre artist and educator, I am encouraged by scholars' interests in understanding theatre's impact on audiences' attitudes towards LGBT issues; however, I find a scarcity in scholar-practitioner research that investigates how theatre and the theatre-making process impacts theatre creators. Scholar practitioners Erica Halverson (2005) and Michelle Freire (2007) have both examined the impact of theatre on the identity development of young artists, who were engaged in

writing, crafting, and performing theatre about LGBT issues; however, the research focus was directed towards the students and not themselves. Presently, there is a lack of self-reflective scholarship that examines how playwrights, actors, designers, and directors, particularly of the LGBT community, perceive their own identity development after engaging in theatre-making processes that explores LGBT issues. For that purpose, I have employed critical autobiography, as a research design, to explore my research question.

CRITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS RESEARCH METHODOLOY

Critical autobiography is an emerging research methodology, grounded in narrative inquiry and critical theory, that allows researchers to make meaning out of human experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988; DuPreeze, 2008; Walker, 2017). With the primary focus of deconstructing one's identity development, critical autobiographical research engages the artist-researcher-teacher in "candid, personal examinations of key moments that teach the self about life" (Walker, 2017, p. 1902). In Anthony Walker's (2013) study, "Living a life of privilege," he used critical autobiography as a research design to unpack his development as a white male educator and to make sense of his racial identity. Using critical autobiography as a reflective means of inquiry, artists-researchers-teachers investigate how various social statuses have made themselves present throughout life and explore how one's knowledge of identity development can be used as an avenue to move beyond them (Walker, 2017, p. 1902).

In this article, I rely on Walker's guide, "Critical Autobiography as Research," to examine how my identity as a gay man has been affected by my involvement in the creation, performance, and discussion of my play, *The Contract*. I acknowledge some readers will find critical autobiographical research riddled with ethical dilemmas, as with qualitative research designs in general; still, there are particular concerns associated with this form of inquiry that bear need for discussion due to the researcher's close connection to the narrative. Walker (2017) discusses three such dilemmas—subjectivity, trustworthiness, and source. He states, "Narrative research itself is not ethically neutral" (p. 1903); instead, critical autobiography is designed to "empower individuals" with the potential to "transform the learning,

values, and identities of individuals, institutions, and greater society" (p. 1905). That said, I concede that playing the role of both researcher and participant distorts any line of perceived objectivity; however, objectivity is not the goal. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, "the contribution of a narrative inquiry is more often intended to be the creation of a new sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic than it is to yield a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field" (p. 42).

Autobiographers acknowledge their writings to be both biased and influenced, which is why they should be explanatory in nature (Godfrey, 2003). Walker (2017) admits that "critics of narrative inquiry question the trustworthiness of narrative as a research methodology due to stories not always seeming to reflect reality" (p. 1904). One's memory and interpretation can differ from person-to-person because narratives reflect the values and norms present in the storyteller's life (McAdams, 2001). Clements (1999) notes,

> Autobiography is 'first hand' in a way that biography cannot be; it is after all the work of the subject reflecting the agenda set by the autobiographer for his/her own purpose. Autobiography is problematic in that the subject may find it difficult to be objective about him/herself and, in viewing ourselves from the perspective of the present, it may be difficult to create oneself as one was in the past. (p. 24)

Still, various techniques can be employed to enhance trustworthiness, including member checking (Guba, 1981), searching for disconfirming evidence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), triangulation (Guba, 1981), and thick description (Geertz, 1973; Guba, 1981). For this inquiry, I used multiple data sources, including journals, video-taped performances, recorded television interviews posted on YouTube, and multiple drafts of my play. I member-checked portions of my narrative with two key witnesses to the events. (With their permission, I use their real first names.) I also took Conway's (1990) words into great consideration when he warned that we often manipulate memory to enhance our own self-image (p. 103), thus, pushing me to craft a narrative that I feel best describes more than a mere positive perspective of my life's events but rather an aligned content and context for critical examination.

Writing about one's life is not only, as Leggo (1997) suggests, recording, reporting, and repeating the lived story as known and written by the subject; instead, autobiography is also recoding, restorying, and restoring the lived story as unknown and unwritten by the subject. To do this, I turned to Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as a theoretical framework, to help me craft the narrative and make sense of my lived experience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Freire is widely known as the father of Popular Education. Born in Recife, Brazil in 1921, Freire witnessed the poverty, oppression, and dehumanization of Brazil's peasant class and began a quest to awaken their critical consciousness through literacy. As a critical pedagogue, he worked with the Brazilian poor, using teaching methods that encouraged critical inquiry and critical reflection. His work was seen as both dangerous and subversive by wealthy landowners and the Brazilian military, so much so that once the Brazilian military overthrew the government and seized power in 1964, Freire was jailed for his insurgent teaching (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 70).

Freire (1970) argues that education is power and it can be used for freedom or domination. In his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he awakens the reader's mind to the dehumanizing effects of oppression. He asserts that one of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge men's consciousness (p. 36). The power of oppression is so strong that it numbs one's natural ability to pose questions and challenge the status quo of the dominant culture. Kincheloe (2004) declares that the oppressed become so inundated by the ideologies of their oppressors that they come to see the world and themselves through the oppressor's eyes (p. 72). Marginalized people who have been continuously called *indigenous, savage, inferior,* or *barbaric* by the oppressor actually begin to believe in these labels and may often refer to themselves as such, reinforcing the oppressor's dominance.

Freire (1970) contends that oppressors use education as a tool to maintain their dominance within a society. Curriculum and teaching styles are framed in ways that validate the privileged while also

certifying the inferiority of students marginalized by social and economic factors (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 71). The oppressor thwarts any attempts to have students, especially those in marginalized areas, awaken their critical consciousness (or what Freire refers to as *conscientização*) to see reality as changeable. Therefore, the oppressor's educational preference for the masses is the banking concept. Freire coined the term *banking* to describe an educational process, which transforms students into mere depositories and teachers into depositors of information.

In this banking style, students simply receive, memorize, and regurgitate information back to the teacher, preferably the same manner in which it was deposited. Students are expected to refrain from asking challenging questions and simply embrace the curriculum of the all-knowing-teacher as empirical truth. Freire (1970) warns that students who accept this passive role imposed upon them are more likely to simply adapt to the world as is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (p. 58). This results in a submersion of students' consciousness and they feel a sense of hopelessness to change their oppressive situation. Using Freirean theories to ground my narrative and draw meaning from my experience, I will now share my story.

GAY AND GOD

I was three years old when I became keenly aware of my sexuality. Growing up in Moss Point, Mississippi and being raised in the Black Church, I struggled with being both gay and Christian, and I even went so far as to suppress and denounce my sexuality for the sake of my spirituality. From a young age, I involved myself heavily within my church, hoping that church would cure me of my sexual nature. I attended church almost every day—Monday choir rehearsal, Tuesday bible study, Wednesday prayer meeting, Thursday youth church, and Sunday worship service. When I heard preachers and church leaders speak about homosexuality as an abomination to God, I joined with other congregants in expressing my agreement to the rhetoric by saying *Amen*. I did what Freire (1970) warned against—taking a passive role, adapting to the world as is, and accepting the fragmented view of reality, which was being deposited into me (p. 58). In so doing,

I maintained my status in the church. I served as an usher, led devotion, and sang in the choir. I worshipped God openly and was not made to feel ostracized because at that time, I, too, condemned homosexual behavior. However, when I reached college and began to engage in self-examination and self-reflection outside the church, I began to see church differently, particularly my role within the institution.

After high school, I left Mississippi and moved to Florida to attend college. Upon arrival, I immediately found a new church home and met my first boyfriend. I struggled immensely with the relationship. I felt it was wrong, so I ended it and devoted myself to church as I had done in my early years. This pattern continued for four years: I would meet a new boyfriend, feel convicted about it, and quickly end it. The internalized homophobia I experienced led to feelings of deep shame, confusion, and distrust. Then, I went to graduate school.

In the University of Florida's MFA acting program, I began to develop a greater awareness of self, and through my theatre training, I began to critically reflect on my life and question my experiences. I became engaged in what Freire (1970) calls "acts of cognition, not transferal of information" (p. 67) because though I still attended church regularly, I stopped affirming sermons that bashed homosexuals as abominations to God. I did not protest openly, but I also did not clap and say *Amen*. Furthermore, I developed a new romantic relationship with one of my male classmates and I was feeling a lot less guilt about it.

Then, one day after class, two of my peers, Marci and Felecia, who are both African American and self-identify as Christians, invited me to attend church with them the following Sunday. They attended a different church from me—one that was considered more progressive—and they promised I would enjoy it. After they raved about the pastor and the service, I happily accepted their invitation and met them at church that Sunday.

For the first ninety minutes, I enjoyed the service immensely. The choir sounded phenomenal. The people were warm and inviting. There were moments of laughter and fellowship. The pastor's sermon was uplifting and inspiring. I felt like a welcomed guest.

After the sermon, towards the benediction, the pastor began to tell a story. He recounted a time he visited a church in New York City.

He was invited to a Unitarian church. Upon his arrival, he began to notice there were openly gay and lesbian members in the congregation, and this Unitarian church seemed to approve of their presence. However, the pastor told us this story as a warning. He cautioned that we should be careful of where we worship because not all churches are the same. He condemned the Unitarian church's acceptance of the homosexual and said, "Be not confused, God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." The organist bellowed a tune and the congregation erupted in laughter and applause.

I was sitting between Marci and Felecia, who I believe were both aware, at least suspicious, that I was gay. I was seething in anger. Though they did not respond like the other congregants, based on their stoic behavior, I was convinced they agreed with the pastor's statement. I could feel the tension between us.

Feeling embarrassed and completely ostracized, I made a conscious decision that I would not subject myself to that type of experience ever again. Freire (1970) demands that the duty of the oppressed is to liberate themselves. He says that oppressors cannot find the "strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both" (p. 28). Once the service ended, Marci, Felecia, and I got in our cars, drove our separate ways, and said nothing about what had transpired. However, later that evening, I prayed and promised God that in lieu of attending church, I would wake each morning and spend the first half-hour of my day in private meditation. I opted for private worship and decided to sever my relationship with the Black Church.

In hindsight, I suppose I could have spoken to the pastor or church leaders about my concerns or even to Marci and Felecia; however, I was afraid that my inquiries (which dealt with sexuality and interpretations of the bible) would have resulted in me being shamed or scorned and feeling more ostracized. The Black Church is not structured in such a way where critical questioning is applauded (Mattis et al, 2004; Miller, 2007). Robin Gillespie (2009) states,

> There seems to be an unspoken but real rule in the Black Church that discourages and even forbids critical questioning of topics, concepts, or ideologies that control the basic manner in which

> people perform life. Parishioners understand this tacit denial of a person's right to question actions of [their] church leaders because critical questioning could be viewed as disobedient, defiant, and disrespectful from both the perspective of the questioner and the person viewed as the authority. (p. 29-30)

Knowing that I had my doubts and confusion about being gay and Christian and understanding that at the time, if asked to defend my position, I simply could not, I chose to hold my tongue, safeguard my questions and dissatisfaction, leave the institution, and pursue my own spiritual path. When I left the Black Church, I walked away with a barrage of lingering questions and unresolved conflict. Needing a viable, healthy method in which to dialogue about my spirituality and sexuality, I turned to theatre and wrote a play—*The Contract.*

THE CONTRACT, A PLAY

My personal knowledge of playwriting stems from twenty years of experience as a theatre practitioner. I have taken graduate courses in playwriting; read Aristotle's *Poetics*, Downs and Wright's *Playwriting: From Formula to Form,* and McLaughlin's *The Playwright's Process*; and written four full-length plays, which have had several readings and productions. My second play, *The Contract,* was the winner of the Kennedy Center's Lorraine Hansberry National Playwriting award.

The Contract is a full-length play that follows the plight of Bishop Daryl Jackson, a high-profile southern African American mega-church preacher, who is at the height of his success with multiple parishes, book deals and a sizeable fortune. Yet, he holds a secret that would endanger his Christian empire and ruin his reputation—he has sexual affairs with men. In order to ensure total discretion, save marriage and ministry, his wife, Deborah, takes control and draws up financial agreements between Daryl and his lovers. The contractual arrangement seems to work, until Daryl falls in love with one of his suitors, Paul—a brilliant and sensitive graduate student, who challenges Daryl's ideas of faith, identity, and sexuality. Wanting to live in truth and share a life with Paul, Daryl takes the ultimate risk and comes out to his congregation, causing a major scandal.

In 2010, when I was a Ph.D. candidate at New York University, I

completed my first draft of *The Contract* and self-produced a workshop production of the play at the Kraine Theatre in New York City's East Village. The purpose was to collaborate with professional actors and a director to present a staging of the play for an invited audience of theatre artists, who offered feedback about the play's plot, themes, characters, and structure. The play was submitted to the Kennedy Center's American College Theatre Festival, where I won the Lorraine Hansberry National Playwriting Award. As part of this award, I worked with a dramaturg, revised the play, and presented it as a reading at a regional theatre in Washington, D.C. Then, in January/February 2012, I worked with Florida A&M University's Essential Theatre to mount a revised production of the play in Tallahassee, Florida. I performed in this production and played the lead character, Daryl. For brevity's sake, I will discuss three major moments throughout this theatre-making process that I believe affected my identity development: (1) drafting the play's major dramatic question, (2) acting in the play while playing opposite my classmate Marci, and (3) engaging in a post-show discussion with audience members.

THE THEATRE-MAKING PROCESS

My first notable moment was during the writing of the play, when I formulated the play's major dramatic question. For playwrights, the major dramatic question is the play's spine that playwrights use to frame and build each scene. In Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun,* I argue that her play's major dramatic question is *how do you know when a boy becomes a man?* In her play, we follow Walter Lee Younger and his mother, watching their journey as they both struggle to define manhood and jockey for the position of being head of the house. In my case, as I attempted to identify the major dramatic question for *The Contract*, I wanted first to explore the notion of *what happens when a revered Christian man comes out of the closet as gay?* However, I struggled with that storyline because I had no life experience in that regard from which my imagination could draw. Personally, I had only revealed my sexual orientation to people outside the church. Also, in 2010, there were no examples in the media of prominent gay Christians coming out of the closet, especially not Black ones, so any storyline I could imagine would have had to be based

solely on fantasy. Not wanting to go that route, I decided to explore the notion of *what factors influence a person of Christian faith to remain hidden in the closet?* In this regard, I had direct knowledge in which to offer my imaginary characters, and by choosing this question, I had a means by which I could examine my life with a level of distance.

According to Philip Taylor (1996), "Distance enables a possible new perspective on a familiar event, a rethinking of an ingrained belief" (p. 44). Creative distance affords the opportunity to explore a familiar topic in a new way. Taylor writes, "[It] makes the familiar strange, it decentres the principal investigator from the lived event and provides a valuable opportunity to hear other voices, see new faces, while building a comprehensive understanding of the one event" (p. 44).

Distance may have provided some level of creative detachment; nonetheless, I was still emotionally attached to the work. One of the more difficult scenes for me to write that went to the heart of my conflicting Christian beliefs was in the second act, Scene Twelve, of the play. By this scene, Bishop Daryl Jackson has fallen in love with Paul and wants to live with him on a more permanent basis. However, Paul has reservations because Daryl wants to keep the relationship discreet, whereas Paul wants Daryl to accept his sexuality and come out to his congregation. Paul says,

> PAUL. Black churches in the South are filled with gays. They're in the choirs, the usher boards, the pews and pulpits. It's no secret. If it wasn't for gays and women, there would be no church.
>
> DARYL. I'm one man, Paul. I can't change two thousand years of church doctrine. You're asking too much of me.

For Daryl, this is an impossible request—to come out the closet and continue preaching in a southern Black church. When Paul presses Daryl to explain his reasoning, Daryl erupts,

> DARYL. You think I'm afraid? You think I care about what those people might say or think about me? It goes much deeper than that.
>
> PAUL. Then, what is it? What is the big deal?
>
> DARYL. Hell! That's the big deal. Big fiery burning place of

> everlasting punishment seething in torment of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Fire and Brimstone. You ever heard of it? That's the big deal.

In this passage, Daryl exposes his most closely guarded and unspoken fear—the retribution of hell. Quinn, Dickson-Gomez and Kelly (2016) affirm this sentiment in their study of thirty Black male youths, who attest to the notion of homosexuality as sin and universally promoted by Black Church pastors, whose "convictions were rooted in scriptures, which pastors readily cited and interpreted to support their beliefs" (p. 529). For homosexuals, raised in the Black Church, these teachings can have lasting impacts. In the play, Daryl speaks to this experience.

> DARYL. For the last thirty years of my life, I have felt the flames of that fire, searing against my back, reminding me day after day after day of where I might be headed. Alright? And even though I believe that God is a forgiving, compassionate, and understanding God, and that He loves me unconditionally, there's still a major part of me that thinks . . . *(Daryl breathes)*.

For me, exposing this fear within the play felt two-fold. On one hand, I felt embarrassed because I knew there was a part of me that believed in the existence of hell and that I might be destined for it, but on the other hand, I also felt like I was shining a light in a dark place and ultimately finding that there was nothing of substance lurking in the shadows. This led me, in the play, to ask a deeper question, *what is the meaning of unconditional love*?

> PAUL. Daryl, when we first met, you told me the only definitive thing you knew was that God loves you, regardless of who you sleep with.
> DARYL. I lied. Sometimes I struggle with it. Most times I struggle with it. The lines are blurred and I'm still trying to figure it out, which is why I can't come out. Because if I came out, then in essence, I'd be saying to the world that what we're doing is right. I can't do that.
> PAUL. Because you think it's wrong.
> DARYL. Because I don't know.

But I did know. In writing that scene, I had come to terms with a satisfied knowledge that regardless of what the scriptures say about homosexuality, I believed in a greater universal truth—that God loves me unconditionally.

The play was offering me a mechanism by which I could have an internal dialogue about the issues and factors that impeded me from living an open, authentic life. At that time, opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and critical questioning within the Black Church did not always exist (Cone, 1978; Gillespie, 2009; Mattis et al, 2004; Miller, 2007), for as Freire (1970) proclaims, “Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in the power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all)” (p. 88).

After writing the play, the time had come for me to share my work in a public forum. Now, I could rehearse the play with other artists and present it to audiences, particularly those who identify as Black, Christian, and southern, and engage in a critical dialogue. After the fanfare of winning the Kennedy Center award, I was asked by my former undergraduate college, FAMU, to present the play in their Theatre Unbound: Writing for Life series. The play was to be produced on campus and I was asked to play the lead. At the time, one of the theatre faculty members working at FAMU was Marci—my classmate from graduate school who invited me to visit the church that helped to set much of this experience in motion. Marci, a rather talented actress, was also asked to perform in the play as Deborah—Daryl’s wife. The irony of this situation had not slipped by me. Although Marci and I had known each other for years, went to graduate school together, and performed opposite in other plays, up until this point, we had never conversed about my sexuality. I had known Marci to be a Christian, who interpreted the bible more literally, so I steered clear of gay-related conversations to maintain an amicable relationship. However, on the first day of rehearsal after a table read of the play, I felt compelled to have a private conversation with her and give full-disclosure about my sexuality.

When I officially told Marci I was gay, she asked, “What took you so long?” Her question was simple, but for me, the answer was far more complex. Kincheloe (2004) reinforces Freire’s sentiment when he

declares that the oppressed become “so inundated by the ideologies of the oppressor that they come to see the world and themselves through the oppressor’s eyes” (p. 72). For years, I had been living a double life because I struggled with the teachings and ideologies that had been deposited into me within the Black Church, and even though I left the institution, I carried within me what Boal and Epstein (1990) characterize as the cop in the head—internalized oppression—or what Freire (1970) calls the effects of a submerged consciousness that had been absorbed into an oppressive reality. In effect, I became my own oppressor, silencing my voice and limiting myself from living a fully actualized life. Prior to writing my play, I didn’t have the words to express the dichotomy of being both gay and Christian because I had serious doubts that the two could exist harmoniously within one body. However, now, the play offered me two things: a mechanism in which I could question and unpack my internalized homophobia and a means whereby to tell others, via storytelling, the factors that impeded me, in the past, from fully embracing my authentic self and coming out.

After a three-week rehearsal process, Marci and I performed the play in a black box theatre on FAMU’s campus. An undergraduate student played the role of Paul. After a Sunday matinee, we had a post-show talk back discussion with the audience. In the play, I purposely left the question of whether or not homosexuality is a sin open to interpretation. The main character simply says, “I don’t know.” This opening also left room for a dialectic conversation amongst the audience. In the talk back, I saw Black, Christian, southern audience members debate the bible, define unconditional love, and embrace the humanity of homosexuals in Black churches. I also found myself for the first time, presenting my truth in an authentic way, to a wider audience.

DISCUSSION

Robert L. Miller, Jr., Director and Associate Professor in the School of Social Welfare at University of Albany-SUNY, states that the active presence of homosexuals in Black churches is a “widely known but largely unaddressed truth” (2007, p. 52). Gay men regularly attend Black churches, even while being subjected to homophobic rhetoric (Andrews, 2017; Quinn et al, 2016). Scholars David M. Barnes and Ilan H. Meyer (2012) argue that over time, continuous exposure to non-

affirming religious settings could lead to higher internalized homophobia, more depressive symptoms, and less psychological well-being. Researchers have linked internalized homophobia to a litany of negative outcomes, including suicidal thoughts, sexual risk-taking, intimacy problems, anxiety, and lower self-esteem (Fields et al, 2016; Frost & Meyer, 2009; Herek et al, 2009; Rowen & Malcolm, 2002; Williamson, 2000).

In spite of the research and the fact that gay marriage has become legal within the United States, many Black churches have maintained their long-standing negative positions on homosexuality. In their qualitative study, based on 21 semi-structured interviews with Black Church pastors, Quinn et al (2016) states that "although pastors espoused messages of love and acceptance, they overwhelmingly believed homosexuality was a sin and had difficulty accepting" young Black same-gender loving men. Horace Griffin, an Episcopalian minister and scholar, claims that gay men who attend such churches often internalize religious homophobia, accepting the belief that they are "inherently sinful because they are sexually attracted to the same sex" (2000, p. 149). With these convictions, gay men in Black churches find it difficult to discuss their sexuality within the institution for fear of rejection (Fields et al, 2016).

Mattis et al (2004) argues that critical dialogue is lacking within the Black Church and desperately needed if the institution is to maintain its relevance in a changing society. They also argue that there is a lack of opportunity for congregational members to voice their concerns and critiques of the Black Church. Congregants who openly engage in critical inquiry and challenge the status quo are often frowned upon by church leaders, who view their critical reflection, critical thinking, and critical questioning as disobedient, defiant and disrespectful (Mattis et al, 2004; Miller, 2007; Gillespie, 2009; Webb, 2016).

If homosexuals, who attend Black churches, cannot find space or capacity within the institution to engage in critical inquiry, then spaces outside the church must be made available to foster dialogue. For me, theatre was my sacred space to combat personal fear and internalized homophobia. The theatre-making process was instrumental in helping me come to terms with my sexuality, come out to others, and explain the dichotomy of being both gay and Christian.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to answer a particular question about the impact a theatre-making process had on my identity development as a gay man. While I concede that my journey of combatting internalized homophobia has been affected by numerous contributing factors throughout my life, I do believe the creation, performance and discussion of my play, *The Contract*, with audiences was a major factor in helping me to critically reflect, question, and examine the teachings and ideologies that helped shape my identity. Whereas, this study is self-reflective and limited, only focusing on my life's events, I do find that theatre, which has been shown to be effective in changing audiences' attitudes towards LGBT issues (Iverson and Seher, 2014), can also be useful, as Halverson (2005) agrees, to assist artists and practitioners in examining their identity development. Thus, I hope other artists-researchers-teachers will explore this type of self-reflective research and share their stories.

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Dr. James Webb is an actor, playwright, educator and scholar. He's written several full-length plays, including *The Contract* (Lorraine Hansberry National Playwriting Award), and penned a children's hip hop musical, *Wrestling with Angels*. His plays have been developed and produced at the Ensemble Studio Theatre/LA, National Black Theatre, FAMU Essential Theatre, Portland's Confrontation Theatre, African Continuum Theater Company and New York's Kraine Theatre. His research on process drama and collaborative playbuilding has been published in the *Continuum Journal* and *William Mitchell Law Review*. Dr. Webb serves as Assistant Professor at the Bronx Community College.

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Addressing Mental Health in South Africa Using the Djembe Drum and Storytelling to Open up the Dialogue of Finding, Owning, and Using Your Voice in the Home as a Christian Woman

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ABSTRACT

Topics like mental illness, abuse, and chronic physical and emotional stress are not popular in the church, which is one of the biggest tragedies of all (Grcevich, 2018). However, we were recently invited into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Christian domain to run a workshop for their women in addressing the subject of finding, owning, and using their voice as women in the home. The method used to address the above mentioned problem was the use of the djembe drum, together with other musical instruments and storytelling. The purpose of this article is to give a reflective account on the drama processes employed in order to address mental health and promote wellbeing in the context of the church.

INTRODUCTION

How can Drama Therapy address specific health concerns and promote wellbeing? We will be responding to this specific question in a reflexive way and consider a session that we recently co-facilitated as Drama Therapists.

We have chosen a non-traditional academic style of writing because we had an opportunity to reflect authentically as therapists and as South African Christian women who hold various roles. Our desire was that our authentic voice should not be lost in the academic jargon because of the very nature of the theme that we were engaging with: finding, owning, and using voice. Although it was initially an unconscious process, we came to understand that we too were exercising our voice after the process. In our own space, whilst driving back home, we reflected with no façade and we began to question what our stand point of finding our own voice was. During that process, our authentic voices started to emerge, where we could not hide behind the roles that we hold. We therefore desire for the reader to also reflect about their practice from an honest and authentic position. As we invite our reader to engage with this paper we ask that they hold the awareness that it is not about the messenger; it is about the message (Sandberg, 2014:1). To begin, we will then like to introduce ourselves.

Faith: My name is Nonkululeko Faith Busika and I am a black female, Drama therapist practising in South Africa specifically in the School context but I find myself in various spaces facilitating for parents and communities. In this specific space, I was with my colleague.

Zandi: And my name is Zandile Mqwathi, I am a Drama Therapist, oh! I am black and Christian and I work in the Higher Education sector in about 26 Public Universities in South Africa.

Faith: So, We would like to highlight this perspective of us both being Christians because, the case that we are bringing in the space that we worked in was within the context of Christianity and this is where we will articulate how the drama processes were able to address and promote mental wellbeing. Also, what is particularly interesting for us in Christianity is particularly in the South African context is that

Christianity and believe in God is often perceived as a context that holds holistic wellbeing and if one practices the rituals of it, one is almost assured that they will be well.

Zandi: You should be, in fact you should be immune to mental illnesses or other challenging things that can put you in the space where you can seek the support of a therapist in our case a drama therapist. Hence we used Marshall's (2002) definition of healing, "healing is not a cure. Cure is clean, quick and done-often under anaesthesia. However healing is often a lifelong process of recovery and growth, it requires time." We acknowledged that it will take time for the women to engage with their own voice.

Faith: So, we were invited to facilitate in this context because I belong to this domination of Christianity that is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This domination has various programs in it that teach individuals from primary children to adults. The program that we were working within is called the Relief Society program that holds women specifically. The programme is not just for South Africans but there are diverse women from Congo, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Malawi. Although the Relief Society is founded on strong values of Christianity that really helps with spiritual wellbeing which both Zandi and I have great respect for because it is something that we too believe in. The Relief Society program, also acknowledges that there is a strong need to have these values running alongside skillful mental health support and information. The invitation therefore was an, ask for us drama therapists to design an embodied session where we could allow the women to begin dialoguing on the theme of finding voice. We will reflectively speak back to the methodology processes that we used, on how they addressed mental health and promoted wellbeing and we will speak back to space, storytelling, music, voice and embodied reflective exercises as to how they played out on our South African soil.

So, Ms. Zandi, if you could start us off by sharing as a practising drama therapist in South Africa, how was your experience of facilitating in a Christian context, being Christian yourself? Do you think that the space had an influence on your facilitation and in how the drama processes unfolded?

SPACE

Zandi: Facilitating in a Christian context being a therapist walking in the space; first of all I noticed the building. In a mysterious and a sacred way, I felt held by the building. It was in a Church, I felt connected to my maker, to God. I felt like I was in the right place; well, although it was a familiar space, it felt sacred. Although we spoke Faith and I about our participants, what I saw were everyday women, women who are like every other woman need to be heard. I saw women who are trying in the mist of today's technologically advanced world to pause and connect. This speaks to Sark's, author of *Succulent Wild Woman: Dancing with Your Wonder-full Self* that "the circles of women around us weave invisible nets of love that carry us when we're weak, and sing with us when we are strong" (Sark, 1997).

I also felt that it was a divine space to be part of and yet at the same time to create a mini-container. However, I was very much aware that as much as I was part of this beautiful container, at that time I was called upon to hold it and my experience of holding this container was very gentle yet, very difficult in the beginning because the theme that relates to wellbeing that we were invited to address was the idea of finding voice in the home, and I am saying idea because I think that somebody decided that because a group of specific people within the group were choosing to be silent during this meetings they were probably voiceless and I am not saying this in a negative way but I found it very problematic that one has to find their voice because I strongly believe that we only look for what we either do not have or have lost. However, what we found was that all of those women had a voice. This reminded me of *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking.* In *Quiet*, Susan Cain (2013) argues that we dramatically undervalue introverts and continues to show how much we lose in doing so. Perhaps, within the Church the introverted women were being undervalued hence the invitation to facilitate finding their voices.

Faith: Zandi could you speak more to us about the notion of space and its influence on your facilitation as a drama therapist, in this particular context? You spoke a little bit about gentleness can you articulate further about that.

Zandi: I think the space, was very much gentle. It also had impact on

me as a facilitator and somehow assured me that all will be well which allowed for me to allow for my roles to shift and move easily. Like when one of the participants walked in with a baby, immediately, my role shifted to one of a mother because I too have a small baby. In that moment there was an immediate identification.

Faith: Would you then say that the space allowed you to be holistically yourself and to bring all parts of yourself, the roles you hold and that there was a fluidity in holding those roles within this space?

Zandi: Definitely! Although initially I wasn't aware that the space allowed for the fluid shifting of the roles that I hold and that I come with. Similarly, I wasn't uncomfortable with silence when the participants chose to keep silent at certain moments during the session. I also learned a lot about some of my expectations from the session. If I may now ask you Ms. Faith, how did the space affect your facilitation as drama therapist?

Faith: Firstly, I was very aware that I am one of the sisters who believes and is a member of Relief Society and I felt overwhelmed and compelled to get the task right. I was also crudely aware that this was the first time that I was bringing my Christian beliefs together with my professional beliefs. However, the moment we drove into the space I recalled that within my Drama therapy profession I am guided and held by the values from the space, the church. I remembered that my Christian role could come out fully in this space, an opportunity that I do not always have in the diverse spaces I work in. My rituals of prayer before the start of my work is what I often use in my private practice. Upon entering the Relief Society room where our session was to unfold, I felt at ease because the space was familiar on both the physical and spiritual level. I realised that even with mistakes that may happen in the process these participants that we were with, were my spiritual sisters in Christ and they saw us as sisters who were coming to contribute wisdom to this body of sisterhood. My insecurities as a professional where therefore held in this solid and sacred space that I value.

Richard Schechner (1975) in his writings about space argues that there is an actual relationship between spaces of the body and that the body moves through; human living tissue does not end abruptly stop at the skin. He argues that both human beings and space are alive. In the

workshop that we facilitated with the women in the church environment as our own bodies were familiar with the sacred nature of the space, the dialogue between the spaces and bodies appeared to be one that invited openness and deep listening from both the participants and the Drama therapists.

The ritual of us clearing up the space was also a form of symbolically creating the space for the "voice" of the women to begin emerging. Our process of starting in a circle was also symbolic of an open invitation for communal learning whilst emphasizing everyone's voice being equal and of value. In a circle, everyone can easily see each other, which is equally cardinal within the African milieu where we often refer to the importance of really seeing each other *Taba di mahlong* which is a Sesotho idiom meaning the face is the index of the mind. What's more, in the circle there is a sense of power being distributed in a democratic way. Through the arrangement of starting in a circle, the women's voices were validated and an invitation on the possibilities of the value of their voices in their homes was presented and validated. Akin to King Arthur's declaration in the movie *Merlin*:

> *Here in this circle, we give thanks to our Saviour for this deliverance, let this circle be a symbol of purpose, each man [woman] in it is equal to the other, each has a voice and each will strive to fight for truth and honour.*

STORYTELLING

In our attempt to meet the workshops objectives of discovering, owning and utilizing voice, we chose to use the medium of storytelling which was familiar to this group of African women, so as to create room for them to use their agency in the choice of how they shape their voice. Power was therefore relinquished from the facilitators; the women could choose how to use their voice during the narration processes. This was critical, to create a safe space for the participants to use their agency and power in how their voice connects to their holistic well-being. The indigenous knowledge systems of South Africa, define indigenous knowledge as emanating from the human spirit; "they are life experiences which are organized and ordered into accumulated knowledge with the objective of being utilized to enhance the quality of

life and to create a livable environment for both human and other forms of life" (Masoga, 2005: 22). Storytelling forms part of the indigenous knowledge systems in South Africa and Africa as a whole.

The workshop therefore made use of the medium of storytelling to get the participants to use their voices in the narration of their home experiences. The storytelling exercise of "mingle, mingle" where the women were asked to walk around the room and get into groups of a number which the facilitator called out and to begin to mingle on a topic that the facilitator gave to them. This created a space where the women's voices were validated. As the exercises expanded to bigger narrations which focused on how women are currently utilizing their voice in their homes. This specific exercise created a space for thinking, listening and empathy. As the women narrated they were also able to name their struggles in terms of using their voice and simultaneously they were able to validate themselves that they have a voice that is strong, however they pointed out that often that voice is not necessarily expressed vocally but is expressed in other ways. The medium of storytelling therefore opened up for dialogue on culture and how voice is expressed in various African homes.

During the story telling session, most women shared that they were making meaning of their voices in the context of their homes. Most of them also pointed out that there is often an assumption that women have no voice, however they shared that they have a voice, it might not be expressed verbally because most of the times, they feel that they are not being listened to authentically and simultaneously they too don't listen to their children. The women were thus able to point out that their inability to listen and be listened too in their homes could be the reason for them not being well. This was specially heightened during the mingle exercise where they were surprised as to how and what listening authentically did in relation to the use of their own voice. Rogers & Farson (1957) emphasizes the importance of being listened to and what the relationship to the voice is, "*When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to re-perceive my world in a new way and to go on"* many of the participants said they would choose to listen better and to simultaneously ask to be listened to when they return to their homes. This exercise of storytelling also created space for the women to show and experience empathy towards each other. This was evident reflection, where they

shared that their connections with the women they were paired with and how their story sharing enlightened their understanding of using voice and at the same time the bond of sisterhood was shared. Rogers & Farson further express that *when we listen effectively we are better able to express our feelings, thoughts through our voice in the most effective way (1957).* The women's response to these stories and the sharing thereof was therefore on several levels; physical and corporeal, affective, cognitive, imaginative and metaphysical (Jennings, 1994, p. 95).

MUSIC

Figure 1: Participant A checking-in

In the centre of the room, the djembe drum, small shakers were placed to set the scene for the check-in moment. The Djembe is a beautiful and special drum with powers to empower any drummer, dancer and listener. It is also referred to as a "Healing Drum". The women stood in a circle listening to the facilitator who explained the check-in; "each of

us are going to share how we are tonight and then you are going to select one instrument in the centre of the circle to demonstrate how you are currently using your voice in your own home. The women started giggling amongst each other while the facilitator demonstrates. The white African woman boldly went straight for the djembe drum and made a big banging sound. She is standing next to the black African women who steps into the centre and confusingly moves between the Djembe and shakers making sounds. This woman steps out and says I am not always sure, of my voice because of being a single woman who constantly has to address her children with a shouting voice and sometimes a gentle quiet voice.

Figure 2: Participant B checking-in

The musical instruments begin to resemble the potential and depth of the women's voice. The Djembe acts as the transport that moves the women's consciousness from the conscious thinking level into the unconscious and the imagination where possibilities are imagined. The Djembe and the musical instruments also begin to create space where the women's stories begin emerging.

During the session, music also allowed for the women to express

themselves in a safe and distance way and ensured no judgment as every sound was invited and welcomed. As the music has an unusual ability to influence well-being, and the influence is usually positive. All throughout history and in all known human cultures, music has been used to promote health and well-being (Gouk, 2000; Horden, 2001). Also in South Africa, music and song are often used during times of celebration, mourning and petition.

EMBODIED REFLECTIVE EXERCISES

The “secret spot exercise”, is introduced to the women, the facilitator asks the group to get into groups of five and to hold hands. Once the groups are holding hands the facilitator then asks the group members to individually “choose a secret spot” without letting the rest of the group members know. The women are then asked to communicate to each other in the non-verbal way. In their groups they are invited to move to their individual secret spots without any talking and while still holding hands. The women begin to demonstrate pulling of the groups into different directions. Eventually the women show exhaustion and they begin negotiating in a non-verbal way to travel to each other’s secret spots in a sequential manner rather than forcefully pulling at each other. As the exercise seizes and we return to the circle to reflect, one black African women shouts out; “I am strong! I am strong!” she begins to share that although she appears to be quiet in the public space of the church she is not weak, she has control over her voice, it’s just that she does not use her voice in a vocal way but her body in this exercise could show that she is strongly has a voice, and she can utilize it.

Augusto Boal (1994) in his book the aesthetics of the oppressed expresses that the body is able to capture that which words cannot capture. In this context, the women’s body could demonstrate her own strategies of expressing and owning her voice in the room. The women begin to dialogue about their cultural differences within the culture of Christ. One white African woman shared that she thought that being vocal in her home demonstrated that she has a voice and that she can use it. I have never thought that being non-verbal could be another powerful way of expressing your voice. The room begins to be still as the women begin to think deeply about the value of the use of voice in

different cultural spaces. This creates a space for the women to begin to reflect deeply on how they choose to carve their voice in the context of their home in a manner that allows wellness to exist in them as women and in their home. Landy (2008) in his writings about role-method and narradrama states that, expanding ones' role repertoire and exploring different roles can open ways of thinking and relating to others in healthier and preferred ways.

Silence is now not necessarily perceived as something that is non-expressive and unwell but rather that there, is deep wellness in being silent and listening carefully before responding in a verbal way. "The individual is not one thing but a multitude of roles that exist in relationship to their several counter parts. Thus the secret spot exercise that is an embodied projective exercise, which allows for critical reflective dialogue about voice expressions that are healthy within a cultural context that is complex.

CONCLUSION

Apart from giving us an opportunity to record our drama therapy session, which in turn created a space for us for reflection, aided the process of considering themes, patterns, key occurrences and interactions within the work (Jones, 1996: 317). We also had a beautiful experience facilitating, we were also captured by the sacredness of the space and it allowed us as therapist to tap into our higher power that governs our work. We have come to be aware that although the church or religious spaces are rarely ever entered into for dialogue on critical matters of mental health, there is a need for this. We also learned the power of drama therapy techniques and tools whether with space, music, and embodied reflective exercise can be employed in addressing complex and sensitive topics in diverse spaces such as the Church.

Faith: What can other practitioners learn from this? We learned that it is ok and that some spaces are valuable to us, that they do place you in a vulnerable space and the vulnerability not being something weak but the vulnerability of being authentic in terms of connecting with the people.

Zandi: We also found that we too ended up identifying with the theme

of finding; owning and using voice as African women whose voices are often not heard, generationally. We therefore desire for the reader to also reflect about their practice from an honest and authentic position.

Faith: We also want other practitioners to be truly reflective and continue to ask themselves questions that interrogate their choices when choosing to undertake work, how honest am I. As most of us in the South African context find themselves in the human development work, and sadly sometimes we fail to reflect on where are motivations for doing the work coming from and as a result, we unconsciously project our own stuff on participants.

Zandi: We want to invite other practitioners to begin and to continue to engage in truthful conversations. As a practitioner, where am I and what is informing my work?

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Towards an Approach of *Performise*: *I Am a Normal Person* (2018) as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes employing the approach of performise*, a term coined by Patrice Pavis (2013) in order to foreground certain indeterminate elements (e.g. improvisation) in the constitution of contemporary performances, and to facilitate accessibility and participation in therapeutic theatre. Different from* mise-en-scène*, which implies how the constituents of theatrical works represent textual scenes onstage,* performise *indicates the degree to which spectators and actors can engage in cooperative creative works during performances.*

My research methodology is Arts-Based Research for scenography, an approach that unifies design practice and academic research. To illustrate this, the author uses case study I am a Normal Person *(2018), in which a woman with cerebral palsy performed her autobiographical memory. As the scenographer and co-creator of the piece, the author worked closely with the actress to configure a*

dynamic space in which the actress's potential reactions are triggered according to her perceptions of the environment.

When developing the scenography, the author found that the concept of performise *has conceptual links to Karen Barad's concept of intra-action (1997), which examines how reciprocal responses only occur while placing oneself within actions. The inter-connection of actors and spectators creates a liminal realm, which leads to a dynamic whole.*

INTRODUCTION

This article is written from the author's perspective while she was engaged in scenography and co-creation for the therapeutic theatre work *I am a Normal Person* (2018)[1] in which a woman with cerebral palsy performs her autobiographic memory onstage. The term "thera-peutic theatre" is a method in the field of drama therapy and can be defined as producing distinctive theatrical performance facilitated by a therapist who specializes in drama that can exert a psychotherapeutic effect on spectators and help them achieve a socially-beneficial shift in consciousness (Snow, D'Amico & Tanguay, 2003). In this sense, every participant in the production, including creators, actors, and spectators, can be thought of as experiencing group psychotherapy (Snow, D'Amico & Tanguay, 2003). Therapeutic theatre deepens the therapeutic process from rehearsal to after-show discussion while at the same time broadens the therapeutic group from private to public.

In Taiwan the field of drama therapy was pioneered by psychiatrist Tzu-Chang Chen and over the following four decades, has mainly relied on the methods of psychodrama (Lai, 2013) rather than therapeutic theatre. Various pieces have been presented in community centres, schools, and hospitals to small therapy groups largely in the fashion outlined in Jacob Levy Moreno's concept of psychodrama (Moreno, 1953; as cited in Lai, 2013). Most frequently, because government education policy has embraced drama therapy as an effective tool, it often appears as a form of education-led performance

[1] *I am a Normal Person* (2018) is produced by a team includes: I-Lien Ho (Director), Yu-Ming Wu (Psychologist), Xiao-Jung Hsieh (Actress), Yi-Chen Wu (Scenographer), and Hang-Gung Chang (Musician).

for students (Chang, 2003). Overall, in Taiwan, productions that employ therapeutic theatre are rare. Of those that do, this type of performance is usually devoid of theatre design for pragmatic reasons such as budget, ease of transportation, and because the directors' main focus is to use performance to draw attention to specific health issues and thereby achieve a therapeutic effect. Similar constraints and characteristics occur in psychodrama.

Nonetheless, during her work, the author found that this approach which lacks theatre design may not be the only way to present therapeutic theatre considering that the genre aims to devise a realm in which spectators can share disabled actors' experiences, rather than inactively listening to the actors' long monologues, or appreciating their acting techniques. This article proposes an alternative approach to therapeutic theatre that effectively employs theatre design, to achieve a political goal: by engaging spectators with the actors, disabled actors can be considered as equal to able-bodied people.

In this context, from the perspective of scenographer, the author contends that therapeutic theatre can apply characteristics of post-dramatic theatre, which, as Hans-Thies Lehmann (1995, 2006) states, implies an open-ended form of performance that releases theatre from drama and instead includes diverse experimental theatre methods that usually use audio-visual media. Furthermore, post-dramatic theatre signifies reciprocal responses between actors and spectators (Lehmann, 1995, 2006). Thus, instead of traditionally appreciating the actor's ability to transform characters from plays into living roles onstage, spectators in post-dramatic theatre alternatively are stimulated to access to and even participate in what occurs in front. The specific qualities of post-dramatic theatre can transcend and break-down a spectator's impression that disabled actors have inherent limitations in their acting.

By merging therapeutic theatre aesthetically with post-dramatic theatre in order to emphasize the performative, rather than dramatic, phase of works, one major question that is rooted in the author's experience of scenography arises—how might the form of therapeutic theatre be restructured to effectively employ scenography with multimedia in order to achieve its goal of psychotherapy? This question encourages an exploration in the following pages of various practices that can merge with post-dramatic theatre in order to enhance a

spectator's accessibility to and participation in therapeutic theatre.

This article argues that these goals can be met through the application of *performise*, a semiotic notion developed by Patrice Pavis (2013) that associates '*perf*' (i.e. performance) with '*mise*' (i.e. placing something or someone) to point out an alternative way of making theatre that differs from the tradition of *mise-en-scène*. The association of *perf* with *mise* reveals a shift in emphasis from literature to performance of contemporary theatre works that employ the use of specific methods, such as improvisation and games, for the purpose of generating certain dynamic spatial configurations in theatre works (Pavis, 2013). In this way, the notion of *performise* echoes the characteristics of post-dramatic theatre in that both emphasize indeterminate factors to activate the process of theatrical performances.

Following this line of thought, since Lehmann's post-dramatic theatre does not include fantasy in theatre, the notion of *performise* needs to be examined to draw out the definitions of reality that exist in therapeutic theatre. That is, what configurations of space in therapeutic theatre can converge different peoples' realities? To assist with this project, the author proposes that Karen Barad's concept of intra-action (1997), which provides a non-dualistic interpretation of reality, appears to share similarities with the notions of post-dramatic theatre and *performise* and thus is useful to understanding the two-fold, merged role of actors and spectators.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned integration in this scenography work, Arts-Based Research[2] for scenography is applied as research methodology. According to Robin Nelson (2013), art practices should be considered as a form of embodied proof to research questions, and emerge in the process of the practices. That is to say, practice is concomitant with academic research. To employ this methodology, the author has merged her findings of *performise* and intra-action with theatre design, so that the design process, or praxis, can "perform" academic theories during the course of performances.

[2] Using the term Arts-Based Research, rather than Practice as Research, here aims to foreground that this methodology significantly involves researchers' art-making practices in their research inquiry process to illustrate their results as creative arts. (Leavy, 2018).

HYPOTHESIS: AN APPROACH OF *PERFORMISE*

As a scenographer, the author has become accustomed to collective creation, that is, developing theatre works together with directors and other artists through a process of asking questions and extracting findings. According to Patrice Pavis' studies, this approach to creating theatre, which is termed as '*performise*', can be defined as focusing on the performance itself, and stands in contrast to the traditional approach of transforming textual symbols into movement and visual sets, namely employing the notion of *mise-en-scène* (Pavis, 2013). This split from the *mise-en-scène* tradition can be traced to the emergence of performance arts in the 1960s that brought about a turn from theatricality to performativity (Pavis, 2013).

In order to clarify the distinction between the tradition of *mise-en-scène* and the alternative method of *performise* that emerged, it is necessary to briefly explain the origin of *mise-en-scène* and its changing definitions. In 1903, French theatre director André Antoine's writing '*Causerie sur la mise en scène*' noted that the term can be traced back to the end of 19th century when theatre directors were responsible for providing an overall interpretation of a work by building up scenes for actors to perform characters while at the same time dramatizing actors' movements in relation to the dialogues to make meaning (as cited in Pavis, 2013). *Mise-en-scène* in this sense can be regarded as thoroughly tied to the directors' vision and creation of stage circumstances based on literature. That is to say, the director's efforts aimed to transform text from two-dimensionally printed words in books to three-dimensional scenery in theatre.

However, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, since the 1960s, performance art has undergone a "performative turn" (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 39) through which theatre has become more deeply associated with performance, instead of with literature and dramatic representation. Following the 1970s, the arts world began to question whether spectators needed fantasy in theatre, and to perceive performance itself as a method or strategy that could challenge traditional notions of theatre and literature which overemphasized guiding spectators to read textual symbols contained in onstage sets (Pavis, 2013). Since then, an increasing number of theatre practitioners have shifted their attention to improvisation and uncertainty that are generated from the interconnections between

perception and movement.

As Pavis became aware of the shift in attention, he invented the term "*performise"* to highlight the emerging trend of performance-led theatre works (2013, p. 303). The concept of *performise* can be thought of as referring to certain flexible and indeterminate mechanisms of theatrical performance. Although the concept *of performise* in Pavis' book (2013) is not fully systematized, he outlines how a notion of *performise* could encourage theatre practitioners to broadly experiment with the dynamic equilibrium between performance and *mise-en-scène*. In other words, *performise* can be seen as an aim for theatre through which the mutual influences that emerge in the performative encounters among theatre practitioners, spectators, objects, and even spaces should be thought of as parameters that affect the dynamics of theatrical performance.

For the above-mentioned reasons, this article proposes *performise* as an approach well-suited for therapeutic theatre because *performise,* similar to the approach of post-dramatic theatre, converges the creation of performance with the setup of lines, objects, and multimedia. With the help of *performise*, scenography is no longer confined to decorating fictional space in theatre. Instead, if scenographers can realise the performative function of lines, objects, and multimedia, s/he can devise spatial configurations that effectively stimulate unpredictable responses from participants, including actors and spectators, during performances. This approach of *performise* has the potential to inspire diverse possibilities in therapeutic theatre.

INTRA-ACTION: LINKING EACH OTHER FROM WITHIN

In the last section, the article clarified the definition of *performise* and described how this new way of making theatre can lead to the sharing of authority between theatre practitioners and spectators in therapeutic theatre. Following this line, the authour suggests that Karen Barad's concept of intra-action (1996), in terms of her discussion of agential realism, could be applied to further examine the spectator's active role in the application of *performise.* The reality created in intra-action can be compared to reality constituted by *performise*, since both approaches reject a dualistic perspective of the world. Thus, because of the similarity between the concepts, the exploration of the concept of

intra-action becomes indispensable to interrogate the hypothesis in this article.

Influenced by the physicist Neils Bohr's philosophy that rejects the notion that anything can be totally divided from its surrounding, Barad's agential realism can be described as "our participation *within* nature" (original italics; Barad, 1996, p. 176). The sense of participation indicates a perception of overlapping positions of the observing subject and the observed object and acknowledges the reciprocal actions between the two parties. Barad identifies these kinds of reciprocal actions with flowing agencies as "intra-action" (Barad, 1996, p. 187). Different from inter-action, which indicates the two-way reactions between two distinctive parties, intra-action refers to those between two relevant parties that consist of a dynamic whole.

Yet, according to Barad (1996), intra-action does not denote dissolving boundaries between the observing subject and the observed object. Instead, the condition by which the intra-action occurs requires moving boundaries between the two relevant parties. Following this non-dualistic logic, as Barad explains, "*Phenomena are constitutive of reality*. Reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena, but things-in-phenomena" (original italics; 1996, p. 176). This perspective sees reality as concomitant with intra-actions, and not veiled by phenomena. That is to say, the subject coexists with the object and yet both retain their own authorities of coexistence.

By applying the above-discussed concept of intra-action to examine the roles of actors and spectators in therapeutic theatre that applies the concept of *performise*, both actors and spectators can be transformed into actively observing subjects who recognize that unpredictable encounters, influences, and unknown elements are the constituents of reality itself, rather than representative of another fictional world. The realm in which actors encounter spectators brings about the emergence of a liminal realm in which the reciprocal actions between the two parties connect them in a dynamic whole that constantly evolves according to their reactions to each other. Using intra-action as a tool for creating scenography can give rise to therapeutic, healing effects on actors and spectators through their mutual responses in the process of performance.

CASE STUDY: I AM A NORMAL PERSON (2018)

The therapeutic theatre work *I am a Normal Person*, publicly performed in Taiwan in 2018, is a case study for this article. This onstage work is an autobiographic memory of the actress herself, a woman with cerebral palsy who recalls her childhood during which she saw herself as an able-bodied person because her mother had always told her that she was no different from other people. It was only after she began to attend school and experienced abusive comments from her classmates that she became fully aware of her health condition and developed the resolve to fight for the rights of disabled people. Even to the present day, she continues to see herself as mentally and physically competent as able-bodied people. For this reason, as co-creator of this work, she entitled it *I am a Normal Person* (Hsieh, 2018).

The author worked as a scenographer and co-creator for the collective creation of *I am a Normal Person*. After watching several rehearsals, the author found that the director was urging the actress to employ difficult acting skills characteristically used by able-bodied actor/actress such as perfectly transforming emotions from sadness to anger while accurately memorizing lines and clearly expressing them. This approach reflected the director's traditional understanding of *mise-en-scène*, a drama-focused method that aims to represent literal scenes to the spectators. Because rehearsals primarily focused on achieving a literal representation of the character in the text, the director experienced many challenges.

To resolve the incompatibilities between performance-oriented and drama-oriented forms of theatre, scenography can be a way to return the therapeutic piece back to its original core idea—stimulating spectator engagement with the actress's performance itself—to give the piece a stronger element of improvisation. To achieve this, scenography for the piece required an alternative approach that focused on performance, similar to the approach taken in the production of post-dramatic theatre. The author found her solution in Pavis' notion of *performise* (2013), which can help creators to design the work so that the actress and spectators' actions and reactions merge into a reciprocal whole.

Therefore, the notion of *performise* was employed in the production of *I am a Normal Person* in order to combine therapeutic theatre with post-dramatic theatre through multimedia scenography.

Furthermore, Barad's concept of intra-action (1996) was brought in as a way to stimulate the interconnection between the spectators' active responses and the actress's performance. With reference to these notions, the author's scenographic design, which engaged the actress as well as the spectators into constantly shifting constituents of a dynamic whole, placed both within the realm of their reciprocal actions. This design avoided the pitfalls of a conventional *mise-en-scène* approach in which the actress and spectators would play passive roles according to the creator's predetermined vision. The multiple choices offered by the design created a piece that is strikingly different from usual approaches that rely on visual effects that hyper-directs the spectator's reading of the work. In what follows, the approach of this design will be will further articulated through an in-depth examination.

With this new approach that aims to avoid representation of literal scenes, I chose black box venues in the cities of Tainan and Kaohsiung to stage the piece. In the piece itself, I transformed the scenes in the actress's memory into a blank white space consisting of two large white standing wooden boards, one of which was covered with cotton and the other with paper, and a huge span of white fabric that overlay almost the entire interior floor. On the surface of the fabric floor, a number of hand-made white pillows of diverse sizes were randomly placed as the audience seating. On the central stage, a wooden box, covered with different shades of white fabric, was prepared for the actress's face-to-face talk to the spectators. At the back and extending to the upper stage were five translucent sheer curtains hanging from ceiling to the floor onto which layered images were projected (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Scene 5 of *I am a Normal Person* (2018): layered live images of the actress are projected onto five translucent sheer curtains hanging from ceiling to the floor. Photo: Yi-Chen Wu.

At first impression, the performance space appeared to be nothing but white space, a strategy the author employed to transform the performance space into a flexible space in order to link the generation of actions with that of scenes. The linkage can be characterized as a form of *performise* because it achieves a relationship between the actress and the spectators that spreads across the white fabric and pillows covering the surface of the floor. Because of the setting, the actress was able to freely walk into the audience seating area and improvisationally engage in direct conversations with spectators. During the after-show discussion, a number of spectators commented that it felt as though the setting carried them deep into the actress's mind. Specifically, the tactile sensations provided by the fabric and

pillows added an intimate atmosphere to the space. Overall, there was a sense of unsecured, shifting structure of boundaries between the actress and the spectators—this is precisely a characteristic feature of intra-action as described earlier in this article.

Furthermore, the author applied the same strategy to the design of the two large standing boards. The one on stage left looked like a blank wall and was covered with cotton to create a texture akin to storm and air currents. The cotton board was used as a medium to transport the magnificent life story of the actress via her verbal and physical expressions. When the actress entered the performance space and walked towards the board, a stick within the left fringe of the board was slowly lowered down to become a coat tree. Then, a table shape hidden in the middle part of the board was gradually exposed when the actress stood in front of the board. While the actress travelled back to her teenage years, the table-shaped prop transformed into a desk shape that was accompanied by the appearance of a chair shape from the board (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Scene 1 of *I am a Normal Person* (2018): the actress performs in front of the cotton board with augmented spaces (for hanging clothing on a coat tree, putting hands and hanging bag on desk, and sitting on chairs) that emerged from the board. Photo: Yi-Chen Wu.

The actress' performance as she responded to her memory was accompanied by the emergence of related furniture shapes and thus generated augmented spaces for sitting, placing hands, and hanging bags. The design aimed to shift emphasis from representing literal places recalled by the actress to the physical presence of the actress. What the places actually looked like was no longer important. Rather the actress's verbal and physical expressions and the spectators' interpretations served to bring out colours and outlines of the scenery. In this way, the spectators became aware that the emphasis of the work lay not only on the actress's performance but also on their participation in it. The emphasis echoes the notion of *performise* and relates to the concept of intra-action, which asserts that reality appears *in* phenomena. Thus, it seems that both the actress and the spectators together constitute a form of reality through what is in front of them. During the after-show discussion, several spectators commented that the blank space felt transformative and incited them to engage their own memories in the performance more effectively than did the literal scenes that they saw in other more conventional theatre works.

A similar effect was achieved with the other large white paper-covered board which was lowered onto stage right. When they were inside the performance space, the spectators were asked to write on stickers their comments about people with cerebral palsy and attached them randomly to the board. After doing this, as after-show feedback from spectators revealed, they were wondering how the stickers might be used in the work. The use of the stickers came to light when, in due time, the actress moved to the front of the board to select a number of stickers to which she wanted to respond, and read aloud the comments. If the comments were acceptable, she placed the stickers on the upper part of her costume. Conversely, if the comments were far from the facts that she had experienced, she tore up the stickers. (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Scene 2 of *I am a Normal Person* (2018): the actress responds to the stickers on which were written the spectators' comments about people with cerebral palsy. Photo: Yi-Chen Wu.

Through the process of attaching and detaching stickers, a flow of agencies between the actress and the spectators was engendered. Here, the flowing agencies indicates the ever-changing reactions between the actress and the spectators. In this sense, the board with stickers can be seen as a form that identifies the concept of *performise* concomitant with the occurrence of intra-actions. In this example, the actress and the spectators perform together through the process of (dis)attaching stickers and the spectators became aware of whether or not their comments were consistent to the actress's real situations and experience. Beginning from the time the spectators left their comments on the board, they would perceive various forms of reciprocal movement throughout the performance. The spectators thus became an important factor that fundamentally affected the development of the performance. By adopting the lens of agential realism, it can be seen that the spectators played the role of co-performer to varying extents, and that the co-performance contributed to the formation of a kind of organic unity.

Such flowing agencies with a shifting focus on co-performance is

indicative of an intention to preclude a dualistic vision of the work. The non-dualization was employed as a fundamental condition necessary to achieve *performise* and intra-action as defined earlier in this article. That is to say, without separating theatre from life, the design strove to avoid pre-determined understandings of the work, but rather aimed to stimulate multiple responses between the actress and spectators, and among the spectators themselves. For instance, the spectators' feedback on the piece suggested that they felt as though their own life stories were being performed onstage. This indicates not only the importance of the spectators' contemplation of the scene that played out in front of them but also of the symbiotic relationship between the spectators and the actress. Thus, the scenographic design yielded an impression that different people's life stories were linked together to search for solutions to moving forward.

In addition, the dynamic configuration of the performance space generated a liminal, agential realm, involving both the actress and the spectators, much in accordance with this article's earlier introduction to the notions of *performise* and intra-action. During the after-show discussion, a number of spectators noted that they felt as though a shared space existed between themselves and the actress since their personal life crises seemed to overlap with certain aspects of the actress's life story. This sense of shared space was created through the scenographic design to cause the performance space to appear as an evolving, morphogenetic state that introduced various improvisational factors such as writing comments on stickers, the emergence of furniture shapes from the cotton wall, carpeting the floor of the performance space with white fabric, and by projecting multiple live images of the actress on translucent screens.

CONCLUSION

This article has used the author's scenography for the therapeutic theatre work *I am a Normal Person* to demonstrate that applying the notion of *performise* led to an alternative way of making theatre, similar to the method employed in post-dramatic theatre, in which the presence of the actress and her performance, rather than a visual representation of the text, was foregrounded. Meanwhile, the concept of intra-action helped to configure the performance space as a kind of

liminal and dynamic realm wherein the actress and the spectators served as co-performers and reciprocally responded to each other.

Therefore, the outcome of the work has supported the article's proposition—namely, an approach employing *performise* to stimulate the spectators' active accessibility and participation in therapeutic theatre. As indicated by after-show spectator feedback, the work generated a perception of healing in the process of performance—that is, the work enabled everyone to be seen as an able-bodied person by causing us to understand that while we all have experienced incapabilities in various situations, we must nevertheless repeatedly continue to persevere and try again.

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Yi-Chen Wu is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Theater Arts at National Sun Yat-sen University, Taiwan. She received a PhD degree in Drama from the University of Exeter, UK, in 2016. With an honor of distinction, in 2002, she graduated from Laban wherein she studied scenography in dance. She is also an experienced scenographer for performing arts in Taiwan. The core of her design is to trigger a kind of performative relationship among the performer, the viewer and multiple-media. Her research papers have been publicly presented in the United Kingdom, Norway, Holland, Canada, Mexico, and Taiwan.

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Preventing Actor Burnout through a Mental Health and Wellness Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the need for a mental health and wellness curriculum for students in actor training programs. Burnout and mental health struggles are a huge concern in the field of professional theatre. It is a uniquely demanding profession, and the strains and stresses that come with a career in theatre often lead to mental health issues, which many performers feel unequipped to address. Theatre creates a means of expression that is unrivaled outside of the arts, but the demands of the profession combined with the vulnerability that theatre-making necessitates can create a difficult environment in which to thrive. This paper proposes a curriculum that allows young actors to do just that, fostering more fruitful careers, with less risk of burnout. The curriculum that is outlined in this paper consists of components such as developing a meditation practice, cultivating and maintaining healthy relationships, physical health for actors, developing mental flexibility, and goal-setting and personal growth. This paper and

curriculum are based on existing research in the field of mental health and the mental health needs of actors, interviews with mental health professionals, actors, and professors of theatre, and the author's experiences as an actor and educator.

As any professional actor can attest, an actor's lifestyle can make it difficult to maintain mental health. Job instability, financial concerns, and rejection and criticism (along with many other factors) contribute to a high-stress lifestyle that can be detrimental to an actor's mental health and lead to burnout. Most actor training programs prepare young actors for the business of being a professional actor by teaching students how to take a good headshot, prepare their resume, get an agent, have a successful audition, and many other aspects of what it takes to "make it" in the business. However, most actor training programs are missing a fundamental part of being a successful actor: how to maintain and nurture mental health. Without this key component, actors are at a high risk for burnout, no matter how talented and otherwise prepared they are. This paper provides a rationale for the importance of mental health and wellness education as part of a collegiate actor training program.

There is an undeniable rate of burnout for professional actors due to the unique challenges of an acting career. One of the most stress-inducing parts of being an actor is the unreliable and often short-term employment and the financial insecurity that goes with it. Getting a paying job as an actor is difficult, and most actors must have a "survival job" that actually pays their bills. Many actors have two or more jobs that they must maintain in order to afford their costs of living. Most are part-time, and it is often a struggle to find a job that can both pay the bills and be flexible enough to allow an actor to go to auditions, rehearsals, and performances. This also means that very few actors (unless they are part of Actors' Equity) are able to get health insurance from their employers, meaning they must go without, or rely on expensive and often sub-par health insurance.

When performers *do* manage to find employment as actors, they are often changing jobs regularly due to the short-term nature of employment (Robb, Due & Venning, 2018, pp. 83-4). If an actor books

a commercial, they may be able to pay their rent for another month, but it most likely won't turn into long-term employment. Many shows do not run for more than a few months, so even if an actor is lucky enough to book a show, they will likely be left unemployed again within a year. There are obvious exceptions to this, such as actors who are cast in long- running Broadway shows or as series regulars in successful TV shows, but most actors aren't that lucky. As a whole, acting gigs are short-lived and unreliable, which can lead to serious financial stress. Even when actors are able to book gigs, the pay is often not enough to live off of, and they must maintain their survival jobs in addition to juggling the schedule of their acting job. Most actors cite financial concerns as a serious source of stress in their lives (Maxwell, Seton, & Szabo, 2015, p. 97).

In addition to job insecurity and financial strain, there is often a feeling of powerlessness that accompanies being an actor. In a study that looked at the mental wellbeing of Australian actors, Robb, Due & Venning (2018) found that many actors reported that "success appeared to be in the hands of a few with power, leading to feelings of helplessness and humiliation" (p. 79). Ultimately, actors have very little control over their success in the field; directors and casting directors have the final say in whether they work. Robb, Due & Venning also found that actors felt that people were cast based on factors outside of work ethic and talent (p. 79). According to one actor interviewed:

> You just don't feel in control of anything because you're at the behest of somebody else, you know, what they've programmed, whether there's even a character that you could conceivably play, depending on what's your relationship with that director, have you worked out a rapport, they want to work with you. You feel like a, I don't know, a little seed in the wind or whatever, just being blown here there and everywhere. (p. 79)

This was a common theme among the actors interviewed for this paper. There are many factors that go into casting that an actor has no control over, and it can leave an actor feeling very powerless. This can be frustrating and disheartening, especially for those that don't fit the mold of what a successful actor is "supposed" to look like. An actor and college theatre professor interviewed for this paper also mentioned the

constant state of judgment and rejection that an actor must endure.

> I think one of the hardest things for [professional actors] is the constant state of rejection that they're in…you're in a constant state of judgement, rejection, judgement, rejection, judgement, rejection. I feel like actors have the hardest time with this gaze that's always on you – your focus is always on yourself and wondering if you're good enough. I feel like that's what plagues a lot of actors.

This came up among several of the actors interviewed. No matter how successful an actor is, most of the auditions they go on end with rejection. This doesn't mean that they aren't talented, prepared, or good at what they do. It's simply a numbers game. Constant rejection is difficult to deal with, and it's a part of daily life for actors.

Additionally, once an actor is cast, they must navigate working with a new director. Working with a director has the potential to be a powerful and rewarding artistic experience, but that is not always the case. In fact, Maxell, Seton, and Szabo (2015) found that a significant percentage of actors reported being bullied or harassed by people in positions of power (p. 95). An actor and professor interviewed for this project mentioned this phenomenon as well.

> I just talked to an actor last night – I went to see a show, and I talked to my friend after the show…and he said "The director was so mean, and particularly to me, the director was *really*, hideously mean to me and it made me question my worth and it made me feel like I was so bad as an actor." This is at a big, big, respected, fancy-ass theater, right? So, he started to question, am I good at this? That can't be good for your mental health, to have someone be cruel to you in rehearsal and questioning you and questioning your craft and questioning whether you're good at what you do.

As she pointed out, being harassed and mistreated impacts your mental health in a profound way. As an actor, where work is so difficult to come by, it is often difficult to advocate for oneself for fear of being seen as "hard to work with." The challenges of finding work combined with the sometimes toxic work environments can lead to feelings of

helplessness and a lack of autonomy among actors.

Mental illness among actors is also a large factor that contributes to burnout. The business of acting can be tough, and there tends to be a high rate of mental illness among actors. According to Robb, Due, and Venning (2018), actors experience depression, anxiety, and stress above levels in the general population (p. 78). A high rate of mental illness combined with the stressors of an acting career increases the risk of burnout. In fact, pursuing acting can create problems with burnout that manifest through "exhaustion, inability to switch off, and a sense of personal failure" (Robb, Due & Venning, 2018, p. 81).

A professional actor who has been working in New York City for over a decade commented on the way that mental health has impacted his acting career:

> Everything I have done in my career, every choice that I make is affected by my mental health. And it has gone up and down, and it has tanked my career at one point…part of [the difficulties in my career] was just circumstances, and part of it was – I was just trying to tough through the mental health things, as I had been for years, and not addressing it, and now that I'm addressing it…in a more direct way, it's so much better.

Many actors are resistant to addressing their mental health, as this actor mentioned. In Robb, Due, and Venning's 2018 study, "Exploring psychological wellbeing in a sample of Australian actors," participants described unwillingness to disclose their mental health challenges because of feared consequences (p. 78). In a profession that has the motto "the show must go on," Robb, Due, and Venning also found that there is a high level of pressure to perform even when ill (p. 78). Consequently, many actors have trouble taking the time to take care of their physical health, much less their mental health. Due to the stigma attached to mental illness, it is often difficult for anyone to disclose mental health issues, much less actors who face pressure to feign health and continue to work despite health challenges (Quinn, et al., 2009).

Additionally, alcohol often plays a role in the lifestyle of an actor. According to Robb, Due, and Venning (2018) and Maxwell, Seton, and Szabo (2015), many actors use alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal

with the stresses of the career. Not only is alcohol used as a coping mechanism, but it is also used as a means of socializing and networking. The consumption of alcohol can be extremely detrimental long-term. According to the UK Mental Health Foundation (2006), amongst those in the general population who drink alcohol, higher volume of consumption is associated with more symptoms of depression (p. 23). In fact, alcohol use can lead to a whole host of psychological symptoms like depression and anxiety, as well as exacerbating any symptoms that are already occurring (p. 22). In a population where there is already a high rate of mental illness, the consumption of alcohol can make things worse.

Despite the difficulties of working as a professional actor, many thousands of people still choose to pursue this career. According to Data USA, a company that looks at employment statistics in the United States, 11,184 theatre degrees were awarded in 2016 (Data USA, 2016). Although not all of them went on to pursue acting professionally, that is still a tremendous amount of people passionate enough about acting to spend thousands of dollars studying it. As most professional actors will attest to, a passion for acting cannot be extinguished just because it's a challenging profession. So, the question becomes, how can actor training programs prepare young people to be successful *and* healthy as professional actors?

Developing and maintaining mental health is a vital part of this process. According to Keyes (2005), "Mental health is '. . . a state of successful performance of mental function, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity'" (p. 540). The ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity is key in being a successful actor. A therapist based in Chicago talked about the hallmarks of an individual who is truly mentally healthy.

> Is somebody really living their life? Are they engaged in things that are meaningful to them? Are they engaged in quality relationships? And do they adhere to rigid rules that hold them back from stuff that matters to them, or are they able to pursue what matters to them in a vital way? … Are you able to accept that pain is part of life, and there is just as much life in a moment of pain as there is in a moment of joy?

For her, flexibility is key. She practices Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT), which is a type of therapy that stresses flexibility, mindfulness, and making space for difficult thoughts and experiences (Harris, 2019; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2009; Gordon, Borushok, & Polk, 2017). ACT will play a large role in this curriculum because the focus in ACT is not on changing one's thoughts, but on learning the mental flexibility, mindfulness, and acceptance that help to navigate negative thoughts and the challenges of daily life. In a career that is fraught with challenges, these tools can be extremely beneficial in maintaining mental health.

As this paper has previously addressed, an actor's life is full of change. They are constantly inhabiting different roles, gaining and losing employment, and being subject to criticism and rejection on a daily basis. Mental health and flexibility are imperative to being able to cope with these aspects of being an actor. Keyes (2005) also wrote that "mental health depends on an individual's ability to mentally cope with, transform, and find meaningful lessons from the stressors and life's challenges" (p. 547). In order to be mentally healthy, actors must be able to accomplish these things and learn lessons from their failures. Some people are naturally better at this than others, but this curriculum is about teaching these all-important skills to young actors.

In terms of mental health, Keyes (2005) focuses on the following criteria to determine whether a person is mentally healthy: self-acceptance, the ability and desire to engage in personal growth, a sense of direction and purpose in life, the ability to mold their environment to fit their needs, an interest in social life, having self-worth that is determined by internal (rather than external) criteria, engaging in satisfying personal relationships, and having a sense of belonging to a community, among others (p. 541). In addition, Keyes (2002) wrote that "[i]ndividuals are functioning well when they like most parts of themselves, have warm and trusting relationships, see themselves developing into better people, have a direction in life, are able to shape their environment to satisfy their needs, and have a degree of self-determination" (pp. 208-9). These are all key components to living healthy, fulfilled lives. Some of these things can't be taught, such as liking most parts of themselves, but this curriculum can give students tools that allow them to build confidence and self-acceptance. In the development of this curriculum, mental health

professionals, actors, and college professors were interviewed to determine how to teach skills like self-acceptance, finding a direction and goal in life, engaging in personal growth, and developing satisfying personal relationships. Through this curriculum, students will learn to develop and maintain lasting, resilient mental health.

According to Farrar (2017), there is a lack of health resources for young actors (p. 28). Currently, there is very little in the way of health resources, especially mental health resources, for actors outside of Farrar's work in the *Teaching Artist Journal*. This is a massive gap in actor training programs, and this curriculum could be implemented to create healthier, more successful actors. Farrar wrote that health curricula for actors should include "healthy eating at minimal expense, body image and eating-disorder awareness, supportive relationships with friends and family, tenable 'day jobs,' budgeting and saving, meditation for mental health, and substance abuse awareness" (p. 29). These themes also came up in the interviews conducted for this curriculum, in addition to things such as developing an exercise routine, fostering hobbies outside of theatre, and developing a meditation and mindfulness practice.

Although there is some scholarship on the connection between mental health and acting, it is largely not focused on developing mental health for the wellbeing of the actor. Some scholars discuss the therapeutic benefits of theatre for participants and audiences alike, which should not be discounted (Schechner, 1973; Torrissen & Stickley, 2019). There is also a significant amount of research on how addressing and developing an actor's mental health and their ability to feel and express the emotion of the character can help them improve their on-stage performance (Kapsali, 2013; Robb & Davies, 2015; Zarrilli, 1995). However, this paper addresses developing the mental health of the actor through alternative means, not to make them a better actor necessarily, but to make them better, healthier people. The work of Barton (1994) has heavily influenced this research, but his focus is largely on creating a safe and supportive environment in the acting classroom and less on developing overall mental health.

This comprehensive mental health and wellness curriculum would be implemented in a collegiate actor training program and would ideally go hand in hand with a business of theatre class in order to prepare young actors for all sides of being "successful." In developing

this curriculum, mental health professionals, professional actors, and college professors working in actor training programs were interviewed to determine what is missing from collegiate actor training programs and how to best teach these topics to young actors. Ideally, students would attend weekly or bi-weekly ACT-based therapy throughout this course.

Many rituals are incorporated from the beginning of the course, such as the same warm- up every class and ending each class with a guided meditation, which can be helpful for students navigating their mental health in a classroom setting (Barton, 1994, p. 112). The first unit of this curriculum focuses on self. It looks at developing self-care, discovering values, mindfulness and meditation, physical health, developing mental flexibility, navigating challenging thoughts and self-judgments, acceptance, and understanding and navigating fear. In this unit, students will develop, implement, and reflect on a self-care plan using the techniques and strategies learned in class. In the second unit of the curriculum, the focus is on developing and maintaining healthy relationships. The lessons focus on love languages, healthy communication, self-advocacy and setting boundaries, vulnerability, and the effects of relationship on self. As the final project for this unit, students will devise a short scene incorporating the aspects of healthy relationships that they have learned in this unit. The third unit focuses on self and art and includes developing confidence, addressing performance anxiety, creating new work, separating from challenging roles and cooling down after performances, and values-based goal setting. As a final project for the course, students will create an original piece in any format that demonstrates their learning for the course.

Within the class, students will be placed into “support groups” of three to four students with whom they will check in on a weekly basis. They will also reflect regularly, both in class and in a weekly journal. Barton (1994), wrote about the benefits of small, supportive groups within the class and regular journaling (pp. 107-108). In an ideal world, it would go hand in hand with professional development for theatre professors to help them design programs that combat the issues that contribute to a lack of mental health in the acting profession while still preparing actors for the real world.

Acting is a difficult profession fraught with issues that contribute to a lack of mental wellness among actors. Mental health is vital to being

a successful, well-rounded human being, and there is a dire need for mental health curricula in actor training programs. This semester-long curriculum addresses mental health among young actors and adequately prepares them for the profession in a way that sets them up for success and avoids burnout. Acting professionally is difficult, but this curriculum can provide students with the skills they need to navigate it in a safe, healthy way.

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Alyssa Digges is an actor, teacher, and researcher based in New York City. She is a recent alum of the Educational Theatre in Colleges and Communities master's program at New York University. While at NYU, she also completed research looking at gender differences in musical theatre audition spaces. She has performed professionally in New York City and regionally, and looks forward to continuing to merge her loves of performing and research in the future.

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Bad Facilitation or the Wrong Approach?: Unpacking the Failure of a Theatre for Health Project

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ABSTRACT

The importance of choosing a suitable applied theatre approach and facilitator is clear for the success of such projects, but what criteria are used to determine whether the use of theatre is appropriate, the selected approach is best, and who should facilitate these projects? In this article, the author explores the failure of a theatre for health project to determine whether the failure was due to choosing the wrong approach or to poor facilitation. Through that discussion, the role of facilitation in theatre for health and the larger applied theatre field is explored. The author uses her own facilitation experience to illustrate challenges to facilitation that training and experience may not adequately address. Also briefly discussed is how practitioners determine if a theatre for health approach is the best option or not for their projects. Finally, the author also discusses suggestions for adjusting approaches to facilitation and the training of facilitators as

well as examines ways to move her own work forward.

INTRODUCTION

Much work goes into the planning of applied theatre projects including what activities to use and when to use them, how to best establish an environment in which participants feel confident and supported in exploring the given subject, and the practicalities of securing appropriate space and needed materials. How much focus, though, is given to the role of facilitation? How are facilitators chosen for particular projects? What skills, characteristics, and other criteria do organizations use when hiring facilitators for their applied theatre projects? What happens when a facilitator is determined simply because she created the project and thus seems to be the logical facilitator for it? Additionally, how is an applied theatre approach determined to be the most appropriate one for that particular subject, venue, and participants? What criteria are utilized to determine appropriateness? After a recent failed theatre for health project, these questions arose as I explored what went wrong and what could have been done to avoid the failure.

In my research exploring weight and body image, I have chosen theatre for health as my preferred approach. In so doing, I am following not only a rich tradition of theatre artists utilizing theatre to explore social issues, but also a belief that theatre is a useful approach for doing so. Theatre for health is a branch of applied theatre that utilizes theatre strategies to explore a health topic. It is not therapy, but an opportunity to learn about, understand, and connect with others on a particular health topic. Veronica Baxter and Katherine E. Low (2017) review the role of theatre in exploring and understanding health in their book, *Applied Theatre: Performing Health and Wellbeing* and Emma Brodzinski (2010) also helpfully explores the field in her book, *Theatre in Health and Care*. Theatre for health allows participants to embody their experiences and feelings beyond merely talking about them. Given that weight is experienced in the body, it seems logical to utilize an art form that also requires the use of the body to explore it.

I thus begin from the belief that theatre for health itself is an appropriate, reliable, and respected method of inquiry and approach

for encouraging connection, engagement, participation, and even advocacy. However, it isn't the right approach for every situation. How does one determine, then, if theatre for health is the correct approach? Much depends on the intention of the work as well as the skills of those facilitating it. When my most recent theatre for health project failed, it prompted me to reflect not only on that project, but on the projects that preceded it to determine if I was indeed making the right choice not only for my research area, but for my abilities as a researcher/facilitator. While a lack of funding and institutional affiliation to support the work also contributed to the challenges faced, the overwhelming conclusion from this reflection was that the facilitation was a fundamental challenge that both contributed to the other challenges and ultimately created an insurmountable obstacle to success. From this examination and subsequent research on facilitation, I conclude that facilitation training as well as facilitator personality play key roles in determining the success of theatre for health projects. In this article, I interrogate the role of the facilitator in theatre for health and offer suggestions for enhancing our understanding of that role in the process. I begin this discussion with a brief overview of my previous research focusing specifically on the role of facilitation within it.

THE INTERVIEW/ETHNODRAMA PROJECT AND PREVIOUS PROJECTS

In previous research projects studying the experience of being "fat", my intention was to both broaden and deepen our understanding of how people experience weight in society. Thanks to two 2010 participants who came into the workshops having lost significant weight, I learned that those who lose weight must renegotiate not only their bodies and body image, but also their connection to and with the world. To better understand this experience and see how it informs how we understand weight and body image, I created an interview project to gather firsthand experience from those who had lost weight. The second part of the project was to shape the data into an Ethnodrama, a performance in which the interviewees' words would be respectfully and creatively represented on stage by actors in front of audiences. Those actors and audiences would have the opportunity to absorb the

interviewees' experiences, and thus expand their understanding of what it means to lose weight.

While as the primary (sole) investigator I had envisioned a relatively easy process in securing participants, this was not the case. Despite casting a wide net, utilizing weight loss organizations and social media groups as well as a network of list serves and colleagues, after months of recruitment, I had only secured three interviews. The first interview went very well. The second, however, was a person who warily shared upon meeting that she'd never actually lost weight and proceeded to talk about her eating disorder history. The third interview participant had lost weight on and off over many years but was not the desired demographic. After making adjustments and another round of recruitment, no new participants emerged, and the project was terminated.

As I began to reflect on the research to determine next steps, that reflection led to a review of prior theatre for health projects. My 2010 dissertation project was a series of workshops in which fourteen adult women who self-identified as interested in exploring what it means to be fat participated in a combined Theatre of the Oppressed and Rainbow of Desire approach that culminated in a performance (Fisher, 2011). On the surface, this project was successful in that all objectives were met. However, several participants dropped out during the process for various reasons including one participant who felt her experience was not reflected in the work. Additionally, in retrospect, having a public performance disrupted the flow of the work as we had to turn our attention to creating that performance during the final workshop sessions.

In 2015 and 2016, I replicated that project, but with various reconfiguring to fine tune the work. The 2015 project was divided into two sections—one a series of standalone workshops exploring weight and body image on an urban community college campus; the other a series of sequential workshops held in a rehearsal space with adult women. The 2016 project was a shorter series of workshops held on the same urban community college campus with adult women interested in exploring weight and body image (Fisher, 2016). None of these later projects included a public performance.

The 2015 project was the most problematic as the off-campus workshops were canceled due to a lack of participants. Approximately

six women showed interest, but only three showed up, one of whom arrived after the second workshop had ended. That person revealed she was interested in the subject, but anxious about what she would be expected to do and reveal during them. Unlike the 2010 project, I had not included a pre-workshop interview for this series, as that had been described as an obstacle to that prior project. However, not having the pre-interview meant participants were unable to have their questions and concerns answered prior to the workshops.

The on-campus workshops were also problematic as there was a mismatch between the project aims and the participants' reasons for attending. Thanks to grant funding, participants were lured in with the promise of snacks, extra credit, and $10. As this project was run as a series of 90-minute stand-alone workshops, the participants changed each week. None of the participants had prior experience with theatre as well as were new to each other as a group. Many if not most participants came not to explore bodies and weight, but for the snacks and $10. As Cecily O'Neill (2015) observes about drama in education but which also pertains to theatre for health,

> …unless the students become really engaged in the material, or we are prepared to adapt our plans to accommodate student responses, there is likely to be little sense of the collaboration or transformation that is at the heart of our endeavors. (p. x)

In one example, when asked to use tableaux to tell a story about oppression, the group members created a story of a bank robbery. Other groups chatted amongst themselves rather than follow the requested activity. Ultimately, the final two sessions were canceled.

Thus the 2016 project was developed to more closely follow what worked and avoid what did not work with the 2010 project including holding pre-interviews and eschewing a public performance. As a lack of time was a frequent 2010 complaint, the 2016 series took place with a closed group of women over three two-hour sessions. With the same grant funding, snacks and $100 were provided for each participant. The group was a mix of students and staff, nine in total. Unfortunately, the time frame wasn't long enough to delve into the topic and the participants appeared uncertain about the work as well as, to be fair, my enthusiasm had waned. Indeed, it was that lack of enthusiasm that

prompted me to explore my facilitation within the process as a potential stumbling block in these projects. To better understand my facilitation, I began by researching facilitation itself to better recognize the skills and characteristics needed to be an effective facilitator.

UNDERSTANDING FACILITATION

The success or failure of a theatre for health project, or any applied theatre project, rests considerably if not primarily on the facilitator and that person's ability to lead the participants. If the facilitator is also the primary researcher who designed the project, its success rests even more assuredly on her shoulders.

Christine Hogan (2002), who researches and teaches facilitation, defines a facilitator as, "A self-reflective, process-person who has a variety of human, process, technical skills and knowledge, together with a variety of experiences to assist groups of people to journey together to reach their goals" (p. 57). Hogan notes, "It is the role of the facilitator to challenge assumptions and to create an environment that is conducive for people to move out of their comfort zones" (p. 30). She adds, "Facilitators need to be able to build secure, trusting environments where participants can experiment and break out of or rewrite the scripts that inhibit their growth and learning" (p. 30). In other words, facilitators utilize a wide variety of skills to push willing participants into exploring new ways of thinking and being.

Looking specifically at facilitation in applied theatre, Prendergast and Saxton (2016) note that the "applied theatre facilitator is a multidisciplinarian who must know about theatre and how it works, as well as have an understanding of teaching and learning" (p. 15). Similarly, Veronica Baxter (2017) also notes the importance of "the facilitator to be extremely skilled at theatre *and* to understand the subject matter [health subjects] in all its complexities" and "to have extensive knowledge of theatrical and performance forms that are both local and global (p. 70). She goes on to suggest, "The skill of facilitation rests on the ability to ask questions to probe the subject matter through a problem-posing performance, or literal questions in a participatory process" (p. 68).

Prendergast and Saxton (2016) further note that "a facilitator knows how to do something, why it is appropriate, when it needs to be

done and how to do it in the most effective way" (p. 15). As Michael Balfour (2016) describes it, "An experienced facilitator, it could be argued, is someone who can pick up, identify and work with all the various complexities that exist in a group in a way that is respectful, flexible and structured" (p. 153). Balfour (2016) also explains this includes balancing the social needs of the group and the aesthetics of theatrical work, "What makes the role of an Applied Theatre facilitator so challenging is that there is a living interplay between the social and aesthetic instincts. Switching, aligning and integrating the different responses is where the *art* of facilitation resides" (p. 160). This is a lot to manage and an intimidating description of what an applied theatre facilitator does. In speaking about her experience as a facilitator, Sarah Woodland (2016) observed that facilitation is a, "… bewildering dance of success and failure that we as facilitators must learn and relearn with every new song" (p. 108).

Indeed, facilitators need a plethora of skills. These include communication (both in speaking and listening), group dynamics, theatre knowledge and skills, pedagogical knowledge, improvisation, conflict resolution, resilience, self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and cultural knowledge (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016; Balfour, 2010, 2016; Preston, 2016; Cohen, 2016; Hepplewhite, 2016; Hogan, 2002). Facilitators must also be cognizant of the potential emotional impact of the work on participants as well as develop trust between the participants and facilitator (Prendergast & Saxton, 2016; Fisher & Smith, 2010). If that weren't overwhelming enough, Balfour (2016) also notes the importance for the facilitator to "bring their own identity into the process, not just a professional 'facilitator' identity, but one that is reflective of their own approach, style and humanity" (p. 151).

Kay Hepplewhite (2016) observes, "The qualities of a facilitator in Applied Theatre are notoriously difficult to describe and can appear daunting to a novice practitioner" (p. 165). From her study of facilitators, she proposed a concept she calls "responsivity" as "a way to reveal the more enigmatic sensibilities" of facilitation which includes the ability to respond in the moment to what is happening in the room using "a complex combination of skills and judgement" (p. 165). As do others, Hepplewhite notes the importance for facilitators to know when to stick to the plan and when to adapt to what is happening in the moment, "The ability to allow space and time to respond to the

unknown/unplanned can be seen as a key characteristic of good facilitation in Applied Theatre contexts; it values the creative role of participants and shows a developed level of responsivity" (p. 175).

So given all of these qualities and skills needed, how does one become a skilled facilitator? Balfour (2016) notes, "Training, observing and working with other facilitators can help a facilitator hone their instincts. Key to this is having mechanisms for reflection and debriefing as an element of the automatic part of running a workshop" (p. 157). Hepplewhite (2016) observes from her research, "…expertise is composed not just of what the practitioner does, but also by an ability to grow the work and grow within the work" (p. 179). It's not enough to receive training, one must continually evaluate one's work so as to grow in both experience and expertise.

REFLECTING ON MY FACILITATION

Sheila Preston (2016) suggests, "a critical facilitation practice requires the facilitator to practice deep honesty, humility, buoyancy, and courage in difficult contexts" (p. 228). I interpret this to mean taking a realistic look at one's abilities and knowledge. Despite years of training and experience, I am still sorting out my facilitation style and do not yet feel completely comfortable as a facilitator. Given the failure of this recent theatre for health project and struggles with the ones that preceded it, taking a step back to reflect on my facilitation was not only prudent, but a necessary step before moving forward. As Michael Balfour (2016) notes, "Learning about failing is an important element of the process, and discovering your own social blind spots and inadequacies is an important development in becoming a skilled facilitator" (p. 155). It is important to note that this reflection on facilitation is not a condemnation of facilitators or to place blame on them when the work fails, but to acknowledge that the facilitation within a project plays a role in how the work progresses and thus must be examined both when the work is successful and when challenges are faced.

Facilitators are a combination of their training, experience, and personality. I have been fortunate to receive training from a variety of respected facilitators including my instructors at NYU (including Nan Smithner, Joe Salvatore, David Montgomery, and Christina Marín),

Augusto Boal and his jokers at CTO Brazil, Julian Boal, Rosa Luisa Márquez, Javier Cardona, Cecily O'Neill, Dorothy Heathcote, and Chris Vine among others. As an emerging facilitator, I have had many opportunities to put that training into practice. However, I am a slow learner and found myself more often mimicking what I had seen others do but without the insight into why it was done. I watched colleagues and others successfully facilitate workshops and wondered if I was alone in my feelings of uncertainty.

Adding to my anxiety, while the notion of running workshops appeals to me, I get flustered by their messiness. I struggle with how to quickly process the information I receive from participants and use that to advance the work. Preston (2016) cites the importance for facilitators of knowing how to stay in the "mess" (p. 70) and deal with the discomfort in the room that may not be a sign of a problem so much as an opportunity (p. 74). Julie Dunn (2015) reminds that mistakes in facilitation happen at one of two levels—macro (pre-planning) or micro (during the workshop). Dunn observes, "No amount of planning at the macro level can ever make micro planning redundant, for micro level planning is mostly driven by, and dependent upon, the spontaneous actions, ideas and responses of the students/participants" (p. 186). As Dunn notes,

> …mistakes at the micro level are far more frequent and are inevitable, for the improvisatory nature of process drama makes high demands on its facilitators. Across each session a continuous flow of spontaneous decision is needed. Facilitators draw upon reflection-in-action (Schön 1983) and their understanding of dramatic form to make on-the-spot decisions about enacting, modifying, extending or even completely ignoring their plans. (p. 186)

Dunn also notes a third "category of mistakes" which occurs "when the facilitator intentionally ignores what has taken place within the drama experience in order to push on with their original planning" (p. 187).
Dunn identifies this third category of mistakes as a "conscious and considered decision to ignore the participants' responses and choices" (p. 187). In reflecting on my facilitation, I realized I often let my goals and plans override what happened in the room. I either kept moving

forward or disengaged from the work. To that point, Taiwo Afolabi (2017) notes that true participation in theatre-based projects is a façade more than a reality as participants have less agency within these programs. Indeed, there was very little agency for my participants.

When I try to micromanage the work and fail to appreciate that it's not the structure or order of the activities that matter but the process, I lose sight not only of the overall research objective, but of the participants' needs. For example, in both 2010 and 2016, I became frustrated when participants wanted to chat instead of get into the work. But had I used what they were talking about to, for example, create tableaux of those situations and then explore them visually as well as engage them with the notion of embodied exploration instead of forcing them to begin with exercises I wanted them to do, their investment in the work may have deepened. Rather than privileging the activities over the participants, I needed to focus on what the participants brought to the room using the activities to help further their exploration. While this may seem obvious, it was not so to me. As I note in my 2016 research journal after the first session, "When we sculpted oppression, it wasn't about bodies and weight, but about things like domestic violence, bullying, illiteracy, and navigating the welfare system." Indeed Juliana Saxton (2015) observed that, "When you take the time to move more slowly, to get to know your students as individuals and as a collective, you also learn to listen more deeply and observe more acutely" (p. 261). My natural inclination is to dive into the work rather than spend that community-building time. Had I instead spent time getting to know the participants, I might have been better able to actually structure the work in ways that spoke to their interests and experiences.

As I reflect back, the more difficult I found the process, the greater my reticence to engage with it. I came into the workshops with carefully planned activities and when those didn't work, I struggled to adapt. Many of my research journal entries reflect my inexperience and lack of skill as a facilitator, as well as my tendency to keep talking instead of listen when I'm not sure what to do in the session.

When I look back on how I was taught facilitation, I remember it as a combination of theory and practice. We read books about and watched examples of master facilitators in action then did small group

activities in which we put those skills into practice. While I found this approach engaging, I struggled to connect the theories I was taught to the practical application of them. This begs the question, what did I need to better prepare? How could my training have provided me the additional tools I needed? Interestingly, I don't recall learning about various facilitation styles during my training or discussion of how to adapt one's facilitation to one's personality. Balfour (2010) discussed the challenges of teaching applied theatre facilitation and observed that, "preparation is often confined to training students in a repertoire of exercises and games, contextualized within broad approaches in facilitation and managing groups, and reflective feedback on context experiences" (p. 55). Are students leaving training well-prepared to juggle the varied theatrical and facilitation skills they will need? To that point, Preston (2016) observed that fewer theatre artists today are trained in teaching. This has led, she noted, to a piecemeal approach to learning how to teach/facilitate drama with a "delivery-focused approach" taking precedence over deeper engagement and technique taking precedence over the artistic craft (Preston 2016: 44).

When it comes to facilitation, part of my challenge is endemic to who I am on a fundamental level which includes the impact of being an introvert, which adds an additional challenge as I get easily overwhelmed by the energy in a room. I share this and previous personal information not to overly personalize this discussion, but with the knowledge that the universal is often found in the specific. Recognizing how my personality contributed to my facilitation struggles allowed me to rethink and reconsider my research approach, a process that is on-going.

While I have turned more of my focus to other research areas, I have not abandoned my interest in how weight and body image are understood and experienced in society. Nor have I abandoned my belief that there is a way to utilize theatre in this exploration. I believe theatre for health projects hold value both for what they can provide for participants as well as for what such experiences can teach us about weight and body image. But I cannot do that without fine tuning how I facilitate taking into account not just my training, but a more reflective interpretation of my prior facilitation experience and a clearer understanding of how my personality influences my facilitation.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the failure of one theatre for health research project and the effect the facilitation had on that failure. I offer my experience as a way of broadening our understanding of facilitation and theatre for health projects. I was pleased to discover, as I looked into the subject of failure in applied theatre, that there were more discussions than I'd expected to find. As Saxton (2015) observed, "But learning, it seems to me, is an ongoing process of explorations in which failure is built in and I am not quite sure why educators are not more transparent about this incontrovertible fact" (p. 261).

While my initial inclination was to identify my facilitation as the sole problem with this particular project and with the projects that preceded it, the reality is more complicated than that. Theatre for health and the applied theatre field in which it lives are rich sources for exploring a variety of health concerns as well as other social issues, but need the right context in which to flourish. In failing both to recognize the challenges inherent in my proposed interview project (i.e., convincing people to participate) and my inability and/or unwillingness to resolve them, the project was doomed to fail. Additionally, my missteps as a facilitator also revealed flaws in previous projects. Before moving forward, those issues must be addressed or future projects will face similar disappointing results.

It is my hope that this article will engender conversations about facilitation and how beginning and emerging facilitators can structure training and experiential opportunities that enhance their skill sets in ways unique to their strengths and weaknesses as well as their personalities. I believe it important for us to explore the various personality types of facilitators there are and how we can better meet their needs. At the very least, to have more conversations about facilitation and how individuals can navigate their way through the process of becoming more skilled and confident as facilitators.

Additionally, I hope this article sparks conversations about how theatre for health can find ways to expand further into exploring issues of weight, weight loss, and body image to provide opportunities for people to share their experiences and understand others' experiences through embodied activities that honor the wide spectrum of bodies in the world.

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The Shadow of the Neutral Mask: A Jungian Examination of Lecoq-based Neutral Mask Praxis

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ABSTRACT

"Psychology" functions as the largest taboo within the renowned pedagogy of Jacques Lecoq; or, in Jungian terms, 'psychology' itself becomes the unconscious shadow within Lecoq's teaching. Carl Jung defines the shadow as: "the thing a person has no wish to be" (Jung, 1966, p. 262). And yet, as with all aspects of the shadow, those elements are indeed a part of the individual (or in this case the pedagogy). This paper will argue that the teaching of Lecoq is indeed highly psychological, drawing comparisons between the theories of Lecoq and Jung, examining a connection between Jung's theory of a collective unconscious and Lecoq's understanding of a "universal poetic sense"; exploring their view of the Self, and outlining the movement from general to particular which is the key to both Jung's understanding of the individuation process as well as Lecoq's progression through an extended series of masks. Highlighting the work of contemporary teachers like Thomas Prattki, I offer a

(re)evaluation of neutral mask praxis, a journey into the landscape of an unconscious psyche, and an encounter with an archetypal image of Self.

The theories and techniques of Jacques Lecoq (1921-1999), the celebrated French mask and mime teacher, shifted the conventional hierarchies away from a medium dominated by playwrights and directors, towards an actor created theatre. Through his study of mask, and with the help of the mask maker Amleto Sartori, he built upon the ideals of actor training inspired by Jacques Copeau, and yet went further, challenging his students to rebel against the "tyranny of the text" (Chamberlain & Yarrow, 2002, p. 4) and to build their own "new theatre for tomorrow" (Murray, 2002, p. 79). This new theatre required a new actor, an individual who was more than an interpreter of pre-existing texts, but a creator him or her self.

Having repositioned this performer, Lecoq presents a paradox within his pedagogical system, stating: "*Actors usually perform badly in plays whose concerns are too close to their own*" (Lecoq, 2000, p. 19). What he articulates is a strong distrust for 'psychology', both adopted artistically as an approach to character, as well as a scepticism about the porous line that separates theatre and therapeutic practices. In his seminal text, *The Moving Body*, Lecoq rejects both: "In my method of teaching I have always given priority to the external world over the inner experience." I argue that "psychology" functions as the largest taboo within the Lecoq technique; in Jungian terms, 'psychology' itself becomes the unconscious shadow within Lecoq's pedagogical approach. Jung defines the shadow as: "the thing a person has no wish to be" (Jung, 1966, p. 262). The shadow archetype becomes "the repository of all the aspects of a person that are unacceptable or distasteful to them" (Casement, 2006, p. 94). This paper builds on the pedagogy of Lecoq, as well as those that continue to develop within the tradition that bears his name, new teachers who have asked the question: How does one make theatre that speaks directly to those "concerns" that are "too close to their own"?

I argue that the 'shadow' of the Lecoq tradition is 'psychology' itself. For Jung, the personal shadow is defined as the rejected aspects

of consciousness. As Ann Casement suggests, a confrontation with the shadow is a necessary element of the individuation process. Knowledge of the shadow precedes knowledge of any other element of the unconscious; Casement states that “no one can gain any insight into themselves or acquire self-knowledge without first tackling their *shadow*” (Casement, 2006, p. 98). I argue that one cannot fully understand the Lecoq pedagogy until one has tackled the “shadow” of the training, that of its psychological foundations. To be clear from the start, a critical examination of the psychological aspects of Lecoq’s teaching is only one frame from which to view a highly complex pedagogy. I do not want to limit Lecoq’s work to only one parameter, and yet, by examining how psychology situates itself within Lecoq’s teaching, I aim to enrich and enliven an important (and complex) aspect of that pedagogy.

UNIVERSAL POETIC SENSE AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

While Lecoq takes an overtly negative view of both psychological acting and therapy, his descriptions of his own pedagogical system have much in common with the theories of Jungian depth psychology. Both Lecoq and Jung describe their work directionally, conceiving of their respective studies as a movement downwards. Lecoq adopts the phrase “the depths of poetry”, and he repeatedly writes of an internal search into those depths. A common theme within his writing, and the title of a video documentary about his school, *Les Deux Voyages de Jacques Lecoq* (Lecoq, 1999), is the two journeys. One journey is horizontal through theatrical conventions, while the other is a vertical movement downwards into a “universal poetic sense”.

This vertical movement, I would argue, is an exploration into the depth of the unconscious psyche. Lecoq’s journey into a collective “poetry” and his concept of a “universal poetic sense” is in many ways similar to C. G. Jung’s view of a collective unconscious. Central to Lecoq’s teaching, his desire for an international student body and his use of the neutral mask, is a belief in a collective poetry that is universally applicable. One must not conflate the theories of these two men for to do so minimizes important differences, however, Lecoq himself is aware of the potential parallels between his teaching and the

theories of Jung. That awareness is referenced in his glossary definition of the universal poetic sense within *The Moving Body*. He states: "… a concept with Jungian resonances, suggesting that all humans share the sense of an abstract dimension, made up of space, lights, materials, sounds which can be found in all of us" (Lecoq, 2000, p. 168).

An exploration of the universal poetic sense which "can be found in all of us" (Lecoq, 2000, pp. 46-47), a shared and impersonal heritage, becomes the aim of Lecoq's teachings. It has much in common with Jung's view of the collective unconscious. It is his unique understanding of mime, and its association to the "universal poetic sense", that separates Lecoq from his contemporaries. Simon Murray (2003) has described how Lecoq's understanding of mime differs from Étienne Decroux. In Murray's view mime for Lecoq was a means of "producing thought" and not simply a means of translating it (Murray, 2002, p. 28). Murray makes an important point in separating these two master teachers and their approaches to mime. I would like to take the point further and suggest that while Decroux uses mime as a method of artistic expression, Lecoq uses it as a methodology for depth analysis. It was through his "submerged form of mime" (Lecoq, 2000, p. 22), established with the neutral mask, that Lecoq found a means of approaching his universal poetic sense.

THE NEUTRAL MASK: A JOURNEY INTO THE PSYCHE

Much of Lecoq's neutral mask praxis can be seen as the embodiment of a Jungian journey, a voyage into the unknown. I have divided this progression into five stages: 1) A rupture with the persona; 2) Contact with the *mundus imaginalis*; 3) Atonement with the archetypal; 4) Union of the Self and *The Fundamental Journey*; finally, 5) Removal of the mask. I hope to demonstrate how the neutral mask can be viewed as a journey into the depths of an individual's unconscious psyche.

A Rupture with the Persona

For Sears Eldredge (1978), the primary function of the neutral mask is to locate the points of tension, or conflicts, within the body of the performer. The teacher pinpoints the personal characteristics manifested within the body of each performer, taking the form of either

physical imbalance (raised shoulders, rotated hips, or locked knees) and specific rhythms of movements (a heavy walk or a frenetic stillness). The mask is a means of locating the specific idiosyncrasies of the performer, and challenging the actor to temporarily discard those personal habits. In his estimation, the mask "attacks mumble-and-scratch naturalism" (Eldredge, 1978, p. 27).

One can view this as simply another part of Lecoq's larger attack on "psychological acting"; however, I would argue that the mask becomes a means of provoking the performer into temporarily removing her/his personally constructed "persona" or social mask. Andrew Samuels defines the persona as referring "to the mask or face a person puts on to confront the world. Persona can refer to gender identity, a stage of development (such as adolescence), a social status, a job, or profession" (Samuels, 1986, p. 107).

The neutral mask is a provocation to temporarily remove one's social mask, it is described as offering no "other", no role or character, but a version of self without social constructions or, to use Murray's term, a "Zero Body" (Murray, 2002). The mask becomes a means of challenging students to dissociate with their individual personae, replacing the social mask with a clean start, a *tabula rasa*. The implication underlining neutral mask praxis seems to be that the student is something more than simply their own socially constructed identity, that the removal of the persona leads to the potential understanding of something which is totally "other", themselves, and shared. This has led to Lecoq's famous assertion:

> There are three masks.
> The one we think we are.
> The one we really are.
> And the one we have in common. (Lecoq, 2000)

Lecoq's three masks can be seen as offering a movement downward through the three stages of Jung's model of the psyche: from conscious construction, to the withdrawal of shadow projections, and finally, to the confrontation with unconscious collective aspects within oneself. It is through the removal of the persona that Lecoq begins his study of that "submerged" form of knowledge derived from the body.

Contact with the Space: The Mundus Imaginalis

In *The Moving Body*, Lecoq describes the first improvisation theme with the neutral mask: to wake, "as if for the first time". While the students may have previously encountered basic activities, it seems important that the first theme, the start of the journey, begins from a position of sleep. There is a subtle allusion to the dreamlike reality that the student is entering. The student is asked to wake and to see the world with a calm curiosity and without preconceptions. Lecoq describes the difficulty the students have in their first encounter with the mask:

> Some students have a tendency to first move their hands, then their feet, to discover their own bodies, while all along an extraordinary dimension is being offered to them: *space*. We have to explain that we aren't dealing with ethnology, that it is unimportant to know how many fingers a human being possesses and that it's not worth having a dialogue with one's own body when, much more simply, the world is there to discover. (Lecoq, 2000, p. 39)

The students described by Lecoq seem to be grappling with a monumental shift – a transition in consciousness from the observable reality (the hand in front of them), to the "extraordinary dimension" which Lecoq describes as "space". But the space to which Lecoq alludes is not the rehearsal studio, the seated class of students, or any constructed set or object; the "world" that he argues is "there to discover" is an "imaginal" world, not unlike what the philosopher and theologian Henry Corbin has described as "mundus imaginalis" (Corbin, 1972, p. 1).

For Lecoq the neutral mask presents a landscape that is not the same as the unmasked reality of everyday life, but a world that is outside of any geographical environment. In his article "Mundus Imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal", Corbin argues for the existence of imaginal worlds, using the writings of the Persian mystic Sohravardi; he describes the "*Na-kojd-Abad"*, or literally, "the land (abâd) of nonwhere (Nâ-Kojâ)" (Corbin, 1972, p. 3). Corbin invites his reader to "overcome what one might call Western man's 'agnostic reflex'", and to explore the possibility that there exists an "intermediary

universe" outside our geographical cosmology, in which the imagination receives ontological value (Corbin, 1972, p. 6).

The provocation offered by the neutral mask is to make the invisible visible; it becomes a call to explore the depths of an imaginal terrain and to demonstrate the existence of the imagined land. The mask challenges the students not only to allow themselves to imagine, but playfully to exist within the image: and in so doing, to attest to its existence. In my view, the neutral mask offers a medium through which unconscious material is allowed to surface and is given an ontological status.

Atonement with the Archetypal

Within the Lecoq tradition, it is important to make the distinction between a movement that is "descriptive" and one that is mimetically embodied. When one approaches an image with a separation of subject and object, mime can be seen as a language with both sign and signifier. The student may see a mountain and point to it. The performer may attempt to signify to the audience, making a gesture that the mountain is high; however, for Lecoq, the challenge is to reduce the space between subject and object: the student *is* the mountain. Through the use of the neutral mask, Lecoq attempts to remove the perceived separation between the image and the body of the performer. Indeed, as I have argued, the mountain to which Lecoq is referring resides within the body of the student. Knowledge of that mountain happens through a process of embodied discovery described earlier, and is assisted through a complex interaction with the teacher. If we look at the standard refrain for Lecoq: "You see the mountain. You *are* the mountain. We see the mountain reflected in your body", we can perhaps appreciate Simon Murray's emphasis on the body producing thought. With his use of the neutral mask, Lecoq challenges his students to become at one with imaginal environments, to form a reconciliation with nature and, in so doing, with the body: "For in truth nature is our first language. Our bodies remember!" (Lecoq, 2000, p. 45). This atonement with nature remains a studio experience; it is not a nature that is particular to Paris or London; it is an archetypal concept of nature: if we swim in the sea, it is not the Mediterranean or any other locatable body of water, it is the archetypal image of the sea-of-all-seas. The mask becomes a means of exploring an archetypal

landscape inside us: challenging the student to be at one with that imaginal reality.

Lecoq makes reference to the search for the archetypal (although he prefers the term “permanency”). “I have always had a strong belief in permanency, in the ‘Tree of all trees’, the ‘Mask of all masks’, the balance that sums up perfect harmony” (Lecoq, 2000, p. 20). No work to date has examined the connection between Lecoq’s ideals of permanencies and Jung’s archetypes of the collective unconscious. Lecoq’s insistence on an international student body, the search for “universal” human experiences, and his belief in a “universal poetic sense”, all point towards a belief in the archetypal. The neutral mask is adopted in order for the students to encounter archetypal images, to find the collective within the body, thereby offering the students a methodology of mimetic embodiment with a “point of reference” (Lecoq, 2000, p. 38) from which to create.

Union of the Self and the Fundamental Journey

The central archetypal fixed point, evidenced by the neutral mask, is Lecoq’s view of Self. As we have seen, the mask presents no role or character, no “other” (Arrighi, 2010). The mask is intended to be a version of yourself that has not been shaped by culture or history (Felner, 1986; Murray, 2002). This suggests an archetypal Self that is both shared and personal. Lecoq’s assertion that, “There are three masks”, shares a striking resemblance to a Jungian view of the relationship between the ego, the Self, and the collective unconscious, all of which become encompassed in the Jungian model of the Self. The guiding symbol which encompasses all three for Lecoq, is the neutral mask: a vision of balance and wholeness, of an individual in whom exists a world of extraordinary dimensions.

The Self, for Jung, is the archetypal centre and totality of the psyche, consisting of both the conscious and the unconscious. The ego, or consciousness, being born from the Self in early childhood and developed within the first half of life, creates what Edward Edinger has called the Ego-Self Axis. The process of individuation, or the act of “bringing the latent self into consciousness” (Coleman, 2006, p. 160), becomes the teleological aim of analytic psychology.

“The Fundamental Journey”, the central theme of the neutral mask, is a solo improvisation in which the performer sets out on an

epic adventure. Throughout the course of a day, the man-of-all-men travels through many elements of the natural world, as described in detail by Lecoq. One can view each element of the journey as having strong symbolic overtones: the ocean, the forest and the mountain all are ripe for symbolic amplification, the world of dream and myth. Each territory is highly symbolic of the unconscious, and a journey through each landscape suggests a being that is at home in all.

Why is this journey "fundamental" to the Lecoq pedagogy? Unlike conventional notions of drama, there is no conflict in this narrative. The performer is not asked to meet and overcome an antagonist, or wrestle with his own personal fears or history. Indeed, the function of the mask is to reduce any conflict or off-balance. The challenges that are revealed, however, are those personal challenges particular to the student him or herself. Those highly personal off-balances that are specific to the performer become the source of the theatrical experience.

The underlying dynamic seems to be that there is an emerging self-knowledge through the depersonalized encounter with an archetypal landscape. Norman Taylor, who has renamed the neutral mask the "mask of reference", describes a process of self-discovery aided by the mask as a reference for a future sense of becoming:

> As the great man said once: 'Do like everybody else, and if you are different, Ah! We will see it. In life, a lot of people want to be different, and you have everybody wanting to be different. And they dress differently. And they're all the same! If you try to be different, you are the same as everybody else. But if you touch where we are united, where we are together, then you will see how different we are. (Taylor, 2011)

Taylor argues that the mask becomes a means of articulating personal difference, not through the attempt at individuality, but through the search for a deep understanding of Self. Each student sets out on a journey alone; he finds his own way through the progression of landscapes. The journey is entirely the same for all; however, the Fundamental Journey represents a "fulcrum point" that begins, not only the study of physical dynamics, but the search for each student's unique path forward.

Removal of the Mask

The neutral mask holds a symbolic position within the Lecoq pedagogy, representing both the starting point as well as the ultimate goal. It is both an initiation and a teleology: a search for neutrality which involves stripping away the persona, a symbolic manifestation of balance and wholeness that defines an ideal. It is positioned, both practically and theoretically, in the first term of training, and doesn't need to be returned to; the actor has received all he needs from the mask: the call to adventure, the mimetic methodology of studying the dynamics of the unconscious, and the aim of theatrical creation and wholeness. Once the mask is passed, it can be removed, and the student can move forward with the knowledge that the neutral mask is inside him: a transformative image is locked into place, and a journey of mimetic identification can continue. After the neutral mask has been removed it becomes the central symbolic "transformative image", to borrow the term adopted by Murray Stein (2004) to delineate a powerful metaphor that guides the transformation process for the Lecoq pedagogy itself: towards an individual who has been trained with this object, who is open to the dynamics of the world and who creates physically, an actor who is both the centre and totality of the theatre he produces.

CONCLUSION: INDIVIDUATION WITHIN CONTEMPORARY MASK PRAXIS

Lecoq's personal distrust of psychology makes a study of the psychological underpinnings of his methodology problematic; however, the fact that in his writings Lecoq argues that he is sceptical of introspection, does not mean that the pedagogy he adopts isn't itself highly psychological. Thomas Prattki (former pedagogical director of the Lecoq school in Paris and founder of the London International School of Performing Arts), combining his study of Jungian psychology within the Lecoq pedagogy, has advanced the understanding of the neutral mask towards the internal landscape of the actor creator him or herself. The difference between Lecoq and Prattki, in my view, can best be seen in their approaches to the neutral mask. Lecoq conceives of a depersonalized being, "The-Man-of-All-Men", that playfully engages with the external world. "You see the mountain; you are the

mountain". He goes on to say, "we see the mountain reflected in your body". The neutral mask for Prattki is also a depersonalized being; however, that being confronts a terrain that is highly personal to the internal terrain of the actor: the mountain is inside of you, and to some degree, the mountain reflects you. For Prattki, the neutral mask becomes a mediating tool between the internal and external worlds of the actor creator.

Lecoq presents five central masks throughout the course of his two-year training. The masks are organized as a process of formation and then subtraction: from neutral or universal, to larval and then into expressive in the first year, and then from half-mask to clown nose in the second. This transformation mirrors the individuation process, the formation of the ego followed by the process of increasingly revealing the Self along the Ego-Self axis. The neutral mask loses its imbalance and presents a larval mask, a being that does not yet have an understanding of itself. The larval mask transitions into the expressive mask, or full-faced character mask, from innocent naiveté to the fully formed individual who understands his or her role in life. In the second year, the masks gradually are removed: with the Commedia dell'Arte half masks, the full faced expressive masks lose their jaw and are now able to speak. Finally, the clown nose, described as "the smallest mask in the world" (Lecoq, 2006, p. 116), reveals the individual clown of the performer him or her self.

The developmental progression through the masks of Lecoq mirrors Jung's process of individuation. Jung saw the process of individuation as a process through which individuals are formed as distinct entities, different from their personal upbringing, their societal roles or religious affiliations. He states:

> In general, it is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological *individual* as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of *differentiation*, having for its goal the development of the individual personality. (Jung, 1971, pp. 448-450)

The Lecoq Pedagogy begins with universals and moves towards the particular. The clown nose, the smallest mask, is seen as a fully

differentiated individual. It represents a two-year journey of development. The exploration of each mask individually takes the same form: a voyage and return. The student adopts the task of bringing the mask to life; he is challenged by the restrictions proposed by the foreign object. Unsure of what is being asked of him, the student moves into a territory of the unknown. In the end, the challenges the student faces are not with the exterior object, but within the performer's own self. Once the mask is brought to life, the fusion has occurred and the mask can be removed. The actor creator has not passed through the masks only to leave them behind, he is the one for whom the masks are symbolically alive within: in the words of Jung, "a living third thing".

Much of the recent interest in the contributions of Jacques Lecoq arises from the wide-ranging individual artists his school has produced. A significant number of institutions around the world, continue his study of theatrical creation through movement and mask. As we have seen, contemporary practitioners like Thomas Prattki, but also Amy Russell (founder and Pedagogical Director of Embodied Poetics) and Giovanni Fusetti (Founder and Pedagogical Director of Helikos) are currently exploring the relationship between Lecoq's approach to training and Jungian depth analysis. These practitioners are antagonising Lecoq's view that "actors perform badly in plays that are too close to their own", viewing their own training as more than simply a study of theatrical creation, but as a time of psychological exploration, personal growth, and individuation.

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The Healing Power of Theatre in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*

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ABSTRACT

Recently, theatre is not only used to entertain and enlighten people but also to heal. The old shaman role finds its way in the theatre of the world today. Theatre in prison is highly manipulated by playwrights to intervene with the tools and expertise they possess. This can be clearly shown in contemporary theatre especially theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker. In Our Country's Good*, the role of the theatre is celebrated as a place where lost voices are regained and heard. For Wertenbaker, theatre has the incentive "to make one listen" (1999). Though the play is about community, or applied theatre, it is also a journey of personal discovery. The artist figures are writers and actors. Phillip, who is aware of the power of theatre, asks Ralph to write and direct parts of George Farquhar's The Recruiting Officer to be acted out by convicts. Though unprofessional actors, the participants prove to be genuine. Obviously, there are some fascinating female*

characters in Our Country's Good*, who again find that they have acting skills. Mary Brenham, for example, who starts out as passive in the first scene, takes the main role in the play within the play. Her engagement with the theatre helps her to find her voice. Similarly, Liz Morden, an aggressive girl, finds a way to speak and communicate with other people which was impossible for her initially. For her, theatre becomes a way of expressing herself and her situation.*

In this paper, I am going to see how Wertenbaker used theatre as a healing power for those who are psychologically and socially isolated. Though theatre in prison is not something new, what is fascinating about Wertenbaker is the use of underrepresented female character who is marginalised to do a play by which she finds her cultural voice.

WERTENBAKER'S PHILOSOPHY OF THEATRE

Having fought her way into the male-dominated theatre scene, Wertenbaker embraces theatre as an effective means of reflecting women's marginalization. In an interview, published in a book entitled *Rage and Reason: Women Playwrights on Playwriting* (1997) by Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, Wertenbaker sums up her influential views on theatre, which she sees as "a public arena [where the] writer tries to filter something in a deeper way". It is a public place through which the writer, unlike the journalist, can debate and "pull the strands together" (1999, p. 145). Moreover, Wertenbaker's preoccupation with theatre and acting goes further than mere showing but rather presenting "theatricality as an opportunity for people who have been atrociously brutalized and debased to discover, through the playing of scripted roles and the interactive process of rehearsal, aspects of the self that have been submerged, in some cases well-nigh obliterated" (Crow, 2002, p. 133). Significantly, those people who are brutalized and silenced are usually women. For Wertenbaker, the theatre is a place which provokes thought and interrogation. Likewise, it is an effective tool by which "gender issues can be shown to be intricately related to power dynamics: the performance of a play, poem or story by a woman, in a woman's voice, on stage or some public space, can still be a powerful thing, made more powerful by the

presence of an audience" (Goodman, 2000, pp. ix-x). Like Barker, Wertenbaker emphasizes the role of theatre as an agent of change. She affirms that:

> I don't think you can leave the theatre and go out and make a revolution … But I do think you can make people change, just a little, by forcing them to question something, or by intriguing them, or giving them an image that remains with them. And that little change can lead to bigger changes. (Sullivan, 1993, p. 140)

Accordingly, on a number of occasions, Wertenbaker refuses to put her works within the rigid parameters of a purely political or feminist stance. Rather, her plays are liable to a more open critical reaction. She prompts the individual's imagination to decide which path he should take. Moreover, seeing the theatre as 'the Court', Wertenbaker argues strongly in favour of the artist avoiding being delivered a verdict. She insists on the vital role of the audience as "the jury to make that pronouncement". So, the function of the theatre is "a metaphorical trial", to use Bush's words (2013, p. 71).

As a radical playwright, Wertenbaker, like other women playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, addresses big issues such as using myths, the acquisition of a voice and women's aspirations to find an equal place in a male-dominated culture. In the following pages, I am going to concentrate on Wertenbaker's plays, which cover three decades (1980s-2000s). In doing so, the role of theatre, the function of art and the dilemmas of women artists are revealed. Plays, such as *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), *Our Country's Good* (1988), *Three Birds Alighting on a Field* (1991), *The Break of Day* (1995) and *The Line* (2009) reflect the function of art and the situation of artists as they live in two different worlds: Communism and Capitalism. Both worlds impose on artists a particular type of censorship. The first is tested by how artists are loyal to the ruling political party while the latter is through the market ethics.

In *The Love of the Nightingale* (RSC, 1988), the theme of violence and silencing women is pertinent. Here, Wertenbaker resorts to myth to dramatize this theme with a contemporary tone whilst at the same time showing the role of theatre in transmitting it. In her speech about the translating and transmitting of Greek tragedy and myth into the

modern stage, Lorna Hardwick, a Professor in Classical Studies, states that

> [p]erformed translations enable audiences to experience interaction between ancient and modern. They can also be indicators of changes in modern perceptions of the ancient play and in how practitioners use the transformative powers of theatre. (Hardwick, 2007, p. 358)

Likewise, delving into the past in order to comment on the present is one of the themes in Timberlake Wertenbaker's plays. The imaginative element of the past and its potentialities give audiences an opportunity to experience and revise the ancient in order to deal with the present and make a comparison between the old and the new. So, using historical facts and juxtaposing them with fiction, Wertenbaker "invites contemporary analogy", as Val Taylor has pointed out (1991, p. 333). Moreover, as a playwright, Wertenbaker repeatedly "turns to history to reveal and challenge human behaviour, depending, like Brecht, not on its universality but on its changeability" (Freeman, 2010, p. 210). In other words, the human propensity to change and adapt is a recurrent theme in Wertenbaker's works. So, eliminating this trait of human potentiality for change becomes the driving force for the ruling political system to stand against any sign of activity.

In his study of *English Drama Since 1940*, David Ian Rabey argues:

> Wertenbaker's drama often ranges from the domestic to the mythic within each play, identifying social situations which depend upon dispossession and restriction of human potential. Moreover, she demonstrates how these effects are the deliberate and intrinsic effects of language systems and terms of response which define the rights of the individual in exclusively patriarchal and imperial terms. This authoritarianism is specifically paternalistic in nature; that is, it pretends fostering care whilst simultaneously eroding systematically any belief in a possible separateness and difference of individual interests. The ultimate threat of this governing system is to deprive the individual of speech, and of the right of expression of selfhood; but hope persists, in the defiant

> reactions of her marginalised protagonists. (2003, p. 138)

This marginalisation of Wertenbaker's protagonists and the role of theatre to regain their voice is a recurrent theme in the next two plays.

HEALING POWER OF ART: *OUR COUNTRY'S* (1988)

In "Theatre, prison and rehabilitation: new narratives of purpose", Bridget Keehan points out:

> A repeated theme in the discourse on theatre practice in prisons over the last 20 years can be summarised as follows: theatre and drama projects have a positive effect on those incarcerated and may contribute towards rehabilitation. Related to this is a concern with explaining how theatre and drama projects achieve this and how their contribution to rehabilitation can be proved. (2015, pp. 391-394)

Likewise, Julie A. Rada asserts that

> As an artist, I respond to culture, and perhaps uncover my responsibility to culture, through creative means. Prison abolitionists and cultural theorists have long suggested that prison is a core structure shaping society, not just for the millions caught up in the justice system, formally, but for all of us. The practices of power, domination, and surveillance, and the resistance to and navigation of such forces shape social relations, institutional structures, and intimate relations. (2019, pp. 58-59)

The role and function of theatre are taken further in Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* (Royal Court, 1988). Again, Wertenbaker focuses on the redemptive power of theatre. Significantly, the artist figures are not as professional. They are amateurs. The play is based on Thomas Keneally's novel *The Playmaker* (1987) and an actual event during the first British exile of 160,000 convicts to Australia between 1787 and 1868 as it is recounted in Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore*. Wertenbaker tries to raise old questions about the revolutionary, political and social function of theatre within society. This public means

of theatre, which is hailed by oppressed people, is not well received by politicians. So, artists find it hard to situate their places without being censored or obliterated. In her answer to the question about the play as "a wonderful defence of the theatre and its value to individuals and society, as well as a classic example of how in oppressive times the arts are censored, if not obliterated", Wertenbaker's argument shows her genuine belief in art, especially theatre, as an important redemptive tool because of its publicity. She states that "[i]n a society that's not very much in touch with itself, art will be uncomfortable and I think that's the situation in England at the moment. It's an extremely uncomfortable country in all kinds of ways and [consequently] art is not going to be very appealing in that kind of discomfort" (Stephenson & Langridge, 2017, p. 141).

Our Country's Good follows the fortunes of 18th century convicts who are sent to Australia as a form of punishment for their vile actions. As mentioned before, these people are a mixture of amateurs, thieves, whores and ruffians. To redeem their behaviour, the governor, Captain Arthur Phillip, and the young Second Lieutenant Ralph Clark, a theatre enthusiast, arrange for the outcasts to put on a performance of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*. Instead of traditional means of punishment, this experience becomes an eloquent argument for the transformative power of theatre both as a means of giving voice, and a sense of communality to a group of social outcasts. This is quite clear in the character of Liz Morden, the hardened thief, who is given a new identity after the performance. From the outset of the play, their perilous situation is reported by John Wisehammer, one of the convicts, who are: "Spewed from [their] country, forgotten, bound to the dark edge of the earth", (1, 1, 185). Ostensibly, they are severed from their birthplace for the good of their country. But, in reality they are used in an experimental field.

The play as a whole focuses on actors. In other words, the figures of the artist are represented by unprofessional actors who have changed through the power of art. In my interview with Sophie Bush, dated February 9, 2016, she points out that "there are several interesting things that are happening in *Our Country's Good*; it is very much about amateur theatre in the sense of ordinary people finding their own artistic spirit rather than about artists who are artists by profession, and it's about people finding solace through art in adverse

circumstances."

This view is shared by Phillip, the governor of the colony, who feels that the convicts will not change unless they are offered something genuine instead of the routine process of floggings and hangings. So, for the good of the colony, Phillip suggests that the convicts should "see real plays: fine language, sentiment", (1, 3, 189). His confidence in the ability of human beings to learn makes him view theatre as an effective means since "no one is born naturally cultured? I'll have the gun now", (1, 3, 188). Metaphorically speaking, theatre is associated with 'the gun' to denote its powerful nature. On the one hand, theatre is a good means of instilling good values and behaviours in the convicts. On the other hand, it is used to domesticate and change oppressed people. In other words, it is a conjunction point between cultural and non-cultural background. In her speech about applied theatre as research, Sarah Woodland argues that

> [a]pplied theatre can be seen as operating at the 'cultural interface'(Nakata, 2007) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges. I conceive applied theatre as an art of living- an embodied, relational act of making of selves, worlds, and cultures in art, and in life…. As such, aesthetics encompasses the embodied aesthetic engagement and meaning making that occurs within the process of ensemble building and creating works; the resulting works as they are experienced in a community-based event; and the radical potential of such affective encounters to embody ethical participation and social justice. (Woodland, 2019, pp. 42-43)

However, to achieve the governor's suggestion, the Second Lieutenant, Ralph Clark, is chosen to put on a play in order to change the daily lives of the convicts and expose them to refined and sentimental language. Ralph becomes the director of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*. What attracts Wertenbaker to the Irish writer is her early emphasis on the subject of theatre which is as follows:

> The argument the theatre is a waste of time and resources, pointless, silly corrupting, evil, dangerous the theatre is

> pleasurable, good for the mind, good for the body, enriching, humanising. (Bush, 2013, p. 118)[1]

Faced with this debate, a heated argument over theatre and its role in society ensues among the authorities of the 'Repressive State Apparatus' and the 'Ideological State Apparatus'. The first represents the whole state, such as the army, the government and the administration of prisons which "function by violence". The latter represents religious and cultural institutions such as churches and the arts which "function 'by ideology'" (Althusser, 2001, pp. 96-97). Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good* witnesses the application of these two devices. In the first part of the play, the authorities inflict their policies by violent actions such as floggings and hangings as stated previously. In the second part, the authorities adopt theatre as an ideological device "to redirect the fervor and passion of dissident action into more socially accepted enterprises" (Sullivan, 1993, p. 143).

The representative officers of the authorities take two opposing sides over theatre. One side views theatre as a subversive force for the social and moral fabric of society which places their authority in danger, while the other side shows no interest. The first side is voiced by Ross who is very conservative towards theatre:

> […] I know this play – this play – order will become disorder. The theatre leads to threatening theory and you, Governor, you have His Majesty's commission to build castles, raise armies, administer a military colony, not fandangle about with a lewdy play! (1, 6, 210)

Ross, like Tereus in *The Love of the Nightingale*, reacts strongly to the production of the play because it stimulates revolution and revolt, which threatens the political system. His suspicion and fear of theatre recalls Tereus's speech: "These plays condone vice". (*The Love of the Nightingale*, 5, 303). So, "we have no theatre or even philosophers in Thrace", (5, 304). This casts a brilliant light on the Marxist-Leninist 'theory' of the state as "a [repressive] 'machine' which enables the ruling classes (in the 19th century the bourgeois class and the 'class'

[1] For more explanation, see Wertenbaker, notes for *Our Country's Good*, 17 June 1988, *TWA* (Timberlake Wertenbaker Archive), *BLMC* (British Library Manuscripts Collection), Add 79272.

of big landowners) to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. capitalist exploitation)",[2] to quote Louis Althusser (2001, p. 92), a French Marxist philosopher.

The religious camp, which is represented by Reverend Johnson, concentrates on the moral issues. Reverend Johnson is not completely satisfied with the content of the play. He says, "I hear many of these plays are about rakes and encourage loose morals in women", (1, 6, 207). Therefore, marriage will lose its value as a sacred bond between two souls since "actresses are not famed for their morals", (1, 6, 202). Being an Irish writer, Reverend Johnson expresses his fear that *The Recruiting Officer* will "propagate Catholic doctrine", (1, 6, 205) while Lieutenant Will Dawes views it as a waste of time, saying: "Put the play on, don't put it on, it won't change the shape of the universe", (1, 6, 204). But he sees no harm in it "[a]s long as I don't have to watch it", (1, 6, 209). Similarly, Captain Tench sees the play as an unnecessary waste of time: "It is at most a passable diversion, an entertainment to wile away the hours of the idle", (1, 6, 204). He further claims that, "It's two hours, possibly of amusement, possibly of boredom, and we will lose the labour of the convicts during the time they are learning to play", (1, 6, 209). His capitalistic thinking leads him to suggest another option which is more practical from his point of view:

> I would simply say that if you want to build a civilization there are more important things than a play. If you want to teach the convicts something, teach them to farm, to build houses, teach them a sense of respect for property, teach them thrift so they don't eat a week's rations in one night, but above all, teach them how to work, not how to sit around laughing at a comedy. (1, 6, 207)

The few officers who strongly support and are motivated by the project are Phillip and Ralph. Phillip believes in the potentiality of theatre to

[2] In his comment on the close relationship between the object of the proletariat and Marxism in Althusser's theory of Marxism, John Fraser states that "[i]n a socialist state this dominance by theory can be enforced only by an apparatus from which the proletariat is excluded. Scientific socialism, that is, will be produced by a form of state of which the class which makes the revolution becomes the 'object', or 'support'. See John Fraser, "Louis Althusser on Science, Marxism and Politics", *Science & Society*, v. 40, n. 4 (Winter, 1976): 442.

redeem the evil-doers. He quotes Rousseau's inflammatory sentence, "'Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains'", (1, 6, 203) to refer to the fact that evil is not naturally innate but it is made by blind political policies. So "They can be educated", (1, 6, 204). To persuade other authorities, Phillip delivers a speech about the role of theatre as "an expression of civilization". Significantly, his speech shows his familiarity with the pioneers of theatre:

> We belong to a great country which has spawned great playwrights: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and even in our own time, Sheridan. The convicts will be speaking a refined, literate language and expressing sentiments of a delicacy they are not used to. It will remind them that there is more to life than crime, punishment. And we, this colony of a few hundred, will be watching this together, for a few hours we will no longer be despised prisoners and hated gaolers. (1, 6, 206)

Phillip, like Ralph, is motivated by the project not only for the convicts' improvement but also for his own self-advancement. So the production of *The Recruiting Officer* becomes a suitable method of rehabilitation for both the convicts and their jailers. For Althusser, the ideological state methods are used "to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks" (2001, p. 98).

Throughout *Our Country's Good*, we are told that the crimes committed by the felons are related to their poverty in their homeland. This old problem of deprivation continues in their new space as there is an extreme shortage of food. So both the authorities and the felons find themselves "at odds with each other and their surroundings, and both struggle to survive against the sometimes desperate circumstances of pioneering" (Sullivan, 1993, p. 142).

This is clear in Ralph's surprise at Mary Brenham, one of the convicts, and her newly acquired behaviour through the rehearsal of *The Recruiting Officer*:

> I speak about her, but in a small way this could affect all the convicts and even ourselves, we could forget our worries about the supplies, the hangings and the floggings, and think of ourselves at the theatre, in London with our wives and children,

> that is, we could, euh – (1, 6, 208)

Mary Brenham can barely speak in the first scene but towards the end she performs the main role in *The Recruiting Officer*. Initially she lacks confidence and does not think she has a voice. So her personal journey is very much one of empowerment and finding her voice through becoming an actress and becoming involved in theatre.

This provides evidence for the role of theatre as an imaginative outlet for the boredom of prison life. The desire of the convicts to be in reflects the modern stories of prisoners with whom Wertenbaker communicated. In a letter to Wertenbaker, Joe White, an actual prisoner who played Ralph Clark in the first production of *Our Country's Good*, writes of drama as "a refuge and one of the only real weapons against the hopelessness of these places" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 166).

Eventually the play is endorsed despite some reticence. Thus, the outcasts are invited to take part in the rehearsal of the play in a transparent atmosphere without being oppressed. In other words, "ideology is not forced upon subjects; its authority and dominance are not maintained by outright or visibly repressive apparati" (Sullivan, 1993, p. 144). This truth is uttered by Phillip as he theorizes about the rehearsal:

> What is a statesman's responsibility? To ensure the rule of law. But the citizens must be taught to obey the law of their own will. I want to rule over responsible human beings, not tyrannize over a group of animals. I want there to be a contract between us, not a whip on my side, terror and hatred on theirs. (2, 2, 246)

Both the oppressors and the oppressed work collectively and cooperatively for their good. With the production of the play, the convicts begin to discover new areas which have not been seen before. Their active participation leads them to self-realization, to discover their potentialities.

However, much of the critical debate of *Our Country's Good* has centred around the character of Liz Morden. Our initial impression of her reveals the impossibility of redemption. She is described by Phillip as "one of the most difficult women in the colony". She is "lower than a

slave, full of loathing, foul mouthed, desperate", (2, 2, 245). Consequently, as a social experiment, her hardened behaviour needs "to be made an example of" redeeming "by redemption", (2, 2, 245). Liz's taciturn and brusque nature hides her feelings of inferiority. Even when she is accused of stealing, she does not defend herself, although she is innocent. When she is asked to tell the truth, she refuses, saying "it wouldn't have mattered", (2, 10, 271). Once again, Wertenbaker uses theatre "as a place where lost voices […] can be regained" (Bush, 2013, p. 146). Liz's disbelief that the officers will trust her is overcome by her valuable participation in the play. And, as Mary insists, "This is the theatre. We will believe you", (2, 1, 243). Liz is given two choices: either to maintain the honour code of the convict community or to continue to act in the play. She chooses the latter, sacrificing her own salvation for the benefit of the players. So, by the play's penultimate scene, Liz comes to realize that her voice will be listened to. Her confidence in her own language prompts her to defend herself and she announces, "Your Excellency, I will endeavour to speak Mr. Farquhar's lines with the elegance and clarity their own worth commands", (2, 6, 272). In her interpretation of these lines, Bush, the author of *The Theatre of Timberlake Wertenbaker*, quotes the positive response of some critics concerning theatre:

> Theatre, it seems, can empower women with some degree of linguistic franchise. The ability to command many voices and to play many parts [provides] survival strategies for women. Those women, ostensibly powerful who lack linguistic versatility […], appear dramatically weak. While those who can switch linguistic codes according to context enjoy greater power whatever their status. (2013, p. 131)

Liz succeeds in engaging with her masters' language instead of her previous argot of thieves. Her social formation with the other spectrum of society is fulfilled when she is offered an opportunity through theatre. In his comment on Althusser's thought of 'theory' and 'ideology', Terry Eagleton argues:

> A social formation […] lacks organic unity and is no way 'centred' upon individuals; but it cannot succeed in reproducing itself unless

> those individuals are permitted the illusion that the world 'hails' them, shows some regard for their faculties, addresses itself to them as one subject to another, and it is this fiction which ideology for Althusser exists to foster. (Eagleton, 1990, p. 88)

Liz gets self-assurance by placing herself "within reach of the field of reflection of a mirror". Participating in *The Recruiting Officer* gives her a chance to find out the potential strengths within herself. So social formation or integration becomes possible by placing the individual into a similar situation drawn from the performed play. Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist, argues that:

> [T]he transition within a generation from the solitary to the gregarious form can be obtained by exposing the individual, at a certain stage, to the exclusively visual action of a similar image, provided it is animated by movements of a style sufficiently close to that characteristic of the species. (2013, pp. 256-257)

Liz overcomes her passivity with the help of Ralph, who discovers her skills. Importantly, by making the characters of Liz and Ralph take the lead roles in act two, Wertenbaker intends to show the hierarchal relation between male and female artists. Ralph, as the director of *The Recruiting Officer*, chooses the cast and gives them instructions on how to act properly. More than that, he encourages them and assigns the most suitable role for each participant. His insistence on including Liz in the rehearsal of the play reveals Ralph's role in Liz's discovery. In doing so, Liz owes him a great deal.

Our Country's Good ends with Ralph's affirmation of the importance of theatre as a therapeutic experiment: "The theatre is like a small republic, it requires private sacrifices for the good of the whole", (2, 11, 280). Liz Morden finds a way to speak to other people and to communicate and interact with others in a way that is not aggressive, through theatre. It is portrayed as an instigator for the individuals to act. In doing so, the marginalized voices begin to be heard. This theme is clearly associated with women. In different parts of the play we see that their aspirations to be empowered are high. In *Our Country's Good*, for example, Dabby Bryant asserts, "We women have to look after each other. Let's learn the lines", (1, 8, 216). In

another place, she says, “A woman should look after her own interests, that’s all”, (2, 7, 258). This fruitful experience, which is done collectively, recalls Wertenbaker’s work with the director, Max Stafford-Clark.

Our Country’s Good serves as a good example of the joint work between the director and the writer. Working with Stafford-Clark, Wertenbaker developed her playwriting through research-driven workshops. This approach was suitable for facilitating the dilemmas of time and a restricted budget which affected playwrights. Bush maintains that:

> [b]y the time Stafford-Clark worked with Wertenbaker, Joint Stock [theatre company] had defined the notion of ‘workshop’ within British theatre as a means of helping a commissioned writer research and develop a script by drawing from responses of performers to research, discussion and structured improvisation, and of helping the company as a whole to develop an understanding about the themes of the play. (2013, p. 146)

Moreover, Wertenbaker’s *Our Country’s Good* (1988) “celebrates the discovery of resources through language and of subversive strategy through theatre, and this liberal element of celebration is arguably a principal reason for its popular acclaim and success for Max Stafford-Clark’s regime at the Royal Court” (Rabey, 2003, p. 140).

Although Wertenbaker’s *Our Country’s Good* focuses on the function of theatre in society, she raises genuine questions about the dilemma of women playwrights and artists in general.

Like other British women playwrights, Wertenbaker devotes her works to dealing with the issues of women writers in their attempts to acquire a positive status. In answer to a question about the positive attitudes to women by contemporary women playwrights, Betty Caplan, an Australian playwright and theatre critic, reports that “there are plenty of women writers confronting the dilemmas of our lives in their plays – Caryl Churchill, Timberlake Wertenbaker, Sarah Daniels, to name but a few” (Goodman & de Gay, 1996, p. 182). In the case of Wertenbaker, the dilemmas of female artists are connected with the problems of mothering and child-rearing which seem less important to male artists. These issues are clearly manifested by applied theatre.

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