NYU | STEINHARDT

ARTSPRAXIS

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ARTSPRAXIS

Emphasizing critical analysis of the arts in society.

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ArtsPraxis Volume 7, Issue 1 looked to engage members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice. This call for papers was released in anticipation of the publication of ArtsPraxis Volume 6, Issue 2. The submission deadline for Volume 7, Issue 1 was November 15, 2019.

Submissions fell under one of the following categories:

- Drama in Education (i.e., studies in drama/theatre curriculum, special education, integrated arts, assessment and evaluation)
- Applied Theatre (i.e., studies in community-based theatre, theatre of the oppressed, the teaching artist, diversity and inclusion)
- Theatre for Young Audiences and Play Production (i.e., studies in acting, directing, dramaturgy, playwriting, dramatic literature, theatre technology, arts-based research methodologies)

Key questions the Issue was to address included:

Drama in Education

- How and why do we teach drama and theatre in schools and community settings?
- How do the roles and responsibilities of the teaching artist differ from those of the classroom teacher (primary, secondary or higher education)?
- What is the contemporary role of drama and theatre in arts education?
- How do we prepare future theatre artists and educators in the 21st century?
- What are innovative ways of devising original works and/or teaching theatre using various aesthetic forms, media, and/or technology?
- To what extent can the study of global theatre forms impact students' learning?
- To what extent should we distinguish theatre-making from drama as a learning medium?
- How can integrated-arts curricula facilitate teaching, learning and presenting the craft of

theatre?
- How do we assess students' aesthetic understanding and awareness?
- What research supports the potential of drama as a learning medium?
- How do drama and theatre make connections across curricular content areas and beyond schools?
- How do drama and theatre education contribute to lifelong learning?
- What role do drama and theatre play in community agencies?

Applied Theatre
- How can drama provide a forum to explore ideas?
- What are innovative strategies for using drama to stimulate dialogue, interaction and change?
- How is theatre being used to rehabilitate people in prisons, health facilities, and elsewhere?
- How do we prepare future artists/educators for work in applied theatre?
- What ethical questions should the artist/educator consider in their work?
- In what ways are aesthetics important in applied theatre? How do we negotiate a commitment to both the process and product of applied theatre work?
- How do artist/educators assess participants' understandings in an applied theatre project?
- What are the major tensions in the field and how are these being addressed?
- To what extent has recent research on affect influenced community-based praxis?

Theatre for Young Audiences/Play Production
- Theatre for young audiences is an international movement and the borders are breaking down so how do we present and respond to work from other countries?
- Who exactly are our new audiences– who are we talking to?
- Are we as brave as we think we are? How does what we think we should do relate to what we want to do as artists?
- Is the writer at the heart of future theatre creation? What has happened to dramaturgy in the brave new world of immersive, experiential, visual/physical theatre?
- Theatre for Young Audiences has always been in the forefront of theatrical innovation. So what is next?
- What have we learned about nurturing the artist of the future– playwriting, theatre-making, performance?
- How do artists establish rigorous, intentional new works development processes that are innovative and sustainable?
- How does accountability serve the stakeholders in a new works development process?
- How do we define and measure success in theatre for young audiences?

We encouraged article submissions from interdisciplinary artists, educators, and scholars. Our goal was to motivate a dialogue among a wide variety of practitioners and researchers that will enrich the development of educational theatre in the coming years.

Call for Papers
Papers were to be no longer than 4,000 words, had to be accompanied by a 200 word abstract and 100 word biographies for the author(s), and conformed to APA style manual.

Reviewing Procedures
Each article will be sent to two members of the editorial board. They will provide advice on the following:

- Whether the article should be published with no revisions/with revisions.
- The contribution the article makes to the arts community.
- Specific recommendations to the author about improving the article.
- Other publishing outlets if the article is considered unacceptable.

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to Jonathan P. Jones, New York University, Program in Educational Theatre, Pless Hall, 82 Washington Square East, Rm 223, New York, NY 10003, USA. Email: jonathan.jones@nyu.edu

Cover image from NYU's Program in Educational Theatre production of *The Triangle Project* directed in 2011 by Dr. Nan Smithner.

ARTSPRAXIS

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ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 1

Editorial: No End and No Beginning

JONATHAN P. JONES
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Welcome to the new home for ArtsPraxis!

ArtsPraxis was founded in 2003 by Philip Taylor following the NYU Forum on Arts Assessment as a peer-reviewed journal that would provide publication opportunities for selected papers from that conference and others which were submitted for review that responded to similar questions as those explored at that event. The genesis of the journal was informed by the results of my literature review which identified over 60 journals in the arts disciplines but few which facilitated dialogue across and between the arts disciplines. The NYU Forum on Assessment in Arts Education brought together over 130 participants committed to discourse among arts educators and the inaugural issue of ArtsPraxis was published in 2004. Thereafter, Christina Marín edited a second edition in 2010 following the 2005 Forum on Ethnotheatre and Theatre for Social Justice. Subsequently, I became the editor in 2016 and since then, we have published six issues.

I write this as I commence the third month of the stay home order in the New York City region due to COVID-19. We understand that a significant social shift is developing. For educators, distance learning

has become our primary mode of instruction. For theatre artists, sharing of work is either done digitally or not at all. Theatres are closed; in-person rehearsals are verboten. And yet, we persist. The need for community engaged theatre and school-based arts programs remains as vital as ever. To that end, I am excited to remain active in the pursuit of sharing research and practice with artists and educators—and look forward to continuing this work through the rest of the year.

IN THIS ISSUE

Our contributions in this issue come from artists and educators whose praxis focuses largely on creating and devising theatre with young people. The first article is from **Gina L. Grandi**. Upon winning the AATE Distinguished Dissertation honor in 2019, I listened to her give a talk about her devised theatre work with girls of color in New York City. As I am strongly supportive of promoting this culturally relevant drama pedagogy, I invited Gina to write an article for this publication. In the second article, **Anna Glarin** explores her work creating theatre *with* young people in the UK. Like Gina, Anna's writing highlights the necessity to center student voice in the theatre they create, while navigating power dynamics and ethical considerations. Finally, **Nkululeko Sibanda**, a practitioner based in South Africa, interrogates the aesthetics of applied theatre projects.

LOOKING AHEAD

From the time government agencies and the press reported the emergence of a novel coronavirus in late 2019, we have collectively faced the need to reconsider the way we congregate, communicate, and educate across the world. Artists and educators have been called upon to reinvent their practice seemingly overnight. While we struggle to balance our personal health and wellness, *ArtsPraxis* invites you to share your scholarship, practice, and praxis in Volume 7, Issue 2a. As we've asked before, we welcome teachers, drama therapists, applied theatre practitioners, theatre-makers, performance artists, and scholars to offer vocabularies, ideas, strategies, practices, measures, and outcomes that respond to Educational Theatre in the Time of COVID-19.

Concurrently, as of this writing, we find ourselves about ten days into international protests following the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Protesters the world over have made some specific calls to action, which include: acknowledge that black lives matter, educate yourself about social and racial injustice, and change the legal system that allows these heinous acts to go unpunished. In thinking through how we in the field of educational theatre can proactively address these needs, I reminded myself that there are many artists and educators who are already deeply engaged in this work. And while scholarship and practice around racial and social justice permeate so much of what we do, now would be a good time to document current examples of best practices, organize them, and share them. As such, we will have a companion issue of *ArtsPraxis*—this one, Volume 7, Issue 2b. Again, we welcome teachers, drama therapists, applied theatre practitioners, theatre-makers, performance artists, and scholars to offer vocabularies, ideas, strategies, practices, measures, and outcomes that respond to Social Justice Practices for Educational Theatre.

These companion issues will publish later in 2020. Thereafter, look to the Program in Educational Theatre at NYU for the 2021 Forum on Humanities and the Arts, and the Verbatim Performance Lab. *ArtsPraxis* will return to general topics in educational theatre for early 2021.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan P. Jones, PhD 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 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. Currently, Jonathan is an administrator, faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at NYU Steinhardt.

Jonathan has conducted drama workshops in and around New York City, London, and Los Angeles in schools and prisons. 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, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. He co-produced a staged-reading of a new musical, The Throwbacks, at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in 2013.

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.

At NYU, his courses have included Theory of Creative Drama, Methods of Conducting Creative Drama, American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Elementary Drama, Drama across the Curriculum and Beyond, Assessment of Student Work in Drama, World Drama, Development of Theatre and Drama I, Acting: Scene Study, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Secondary Drama, Directing Youth Theatre, Dramatic Activities in the Secondary Drama Classroom, Shakespeare's Theatre I, and Devising Educational Drama Programs and Curricula. Early in his placement at NYU, Jonathan served as teaching assistant for American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Seminar in Elementary Student Teaching, Theatre of Brecht and Beckett, and Theatre of Eugene O'Neill and worked as a course tutor and administrator for the study abroad program in London for three

summers. He has supervised over 50 students in their student teaching placements in elementary and secondary schools in the New York City Area. Prior to becoming a teacher, Jonathan was an applicant services representative at NYU in the Graduate School of Arts and Science Enrollment Services Office for five years.

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).

In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, Jonathan currently teaches Fundamentals of Speech, Introduction to Theatre, and Theatre History at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 7 Issue 1

"I'm Gonna Use It To Tell You": Self-Reflection and Construction of Self

GINA L. GRANDI

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

For seven weeks, I worked with thirteen high school girls to explore issues of identity through a devised theatre performance. Throughout the process, I found evidence that the process of working through theatre mitigated the ways young people filter their responses and provides a platform in which they can interrogate their perceptions and opinions. This article discusses how, while working through theatre provided a space in which the girls I worked with expressed uncensored thoughts and opinions, there was a return to constructed personas when creating a public performance.

At 3:15 p.m. on July 5th, 2016, in a basement rehearsal studio in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn, eleven high school girls were

writing about their identities. Some had cleared spaces on the room’s single table, shoving aside the stacks of permission slips and loose-leaf paper. Others perched on folding chairs, leaned over the windowsill, or sat on the floor, notebooks propped in their laps.

Within a few days, the girls would number thirteen. In the weeks that followed, we would work to create a full length, original theatre performance through writing, improvisation, theatre activities, and discussion. The girls wrote close to two hundred poems, monologues, dialogues, and diatribes. They improvised and created dozens of scenes. They talked with me and with each other. They experimented with theatrical structures and with forms of writing. By the end of seven weeks, they had written, rehearsed, and presented a twenty-six page script, and I had a stack of script pages, writing, field notes, memos, and transcripts.

For my dissertation study, I worked with thirteen high school girls for seven weeks to create an original performance. For three hours a day, three days a week, the girls experimented with scene work, movement, poetry, and dialogue. After three weeks, they looked over their work to identity throughlines and themes. From there, they developed and rehearsed a final performance: a collage of theatrical scenes and spoken word pieces. They presented their work in a professional theatre space to an invited audience. Each performance was followed by a facilitated talkback.

This study was done in collaboration with an existing theatre program, Summer Theatre Experience (STE).[1] We began with thirteen girls—Mazzie, Ashley, Maya, Liz, Eva, Melanie, Anna, Asia, Janelle, Jordan, Akila, Mia, and Adriana—eight of whom identified as black, one as Dominican, one as Puerto Rican, one as South Asian, and two as mixed race. All the participating girls lived in Brooklyn and all attended public or charter high schools with free and reduced lunch rates of over 70%. Janelle and Jordan did not complete the program, although their writing was represented, with their permission, in the final performance.

My original research objective was to investigate the ways in which theatre creation might serve as qualitative method, providing potentially more nuanced data than might be achieved through traditional methods. While the resulting study yielded insight into the

[1] All names of organizations and participants are pseudonyms.

ways the participating girls viewed themselves and their peers, their thoughts about race, power, and personal agency, this article focuses on the ways in which this process served as a vehicle for self-reflection and personal understanding.

POWER OF THEATRE

As a former high school teacher, I have seen firsthand the ways in which participating in drama activities and creating theatre can be a catalyst for community building and self-reflection. Theatre of the Oppressed creator Augusto Boal refers to theatre as “a rehearsal for the revolution” (Boal, 1979, p. 122): the means by which an individual might train themselves for real-life action. I see theatre as a space in which personas might be tried on and strategies to various situations considered. One can experiment with relationships and attitudes without real world consequences. As drama is an inherently group activity, practitioners also have to learn to work effectively and productively with other people.

This study employed *devising*, the common theatrical term for the process by which a piece of theatre is created by and originates with a particular group. It is, in short, theatre that is generated, rather than starting with a script (Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007; Oddey, 1994). While it is a collaborative process, there is no prescribed methodology to the form that collaboration might take (Bicât & Baldwin, 2013; Oddey, 1994).

Devising is well suited to examining individual experience, as it allows space for individual perspective and reflection (Oddey, 1994, 2007). I was able to introduce ideas, themes, and skills, but let the participating girls decide what themes and ideas they wanted to explore in more depth and which they wanted to leave behind. There were ample opportunities to incorporate full and small group conversations. Only writings the girls chose were included in drafts of the performance script, and throughout the rehearsal process, the girls had final say over the content and presentation.

When devising with young people, the workshop leader walks a fine line. On the one hand, the work is participant-generated. On the other, the facilitator, as an experienced theatre practitioner, has the responsibility of pushing the acting and production value to a higher level. For this study, I was teaching acting, production, and playwriting

skills as well as working to create a space in which students felt able to speak and write freely and honestly.

EXAMINING HONESTY

Researchers have found that adolescent girls often demonstrate the internalization of cultural expectations and stereotypes, even when challenging them. Researcher and arts practitioner Dana Edell (2010) describes this in detail in her doctoral research, which investigates the playmaking work of a similar demographic. Edell speaks of the mix of internalization and rebellion that often manifested in the girls’ writing. Edell’s conclusion that “uncensored” does “not mean unchecked and unquestioned” (p. 324) served as a reminder to me that these internalizations ran deep, and that open and honest discussion and communication was essential when working with the group. My responsibility during the first several workshops was to create a space in which the girls felt they were able to speak without judgment, while providing the kind of probing questions that would open space for deeper thinking.

At the end of our first week together, I set up a group conversation to discuss some of the themes that had come up so far in our work. I chose to structure this as a graffiti discussion, a common classroom strategy designed to facilitate equity of access. In a *graffiti discussion*, questions are posted around the room on large pieces of paper. Each student takes a marker and responds to each question on their own, then to each other’s responses, all in writing. In this way, students have the chance to process and reflect before having to speak. They have the opportunity to read others’ opinions and thoughts, which may spark new ideas of their own. For this discussion, instead of posting questions, I posted quotes and asked the girls to respond.

During this activity, I noticed we had reached a point where the girls were feeling comfortable asking each other to think more deeply and questioning their own responses. Under “There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you,” responses included:

> Having to hold in your true identity is like drinking poison and expecting someone else to die—it is a lifetime of captivated angry. That is no way to live.

That is a great simile, but what does it truly uncover?

Agreed b/c when you hold something back it gets worse instead of it getting better.

I think it can make you super sad to hide your roots.

I agree because it's like when you're angry about something if you continue to hold it in and not let it out sooner or later you're going to explode and it's going to be crazy.

It's either we are forced by authority to not speak up, or we are scared. Sometimes we are not able to express ourself and that is caused by us not being able to have the courage to tell how they really feel. So they keep whatever they have balled up inside of their selves.

I'll admit that I do this a lot and I feel like it's second nature to me. I would rather keep it to myself instead of bothering someone else with my troubles.

The girls were starting to dig more deeply into each other's statements. asking what a quote really meant, or pointing out that perhaps no one is ever satisfied with 'who they are.' There were connections being made to personal experience and musings as to why such situations might occur.

While there were many thoughtful responses during the 'conversation,' there were also glib statements such as "negative influence leads to negative consequences" and "there's no such thing as normal." One recurring platitude I noticed was "just be yourself," in statements such as "Be happy with yourself," "I agree we should be comfortable being ourselves all the time," and "You can't become better or the person you'd like to be unless you're true to yourself and comfortable with who you are."

About halfway through the verbal discussion about what they had read and written, I pressed the girls on this point. "So here's a question I've been wondering," I said.

I see on a lot of these 'it's really important to be true to yourself'

> and ‘be happy with who you are’—there’s a lot of those comments. So my question is, what if you can’t? This says ‘make decisions to be true to yourself’, but what if what you want to do is not what your family wants? Or teachers? What if what’s being expected of you is not what you want in that moment?

Eva was first to answer, saying she believed that this was a relevant question because, “I feel like teachers, they don’t really understand your process of thinking.” She went on to talk about her frustration with her school’s expectation that she act in a specific way. Anna jumped in to agree and echo Eva’s sentiments, mentioning college and, “I know we have to do it or whatever.”

“Why?” I asked again. “Why do you have to?”

From there the girls took over the discussion while I stayed quiet. Janelle talked about her father leaving her mother to start another family, and how, while she knew he was ‘following his heart,’ she wondered if he could be completely happy after making that choice. She also talked about how she wasn’t able to come out as bisexual to her religious mother, and that she would have to wait for a different time in her life to be fully herself. The girls talked about the difficulty of truly accepting others, the complications of pursuing artistic ambitions, and feeling torn between school and home culture. Although the conversation meandered in a variety of directions, the act of stopping, thinking, and having the space to try out new ideas seemed to move the girls away from glibness and into nuance.

The “be yourself” theme came up again over the course of the summer, and there was a great deal of that message in the final script. This conversation, though, marked a turning point. The girls were weighing consequences and possibilities and taking the time to examine their initial reactions to questions and statements. It felt as though when “be true to yourself” came up again, there was a deeper understanding of some of the complications behind the statement.

CONSTRUCTING PERSONAS

Through this process, I discovered a great deal about what these young people thought and felt about themselves. What was interesting, and what I had not anticipated, was that when the girls went through

the process of curating their work and deciding what they wanted to present, they also went through the process of making that performance presentable. The fact that there was an audience mattered to them; even knowing the audience was ostensibly there to witness their truth, the girls chose and constructed their public personas within the framework of that performance. Those personas included expressing vulnerability they may not have risked expressing six weeks earlier. They included anger and grief in ways the girls may have been previously unwilling or unable to publicly inhabit. However, the fact of an audience impacted the way in which those personas manifested. While the girls used the workshops to process, the final performance was what, ultimately, the girls wanted an audience to hear and experience.

The writing and scene work the girls created during our first workshop expressed many of the themes we explored over the next several weeks, including those our final show eventually centered around. The creation work our first day revolved around themes of 'rising above.' One group portrayed a figure literally breaking out of situation in which she was held down, the other a series of figures ascending. In both writing and creation, expressions of self-confidence were prevalent. The final show returned to these themes, to messages of 'I will not be brought down' and 'I will succeed.' It was a reversion to clichés, but, it seemed, clichés they wished to inhabit. In the world they created on stage, the girls recognized those things that made them angry, those things that made them frustrated, and then broke away from them, creating a unified, confident, 'see me' finale. While the girls wanted their dissatisfactions to be heard by their audience, they also wanted to be seen in a certain way.

Perhaps they weren't just telling their audience, but were also telling themselves. Perhaps there was an element of wish fulfillment embedded in what they presented. Edell (2013) notes that the young women she worked with often re-embodied oppression and presented stereotypes in their original performances. In some ways, this was the case here. It also seemed as though the girls were striving, in their conclusion, to portray their best selves. The performance felt like a mix of genuine expression and constructed narrative. However, there wasn't anything that didn't feel honest. They weren't lying, but they were also being careful about the way they were presenting themselves.

PROCESS, PRODUCT, AND IMPACT

In my experience as a classroom teacher and as a teaching artist, I have observed that the act of performing, particularly performing self-written work, has been an overwhelmingly positive experience for young people. But is it the process of creation, and of being part of a supportive community, that makes the experience a profound one? There is a specific kind of validation inherent in performance. Drama therapist Stephen Snow (2009) speaks to the particular benefits of performance: both the build up during the rehearsal period and the “intensity and concentration” creates an “effective, focused rite of passage” (p. 132). Snow contends that this final rite was essential in terms of bringing closure to participants and providing outside acknowledgment of their work. Although Snow was referring specifically to therapeutic experiences, the same argument could be made for any devising process: the final validation of presentation bringing closure and meaning. In our situation, one could argue that it was the process that contributed to any deeper understanding or insights the girls may have walked away from, but the performance still offered a culminating event, a public acknowledgment of their work together. As a researcher, I found both process and product valuable, particularly when comparing the two and examining the differences in the roles the girls inhabited on and off stage, but in terms of the impact the work had on the girls themselves, I think the performance made less of an impression than the work moving towards it.

Mia, for example, was engaged throughout the workshop process. While she wasn’t always vocal during full group conversations, she often took on a leadership role in small group creation work and her feedback when reflecting on writing and scene work was thoughtful and insightful. She expressed interest in the process, contributing a great deal of writing to the final performance. At the post-show talkbacks, though, she was quiet, slumped in her chair. When an audience member asked the girls what impact the process had had on them, she replied, “I think this was a great experience, but it’s not going to impact me on any type of way.” Were Mia’s words merely disappointment that the program was ending, and she was returning to a school in which she was unhappy? Or did they speak to a greater sense of futility? Was she truly leaving the program unaffected in “any type of way?”

Asia, another otherwise largely silent presence during the

talkbacks, responded. “I agree with Mia,” she said. Mia elaborated, explaining how she didn’t think that the teachers from her school hearing her words would matter:

> Honestly, I feel like [teachers in the audience] going back to the school and telling them about this place, ain’t gonna do that much … Because they feel that what they’re doing is right.

Mia believed that even if the teachers in attendance told other teachers and administrators what the girls had communicated on stage, nothing would change, and Mia’s understanding of ‘impact’ was that something changes. She was leaving a seven-week process that culminated in constructing a message that she believed wouldn’t be heard. If we had not had a final performance, would Mia have expressed a different opinion about the way the work had impacted her? Did her understanding of the final performance as pointless color the entirety of the summer?

One of the girls, Mazzie, didn’t come to the second performance. While I found out later she had mentioned to a couple of the other girls that she would only be performing one of the two nights, she did not tell me that she would be absent. She had missed a week and a half of rehearsal time to attend another program and her speaking parts in the show were limited. Did Mazzie not feel invested in the project as a whole, having missed much of the writing of the script, or did this speak to the performance not being what she viewed as the ‘point’ of the program?

The potential of theatre as a means as a means of empowerment, particularly with marginalized communities and young people, has been written about extensively (Boehm & Boehm, 2003; Sola, 2012; Wernick, Kulick, & Woodford, 2014). Companies that work with young people through theatre use the word in their mission statements, testimonials, or “about” sections (Opening Act, n.d.; Marquee Youth, n.d). Did the girls find the performance empowering? They expressed pride at the conclusion of the performance. During the talkback, many expressed their general happiness that they had participated. Would the workshops on their own have accomplished that? Some may have needed the culmination, the public acknowledgement of what they have to say. For others, like Mia, the public nature of the final performance may have merely underscored what they saw as

systematic stasis.

What the final performance did provide was the opportunity to publicly inhabit roles of their choice. These roles were filtered for public consumption, but they were actively chosen roles. Anna and Eva spoke, without interruption, against the systems in their school they felt frustrated with. The girls introduced themselves with words they felt were important. The finale presented a unified, connected line of girls, demanding to be seen.

CONCLUSION: BEING HEARD, BEING SEEN

Throughout this process, I found evidence that the girls felt opportunities for speaking and for speaking out were limited in their day-to-day lives. They often commented on their lack of space for expressing their opinions, particularly those opinions that might be unpopular with parents, teachers, or adults in power. It was clear that the workshop space offered an uncensored platform that they did not feel they had elsewhere.

In many instances, the girls specifically expressed the lack of opportunity to voice their thoughts in school. When I spoke to Liz and Eva before the first performance, I asked what they hoped any teachers attending might take away from the show. Liz said, “I’m hoping teachers just take away that school is hard. And you’ve got to be able to express yourself. And I guess this was the way to do it.”

“[I think they should] have more students be vocal about [issues and opinions],” Eva added, “because we had the opportunity [in STE] to be vocal about it, where we usually won’t. And our voices would be shut down. But now we are not shut down, and we have the opportunity to allow people to hear.”

Both Liz and Eva saw the workshop and performance as their opportunity to speak their minds, particularly about issues where they didn’t feel heard otherwise. They viewed our space as a direct contrast to their space at school. Eva, before heading backstage as we prepared for the audience to enter the first night, told me how much she likes being honest without “getting into trouble.” At school, “they don’t want to hear it,” she said.

“I like this program,” Ashley said when I spoke to her and Maya after a workshop one day. “In school, I guess, like, we’re given the opportunity to do different things, academic-wise, but we don’t get a

chance to express ourselves as much as we want." Ashley tended to be quiet during group discussions and a lot of her writing addressed the idea of living "in the background" or "in the shadows." The workshops allowed for individual expression through a variety of mediums including writing and silent movement—opportunities to be 'heard' without necessarily speaking.

The girls talked about the process of creating this performance as a vehicle for their words, regardless of their interest in theatre or acting on its own. Some of the girls were required to participate in an approved summer program and STE was on the short list of acceptable opportunities. "They make us [participate]," Liz said, before our first performance. "So like, 'I'm gonna use it to tell you.'" Liz, like many of the girls, appeared to have chosen the program not because she was particularly excited about drama, but because she was drawn to the offer of uncensored expression.

Much of what the girls had to say didn't change dramatically from the first day to the last. However, they spent time more deeply examining their attitudes and opinions, questioning themselves and each other. Drama was a catalyst for critical thought. The nature of the work meant that when I asked probing questions or challenged their statements it wasn't a confrontation. Instead, it was an attempt to better understand what they had to say. This was not an interview or a focus group; this was a room in which they were told from the beginning that their uncensored stories and questions were wanted. It's clear to me that the process of devising created a space in which this group of girls felt they were able to openly and honestly talk about their opinions and ideas, free from constraints of what they might have imagined was expected of them.

And perhaps what was 'empowering' about the public performance was that the girls did circle back to platitudes, but after exploring those platitudes' limitations. They presented themes of rising above, of self-belief, and of intrinsic worth that overshadows stereotypes and negative expectations. They chose the idealized clichés they wanted to be reality. What this may mean is that actively questioning bromides and narratives—even positive ones—might be useful in that this questioning provides an ownership that didn't previously exist.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Whose Story Is It Anyway?: Reflections on Authorship and Ownership in Devised Theatre-Making and Ethnodrama with Young People

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ABSTRACT

A paradigm shift to research 'with' young people as opposed to 'on' young people has led to focus being placed on young people's voices in matters concerning them as they are viewed as the experts on their own lives. This article reflects on authorship and ownership of work created collaboratively with young people and on the devised theatre-making process which lead to the creation of ethnodrama, a script of dramatised narratives. The applied theatre practitioner and researcher devising work and creating ethnodramas with young people (and indeed other community groups) faces additional challenges compared to the traditional playwright; they do not just have to entertain but also convey narratives from and about people. This article argues that while aesthetic judgement can be exercised to some degree in the process of scripting the narratives, there are competing tensions involving power dynamics and ethical considerations that must be carefully negotiated and

renegotiated through a collaborative process of (re)creation, (re)presentation and (re)telling of the young people's narratives. The article gives examples of practice which supports the idea when making work with young people it is this collaborative process that is key to the notion of authorship and ownership. It concludes that through this process, the aspiration is that authorship is shared between everyone involved in the process, but that the ownership lies with the young people, from whom the narratives originate.

INTRODUCTION

Devising original work with teenagers is exhausting, exhilarating and exciting. They have plenty to say and are keen to say it. Personally I do not subscribe to the notion of 'giving young people a voice', a phrase commonly used in youth settings; in fact, I find it rather condescending. Who are we to say that young people do not have a voice, or that they need it and indeed want it? As a theatre practitioner with over fifteen years' experience of working with young people and currently pursuing a PhD, my firm belief is that young people *have* a voice, but what they often need and want is a platform to help make it heard. My theatre-making practice and research methodology with young people is one of reflection practice (Mirra et al. 2015; Mackey 2016); we create new theatre work which is reflected upon and re-worked in a continuous cycle. This article will reflect on the notion of, and explore the difference between authorship and ownership when devising and creating new work with young people. As a group we create scripts which technically originate from them; the ideas and stories we share are theirs and the words conveying these stories, often verbatim, are theirs. Yet I am the one putting it all together into a workable shape, a script if you like, and therefore, it can be argued, it is I who is the author. So who can rightfully and ethically claim authorship and ownership of the work? The reflections in this article will offer insights into the dynamic writing process with young people and how this affects the authorship and ownership of the text.

RESEARCHING AND WRITING 'WITH', NOT 'ON' OR 'ABOUT' YOUNG PEOPLE

Research "with" as opposed to "on" young people (Reason 2010; Fielding 2010; Coyne & Carter 2018) aligns with research into the "new sociology of childhood" (Coyne & Carter, 2018, p. 9), which highlights the rights of the child to have a say in matters concerning them (United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child). While my practice has always been centred around young people and their voices, embarking on a PhD has enabled me to also consider young people's vital roles in research. By asserting young people as "experts in their own lives" (Coyne & Carter, 2018, p. 8) and placing them at the heart of research agendas they give "voice to the study community" (Taylor et al. 2017, p. 533). As researchers and practitioners we ought to take note of that voice and seek to incorporate it into our research and theatre-making, with young people recognised as competent "beings" (Kallio, 2008; Coyne & Carter 2018). Water (2018), whose research focuses on health care ethics and youth voice, claims that a participatory approach with young people by its very nature suggests an "ethical standpoint" as it values the "agency and right of the children and young people to have a voice in things that matter to them" (p.37). Thus, the approach I adopt is one of research and development (R&D) around specific themes or topics, always selected and steered by the young people. My co-artistic director and I facilitate creative workshops with young people in which improvisations and scenes around their ideas are created. All ideas are recognised and considered through a democratic process of discussion and trying-things-out, a process of "plussing" (Belliveau, 2015, p. 11). Some are rejected immediately, while others are further developed; one young person reflected on this process and noted that "when one person has an idea, everyone tries to improve it" (Waterloo Community Theatre). The young people's responses are captured and I, alongside my co-artistic director and the young people, co-author a script with verbatim text which is shared with an audience. Theatre scholar Saldaña, with a background as a theatre educator, director, playwright and qualitative researcher, refers to this process as ethnotheatre, and the script as ethnodrama (1998; 2005; 2008; 2010). Both are achieved through a collaborative process of generating, scripting and performing material that originates from the young people. While every effort is made to retain the aforementioned ethical standpoint through a

collaborative approach which involves constant dialogue and continuous negotiation and renegotiation, unavoidable power relationships make it a challenging and dynamic process (Hart 1992; Mannay 2016; Water 2018).

Reflecting on a recent project with young people, the challenges of the scripting and playwrighting process came to the fore. We generated a great deal of material and I found myself torn between what to use and what not to use; who is represented and how are they represented – and how do I ensure authenticity? It led me to ponder that it is not how they create, present and tell their stories to the facilitators and each other in our sessions, but rather how we (re)create, (re)present and (re)tell them together, and the importance of not undertaking this process in isolation, but rather in collaboration *with* the young people. As one young person said when asked about what they enjoy about coming to the sessions: "we're kind of in control, I enjoy that we have that control and the adults don't make it that they're only ones in control, if we have an idea, we can actually say it".

(RE)CREATION, (RE)PRESENTATION AND (RE)TELLING

Young people create, present and tell stories all the time; in school, in youth settings and on social media. The tension, and often the dilemma, is in how we choose to (re)create, (re)present and (re)tell them and as theatre practitioners we use theatre as a medium to do so. O'Toole et al. (2010) likens it to the process of any playwright who researches material for their play, claiming that the "re-creation of researched communities … make sense" (p. 5). It does indeed make sense; it provides a platform for unheard voices. Although, on the contrary to how traditional playwrights might work, playwrights of ethnodramas do not "write" them, we "adapt" them (Saldaña, 2010, p. 4). We generate fieldnotes, footage and quotes and our job is to transform these into performances; we are the 'writer-uppers' of the fieldnotes. Therefore, while I assume a role of playwright in the sense that I write up the fieldnotes, these scripts are not ""play scripts" in the traditional sense, but essentialised fieldwork reformatted in performative data displays" (Saldaña, 2010, p. 5). The process of (re)creation, (re)presentation and (re)telling can therefore be viewed as one of (re)formatting; finding a way to transform—to reformat—fieldnotes into performances. This process of reformatting is multi-layered, it is not only the words and the content

that need to be taken into consideration but also the performative elements; *how* to perform the text to best serve the content. Thus, the result should not only engage and entertain, but also convey the narratives.

There is of course the challenge and the ethical dilemma of maintaining fidelity to the fieldnotes and transcripts. In an attempt to achieve this fidelity, it has become our process to continuously validate the data (Mienczakowski, 1995)—the ethnodrama—with the young people and ask *them*: 'is this what you said?', 'is this what you mean?', 'did I interpret that correctly?', 'do you think this works?' etc. This process starts with a scene that is created by the young people, it is recorded and transcribed. The young people then read the transcription and make edits. This validation is often repeated several times until everyone involved are satisfied, it is negotiated and renegotiated. The final script is read together as a group and a discussion about the tone, the choice of words and the structure takes place and together we decide how to take it forwards. It is a process that while completed in stages is never fully complete until the piece is performed, and even then, changes can still occur. This to-ing and fro-ing is crucial; I have found that in order for my adaptation—my reformatting—to be faithful to the narratives the young people tell us they must be consulted at every stage of the process; they need to have an equal stake in that process, despite the added layer of 'messiness' it undeniably brings (Hughes et al. 2011; Coyne & Carter 2018; Baxter 2019). The constant dialogue is paramount to achieving fidelity. Care must be taken to retain the authenticity of the stories that are being re-told; by being faithful to the original stories. Saldaña (2015) asserts that a playwright of ethnodrama "is not just a storyteller; she is a story-reteller" (p. 20). Despite me being in a position of power and, for all intents and purposes, assuming the role of playwright, this fidelity can only be achieved through collaboration and continuous validation with the young people. It is this process of (re)creating, (re)presenting and (re)telling that impacts ownership and authorship of the text. Be that as it may, in a process that by its very nature involves a group of people, one cannot escape the fact that there is ultimately one person who commits the final words to paper, or more commonly, the final tap of the keyboard, and thus makes a final decision as to what is included and how it is (re)created, (re)presented and (re)told in the text. How and to what degree one exercises that aesthetic judgement must also be considered.

AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT, AUTHORSHIP AND OWNERSHIP

I recall a recent incident in our R&D process in which the young people were asked to write a monologue on flip-chart paper based on prompts that I provided them with. While typing up the monologues I exercised my aesthetic judgement to omit the things I thought did not work in the context of the monologue and with the wider message and theme of the work, re-shuffled some sentences and highlighted everything that needed clarification. I then brought them back to the young people the following week. They were asked to read through their edited monologues alongside the originals and approve (or disapprove) the changes I had made, as well as clarify words and meanings. One young person had used a lot of acronyms and linguistic features that I was not acquainted with, 'youth-language', for lack of a better term. While explaining the meanings of the words and acronyms to me, they made it clear that while they did not mind the omitted parts, their language and how they chose to present their story to me, was not to be changed; they had strong feelings about how their words were (re)presented. In fact, overall, while the young people did not mind changes such as sentence re-structuring and other logistical changes; changes that in my experience had potential to enhance the performative elements, they wanted their original language to be kept intact. They wanted us to be faithful to what they had said, the words they had used. Thus, the text we ended up with was indeed a combination of their topical knowledge, of which, in this context, they are the experts, and my theatrical/professional knowledge, of which I am the expert. The described incident could suggest a subconscious awareness of this process on behalf of both parties; both knowing and recognising the expertise of the other and be viewed as an example of "respecting different knowledges and skills and a proactive construction of balance and equity" (Mackey, 2016, p. 485).

So long as the focus is on maintaining and not restory-ing the narratives, Saldaña (2005) argues that the playwright can 'creatively and strategically edit the transcripts' (p. 20). I would suggest this is using my aesthetic judgement as the one more experienced in theatre-making. I undoubtedly exercise my aesthetic judgement as playwright in the choices I make but as it is a constant process of writing, editing and re-writing, involving the young people and theatre practitioners in equal measures, we arrive at a final text we have all had equal input into. This eliminates the need to exercise aesthetic judgement to any degree that

would risk upsetting the carefully negotiated balance. Thus, I am not re-storying the narratives but facilitating a democratic process of collaborative playwrighting. Through the constant validation and renegotiation with the participants, playwrighting equilibrium is established and an ethical standpoint maintained.

However, there is no doubt that this is a delicate balance to strike and Saldaña (2010) stresses that it must not "paralyze us from thinking imaginatively about a research study's staging potential" (p. 6). It can be argued that theatre, by its very nature, exists to entertain. The first "archetypal post-performance question" one tends to ask of an audience post-performance is "did you enjoy it?" (Reason, 2004), suggesting the main reason for attending is for enjoyment; to be entertained. Indeed, Saldaña (2005) claims that "one of the playwright's functions is to use an economy of words to tell a story" (p. 20), and therefore the verbatim transcript is minimised to the "juicy stuff" for "dramatic impact" (1998). Of course, as playwrights we want to entertain and enthral an audience, but it is equally paramount that as applied theatre artists we also exercise our aesthetic judgement to ensure the ideas we choose (re)create and stories we (re)tell are authentic and (re)presentative of the community we work with. Therefore, I argue that the notion of ownership is distinctly different from that of authorship.

Youth as a stage of becoming (Tilleczek, 2011) suggests it is a transitional period with multiple changes taking place; for example puberty, moving from primary to secondary school and forming new peer groups. As adults, having already gone through these transitions in life, it is impossible to claim knowledge of what it means to go through them today. Adults can therefore be viewed as 'outsiders' in relation to youth culture and "[o]utsiders cannot produce works that are authentic expressions of a culture they have not lived" (Young, 2008, p. 60). Thus, it can be argued that young people and adults inhabit different cultures and "[y]oung people … are inseparable from their cultures" (Tilleczek, 2011, p. 5). The stories the young people tell us facilitators therefore belong to and are situated in their world, their culture. As illustrated by the young person who claimed ownership of her words in the example above, the stories belong to their culture which adults do not have knowledge or experience of. As the originators of narratives which are produced in a culture far removed from that of adults, they own them; they *are* the stories. They embody the narratives because they *are* the

narratives, the “embodied focus” (Mackey, 2016, p. 482). Once the narratives have been offered to and shared with the facilitators and/or researchers, they have moved from a personal sphere to a space where we re-create and re-tell them together. While the theatre practitioner and/or researcher uses their aesthetic judgement and “’authors’ the research ideas; the participants might not be co-authors, perhaps, but certainly they comprehensively inhabit the research findings” (Mackey, 2016, p. 486). Wong (2019) concluded in her article about a participatory community-based playbuilding project that the young people she worked with “thanked me for teaching them how to do drama but reminded me that the stories belonged to them” (p. 36). In other words, if it were not for the young people the stories would not exist. Ownership, therefore, I argue can only be attributed to those who told the stories in the first place, while authorship ought to be attributed to all those who were part of the (re)formatting process as they all have equal stakes in the (re)telling of the stories.

CONCLUSION

The devising, writing and research process with young people, or indeed other community groups, is not linear, nor is it straightforward. I concur with Mackey (2016), Professor of Applied Theatre and founder of the first UK undergraduate degree in applied theatre, who muses that in applied theatre situations “research ownership becomes interestingly ambiguous” (p. 486). As demonstrated above, the process involves active input from young people and practitioners/applied theatre artists alike and the finished product may contain words, phrases and ideas from both, hence “[t]he results are a participant’s and/or researcher’s combination of meaningful life vignettes, significant insights, and epiphanies” (Saldaña, 2005, p. 16). There is no one single correct answer, rather it must be negotiated by the process through which the content is generated, “knowledge production is therefore shared—and complex” (Mackey, 2016, p. 486). Thus, the debate on the “tension between an ethnodramatist’s ethical obligation to re-create an authentic representation of reality (thus enhancing fidelity), and the license for artistic interpretation of that reality (thus enhancing the aesthetic possibilities)” will undoubtedly continue (Saldaña, 2005, p. 32). Nonetheless, despite the fact that young people often are perceived as lacking decision-making power and agency simply by virtue of being

young (Hart 1992, Water 2018), I argue that they ought to be in charge of their own narratives, because they own them. Therefore, it is my duty as an ethical theatre-maker to offer a mechanism through which these narratives can be told most effectively and authentically. I suggest that it is in this process; from young people creating, presenting and telling their stories to the theatre practitioners/researchers, to us (re)creating, (re)presenting and (re)telling their stories with them, that the magic happens. But it is also in this process that many questions arise and transparent negotiation and constant renegotiation is key. The ownership of the stories will always be attributed to the young people, after all, they created and shared them and without the young people the stories would not exist. Authorship, however, is shared as a result of a collaborative process of (re)creation, (re)presentation and (re)telling.

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Negotiating Design in University Applied Theatre Projects: The Case of *Safe Cities* (2015)

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ABSTRACT

This account engages the aesthetic possibilities in the choice and use of space in University of Zimbabwe applied theatre project, Safe Cities *(2015). This paper argues that design has, for quite some time, been considered peripheral in applied theatre performances, thus creating challenges for designers who seek to foreground communicative efficacy on it. In most university projects, student-practitioners pay particular focus on the performative presentation of their productions, overlooking the influence of space on their performances. This article exposes the blind spots in the choice and use of Beit Hall to host the* Safe Cities *(2015) project. The article submits that beyond the efficacy of an applied theatre project, it is fundamentally important for applied theatre practitioners to pay particular attention and embed scenography, in its totality, into their presentations.*

INTRODUCTION

This account engages the aesthetic possibilities in the choice and use of space in University of Zimbabwe applied theatre project, *Safe Cities* (2015) and, by extension to other similar applied theatre projects. The article adopts, as its point of departure, Christopher Odhiambo's (2004, p. 6) observation that applied theatre projects are first and foremost theatrical "performance about the people by the people for the people, expressing their struggle to transform their social conditions and in the process changing those conditions." This characterisation of applied theatre projects as purely theatrical performances demands an analysis framework that moves away from an emphasis of effects to an aesthetic experience (Thompson, 2011). Consequently, most applied theatre projects in Africa have largely focussed on the efficacy of narratives and dialogic nature of the presentations (Sibanda, 2017). The central argument of this paper, which extends on my argument elsewhere (Sibanda and Gwaba, 2017) is anchored on the pretext that the *Safe Cities* (2015) project was principally a performance presented to spect-actors, witnesses and audiences. As a performance, it was my expectation that the students would deploy aesthetic designs to complete their performance. Yet, when these students were assessed, the aesthetic component was not considered and therefore did not have an effect on the overall marks allocated to the students. It is the contention of this paper that this act is ultra-vires the framing and presentation of the project. I therefore, through this paper, seek to highlight the missed aesthetic opportunities and blind spots that university applied theatre projects such as the *Safe Cities* (2015) project overlook.

SPACE AND POLITICS: PERFORMANCE AND PRACTICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE'S BEIT HALL

Space is an important and influential element in applied theatre and theatre performance, in general. It affects and influences the theatrical experience and communicative aspects, and shapes audience meaning and reception of the performance. Performance spaces are a site for the struggle between the power of performance in the arts and the performance of power by the state (wa Thiongo, 1997, p.11). With space come politics, horizon of expectations and meaning (Kershaw,

2000, p. 138). Pearson and Shanks (2001) in Victor Ukaegbu (2013, p 33) submit that, as a result of this politics, expectation and mode of spectatorship, “audiences experience the performance in a state of preparedness which derives from the past experiences and the way in which they have chosen to order them and accord then significance.” The applied theatre practitioner needs to exploit the “different potentialities” (Sloan, 2018, p. 587) that may lie in his/ her chosen space due to these different experiences brought by the participants and facilitators.

The University of Zimbabwe’s (UZ) Department of Theatre Arts uses the Alfred Beit Hall as its performance space. The Beit Hall is a colonial residual space modelled as a proscenium arch design. It is within this space that all university theatre performances, inclusive of the case study project, are performed. The UZ’s Theatre Arts programme, according Robert McLaren (1993, p. 36) was introduced, initially as drama courses in 1983, as a strategy of transforming the University into a ‘people’s university’ through fostering a symbiotic relationship between the university and surrounding communities. In 1988, the UZ introduced the ‘Theatre in the Community’ course with the sole purpose of training students in practice and methodology of theatre for development and theatre in education (McLaren, 1993). The course was divided into three modules: Practical Drama I and II and Community Outreach. Students were taught acting, playmaking, improvisation, script writing and directing under Practical Drama I and II and used the Community Outreach module to gain practical experience through performing collaborative community plays that addressed development issues in the Harare community (McLaren, 1993). This paper submits that three and half decades later, the University of Zimbabwe is still using this model for its applied theatre courses. It is this foundation, pivoted in performance in its strictest sense that I argue in this paper for the inclusion of scenography as a part of the communicative strategy in projects such as the *Safe Cities* (2015) especially in light of new research and developments in the area (Mackey 2016; O’Grady 2017; Sloan 2018).

Although the Zimbabwean socio-cultural and economic landscape has changed over the years, the approach to applied theatre practice at UZ seems to have not changed. While in the early 1980s through the 90s, students collaborated with the prisons and national army, albeit with security imposed restrictions, currently students collaborate

with primary and secondary pupils, government departments and civic society organisations. This comes with its own gate keeping, self-censorship and surveillance challenges. As it came out of the deliberations during the *Safe Cities* (2015) presentation, government institutions view university students as 'enemies' because they expose them or put them on the hot seat when they do not have the juridical power to make pronouncements or decisions. As a result the process of getting clearance for applied theatre projects is long, tedious and time-consuming, a privilege students do not have especially in a semesterised education system. These challenges force students to abandon the applied theatre process approach and adopt a performance one, where they present a 'play' dealing with issues raised during research and anticipate an in-depth discussion that will yield positive results – navigating towards self- and collective transformation. Because these projects are presented in the Beit Hall, a known performance space with an inscribed conventional horizon of expectations and meaning, I attest that students must adopt a complete approach to performance or they run a risk of being labelled 'badly performed pieces'.

SPACE AND SPECTATORSHIP

Marvin Carlson observes that spaces determine the social and cultural interpretation of aesthetic designs. The use of a theatre or a space that does not have a link or significance to the community necessitates the semiotic interpretation of aesthetic designs from the perspective of the space rather than community. When applied theatre performances are presented in conventional theatre spaces or rented spaces, the social realities confronted by the spectator are coded differently from his/her conditions in the source community (Sibanda and Gwaba, 2017). Nkululeko Sibanda and Privilege Gwaba (2017, p. 530) further submit that the Theatre Arts degree programme at the University of Zimbabwe has an integrated approach to teaching and learning that demands students to transfer knowledge gained in one course in practical examination of other courses. It is therefore a given that every performance must draw knowledge and expertise from other courses, to enrich the aesthetic image of the final presentation. This provides a need to assess the influence of this teaching and learning strategy on

the execution of applied theatre projects.

A (performance) space has the power to influence and transform the audience into different states of spectatorship. This process of transforming and shaping of participants through space is affixed on conventions attached to the space. Buildings in which performances take place are presented as 'cultural spaces.' These cultural spaces, created by architects, enable practitioners to attach cultural codes that determine the reception and appreciation of performances within these spaces. These cultural codes are not only associated to the physical forms of these spaces, but also the behaviours within these physical forms (Balme, 1999, p. 228). The context specific spatial concepts latent in cultural spaces influence performance space structures in terms of their physical form show that "places of performance generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatre process" (Carlson, 1989, p. 6). Aesthetically, spatial designs are therefore coded with meaning which influence the spectator's reception of cultural products. The *Safe Cities* (2015) project was staged in the Beit Hall auditorium although the spatial narrative of the performance located the characters in the streets of Harare. Is the contention of this paper that the use of the Beit Hall as a performance space characterised the participants into different categories of spectatorship.

Freddie Rokem (2002) identifies three types of participants who come to a theatre. There's what he calls a spectator, an audience and a witness (Rokem, 2009). A spect-actor is one who watches a performance and participates in it (Boal, 2013). Ken Gewertz (2004) submits that Boal's spect- actor is free not only to comment on the action, but also to step up on stage and play roles of their choice. In doing so, they discover new ways of resolving the dilemmas that the play presents. To bear witness is to interrogate the "role of the person present and by extension, in the act of recounting the event that has been witnessed" (Das, 2016, p. 20). The process of witnessing describes an engagement with artworks that are created with the intention to share intimate experiences such that they might allow for possibilities of social transformation (Das, 2016). Kelly Oliver's (2001, p. 251) conceptualisation of witnessing invokes Augusto Boal's (2013) transformation of a bystander audience member into a critical and participatory 'spect-actor' in performance. Boal's approach to performance separates a [passive] audience from an audience as a

witness by destroying the barriers between a performer and spectator. He observes that "all must act as protagonists in the necessary transformation of the society" (2013, p. 34). An audience member is one who comes into a space, passively watches the performance and does not participate or comment till the end.

The role of applied theatre is to initiate transformation at an individual and collective level. As a result, it demands the kind of a participant who will actively and critically participate in the process of problem identification, critical reflection and action-process towards developing a solution to the identified problems. This foregrounds Boal's spect-actor as the ideal participant in applied theatre. Although Das' concept of the witness highlight characteristics critical to social transformation, the fact that catharsis is at an individual level and does not spur action towards collective transformation creates challenges to an applied theatre presentation, such as the *Safe Cities* (2015) project, achieving its desired objectives. The witness is couched in the hybrid space between a passive audience member and a spect-actor; a no man's land in respect of applied theatre.

STAGING THE *SAFE CITIES* (2015) PROJECT AT THE BEIT HALL

The *Safe Cities* (2015) was a follow-up project to the Uses of Theatre project (2014) conducted by the UZ's Bachelor of Arts Honours Level Two 2015 class (Sibanda and Gwaba, 2017). Initially, it was designed as an intervention to address the frosty and condescending working relationship between the Harare City Council (HCC) and informal traders, at one level and HCC administration and the Greater Harare Association of Commuter Operators (GHACO), representative association of commuter omnibus operators, at another level[1]. A need for a safe space for engagement was thus needed urgently for these involved parties and the *Safe Cities* (2015) provided that platform for discussion and interface between ZRP, GHACO, NAVUZ, Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Ministry of Local Governance, Town Planners Associations, Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and Harare City Council on these issues, using the medium of theatre. The presentation modelled as a workshop was conducted at the UZ's Beit Hall with a

[1] Please see Sibanda and Gwaba (2017) for a more in-depth narrative of this project.

performance by the students followed by discussions between the parties present who represented these different entities (Sibanda and Gwaba, 2017).

While the *Safe Cities* (2015) project was performed at the Beit Hall, the 2014 one used an open space at Copa Cabana[2]. Critical to these two performances is that they were meant to attend to the same spec-actors/ stakeholders, with the exception of the multitudes of vendors and commuter omnibus drivers. This transposition of the stakeholders to an enclosed Beit Hall 'safe' space within a recognised university, far-removed from troublesome and ungovernable streets creates a new horizon of expectation and directly affects the process of engagement. This invokes Richard Schechner's notion of "negotiating with an environment, engaging in a scenic dialogue with a space" (1994). In reframing the horizon of engagement from Copa Cabana to the Beit Hall, the spect-actors, performers and facilitators of the *Safe Cities* (2015) had to negotiate with the historically inscribed meanings on the space during and after the performance. Interesting to note is that during the post-performance discussion, spect-actors kept referring to the presentation as a 'performance' highlighting the frame through which they were using to engage both the project and issues raised.

The use of a conventional performance space for a project that demanded a site-specific space moves the presentation away from the basic principle of applied theatre (Nicholson, 2005). When conducting an applied theatre project, one should identify a community and work with the concerned people in identifying common developmental problems. Although, this has its own challenges associated with power, hierarchy and interests, within the UZ set-up, it is the best approach. Community located spaces grant relevancy and contextuality to issues raised as these spaces are usually an embodiment of the totality of the people's lives and experiences. These spaces also grant the site-specificity to the presentation and issues raised in performances. Yet, the students who facilitated the *Safe Cities* (2015), identified a community with a developmental site-specific problem but chose to use the UZ's Beit Hall, a space that belongs to a different community, far removed from these challenges and its own historically generated meanings and horizon of expectation. Once a site-specific community

[2] Copa Cabana is located downtown Harare. The performance took place on the edge of a taxi rank.

based project is taken away from that community, expectations and meaning of performance change and issues raised lose currency and agency. By bringing the project to the Beit Hall, the students therefore downplayed the agency and currency of the issues raised and sabotaged their project.

From a spatial aesthetic perspective, the Beit Hall was not the best space for this kind of a project because when one walks into the Beit Hall, they come with the expectation of watching a performance or a show, not to be part of a dialogue or discussion. While the students assumed (and expected) that the audience would adjust to the forum theatre presentation, I argue that this was an aesthetic oversight, though historical, and has continued to affect applied theatre projects at the UZ, in this instance created more challenges than opportunities for the students. It is this failure to acknowledge the influence and effect of spatial aesthetics on applied theatre projects such as The *Safe Cities* (2015) that university and by extension, community theatre practitioners disrupt the communicative efficacy of their presentations.

The use of the Beit Hall as a performance space for *Safe Cities* (2015) project created all these three types of a participant. The participants were made up of Theatre Arts students, officials from the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), NAVUZ, Harare City Council, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education and the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare. As the performance started, the student performers invited everyone to join and participate in warm-up games. The warm up games transformed everyone who participated into spect-actors (Boal, 2013) or “actor substitutes” (Tompkins (2012, p.10). However, these spect-actors did not participate at their free will, as Boal demands, but through compulsion. In such a scenario, participants are always aware that they are part of a scheduled and determined process which must be undertaken so that the project rolls on. Yet, during these warm up games, another group was created; the witnesses. This group comprised most of the invited parties, mainly from the two ministries, City Council and University of Zimbabwe students, who were not part of the Theatre Arts Honours II class. This group witnessed the warm-up games, giggling and laughing at those who made mistakes and encouraging, by clapping, those that did well. As such, this group was not fully active and participative such that they could reach a stage of critical consciousness and self-awareness.

The third and final group, arguably the biggest, that was created and, emerged due to the choice of the performance space, was the (passive) audience. As alluded to before, an audience member is one who enters the performance space, sits, watches the performance, applauds and leaves, without participating or commenting. An audience member is not interactive with the performer or core-audience members. The audience members were largely made up of First Year Theatre Arts students, Ministry and CHRA officials. I observe that these parties, especially those from the Ministry and CHRA simply attended the workshop in response to the invitation. In most cases, these were junior staff members with no power and authority to make decisions and contributions that would have an impact on the issues debated and operation of their organisations. As a result, they sat and took notes, presumably so that they could use them as proof that they attended the assigned event. It can be argued therefore that, some of these officials attend these projects as part of their organisation's public relations management strategies. This is the reason why there have been so many follow up applied theatre projects over the years because issues are not debated conclusively. These audience members only contributed when they had been asked to do so, sitting comfortable in the 'safe zone' provided by the Beit Hall, which sits in the heart of the UZ.

The failure by students to appropriate the Beit Hall into what Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson (2016, p. 5) call an 'appropriate ecology' that allow indeterminacy, opens up possibility into potentiality. In using the Beit Hall as a venue for the *Safe Cities* project, the students were operating at a possibility level. Possibility is "what a thing can be said to be when 'on target' and so it is limited by normative notions of what that target should be" (Sloan, 2018, p.586). In staging the the *Safe Cities* project in the Beit Hall, it was therefore received as a 'performance' in its normative sense, rather than an applied theatre performance meant to create a platform for engagement.

If the students had explored the 'potentiality' (O'Grady, 2016) that lay in the Beit Hall through design or took the performance back to Copa Cabana, the *Safe Cities* (2015) project could have modelled its participants into the desired ones if the students had chosen a contextually relevant site-specific site. Although, in every performance one is bound to find all these three types of participants, and even many more, this project desired a specific type of a participant; the

Boalian spect-actor. If the students had taken this project back to Copa-Cabana, where the vendors and commuter omnibus operators work from, the majority of the audience members would have been transformed into spect-actors. The street is more interactive and takes away the surety of safety granted by the university and the Beit Hall. In the words of Cathy Sloan (2018, p. 586) such as a space "evades normativity based on hegemonic values and the imposition of neo-liberal social impact agendas." Second, as a follow-up project, taking it back to where it was initially performed meant that there was a possibility for and/ of continuity. Some vendors and commuter omnibus operators who participated in the previous edition could have also participated in the 2015 edition, further enriching the discussions. In drawing it away from the initial site of the first performance, continuity was curtailed.

CONCLUSION

I have argued throughout that community theatre practitioners should appreciate and understand the currency of what I term 'the politics of design' (Sibanda, 2017). I frame the politics of designs as "a process and conduct of decision making" in the creative process of developing and implementing scenographic designs in performance (Sibanda, 2017, p. 322). For example, the politics of space relates to the considerations of the performance spaces used for rehearsals and performances. Most of these challenges that I have raised specifically with the *Safe Cities* (2015) project are a result of a failure to appreciate and understand the politics of design, which would destabilise the suppositions of the Beit Hall. Key to this failure was the absence of an appointed focal person in charge of design. If the students had appointed a focal person to oversee their design needs, the *Safe Cities* (2015) project would have communicated, effectively, at two levels and allowed its spect-actors to enjoy a total theatrical experience, yet achieve its set objectives.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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