Cover 36/2, Design: Debra Livingston – University of the Sunshine Coast.

The papers published in this issue of Social Alternatives, ‘Performance, Community and Intervention’ discuss the issue of working responsibly with other people’s stories and experiences in theatre and performance. To represent the broad cross-section of these papers a theatrical mask was selected as the basis for the creation of the cover art. The artwork draws on the Venetian carnival mask, a popular form of improvisational theatre that was performed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century and continues to be celebrated today. The theatre masks are used for their expressive and mysterious powers as a feature of masked performance. For the cover image a base white theatrical mask was photographed then layers of artistic manipulations were combined using software to reveal a new persona.

Since ancient times masks made from leather and wood were used in many folk and traditional rituals, and for ceremonial and theatrical purposes. The etymology of the word mask possibly appeared in English as early as the sixteenth century, but its origins stem from many cultures from much earlier times. Carl Jung (2003) referred to the mask people wear in public as the ‘persona’ expressing their hidden desires as their ‘shadow’. The mask was also seen as providing protection. Since theatrical masks are physical, they are able to impress the audience by making the fantasy become a reality, a fantastical spectacle for our eyes in which to evoke thought and feeling. The Encyclopaedia Britannica explains:

References
Social Alternatives

Vol. 36 No 2, 2017

EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

Bronwyn Stevens
Clare Archer-Lean
Robert Gilbert
Jennifer Mays
Julie Matthews
Marcus Bussey
Ginna Brock
Mark Roberts
Graham Maddox
Cassandra Star
George Morgan
Helen McLaren
Lee-Anne Bye
Elizabeth Eddy

University of the Sunshine Coast
University of the Sunshine Coast
University of Queensland
Queensland University of Technology
University of Adelaide
University of the Sunshine Coast
University of the Sunshine Coast
University of New England
Flinders University
University of Western Sydney
Flinders University
University of the Sunshine Coast

ADVISORY BOARD

Roland Bleiker
Verity Burgmann
Parlo Singh
Don Alexander
Vicki Crowley
Geoff Dow
Brien Hallett
Ian Lowe
Brian Martin
Philip Mendes
Rebecca Spence
Frank Stiwell
Ralph Summy
Sue Thomas
Baden Offord
Jason Laker
Elizabeth Webby
Paul Williams
John Scott
John Synott
Sue Thomas

University of Queensland
Monash University
Griffith University
University of Queensland
University of South Australia
University of Queensland
University of Hawaii
Griffith University
University of Wollongong
Monash University
University of New England
University of Sydney
University of Sydney
Griffith University
Curtin University
San José State University
University of Sydney
Griffith University
University of Queensland
University of Sydney
Griffith University

EDITORIAL CONTACTS

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Lee-anne Bye
Operations Manager
Social Alternatives
Faculty of Arts, Business and Law
Maroochydore DC Qld 4558
lee-anne@socialalternatives.com

GENERAL ENQUIRIES
Julie Matthews
University of Adelaide
julie@socialalternatives.com

CO-ORDINATING EDITOR
Bronwyn Stevens
bestevens@biblio61.com

SHORT STORY EDITOR
Clare Archer-Lean
University of the Sunshine Coast
carcher@usc.edu.au

BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR
Hayley Baxter
hayleyjabaxter@gmail.com

POETRY EDITOR
John Synott
jsynott@socialalternatives.com

COVER DESIGN & DESKTOP PUBLISHING
Debra Livingston
University of the Sunshine Coast
debra@socialalternatives.com

WEBSITE
Julie Matthews and
Debra Livingston
julie@socialalternatives.com

Social Alternatives

Social Alternatives is an independent, quarterly refereed journal which aims to promote public debate, commentary and dialogue about contemporary social, political, economic and environmental issues.

Social Alternatives analyses, critiques and reviews contemporary social issues and problems. The journal seeks to generate insight, knowledge and understanding of the contemporary circumstances in order to determine local, national and global implications. We are committed to the principles of social justice and to creating spaces of dialogue intended to stimulate social alternatives to current conditions. Social Alternatives values the capacity of intellectual and artistic endeavour to prompt imaginative solutions and alternatives and publishes refereed articles, review essays, commentaries and book reviews as well as short stories, poems, images and cartoons.

The journal has grappled with matters of contemporary concern for three decades, publishing articles and themed issues on topics such as peace and conflict, racism, Indigenous rights, social justice, human rights, inequality and the environment. Please show your support by subscribing to the journal. For other enquiries please contact a member of the Editorial Collective.

The Editorial Collective

Editorial decisions are made democratically by the Social Alternatives editorial collective. Each edition involves the work and cooperation of a guest editor, liaison editor (to assist guest editors), general editor, poetry editor, short story editor, book review editor, cover designer and desktop publisher. A liaison editor is responsible for managing the editing and publication process. After contributions are blind refereed, the editorial collective has final control over publication. Where necessary the editorial collective calls on the advisory board to assist with refereeing articles.

Contributions

Social Alternatives accepts work focused on the aims of the journal. The journal also accepts proposals for themed issues from guest editors. Proposals may emerge from workshops, networks or conferences. For specific enquiries about the submission of articles, short stories, poetry or book reviews please contact an editor with appropriate responsibilities.

Submissions of articles, commentaries, reviews and fictional works are subject to double blind peer review and should be emailed to the general article editor. Authors are encouraged to consider and reference papers previously published in Social Alternatives to promote ongoing discussion. Submissions should be double-spaced with page numbers on the bottom right. Academic articles should be approximately 3,000-5,000 words, commentaries and review essays between 800 to 1,500 words, book reviews 800 words, short stories 1,000 words and poetry up to 25 lines. Submissions must include:

- copyright release form
- title page listing contributing authors, contact details, affiliation and short bio of approximately 80 words
- abstract should be a maximum of 150 words
- three - five keywords.

Please use Australian/English spelling and follow Harvard referencing. Submit tables, graphs, pictures and diagrams on separate pages. Remove in-text references identifying authors and replace with [name removed for the review process].

For further information please consult our website:
http://www.socialalternatives.com/ and our Facebook page.
Introduction

3 Introduction: Performance, Community and Intervention.........................................................Natalie Lazaroo and Sarah Peters

Themed Articles

6 Acts of Stammering and Aesthetic Nervousness: Reflections on intervention in applied theatre practice.................................................................Natalie Lazaroo

13 Supporting Settlement: Participatory drama as intervention.......................................................Penny Bundy

20 Textual and Performative Interventions: Autobiographical stage writing as a rescription of the self........Dallas Baker

25 ‘Ten Foot Tall and Bullet-proof’ – Assess, Adapt and Overcome: The Anzac legend in modern times.................................Linden Wilkinson

32 The Impact of Participating in a Verbatim Theatre Process...........................................................Sarah Peters

40 Hearts Are Trump’s: Post-truth as intervention............................................................................Tim Prentki

48 Articulating the Inarticulate: Performance and intervention in masculine gender (re)presentation........Shane Pike

Book Reviews


56 Island Home..................................................................................................................................Stephen Harris

Short Story

57 Eden..............................................................................................................................................Kate Elkington

Gallery

60 The Black and White of Reptiles..............................................................................................Darren Smith

Poetry

5 Pukekura, Royal Albatross..............................................................................................................John Synott

5 About Herself..................................................................................................................................Noel King

5 Chai Wallah......................................................................................................................................Lesley Synge

12 Roos at Dawn..............................................................................................................................John Strano

24 Watering Trees in Nicaragua........................................................................................................Warwick Fry

39 The Eater of Light......................................................................................................................David Reiter

39 At the Board Meeting...................................................................................................................Noel King

47 The Pyramid at the End of the World............................................................................................David Reiter

54 Extremis.......................................................................................................................................David Reiter
When we were invited as co-editors of a special issue on performance, we immediately began discussions on a theme that we felt strongly about. The two of us have had numerous collegial discussions while completing our doctorates (at separate institutions), and one topic that kept returning in our conversations was the issue of working responsibly with other people’s stories and experiences. As feminists, we both were sensitive to the implications of speaking on someone else’s behalf. For instance, Linda Alcoff (1991-1992: 6) argues that:

As a type of discursive practice, speaking on behalf of others has come under increasing criticism, and in some communities rejected. There is a strong, albeit contested, current within feminism which holds that speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate.

As such, we proposed that the special issue consider the idea of ‘intervention’ in performance. Intervention usually signals the arrival of an outsider or a group of outsiders seeking to enable some kind of change within an individual or a particular community. Alternatively, intervention can be understood as an interruption: an intercession or an attempt to disrupt the status quo and cause change. In theatre and performance for, with, or by communities, intervention can evoke the image of the well-meaning ‘expert’, someone who applies the processes of drama to help heal fractured communities, give voice to the voiceless, or empower participants to acknowledge their own oppression. While the act of intervention is often well-meaning, it raises numerous questions on an ethical front, in particular the imbalances of power that can exist in the encounter. This themed edition interrogates and articulates concepts of intervention within the field of drama, creative writing and performance. Each author explores the manifestation and impact of intervention in their creative practice, offering a unique perspective on intervention as a catalyst for change and transformation. The themed articles in this edition thus seek to question how the concept of intervention in performance can be theorised, problematised and alternatively articulated. How does intervention manifest in theatre for, with and by communities? How can the concept of intervention be extended to an analysis of the process and practice of the artist themselves, and the personal and communal impact of that intervention?

The first themed article, ‘Acts of Stammering and Aesthetic Nervousness: Reflections on intervention in applied theatre practice’ by Natalie Lazaroo, uses a critically reflective lens to analyse the ‘good intentions’ of intervention in applied theatre practice, and suggests that positive intervention is more likely to occur when artists engage in continued reflexivity around their ethics of practice. Applied theatre is a process used by a number of the contributors to this edition, and Lazaroo’s article contextualises this form within the framework of intention, intervention and ethics. Drawing on examples from an applied theatre project with disabled people in order to frame her thinking, she positions the facilitator as someone who ‘stammers’, a person who experiences uncertainties and tensions rather than as an eloquent expert. Lazaroo encourages facilitators in applied theatre processes to be more sensitive to the representational politics that are embedded in their work, and cites some suggested critical questions through which to begin this reflective process.

Penny Bundy’s article then provides a detailed case study of a participatory drama program used to support the settlement of migrants and refugees from culturally diverse backgrounds. Bundy's paper explicitly uses the lenses of resilience, hope, belonging and connectedness to explore the impact that participating in in-school drama programs had on the participants. Bundy outlines the intentions behind the project – the interventions that they hoped it would make, and then reflectively analyses how these interventions manifested in the classroom. Using data collected from interviews with students across the program, the article demonstrates how participating in the drama workshops intervened in the students’ sense of belonging within the school community, their confidence when participating in other classes and created opportunities for deeper self-awareness.

‘Textual and Performative Interventions: Autobiographical stage writing as a rescription of the self’ by Dallas Baker explores the concept that our experiences shape who we are. Looking specifically at the practice of writing, Baker
Linden Wilkinson also expresses how the process of playwriting (in this instance, within a verbatim theatre process) influenced her personal understanding. She outlines the process involved in writing *Seeking Joe Civilian*, a verbatim play based on interviews with seven former or currently serving Australian soldiers and one soldier’s mother. Wilkinson articulates that the intentions of this play were to subvert the Anzac mythology that positions the Gallipoli campaign as Australia’s one defining moment in military history, and instead explore stories from the war in Afghanistan, balancing stories of courage, mateship and endurance with those of fear, inferiority, isolation and disgust. Across the article, Wilkinson critically questions how an artist can set out with explicit intentions such as these, and fail to actualise them. She describes how in the rehearsed reading of *Seeking Joe Civilian*, the Anzac myth prevailed, and suggests why this may have occurred. Wilkinson’s article contributes to the overall theme of this edition by suggesting that intervention is a two-way phenomenon: as an artist Wilkinson was intending to intervene on a nationally held myth, but in the process, experienced intervention in her own understanding and intentions.

In ‘The Impact of Participating in a Verbatim Theatre Process’, Sarah Peters also uses a case study approach based on a verbatim theatre process to interrogate the theme of intervention – specifically the impact of participating in a verbatim theatre process. In the same way that Lazaroo advocates for critical reflection, Peters outlines her theory and ethics of practice within the process of writing *bald heads & blue stars*, and her intention to intervene in normative understandings of female beauty. In this research, the women who were interviewed in the project (whom she refers to as the community of storytellers), were surveyed at three key points along the creative development process. The article uses data from these surveys to research how the storytellers responded to the experience of participating in a process that shared their stories. The verbatim theatre process is a constructed experience, and is therefore an intervention in the everyday life of the participants. Peters outlines her ‘good intentions’ for this intervention, and uses the surveys as an opportunity to check their effectiveness. She details specific practices that positively contributed to the intervention, and balances this with a critical engagement with moments of discomfort and confrontation for the storytellers. Overall, the data from her research indicates that being involved in a verbatim theatre process intervened positively in the storyteller’s subjectivity, enhanced their interpersonal communication with family members, and created a sense of community.

In ‘Hearts are Trump’s: Post-truth as intervention’, Tim Prentki explores how the One Hour Theatre Company (OHTC) is attempting to intervene in contemporary socio-political crises, within the current climate of fake news and lies accepted as truths. Referencing the practice of Bertolt Brecht and his wish to evolve an art fit for the times, Prentki asks what an artist can offer in this context, and who the agents for social change are in our present-day setting. He then describes the practice of the OHTC, making parallels between their work and that of Brecht’s Lehrstücke (Learning plays), with the intent to trigger conversation. Uniquely, the OHTC uses Shakespearean texts as a catalyst for intervention into contemporary politics, such as *Lear in Brexitland* – a contemporary take on King Lear, which becomes a ‘cautionary tale for our times where grotesque inequalities, left unattended, may give rise to large scale violence and the teaching of the social fabric’.

The final themed article in this edition by Shane Pike explores the process of researching, writing and performing *Yesterday’s Hero*, a play that seeks to intervene in representations of Australian masculinity. Pike explores how theatre can be an effective medium for questioning, unravelling and diminishing the power of negative notions of constructed identity and can provide alternative narratives about what it means to ‘be a man’. Pike’s article emphasises the urgent need for theatre that prompts a critical questioning of the traditionally masculine traits of Australian male identity. These traits, such as stoicism and dependence on alcohol to respond to stress, have a detrimental effect on men’s physical and mental health. Pike aligns this research with data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics who report that death by intentional self-harm in young men is three times higher than that in young women, and is the leading cause of premature death in Australia. In this context, theatre that seeks to positively intervene and provide alternative narratives around masculinity is vital and urgent work.

**References**

Authors

Dr Natalie Lazaroo has a PhD from Griffith University (Brisbane), which investigated the community performance work of Vulcana Women’s Circus. Natalie’s research interests include applied and community performance, feminist theatre, physical theatre, disability studies and research methodologies. She is the Executive Member-at-large of the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies (ADSA), and an adjunct research fellow at the Griffith Institute for Educational Research (GIER). Her current research is a narrative inquiry into the work of community-engaged arts in Singapore.

Dr Sarah Peters is a theatre artist and practice-led researcher, completing her PhD at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) in 2016. She now lectures in Drama at Flinders University and has tertiary teaching experience in theatre history, children’s theatre and community and political theatre. Sarah has written two verbatim plays, *twelve2twentyfive* (2013; 2015) and *bald heads & blue stars* (2014), and her latest work *Eternity* (2017) premieres in October at USQ.

---

About Herself

When we married
you’d stopped,
promised you’d stopped forever.

The signs appeared
as you suckled our second baby,
something in your eyes
and attitude. But subtle.

I never found the bottles,
nor even a few stray corks.

Noel King,
Tralee, Ireland

---

Chai Wallah

Cinnamon and cloves
milk from a village cow
sugar crystals dried in the sun:
the magic of a chai wallah’s roadside brew.

We’ll come drink while you channel Tagore

Oh come ye tea-thirsty restless ones
the kettle boils, bubbles and sings.

‘Let my country awake,’ Tagore also wrote
but who recites poetry these days?

Be happy, Chai Wallah, while you can
for the wallahs of Wall Street are plotting.
Can you hear their song? Things go better with Coke!
Face it man – Sanskrit’s stuffed.
Forget kofta –
the Americans are coughing up five billion dollars
‘cos India is the emerging market.

Stop talking idly talk investment.
Don’t bother with okra talk opportunity.
Vishnu rituals and rupee tips – so yesterday –
it’s volume and revenue now.

You may as well dump your bike
destroy your little cups of clay
and tell your sons to go into the billboard business.
Who will care on Wall Street?
Who recites poetry these days?

Lesley Synge,
Highgate Hill, QLD
Acts of Stammering and Aesthetic Nervousness: Reflections on intervention in applied theatre practice

Natalie Lazaroo

Introduction

In Tim Prentki's (2009: 181) introduction to intervention in applied theatre, he asserts that ‘the very idea of intervention is implicated in the issues of power and the right to speak on behalf of others’. Investigations into the work of applied theatre practitioners with disempowered or disenfranchised groups thereby require a closer look into claims surrounding transformation, empowerment, social change, and the related ethical concerns and problems associated with such intentions.

This paper considers the oft-stated aims of transformation, empowerment, and social change in much applied theatre work, as well as the discussions within the field that problematise these acts of good will. Because of the operations of power that are inherent in applied theatre contexts, there is a constant need for reflexivity – practitioners have to consciously ask the difficult but necessary questions about their work particularly with regards to the ethics of their practice.

In examining these discussions, I became inspired by James Thompson’s (2009: 133) notion of the ‘stammering moment’, a point of tension that captures the uncertainties felt by those experiencing the work. I then propose that when working with communities, practitioners pay attention to their own acts of ‘stammering’ that arise. Acknowledging these acts of stammering is an alternative to the view of the applied theatre facilitator as ‘expert’ as it allows for the interrogation of the ‘dynamic of authority based on knowledge and/or expertise’ that often exists between facilitators and participants (Nellhaus and Haedicke 2001: 15). To illuminate this idea, I draw on a specific example of an applied theatre project with a group of people living with disability. In particular, I consider the ethics and politics of working in a disability context, and the facilitator’s stammerings that emerged. In this case, examining the work through perspectives on disability revealed how the concept of aesthetic nervousness (Quayson 2007) could offer a deeper understanding into the issues that arose for the facilitator.

Applied Theatre Interventions: Asking tough questions about the ethics of applied theatre practice

Numerous scholars have already set out to offer definitions and examples of applied theatre (see for example Prendergast and Saxton 2009; Prentki and Preston 2009; Taylor 2003; Thompson 2003; Thompson and Jackson 2006). For the purpose of this paper, I refer to Dani Snyder-Young’s (2013: 4) writing, which refers to applied theatre as ‘a wide range of practices in which participatory dramatic activities and/or theatre performances are used for a broad set of purposes including education, community building, rehabilitation, conflict resolution, and advocacy’.

In applied theatre contexts, an interventionist approach is often accompanied by ‘an agenda of social change’ (Arrighi 2014: 200). Similarly, Helen Nicholson (2005: 6)
notes that ‘most practitioners working in applied drama are motivated by individual or social change and there is, therefore, a similar interest in the effects and usefulness of the work’. Other studies frame the objectives of applied theatre as that of ‘transformation’. Philip Taylor (2003: 1) proposes that applied theatre work be understood as ‘transformative encounters’ that occur as a praxis that involves action, reflection, and transformation (Taylor 2003: 9). Drawing on the theories of critical pedagogue Paulo Freire, Sheila Preston (2009a: 304) considers how transformation may be achieved through a process of ‘cultural synthesis’ where dialogue and reciprocity allow participants to claim greater ownership of the work created, as opposed to a kind of transformation that is enforced upon them by practitioners.

Yet other articulations of the objectives of applied theatre include evoking a sense of empowerment. Richard Boon and Jane Plastow (2004: 7) for example, consider how the empowering process of theatre can lead to the ‘liberation’ of the mind and spirit of participants who often see themselves and are seen by others as ‘subhuman’. Working with the Mizrahi group (Jews originating from Arab countries), Shulamith Lev-Aladgem (2010: 12) expresses confidence in applied theatre’s potential to evoke empowerment. She does, however, readily distinguish empowerment at the interface of theatre and welfare, signalling that ‘welfare bodies’ often approach empowerment in terms of ‘good-will’, while theatre practitioners commonly ‘engage with theatre as a consciousness-raiser and symbolic weapon with which to stimulate social change’.

Despite these good intentions Judith Ackroyd (2007) criticises the unquestioning view that all applied theatre works are acts of good will. Ackroyd (2007: 3) for instance employs the term ‘dubious’ to describe work with less than ‘humanitarian ends’. Likewise, Thompson (2003: 41) cautions against a ‘cultural invasion’, asserting that even with the best intentions, ‘change set from the outside is more often an imposition than an act of liberation’. Nicholson (2005: 82), while acknowledging practitioners’ motivations, expresses doubts regarding ‘claims that drama always transforms beliefs and attitudes for the better [as] this is based on the understanding that no social encounter … is exempt from other social narratives and alternative perceptions of power’. Snyder-Young (2013: 22) problematises interventionist approaches rather astutely, commenting on the “good intentions” of many privileged theatre practitioners [who] perceive a social problem, an inequality, or an underserved audience, and want to use our theatre-making skills to improve the lives of those we see as having “less” than we do’.

By problematising acts of good will, it brings to the fore the need to constantly interrogate the ethics of practice and the operations of power present in applied theatre contexts. Facilitators are then tasked with asking the difficult questions about their work. One reason this is a hard process is due to what can sometimes be a tenuous relationship between applied theatre work and funding bodies. As Snyder-Young (2013: 6) puts forward:

Institutional agendas have a great deal of impact on the work artists do. When artists cannot explain their work to those institutional authorities, there is the danger of losing the resources required to make the work. As a result, artists are often reluctant to ask hard questions to which they, their participants, and their funders may not like the answers.

These sentiments echo Thompson’s (2009: 160-161) concern about ‘apply[ing] performance at the service of the various institutional, social and discursive regimes that surround and contain the communities in which the practice takes place’. Even when funders themselves employ terms like ‘empowerment’ and ‘agency’, facilitators and participants often have to operate within the agenda of the funding body. Ultimately, ‘the privilege of the powerful trumps the agency of the participants’ (Snyder-Young 2013: 36-37).

While it is necessary to consider the impact that funding organisations have on the work created, it is just as important to reflect on the operations of power existing between applied theatre practitioners and their participants. Although Thompson’s (2005: 40) concerns are situated within the context of applied theatre and communities affected by war and can be seen as an extreme example, he nonetheless makes a valuable statement about the importance of asking difficult questions about the work. Drawing on a particular incident in his work where the act of re-presenting stories from the community created further conflict, he reflects:

My point is that our enthusiasm for running projects such as these, and the growing popularity of similar applied and social theatre initiatives, mean that tough questions should be asked about the ethics of practice. Without a more thorough, critical and sceptical look at the work, we have no way of knowing how projects might create something worse than the tension I speak of here (Thompson 2006: 40).

Thompson’s concerns resonate with the broader discussion on ethics in applied theatre contexts. Importantly, practitioners need to be aware of the kinds of representations that are created in the process. In Doreen Mattingly’s (2001: 448) article on theatre work in an impoverished community, she recognises the power of representation and how ‘not all representations
have the same power nor offer the same potential for change’. How then can applied theatre workers become more sensitive to the representational politics that are embedded in their work? Certainly, as Preston (2009b: 65) argues, that even while seeking to empower, transform, or enact change, applied theatre workers need to ensure that representations of a community are made through dialogue with and respect for that community. Representations, especially of vulnerable and/or marginalised groups, will always bear their own political significance and be susceptible to appropriation. Preston (2009b: 68) offers some ‘critical questions’ to consider as means of interrogating applied theatre practice:

- How appropriate is our preferred aesthetic for engaging with the politics of speaking with, for or about communities?
- How do we deal with our moral and/or political tensions at the heart of the stories and texts that are created?
- How can we work sensitively, and create a genuine climate of dialogue and reciprocity?
- How are issues of voice, authority and ownership reconciled in the process of constructing narratives and representations that result?
- How will representations that have been created impact in diverse, unpredictable and political contexts?

These questions are critical in guiding practitioners towards a more ethical practice. The imperative to question one’s own practice and knowledge means that facilitators need to decentre themselves from their supremacy, and locate what Thompson (2009: 165) refers to as ‘a politics that has an inbuilt ethics of humility’. This notion of humility is a familiar call by Freire (1996: 71) who proposes that theatre facilitators, or educators in the Freirean sense, should perceive their own ignorance in order to effectively engage in dialogue. Susan Haedicke (1998: 129) similarly calls for facilitators not to attempt to ‘awe the community with their talent or expertise’. Rather, they should find ways to work with the community to discover its own power.

It is with these considerations that acts of stammering, a phrase I have borrowed from Thompson (2009: 77), can be useful. Thompson explains ‘stammering’ in a number of ways. First, he offers that stammering can be the result of having the ‘contradictory wish to speak and not to speak’. He wonders if stammering could therefore be a ‘poised’ response situated between speech and silence, a ‘complex reaction to [the experience] of crises’. Thompson’s (2009: 132-133) idea on stammering builds on Gumbrecht’s call for ‘a pause before we begin to make sense’. Thompson (2009: 182) proposes that when practitioners experience stammering, it allows them to find a more ‘tender, embodied connection’ to the injustices that they denounce through their work. Such affective concerns, Thompson argues, ‘grounds [the work] in our humility and lack of superiority’.

As mentioned earlier, Thompson works in the context of war and conflict, which brings with it particular issues associated with suffering and trauma. It is critical to acknowledge that I am by no means suggesting that stammering encountered in those contexts is the same as those experienced by practitioners working in other areas. Nonetheless, Thompson’s articulation that stammering reveals moments of tension and uncertainty is a useful way to capture the sort of struggles that can emerge when creating applied theatre work in unfamiliar contexts. Stammering then, as Thompson suggests, helps facilitators question their expertise and ground their work in humility. In the next section, I draw from an example of an applied theatre project created with a group of people experiencing disability, discussing how the facilitator encountered acts of stammering in the process of creating the work.

**Stammering from Aesthetic Nervousness: Creating uneasy representations**

The practice that I examine here comes from my doctoral study (Lazaroo 2016), which examined the complexities of applied theatre work with disabled people. I approached the study from an ethnographic perspective, focusing on the experience of the facilitator engaging in a four-month process of working with the group towards a short performance. The data informing my reflection is drawn from researcher observations of the process, and in-depth discussions with the facilitator. Part of my research sought to understand the facilitator’s objectives of the work. She shared:

> Ultimately, everything we do is about making change, and making people view [the participants] differently. We’re aiming to [empower], and whether we actually achieve that or not, we don’t know (Facilitator 2013, personal communication, 7 August).

My primary aim was to have the workshop participants acknowledged as owners of their own work, well also even just as visible on stage … and not spoken for … I wanted to see how we could achieve this … As leaders of processes we work to certain agendas that are agreed upon. They happen to be empowerment and also about ownership of work made and certainly of work performed (Facilitator 2014, personal communication, 27 May).
The facilitator’s stated aims certainly reflect the discussions within applied theatre literature around empowerment and agency in work with disempowered groups. Even though I locate my research firmly within the field of applied theatre, it is important to consider how disability perspectives inform the work. As Thompson (2003: 20) articulates, ‘We are only ever visitors within the disciplines into which we apply our theatre’. Amanda Stuart Fisher (2005: 247) explores this argument further, writing that ‘attempts to meddle and intervene in people’s lives and communities must therefore be informed by an ethics of practice that can be responsive and responsible to each of the different contexts’ of the work. Nicholson (2013a: 329) considers the relationship between representation and context, arguing that ‘[t]heater is ... a representational art form and, arguably, issues of representation are amplified in applied theatre where there is often an intimate connection to the contexts in which it happens’.

Colette Conroy (2009: 11) writes that ‘[t]here is no recognisable field of disability in applied drama ... the two fields of applied and community drama and political disability arts have no coherent meeting place in discourse’. She does, however, offer a suggestion:

I would like to suggest that the meeting of applied theatre and disability offers a productive area of discursive practice ... The work of disabled scholars and scholars of disability, disabled practitioners and makers of theatre with and for disabled people needs a creative space to articulate and explore the tensions between us all (Conroy 2009: 12).

This is what I hope to achieve by drawing on disability perspectives in order to better understand applied theatre work, allowing it to serve as a productive area of discursive practice and a useful ‘cross-field encounter’ (Kuppers 2014: 29) between the two fields.

Before I proceed, I would first like to signal the difference between the applied theatre work of my study and political disability arts indicated by Conroy (2009) earlier. Even though ‘any definition of disability is already a political statement’ (Kuppers 2014: 9), political disability art/performance – as opposed to performance by disabled people – can be understood as having a strong relationship between ‘the politics of identity and the notion of [disability] representation’ (Conroy 2009: 9). It has, as Conroy (2009: 10) suggests, political urgency and efficacy.

Nonetheless, any work in a disability context demands a reflection on ethics and power, especially with concerns regarding non-disabled representations of disabled people (see Leighton 2009: 100). Conroy (2009: 5) makes the call that ‘to work in ... arts for disabled people, is to experiment with one’s own positioning and to struggle with meanings that arise at the point where practitioner (disabled or non-disabled) meets work’. Giles Perring (2005: 177) contends that ‘it is vital to acknowledge and explore the interests of the non-disabled artist who often works with and facilitates the learning-disabled performer’. Fran Leighton (2009: 99) acknowledges Perring’s arguments, reading them as ‘non-disabled artists’ interventions’ that require a rigorous examination of the work.

There are numerous discussions on studies into disability and issues of power (see for example Barnes 2003; Barton 2005; Hunt 1981; Oliver 1992; Stone and Priestley 1996). While I acknowledge that this sort of work requires the kind of scrutiny that Leighton mentions, I am also motivated by Alan Roulstone’s (2010: 437) reflections:

What I crave, however, is more confidence amongst disability drama practitioners and writers to move beyond doubts based on essentialist orthodoxies of disabled versus non-disabled sensibilities and positions. Disabled people can disable others, non-disabled people can and do enable. I welcome notions of reflexive praxis as a sine qua non of good theatre (and wider) practice with disabled people; the sense of having to apologise for non-disabled lives and their work with disabled people always strikes me as a little dated.

Roulstone’s statement seems to alleviate a certain sense of guilt that can be felt by non-disabled practitioners and scholars who engage in disability work. Instead of apologising, his call for reflexive praxis thus connects with the ability and openness to reflect on the acts of stammering that emerge in the process, and how this can encourage facilitators to work more sensitively.

In my research, the facilitator worked with a group of disabled participants to create a short performance around the theme and aesthetic of the circus. Immediately, this raises concerns regarding the frame of the circus and its complex history with disability. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the history of the circus and its associated freak show in depth. Other scholars (Adams 2012; Bogdan 1996; Conroy 2012; Hadley 2008; Kuppers 2014; Stephens 2006) deal more thoroughly with circus/freak shows as a disempowering/empowering site of disability. A key aspect of this discussion is that contemporary disabled performers have appropriated the freak show to interrogate and contest culturally oppressive narratives about physical differences. Many of these appropriations have been performed by professional artists who have actively sought to deconstruct and shift the spectatorial frames of the freak. Bree Hadley (2008: 2) makes a pressing statement about agency in light of the freak show. She writes:
The question of agency extends to the discussion of whether disabled performers ... can, by consciously appropriating the figures, symbols and scenography of the freakshow, start to deconstruct the mechanisms by which this contested sphere of cultural practice has historically defined them, confronting their spectators with their own complicity in the construction of the freak.

The participants in the project, however, were not professional performers and did not actively employ a deconstructive lens to the freak show. The circus theme and the idea to have the participants put on red noses were put forward by the facilitator, as opposed to the participants actively working to reinvent the frame of the circus. The facilitator’s reflection on this moment showed that she was acutely aware of the politics behind disability and the circus:

The first time that I (breaks off mid-sentence) ... the suggestion of putting the clown nose on people who are ... have severe disability is like (gasp), you know, is that ... what are we saying with that? What does that mean, and what do people think when they watch that? (Facilitator 2013, personal communication, 12 September).

In the above excerpt of our communication, the facilitator’s stammering is observable as she tries to grapple with the conflicted act of representation. Two years after the project, I spoke to her again, inviting her to reflect on her initial impressions. She expressed her vulnerability and uncertainty:

The big thing for me [in questioning my assumptions] was being able to see past the body and finding who the person was behind that ... discovering who they are as individuals, what their capacities to contribute to the process was.

There was a genuine feeling of fear about making mistakes ... it felt dangerous, it felt like there was a danger in turning them into clowns. The fact we’re putting on the clown nose and all that kind of stuff, and turning them into clowns. What was that about? (Facilitator 2015, personal communication, 7 April).

I believe that this stammering emerged because of how the facilitator had to question her assumptions about the participants, as well as how she could have been viewed as actively disempowering the participants by exhibiting them as freaks. This possibility of disempowering the participants ran counter to the facilitator’s desire to ‘find a way of creating something where the performers had agency’ (Facilitator 2015, personal communication, 7 April).

In order to understand how to possibly explain the cause of the facilitator’s stammering, I once again draw from a disability perspective. I propose that this act of stammering stems from what Ato Quayson (2007: 15) describes as ‘aesthetic nervousness’, which can be observed when:

the dominant protocols of representation within the literary text are short circuited in relation to disability. The primary level in which it may be discerned is in the interaction between a disabled and non-disabled character, where a variety of tensions may be identified.

The appearance of a disabled character thereby ‘precipitates a crisis in the protocols of representation’ (Davis 2011: E211). The crisis operates in a number of ways, one of which is the issue of how to represent the disabled character without necessarily assigning it a ‘subaltern or degraded position in the text’ (Davis 2011: E211). Another problem arises when considering the possibility of the disabled character or disability being represented in a way other than simply a metaphor for an aspect of the human condition (Davis 2011: E211). These elements of crisis are what trigger aesthetic nervousness. Quayson (2007: 15) explains that much aesthetic nervousness extends beyond this primary level (between characters), and includes areas such as the ‘overall narrative or dramatic perspective’. He also offers insight into the aesthetic nervousness that can exist between reader and text, where ‘aesthetic nervousness overlaps social attitudes to disability that themselves often remain unexamined in their prejudices and biases’.

Although Quayson’s (2007) examination of aesthetic nervousness centres largely on literary texts, his ideas are useful for consideration within the context of applied theatre work. I stress here that I have borrowed and adapted Quayson’s theories, thus offering a way of looking at this moment of the project through a reinterpreted lens of aesthetic nervousness. I propose that the facilitator be compared to the author of a literary text: her choice of accessories (the red noses in this case) creates the text’s characters, that is, the participants in the project. The audience watching the performance then are a parallel to Quayson’s implied readers. Aesthetic nervousness thus arose within the facilitator, who acknowledged her struggle to consciously see past the participants’ physical limitations and find opportunities for them to be agentic. Faced with the representation of disability through her aesthetic choices, the facilitator was aware of how her choices would, in Quayson’s (2007: 15) terms, cause a ‘short circuit’, thereby passing on the aesthetic nervousness to an audience. All these experiences of aesthetic nervousness thus resulted in the facilitator’s stammering, a reaction to the experience of crisis in the act of representation.
Such moments of stammering emphasise how the relationship between ethics and representation cannot be separated. As Quayson (2007: 19) articulates, '[d]isability returns the aesthetic domain to an active ethical core that serves to disrupt the surface of representation'. This notion indeed echoes Preston's (2009b) call for ethical practice, which I outlined earlier. An awareness of this reading of aesthetic nervousness as a potential cause of stammering thus makes visible the 'elements of power' that are often not disclosed in the interactions between people with and without disabilities (Quayson 2007: 16-17). It can help applied theatre facilitators working in unfamiliar contexts better understand the issues of power and representation that can arise in the moments of tension and uncertainty.

Conclusion

The call for scrutiny into the ethical practice of intervention in applied theatre practice is a continuous effort. To what extent, and how ethically, can applied theatre work create transformation, empowerment, and social change in the community? In the process of trying to empower and transform, what kinds of representations of the community are made, and what political significance will they have?

As outlined earlier, Stuart Fisher’s (2005) arguments about needing to reflect more critically on the ethics of practice within particular contexts resonate. In the practical example of applied theatre work with disabled people, it was therefore fundamental to interrogate the representations of disability that emerged through the work. In the case that I presented, borrowing and adapting Quayson’s (2007) concept of aesthetic nervousness offered the possibility of more deeply understanding the facilitator’s stammering caused by her idea of the circus as an aesthetic frame. I propose that bringing an awareness of aesthetic nervousness into any situation where representation is a difficult issue can perhaps offer new ways of thinking about how representations are made. How does aesthetic nervousness reveal itself in other applied theatre contexts? How will audiences interpret or receive these representations? At what points does the work cause a ‘short-circuit’? I believe that this notion of aesthetic nervousness can begin to inform applied theatre theory and practice.

Finally, when confronted by possible repercussions of their work, applied theatre facilitators can encounter acts of stammering that leave them feeling vulnerable. However, as Nicholson (2013b: 214) offers, the poetics of failure can be ‘a productive force for change’. These acts of stammering allow facilitators to reconsider and reinvent their knowledge (Freire 1996: 53) as well as question their expertise in order to ‘willingly disempower themselves in favour of more open-ended, democratic and meaningful learning processes’ (Boon and Plastow 2004: 4). Amidst these stammerings, disability scholar, performer, and activist Petra Kuppers (2011: 4), offers some words from which applied theatre facilitators can draw comfort:

This is all a lot of work, trying to think without victimization and exclusion, forgiving others and oneself when it is not yet working well, and being aware of the many different forms of privilege and power that mark how we got here.

References

Barnes, C. 2003 ‘What a difference a decade makes: reflections on doing “emancipatory” disability research’, Disability & Society, 18, 1: 3-17.
Roos at Dawn

At break of day I saw their tracks in the mud of the dam with only a water-puddle left in the middle. Like a dead hand the dry winter and grinding summer cursed all within reach. And if late rain didn’t climb the ranges the bane of fire must follow. Then on the other side amongst the shade of eucalypts like two beautiful women from a Greek myth; from the shiny blue-gums they rose and looked at me to share a new dawn. They stared under long lashes considered my appearance as if I were an apparition, stranger of clay. One leaned forward, maybe meaning to touch me but the other shook its head; and together these Eastern Greys bounded back to their dreaming. Then I was alone, ‘Is this how one should pray?’

JOHN STRANO, EUMUNDI QLD.
In this paper, I briefly introduce the participatory drama practice that the Griffith University Applied Theatre team has been engaged in within the context of new arrivals over the last ten years. I then turn to discuss resilience and the importance of hope, belonging and connectedness in the lives of new arrivals. This is followed by a description of a participatory drama program that occurred with a specific group of year 11 and 12 students with refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds during two school terms in 2016. The drama program that took place at one Brisbane high school, in Queensland, Australia, was designed as an intervention to support the young people based on the school’s assessment of their particular needs. I then turn to reflect on the program’s achievements against the stated goals. To do this I draw on my own observations as well as interviews with the students and one of the teachers. I conclude that the participatory drama program was a valuable and joyful intervention for these young people.

In 2007, members of Griffith University’s drama team were approached by Multilink, an organisation that provides community services and resources to migrants and refugees from culturally diverse backgrounds. They wondered if drama might be used to assist successful settlement in Australia. We started with a small pilot study working with newly arrived humanitarian entrants from Burundi and Ethiopia on drama projects designed to help the resettlement process.

This paper considers the oft-stated aims of transformation, empowerment, and social change in much applied theatre work, as well as the discussions within the field that problematise these acts of good will. Because of the operations of power that are inherent in applied theatre contexts, there is a constant need for reflexivity – practitioners have to consciously ask the difficult but necessary questions about their work particularly with regards to the ethics of their practice.

Since then, our work in the context of refugee resettlement has continued to expand. We have engaged in participatory drama projects in Logan and Brisbane with refugees and others seeking asylum from: Afghanistan, Burundi, Cambodia, China, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, El Salvador, Eritrea, Iran, Kenya, Laos, Liberia, Macedonia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo and Uganda. We have worked in primary schools, secondary schools and in the TAFE sector. Our work has been supported by ARC Linkage funding and more recently by a Queensland Government Department of Education and Training Collaboration and Innovation Fund Grant.

In this paper, I begin by briefly discussing resilience, hope, belonging and connectedness in the lives of new arrivals. This is followed by a discussion of the participatory drama work that occurred with one group of year 11 and 12 students with refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds. The voices of the young participants are used to illustrate their perceptions of the impact of the program.

Resilience

Commonly, resilience is thought of as a person’s ability to bounce back or cope after experiencing challenge or adversity. For example, the Collins Concise Dictionary (1988) defines it as ‘recovering easily and quickly from illness, hardship etc’. It is often written about as an innate human capability, a particular inner strength. From this perspective, there is little focus on the broader social circumstances experienced by the individual.

More contemporary views about resilience recognise (to varying degrees) that the environment and social world that a person finds themselves in significantly influence their ability to cope. For example, an ecological approach, while still seeing resilience as a human trait, recognises that the child, their environment and the relationships that they experience all impact on their wellbeing and their development (Yohani 2010: 866).

Ungar (2011: 1) questions an ecological approach that still positions resilience as a human trait. Rather, he argues that resilience is a quality of the child’s environment (their ‘social and physical ecology’). While earlier ecological studies focused on how people might...
Hope, Belonging and Connection

Like Ungar, Correa-Velez and colleagues (2010: 1406) assert that successful resettlement is significantly influenced by the social environment that people experience post-arrival. Furthermore, they argue that the settlement experience can be potentially more damaging than the pre-migration experience (Correa-Velez et al. 2010: 1400). People need to feel welcome and included. They need a sense of belonging and of achievement in their new land. They assert that wellbeing is significantly impacted by whether a person feels a sense of belonging early in resettlement (Correa-Velez et al. 2010: 1399).

Reading about this topic, I was drawn to the work of Beth Crisp, who separates belonging and connection, explaining that they are related but different concepts. They may co-exist but it is also possible for one to be present without the other. Crisp (2010: 124) uses belonging to refer to being an insider in a group. As an insider, you share the information that other members of that group share. Beyond having some shared values and beliefs, you feel you belong. There is positive emotion attached to this. Crisp (2010: 124) claims that all human beings require some level of belonging. When we know we belong, it is easier to take risks, to attempt tasks we have never attempted before, to ‘meet new people or go to new places’. When belonging is desired but denied to a person, there is likely to be negative impact including feelings of ‘isolation and loneliness’ (Crisp 2010: 127).

Unlike belonging, emotion does not necessarily attach to connection. While a sense of connection or connectedness emerges as a result of participation in ‘societal organisations or social networks’ (Crisp 2010: 124), membership itself may not impact directly on one’s sense of subjective identity. Programs that are designed to increase connection without also focusing on building belonging are unlikely to succeed. Crisp uses the example of programs that create access pathways to university for students who might not normally participate. If, once they get to university, there are no programs in place to support a sense of connection, they are likely to feel isolated and the pathway program will have failed. Similarly, schools must focus on programs that offer students connection to others through their participation in worthwhile/meaningful activity. Students need to experience the positive emotion that attaches to belonging as they participate in these.

Yohani (2008: 313) found in her work that ‘connectedness to others’ plays ‘an important role in enhancing hope’. Yohani adopts an arts-based approach to work with newly arrived migrant and refugee children in Canada. Observing the children in her research, she noted certain qualities of life were present for the children when they experienced hope: they were more engaged in life; they could see good in themselves; they felt capable; they felt free (Yohani and Larsen 2009: 248).

Hope gives people the motivation to cope with adverse events (Yohani 2008: 312) and is forward thinking. When we hope we can picture ourselves in a positive future. There is a link between hope, self-perception and action (Yohani 2010: 868). There is also a link between sense of achievement and hope. Positive emotion is likely to be experienced when a person takes action that requires effort and their action results in success. Yohani and Larsen (2009: 254) note that experiencing success encourages a person to see other future desirable possibilities that they might engage in and achieve.

Hope and wishing are not the same. Hope implies goals and action. Te Riele (2010: 36) draws attention to the three elements that comprise Snyder’s (2000) broadly recognised theory of hope: goals, pathways to achieve goals, and agency – the perception that one is capable of working towards the goal. What we hope for must be attainable, agreeable, future-oriented and require effort on our part. Like Te Riele (2010: 40), I suggest that there are ethical considerations in what we hope for. We should also ask if what we hope for is just.

Similar to Ungar’s (2011) position regarding the importance of an appropriate social ecology, Te Riele (2010: 39) notes that hope needs to be considered in the context of the agency of individuals and groups plus the social conditions that constrain and support them. Young people need experiences in the classroom that allow them to feel success. They need to experience secure and positive relationships with family, peers and teachers. A person who feels supported by their personal and social networks is more likely to experience hope than one who is isolated. A person who feels secure in their settlement status is more likely to experience hope than one who is not.

Hope is encouraged when you feel that someone is there for you. This is more than trust. It is trust plus a belief in
its outcome. If I trust you, this can happen (Yohani and Larsen 2009: 255). There is a direct link between trust and hope (Yohani and Larsen 2009: 248). There is also a link between trust, hope and belonging (Yohani and Larsen 2009: 259). Activity that fosters positive relationships nurtures hope.

Drama for Hope and Belonging

The young people engaged in this project were all students in years 11 and 12 in one Brisbane high school in 2016. They ranged in age from 16 to 20 years. All were selected by the deputy principal, who believed that they might benefit from engagement in the drama program. While a few of the young people had been selected because it was thought they could be strong role models for others, most had specific needs. Many of the students were highly anxious. Some had limited family support or were themselves carers. Some had witnessed, or were themselves, victims of domestic violence. The deputy principal wanted a program that would offer these young people a safe environment, that would encourage their desire to come to school, and that would encourage them to feel a sense of belonging. She wanted them to gain in confidence and to develop oral language ability.

At the beginning of the year, there were 17 year 11s (13 female and four male) and eight year 12s (three males and five females) officially in the class. By the time the project concluded, 32 young people had participated at various times.

The countries of origin of the young people in the class at the beginning of the year included: Afghanistan, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iran, Kenya, Liberia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda. The declared first languages of the students in the class included: African, Ewe, Dari, Dinka, French, Kurdish, Pashto, Somali, Swahili, and Tigrinya.

The visa subclass of the young people initially enrolled gives some indication of the difficulties of their lives:

- eight students entered Australia on a visa subclass 204 – woman at risk:
- 10 students had a visa sub-class 200 – refugee:
- two students had a visa sub-class 202 – global special humanitarian entrant:
- one student had a visa-sub-class 114 – aged dependent relative: and
- two students were persons seeking asylum – one had a bridging visa, the other had no visa.

Any person without a visa, or with a bridging visa of this kind faces a very uncertain future. The children in the school are aware of this. Knowledge of current government policy, and a personal sense of connection to stories of despair, impact on the outlook of other students and community members. The opposite of despair is hope. Included in the purposes of the drama program with these students was to support resilience and foster hope and belonging.

Our work together

Based on my understanding of the needs of the young people emerging from my interview with the deputy principal as mentioned above, as well as my understandings about resilience, belonging and hope, and of engagement in participatory drama, I determined a number of principles that would guide the work:

- to create a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment where students experience a sense of community and a sense of belonging
- to create a climate where secure and positive relationship building is encouraged amongst peers and between the participants and teachers
- to build an environment where people are able to trust each other
- to create an environment that encourages joyful encounters and experiences
- to create opportunities for new connections to be formed
- to create tasks that are meaningful, challenging but ultimately achievable.

We met once a week on a Wednesday afternoon for most of the school year. Often our planned sessions were abandoned when competing events occurred in the school. I worked alongside two experienced teachers, one a drama teacher and one who has an interest in drama and expertise in working with children for whom English is not a first language. I wanted to create an inclusive, open and inviting environment. Each week we began with a check in. We all sat in a circle and each person was greeted and invited to share something with the rest of the group. Throughout the sessions, I tried to vary how we worked, offering the students opportunities to work in pairs, small groups and in the larger group. Students were continually invited to share their opinions and ideas with others.

The focus of the first four weeks was on getting to know each other and build trust. I tried different drama approaches. I knew that I needed to develop a strong
pretext that could guide our continuing work. Four weeks into the project the students were engaged in a drama activity exploring emotion and status. They had listed words that described the emotions they were feeling and then together had brainstormed words that might be the opposite. All of these were written on yellow sticky labels and placed on the board. The students formed small groups. In each group one person lay down on a large piece of butcher’s paper and the others drew an outline around the body. They then took turns to select sticky labels naming emotions that they had placed on the board and placed these onto the body shapes. They were then faced with a question: Who is this person that experiences all these emotions? Their task was to create the fictional character and their story.

In the process of working in their groups to try to create the characters, one group had indicated that their character was strong, not necessarily physically, but as a person. One young woman declared that it had to be a male character, because girls can’t be strong. The information that I had received from the deputy principal was that this student was a victim of ongoing domestic violence. Her response and this knowledge informed my choice of pretext for the ongoing work.

I had recently read Kristin Hannah’s (2015) The Nightingale telling the story of a young woman who was active in the French resistance during WWII. When I mentioned the book to someone else they asked me if it was based on the story of the White Mouse. I then started to research her story. Nancy Wake was similarly engaged in the resistance movement in France. Kristin Hannah maintains that her character is not based on the White Mouse but on the experiences of a woman from Belgium. She claimed that there were many women during WWII who were strong and took great risks to aid other men, women and children. I combined the stories and then further fictionalised this to create a character and a story that could be a starting point for the students to explore. The intention was not to re-enact a predetermined story but to offer the students the opportunity to create their own fiction with this as a starting point. As well as involving a strong female character, this had potential as a pretext for a number of reasons:

1. It contained a situation distanced in time and place from their own.
2. It was likely to evoke their interest.
3. It offered the possibility of engaging them intellectually and emotionally.
4. It implied roles for the participants and a range of situations that they could explore.

I told the students that we were going to draw on the two stories to weave fact and fiction and create a new character and a new story. For them to follow what could be really complex, I needed to break it into small chunks, introducing just a little that we could explore each week – but hint that there was more to come. In the first session I told them:

1. Our story is set in France just before and during WWII. When our story starts, Isabelle, a French girl and the hero of our story, is 16.
2. Isabelle has no mother. Her mother died when she was just a baby. Although her father tried to raise her, he was grief stricken by the loss of his wife and his experiences of war, and it seemed to Isabelle that he really didn’t know how to be a good father to her. He decided to send her away to a boarding school in Switzerland.

The students were instantly engaged. They created a paired role play. One person was the father and one was Isabelle. It was the night before Isabelle was to be sent away. She is packing her bag. The students playing Isabelle were given the task of trying to convince their fathers not to send them away. The fathers were told a secret that was not shared with those playing Isabelle. They knew that war was imminent and wanted the daughter to go away where she would be safe but they mustn’t let her know that.

The students were highly engaged in the task of creating the scenes. The secret added a layer of purpose and tension for the fathers and something to play against for the daughters. One participant, playing the father, painted a poetic image of the daughter’s future through the stars. It was very moving and I wondered if there were resonances to leaving her homeland in the story she created. Other scenes portrayed the fathers as cold and distant. I asked those playing the father to keep the secret till the following week. Most did.

The following week we recapped the story we had created so far. This became a necessary and successful approach throughout the work. It helped those with limited English to gradually understand more and more of the story and assisted those who may have missed the previous session.

I wanted them to have fun and perhaps play with a little irony. I told them that the boarding school she was sent to was a finishing school. It was a place for her to learn how to become a lady, something she had no interest in learning. They worked together to create a list of the subjects that she would study and then took a blank timetable, the same as the ones used in their own school, and filled in her lessons for the week.
They split into two groups and each created a group improvisation of the most pointless lesson they could imagine her engaging in. They improvised an unwilling Isabelle engaged in a manners lesson, and a lesson about meeting suitable young men. They were very funny and even the shyest young people in the group were highly engaged.

We did revisit the fathers from the previous week. Each of the daughters was given the task of shaping their father into the statue that would capture what they thought their father was thinking and feeling when he sent the daughter away. They created images of fathers who didn't like them, didn't care. At a signal, each father spoke what they were really thinking or feeling. This added a layer of complexity to the characters and relationships that further engaged the students.

Over the following weeks we continued to explore the story, adding to it as we went. The students considered what Switzerland might look like. They drew a map of the school and the village complete with the obstacles Isabelle would face if she were to try to run away. They then created and enacted scenes showing her trying to escape. Each time she was caught and returned.

They created and took roles as the teachers in her boarding school at a staff meeting considering the problem of what to do with Isabelle. I wanted her to be expelled because I thought we'd spent long enough at the boarding school and needed to get back to Paris for a bit more action. They decided that she was really a very caring, brave and good person. They wanted her to have another chance. Having decided this, the students worked in groups to create a scene that would show her doing something that would make the teachers think they had made the right decision in letting her stay.

After several more sessions exploring and creating Isabelle’s story, the students were given the task of choosing what they wanted to happen when she got back to Paris. Several different endings were created. One of the participants explained her ending to me:

Actually, when she went home she met her stepmother at the house. We all gave our idea of how the story was going to end. Whether her dad will forgive her or not. As for me, I said her dad going to forgive her because no matter how angry he is he'll want to forgive her because it's his daughter.

Reflection

While this particular drama concluded at the end of term two, we continued to work together throughout the year. From September to November, I conducted ten, 30-minute individual interviews with those students who gave permission for this to occur. I also interviewed one of the teachers who had worked alongside me throughout the work. Drawing on these interviews and my observations, I turn now to reflect on our achievements against the program goals.

All of the students whom I interviewed noted that they felt that our Wednesday drama class was welcoming and inclusive. This was supported by the teacher's interview comments. For the majority of students who regularly attended the sessions, a sense of community and belonging was created. They identified as members of this particular class and noted that they would greet each other in the playground outside class time. Many commented on feeling comfortable working in this environment, sometimes even comparing this to how they felt in other classes. A student who was relatively new to the class and to Australia stated:

So it was very hard for me but the day I came here, it was, it felt like I’m home. Everyone is my friend. My family. You know. So I didn't feel anything. Just very good and happy. Every time. Talk to anyone. Tell anyone that I trust my things you know.

Another student noted that she felt both comfortable and valued:

... for example, in English class I feel so uncomfortable. I don't know. I just get a feeling like I'm nobody in the class. Everybody is on the top and I'm nobody. I feel discouraged by myself. But in the drama class, it's really, really important and it takes away some worries and makes you feel comfortable about yourself. Makes you value yourself. You know? Feel confident in yourself. Do what you can do and it's alright. Not stressed and worried.

The comfort felt by the students as they worked together with the same group of peers also influenced their willingness to contribute ideas:

When we are here, we don’t mind. It’s like we are like brothers and sisters. We talk to each other and everyone gives their own opinion in what we are doing and we discuss about it.

An important comment made by one student was that she felt supported in the drama class and believed that the teachers genuinely cared about her:

Oh my god. I think because we can talk about it. What we do. In my English class it's like, you go to class and you don't just talk and she'll look at you for language. She's not focusing on you, on
how you feel because sometimes I might be feeling really depressed. If I don't speak it out she won't know. That don't help me focus what she is saying. And I will never get what she is saying. That's what happens to me most of the time.

Shyness impacted on student willingness and ability to talk and engage. Many claimed that the drama program helped reduce this:

It makes me feel comfortable talking in front of people because after working together we have to present our point of view which is really good. I think it can take away shyness.

There was a general view that the way we worked encouraged participation. Each student was invited to share something with the group at the check-in at the beginning of each session. They were regularly invited to contribute their ideas as the sessions continued. Several mentioned that they did not think this was expected of them in other classes. One of the senior students stated:

If the teacher asks for ideas, in those other classes, it's optional if you put your hand up when you want and when you don't want but in here you go around and people actually say what they have in mind but in other classes like no one is there to actually tell them, like to say what's in their mind even if they have great ideas.

Comments that the drama contributed to confidence and sense of self-worth were made by most students:

The first time I took part in the drama I was feeling nervous and I was like scared. I feel like maybe they will tease me or anything and then I tried. I took part in the drama and the students were very good and I thought like it's nice. The things just come up in my head and tell me maybe if you do this it's going to be good and yeah.

I did not trust myself in doing everything but now I trust myself, because when I bring up something, like how I was bringing up something that we can do in the drama, and it's come up a good thing, and I feel like the leader of the group, the little group and ... I find it works.

Before I didn't thought that I can do things but now I feel and know and believe that I can do stuff. Before I didn't know that I am good at stuff. Whenever people say do this, I say no. I can't do it. But now I realise that I can do it because I feel more better seeing what I can do.

Two of the students spoke about developing self-awareness. They gained insight into the way they were responding to others outside the drama and the way other people were reading and responding to them. Discussing participation in the drama, one of these students stated, 'Just helps me realise what kind of person I am'. The other told me that through the drama work he learned that, 'sharing, that me telling my ideas might be worth listening to'.

Another key idea that emerged in two of the interviews was freedom. One young man stated:

Here you have more freedom but other classes it's a lot about listen and learn but here it is do, learn, have fun.

He spoke about having the freedom to express his feelings. The other student commented:

I really like the fact that we have the freedom of expression in the classroom because most other time in our classroom you don't really have that. Freedom. You just have to do what you're meant to do. This class gives us freedom to express ourselves in ways that we don't normally do in other classes.

This same student linked the idea of freedom to exploration and portrayal of character. The stories and characters weren't predetermined by a script but could be developed by the individual students.

Many of the students I spoke to throughout the year and all of the students I interviewed mentioned the sense of joy they experienced coming to the class. All of the students who were interviewed and who had attended when we had explored the Isabelle story mentioned their enjoyment of exploring this in particular.

I asked the students if it was similar to their other classes. A few who studied other arts subjects noted similarities but also noted that the lack of assessment in this made it different. Other students who did not otherwise study arts subjects commented:

It's different. The differences are like, firstly, we are not reading, we are not sitting in a chair. It's just like we are at a party.

In our normal classes we go to learn a book and in here we just act, we do acting, talking, communicating, and entertainment stuff.

Another comparison made to their work in other subjects was the way that they worked in pairs or groups in the
drama. They talked about helping and supporting each other. One young man commented that in all his other classes he just did individual work. The students noted that the pair and small group work encouraged them to participate, to contribute their own ideas, to take risks, to communicate. They noted that this way of working improved their oral language skills and their confidence:

In a small group of people you get to learn because you know something but you don’t know all. You get to share ideas and learn from all the people. You improve your speaking with other people. As much as you speak you make mistakes and someone will be able to correct you. You can be able to learn from them.

Most of the people in there, English is not our first language, and some people don’t feel comfortable about talking among public, and some people feel shy to speak out their mind. These sessions are really good because they help people to share their ideas, helps people to communicate, improve their communication skills, it helps them also to build up their confidence, yeah to learn from each other which is really good.

Here you get to share things. And you just get to learn how to share. Normally I’m not that kind of person, who likes telling things, sharing ideas. I’m not really that kind of person that shares ideas. Just keep quiet. But this class just helps me you know. Here it’s easy to share ideas because everyone is doing the same thing.

Throughout the responses, a sense of pleasure and achievement is evident. They have learned that they are worthwhile and that they have something to offer that will be valued by other people. The teacher whom I interviewed alerted me to an important idea about the link between achievement and belonging:

... belonging really means that you’re kind of wanted somewhere, not that you’re just welcome because it’s a good thing to welcome people ... I think, especially for our students, when we make them feel like there’s something in you that I need or something that you’re adding to this, that’s when they really, genuinely, without any outsider feeling, they feel, ‘Oh, there’s a spot for me’.

Conclusion

On reflection, I believe that the way we worked and my attempts to create a safe and creative space with the young people were successful. New friendships were forged. Together we created a drama workshop space filled with joy, optimism and fun in lives where this is not always available. There were opportunities to be playful, physical, and ironic. We created a fictional world and characters that were of sufficient interest to matter to them. Positive peer-to-peer and student-teacher relationships were built. I have a sense of the growing trust the young people feel about each other and me. Some of the students who were reluctant to speak when we began the work now voice their ideas and opinions. Throughout this work they have variously experienced success and developed a positive sense of their own capabilities. There is a sense of belonging. The school’s decision to create the space for a program like this has been a valuable and joyful intervention for these young people.

References

Correa-Velez, I., Gifford, S. and Barnett, A. 2010 ‘Longing to belong: social inclusion and wellbeing among youth with refugee backgrounds in the first three years in Melbourne, Australia’, Social Science & Medicine, 71, 8: 1399-1408.

Author

Penny Bundy is well known for her work investigating the value of drama for participants whose lives have been impacted by particularly challenging life experiences, and in which she takes an active role as drama facilitator and researcher. Penny has been a chief investigator on four Australian Research Council-funded Linkage Projects. She is co-author, with colleagues Balfour, Burton, Dunn and Woodrow of the Bloomsbury publication Resettlement: Drama, refugees and resilience. Penny is an Adjunct Professor at Griffith Institute for Educational Research.

End Notes

1. The following people have actively engaged in and contributed to the drama and research work mentioned in the introduction to this paper: Michael Balfour, Merrellyn Bates, Penny Bundy, Bruce Burton, Julie Dunn, Penny Glass, Linda Hassall, Adrienne Jones, Marta Kawka, Madonna Stinson, Keithia Wilson, Sarah Woodland, and Nina Woodrow. In addition, several key teachers and further undergraduate and postgraduate students have worked alongside us. For ethical reasons these people are not individually named.
Textual and Performative Interventions: Autobiographical stage writing as a rescription of the self

DALLAS BAKER

It is well established that some types of performance and theatre both document and catalyse social and/or cultural change (Mitchell, Dupuis and Jonas-Simpson 2011; Epskamp 1989; Shank 1982). This idea is so influential that for decades many anthropologists have used the notion of theatre or performance to describe the way whole social and cultural systems work (Schechner 2004; Turner 1982; Goffman 1956). Similarly, certain types of writing document and catalyse individual or personal change processes (Baker 2012, 2017). In other words, writing can be understood as an intervention into subjectivity in the way that performance and theatre are interventions into social systems and cultural practices. Michel Foucault (1997) described this process as self-writing or self-bricolage. This paper focuses on stage writing as an intervention into subjectivity or identity and a catalyst for personal transformation.

Introduction

Lived experience is core to the constitution of subjectivity (or sense of self) and identity. Quite literally, we are what we do. Joan Scott (1991) argues that subjects are constituted directly through experience, that who we are alters with each new experience. The practice or act of writing, like all creative practices, is a significantly reflective experience. These kinds of creative and reflective experiences have the potential to be profoundly transformative, to change who we are. Identities are narrative constructions adapted through self-talk (Sarup 1996). Our identities are the products of our own self-telling (Baker 2017). In other words, when we write about ourselves transformation is inevitable. As I have written elsewhere:

What we know transforms us. When we write, we write from what we know. We come to know through investigation, discovery and reflection, which is research. Just as often, we come to know a thing more deeply as we write about it. Writing is its own research method, its own form of inquiry … Thus, writing transforms us (Baker 2017: n.p.).

It is well established that some types of performance and theatre both document and catalyse social and/or cultural change (Mitchell, Dupuis and Jonas-Simpson et al. 2011). This idea is so influential, many anthropologists use the notion of theatre or performance to describe the way that whole social and cultural systems work (Schechner 2004; Turner 1982; Goffman 1956). Similarly,
emphasis added). Elsewhere I defined the ‘already said’ as: ‘the discourse currently in circulation to which the subject can be or has been exposed. It is this “already said” from which writers write’ (Baker 2017 n.p.). The act of writing, the engagement with, or reflection on, this already said, on alternate or different subjectivities, leads to a transformation (or rescripting) of the self. The writer’s subjectivity or identity shifts in (resonant or resistant) response to exposure to other identities or subjectivities.

I have researched and written extensively about the act of writing as an intervention into the self, a rescription of subjectivity, an ongoing making and re-making of identity (Baker 2017, 2012, 2010). Michel Foucault (1997) described this process as self-writing or self-bricolage. Foucault (1997) argues that who one is emerges out of the problems with which one struggles. Foucault advocates an ongoing investigation or struggle with the self through writing – an ongoing assembly and disassembly of subjectivity – that constitutes a kind of self-bricolage; a making and re-making of subjectivity (Rabinow 1997).

Importantly, writing, like subjectivity, is a performative act (Baker 2012), in that in the doing a knowing occurs. As we write, we come to know more about the subject of our writing, and more about writing practice itself. We also come to know more about ourselves; see ourselves through different lenses, understand ourselves from within different frameworks. I have often argued that the act of reading (and viewing) can also be understood as part of a self-bricolage (Baker 2017; 2012). Together, the acts of writing and reading form a process in which the writer and reader make and re-make their subjectivities in response to a text (Baker 2012). For the writer, this remaking, or intervention, mostly occurs in the act of making the text, in writing practice. For the reader, the intervention occurs during and after exposure to the text (in the moments of reading and later reflection).

Like any other form of writing, stage writing can be seen as an intervention into subjectivity. It is unique as an interventional act because it adds the dimension of live performance. For the playwright, the intervention into subjectivity is triggered by the act of writing a work for performance, which includes the writerly practices of reflection and revision, which in stage writing includes responding to rehearsals and live performances. From the moment of inception to the final performance, multiple moments occur in which the stage writer’s subjectivity is altered. For the actors performing the finished script, this intervention begins at first reading and continues through rehearsal to live performance and into post-performance reflection. For the audiences of those productions or performances, the intervention occurs as part of the live experience but also continues beyond that as they contemplate and reflect on the specific performance they attended. To return to the notion of the already said, it is this already said from which writers, actors and audiences create meaning from the lived experience of a stage production. That meaning alters their subjectivity, it is an intervention into their knowledge and world view, in subtle and unnoticed ways for most but in profound and obvious ways for others.

For the most part, these interventions are neither intentional nor acknowledged, especially among audience members. I have argued elsewhere that writers can not only acknowledge these interventions into their identities but also trigger them intentionally by using a practice-led research process heavily focussed on reflexivity (Baker 2012). I will not revisit that idea here, but instead focus on how autobiographical stage writing can be understood as a rescription of the self, an intervention into the writer’s subjectivity. To illuminate this discussion, I will reflect on my own writing of a short script, Home [Hoom]: Noun. The Place Where One Belongs, which was completed as part of a Practice-led Research project.

Writing and Performing the Self

The writing of Home, an autobiographical play, revealed the truth of the ideas outlined above – that the performative act of writing for the stage is a creative practice of equal significance to the formation of my subjectivity or identity. I write myself and perform myself (Baker 2017). In Home, my lived experience is represented by two characters: Bax, based on myself as a youth, and Baxter, based on myself as a reflective adult.

Three people sit in the sparsely furnished sitting room. Two of them, BAX and EDITH, are sharing an old three-seater Genoa sofa. The other, JEAN, is alone in an armchair beside the bay window. Edith is asleep, but restive.

The narrator, BAXTER, sits on the floor, stage right, watching the scene. The Narrator is Bax grown older, remembering and reflecting.

BAXTER

It was only a little after dawn, an early spring morning in 1982. See how my mother angled her face so that the sun from the window dried the tears rolling down her cheeks. They just kept coming and she’d grown tired of wiping them away. It was one of the saddest things I’d ever seen. I’m sure I could live to a hundred and not see anything that sad ever again.

Bax reaches out toward his mother, as if to touch her on the arm, but he thinks better of it and his hand falls back in his lap.
The excerpt above (Baker 2016: n.p.) shows that Home refers directly to the interrogation of memory, the act of looking back at oneself. Once joined with understanding garnered through reflection, the writing and reading of the play acted as a formative narrative that informed the ongoing performance and production (in both the construction and theatrical senses) of my subjectivity. This process deepened when the play was performed as a rehearsed reading as part of the 2016 Scriptwriting as Research Symposium (SaRS). Witnessing the performance of the play produced an affective experience that facilitated further (and deeper) reflection that constituted a more profound intervention into self, which enabled deeper emotional reactions/responses to the material. In turn, these reactions and responses provoked a further altering of my subjectivity, a more holistic understanding of myself.

Home was written using a semi-autobiographical process, especially in relation to the construction of two of the main characters, Bax and Baxter. These characters are autobiographical specifically in that they draw on my lived experience and on my habit of interrogating my own memories. The writing of the characters was based on this ‘looking back’ and on my lived experience as an alienated and effeminate youth in regional Queensland in the 1970s and 1980s.

This semi-autobiographical approach to character construction best enabled an informed (as in based on experience) discussion of the issues at hand – the ways that our relationship with our own memories changes those memories. This approach to the constitution of Bax and Baxter’s discursive subjectivities also enabled me to reflect more deeply on my experiences as an effeminate male growing up in a conservative environment. Stewart (2007) argues that such autobiographical methods enable ‘a personal investigation of the self: self-research, self-portrait, self-narrative’ (129). Stewart explains this in more detail when she writes that autobiography provides:

...ways to incorporate and map a deep sense of the intricate relationships of the meaning and actions of artistic practice and its embeddedness in cultural influences, personal experience and aspirations (2001: 129).

In other words, as I wrote the characters of Bax and Baxter I found myself understanding the deep relationships between artistic practice (writing) and the socio-cultural situation and individual positionality and contextuality in which it was embedded. From the outset, the narrative was conceived as a discourse that would foreground the mutable and fluid qualities of memory as well as the potential for productive resistance arising out of the act of creative self-construction. The key theme of the work – that of the shifting and ‘shifty’ quality of memory – lent itself to ambiguity. This ambiguity, I felt, was best emphasised by a text that included characters modelled on myself but in a totally fictional situation – with an older version of myself looking back at a younger version. Given this, I felt that some aspects of Home resisted (and frustrated) easy categorisation, much as memories and identities resist overly-simple definitions. The situation shown in Home is fictional, yes, but Bax and Baxter as characters owe much to my own history and experience. For me, this blurring of the boundaries between the characters and myself as a subject foregrounds the performative aspect of the act of writing and the performative and reflexive quality of narratives.

The short script, as the creative practice component of a Practice-led Research project, was the principal means through which notions of memory, looking back and subjectivity were explored and expressed. Home presents the act of reflection as a uniquely constituted and performed self-writing. The play was envisaged as an example of how critically informed (performative) subjectivities can be articulated in an accessible way for professional, academic and general audiences. Thus, Home targets audiences of regular, theatre-going individuals but also an academic audience and professionals (producers, directors) with an interest in memory and identity. I mention audiences here because it is in the viewing/reading of the performed text that a performative understanding (or knowledge) of the fluidity of identity and memory is produced. This experiential understanding occurs as part of what Foucault called an ‘object-event’ (Foucault 2006), in which the text (script) is an event that triggers a chain of further events. A text is consumed by readers/viewers, it inspires commentators to discuss its qualities, and it is the focus of ‘multiple interlocutors who constitute its various discursive contexts’ (Huffer 2009: xii). In this way, a text’s ‘truth effects ripple through the world like rings on water, as the light-bringing rupture of an expansive doubling’ (Huffer 2009: xii).

The ‘rupture’ referred to here is a break in the citational chain (to use a Butlerian term) in which the history of a subject (a viewer/reader) is interrupted and altered (and illuminated) by the intrusion of an alterior discourse. This alterior discourse is the irruption of speech that Foucault (1978) demands of any discourse aimed at destabilising normative ideas. In this sense, Home, as a Foucauldian-style irruption of speech, is a discursive break from normalising discourses about memory and identity that performatively disseminates understanding about these things. This understanding is itself performative, as it occurs in the act of reading or viewing, reflection and discussion, and thus produces not only a theoretical understanding, which it does, but also produces knowledge as an affective experience. This is an alternative route to knowing, a different way of coming to understand the themes or issues investigated in creative works (Baker 2012). As I have written elsewhere:
As we engage with cultural artefacts, we experience them in quite an embodied way. We laugh, we cringe, we cry, we feel good, we feel bad, we sympathise, we identify, we rage. These affective experiences inform us about material realities and lived experiences that we may never have understood otherwise (Baker 2017: n.p.).

To put it simply, affective experiences are another (and a non-theoretical) way of producing knowledge (Haseman and Mafe 2009). The creative artefacts coming out of practice-led research projects can be seen to ‘disseminate knowledge in the context of narratives which readers [audiences] directly experience, thus providing an alternative (and affective) way of coming to understand the themes or issues investigated in those projects’ (Baker 2012). Affect, as both a kind of research and a kind of knowledge, is also performative (Baker 2012). In the moment of experience we simultaneously understand or know something about that experience. Accepting that affect is both a kind of performative research and a type of performative knowledge radically changes the way that we think about research in the arts. As Grayson Cooke (2011: 60) has articulated:

If research is the production of ‘new knowledge’, and if we can accept that knowledge may be able to be figured as affect … as something that happens in the mind of an audience member, then it is not ‘contained’ in the work, it occurs only in performance, and the ‘research’ does not precede the work’s public performance or dissemination but happens concurrently with it. Research in this sense is a process, a doing, an event, it is not something static that can be contained as such.

For me, affective experience of the act of writing Home caused a rupture in the citational chain of my own identity, and indeed a break in the chain of my memories. This rupture provoked a new understanding of memory and identity as applied to my own subjectivity; an exposure to a reflexive subjectivity that triggered the emergence of a new, subtly different, subject position. This brought into sharp relief the ways in which the act of writing not only evidenced performativity but was performative itself. Writing ‘produces subjectivities, tests them out against each other – surveys their boundaries as it were, to see how they might respond in different scenarios – and disseminates them all at once’ (Baker 2012).

If we recall that Butler (2004: 1) argued that exposure to a non-normative (or ‘new’) subjectivity can ‘undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one’ then we can see that engagement with, or exposure to, a creative text can have potent effects. An experience of a non-normative subjectivity, such as a self-reflexive subjectivity featured in Home, can ‘undo’ one’s personhood and facilitate the emergence of a new one. As an example of the power of discursive subjectivities to provoke shifts in individual identities, think of the way that Jack Kerouac’s novel On The Road (1958) triggered the ‘rucksack revolution’ (Kerouac 1958), the emergence of a counter-culture as individuals remade themselves in accordance with the subjectivities celebrated in Kerouac’s writing. Think of the sudden emergence of a whole generation of young feminists that followed the publication of Germaine Greer’s The Female Eunuch (1970). Think also of the proliferation of ‘gender-benders’ in the wake of the popularity of 1980s popstars like Boy George, a clear example of how exposure to alternate subjectivities or identities triggers the emergence of more and more similar subjects.

This idea of Butler’s was proven accurate by a subtle change to my own subjectivity as I wrote Home. Before writing the piece, and undertaking the research that preceded it, I had ambivalent (and uncomfortable) feelings about my past, in particular my traumatic memories. In writing the figures of Bax and Baxter, characters who ‘lean in’ to trauma and use reflexivity to better understand and deal with it, I was able to shift into a new subject position: one which embraced reflexivity as a powerful tool in understanding and contextualising the changeable nature of memory and identity. Put simply, the act of writing within a reflexive and theoretically informed practice-led research process constituted a kind of immersive exposure to a reflexive subjectivity that triggered the emergence of a new, subtly different, subject position. This process was one in which research around theorisations of identity and memory and my reflexive writing practice triggered affective experiences, which then produced new understandings around memory in general, specific memories in particular and lived subjectivity.
Conclusion

During the writing of Home, critical research and creative practice were intertwined and mutually engaged each other in ways that enriched both processes. This intertwined relationship between research and creative practice was core to the way I undertook the project and was crucial to the development of knowledge and an iterative understanding of my object of study: the performativity of identity and the fluidity of memory. In that act of writing, my lived experience coalesced with knowledge from critical research so that my writing practice became a productive, identity-forming act.

References


Baker, D.J. 2012 (re)Scripting the Self: Subjectivity, creative and critical practice and the pedagogy of writing, PhD thesis, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia.

Baker, D.J. 2016 Home [Hauum]: Noun. The Place Where One Belongs, unpublished manuscript.


Author

Dr Dallas Baker is a Senior Lecturer in writing, editing and publishing in the School of Arts and Communication at the University of Southern Queensland. Dallas has published dozens of scholarly articles and creative works, including a book of travel writing, America Divine: Travels in the Hidden South (2011), and, under the pen name D.J. McPhee, a fantasy fiction serial, The Faeden Chronicles (2016). His scholarly and creative work have appeared in Polari Journal, TEXT, and New Writing, among others. Dallas has published a number of short scripts for both stage and screen, notably two in TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses, a peak journal in the Creative Writing discipline. He is Editor, Special Issues, of TEXT and director of Black Phoenix Publishing Collective.

Watering Trees in Nicaragua

Singing clay and stone
echo water
sliding from kerosene cans.

Snaking roots
rock bent.

Times of hardship,
veined in peasant arms
and peasant hands.

WARWICK FRY,
NIMBIN, NSW
‘Ten Foot Tall and Bullet-proof’ – Assess, Adapt and Overcome: The Anzac legend in modern times

LINDEN WILKINSON

This article explores the evolution of a verbatim play, Seeking Joe Civilian, from its origins as an idea to its execution as a rehearsed performed reading in its first draft form. The play began as a conventional telling of the Anzac story in order to attract funding; it failed to do so. Still in proposal form, the decision was taken to continue with the idea but to adapt it to what was perceived as a shift in public consciousness over the period referred to as the Anzac century. This was a period of massive political investment in the Arts and communities designed to generate stories and events that would celebrate the national identity located within the Anzac story as told from a World War I perspective.

The intention was to diffuse the Anzac story, to relegate it to the past and foreground modern soldiers. But in the performed reading this did not happen. The Anzac story proved resilient; in our imaginations our modern soldiers, as our actors, became universal. The Anzac story embraced our modern soldiers as well. But what the play did expose was an even more significant intervention: the personal opportunism embedded in politically-driven campaigns of commemoration.

Introduction

What has happened when the performance intervention we intend is not the one we deliver? Is this outcome a reflection of poor practice? Does it suggest a lack of focus on the part of the researcher/writer? Or is this possibility a by-product of the performance process itself?

The paper examines what happened to a national story – the Gallipoli Landing during World War I – a story ‘now emptied of its historical context’ (McKenna as cited in Clendenin, 2006) when it is retold as part of a play. The play, Seeking Joe Civilian, is concerned with a century of wars fought by Australians, from the Gallipoli landing to Afghanistan. The intention was to subvert the mythology that now surrounds Gallipoli to demonstrate how the story no longer serves the current Defence Force. Instead the myth, the legend, the story survived. The play concluded not with cynicism but with dignity, valour and heroism. The legend lives – even though it was not the intention of the actors to explore this dimension in performance. This tension between what was performed and what was created is explored and analysed throughout the paper.

Fighting Words

The potential fragmentation between concept, development, text and play is always a risk factor embedded in the art of text-based performance. Revision, reassessment, rewriting are characteristics of the transformative alchemy that distinguishes the making of art, in this case drama. Words on the page are subjected to a process of transmogrification, as they are absorbed within the elements of production and blended with circumstances not beyond our influence but still beyond our control.

This play, Seeking Joe Civilian, is a piece of verbatim theatre: a form of theatre that has a particular reverence for words, for expression of all kinds, as the text is taken directly from interviews. Participants are usually interviewed alone, so, as characters, their interactions with each other are imposed by the writer/director, but their interaction with the audience reflects the true nature of the data gathering process. The audience then is, like the researcher before it, part of the dialogue; a witness. There is no ‘fourth wall’ and the experience of the play differs from that of conventional drama, which frequently is based on fact, or observation, but filtered through the imagination to create fiction.

Verbatim practitioner, Robin Soans (2005), examines this relationship between the truth, content and audiences’ expectations:
... the audience for a verbatim play will enter the theatre with the understanding that they are not going to be lied to. They may be unsettled by the unusual way the play is constructed, but they will be compensated for the lack of convention by the assumption that what they are looking at and listening to is revelatory and truthful (Soans 2011: 19).

Soans (2011) develops this notion of the role of truth in verbatim theatre. He suggests it accelerates identification – actor with character, character with audience member – and identification develops the possibilities of transformation offered by empathy. Soans continues:

Great drama gives playgoers a heightened emotional experience when strong narrative combines with the empathy that comes from recognition. A kind of enlightenment results. This is my aim: to use people’s real words to move us to a new understanding of ourselves (Soans 2011: 41).

Seeking Joe Civilian takes the testimonies of former or currently serving Australian soldiers as well as one soldier’s mother and these testimonies are interwoven to create a two-act play. This is my fourth verbatim play and as I have become more familiar with the form, I sought to make this play more active in terms of staging. Therefore, I asked for stories about army life, army patrol and combat.

Because I wanted to examine the mythology, which is embodied within one particular action in World War I, the Gallipoli landing, and how this mythology impacts now on current Defence Force personnel, some contextual knowledge is required.

Anzac – The Only Show in Town

During the 1990s, Australian politics discovered commemoration. From 1994 bi-partisan politics had ‘ventured into the realm of public history’ (Reynolds 2013: 232) under two different initiatives – ‘Australia Remembers’ and ‘Saluting Their Service’. Government-sponsored remembrance therefore was already two decades old before 2014 would deliver a four-year opportunity to dig deep into the archives of the dead. Over those two decades, the number of war memorials for those who did not return from overseas engagements, had mushroomed from between four and five thousand to six thousand by 2006 (Inglis 2008).

Furthermore, then Australian Prime Minister John Howard, in 2004 announced a $31 billion education package. The funding was tied to schools having a functioning flag pole, an Australian flag and the display of a ‘values framework’. Howard wanted those values to reflect a past that represented a structured narrative of achievement, as Clendinin (2006) suggests: ‘History fuses easily with patriotism’. Howard wanted history to be taught differently. Clearly there would be no reference to the frontier wars of Australia’s first century of colonisation; for important values like ‘courage’, ‘mateship’ and ‘sacrifice’ one couldn’t go past Gallipoli. Subsequent prime ministers continued the narrative and embellished it.

On Anzac Day, April 25th 2010, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that a National Commission on the Commemoration of the Anzac Centenary would be formed. Keen to include community, celebration and competition in the nation’s commemorative efforts, Rudd directed the focus towards the singular military engagement that occupies ‘a sacred place not far from the nation’s soul’ (Rudd 2010: para. 8) – Gallipoli. The Allied invasion and attempted occupation of Turkey through the catastrophic Dardanelles campaign was to dominate the first round of funded projects. Significant in this epic battle narrative would no doubt be the ill-fated Gallipoli landing in the now-named Anzac Cove just before dawn on April 25th, 1915. This is the date that signifies Australia’s and New Zealand’s entry into World War I, when inexperienced troops landed on the wrong beach and faced a storm of defensive Turkish artillery from the cliff tops even before they left the landing craft. The carnage subsequently gave birth to the Anzac legend, from which those values mentioned earlier, ‘courage’, ‘mateship’ and ‘sacrifice’, would be etched into the national psyche (Wright 2015).

Like Howard before him, Rudd wanted our history to really begin on April 25th, 1915 on the Gallipoli Peninsula. That was the start of the past, as explained below, and that gave us direction, united us in the journey forward, because for Rudd:

All nations are shaped by their histories, their memories and their stories ... how a nation remembers its past animates how that same nation sees its future (Rudd 2010: para 1 and para. 5).

The 2010-11 Budget reinforced Rudd’s initiative with a $2.3 million ‘seed funding’ allocation for the National Commission on the Commemoration of the Anzac Century. By 2014, the estimated amount that would be spent on commemorating the First World War grew to $323 million, greater than any other nation and 200% higher than the amount allocated by Great Britain (Wright 2015). As former Australian Army Officer, James Brown (2014) suggests, the final amount might be as much as two-thirds of a billion dollars.

While major spending was directed to upgrades for significant war memorials, by 2014 under the Abbott
Government, a $4 million public arts fund was announced for the grass roots exploration of service and sacrifice stories. Every Australian electorate would also receive $125,000 to support community activities focused on World War I (Brown 2014). Anzac was everywhere, reinforcing, as Reynolds (2013) notes, a national identity fused with warfare.

Rudd’s initial vision for Anzac stories delivered innovative contributions into the public space because of the inclusive nature of the original brief. Embedded in words like ‘community’, ‘celebration’ and ‘competition’ was the invitation to envision the Anzac story as having more players than those men – and women – on active service. The men might have left the farms, downed tools across the fledgling nation and sailed to the other side of the world – but what was happening at home? What of the sisters, wives, lovers? What about those empty factories, those abandoned farms?

It was through one of the rounds of public arts funding that my producer and I submitted our first idea. It was big, bold, predictable and rejected. But our enthusiasm to tell our version of the national story didn’t wane.

**A Shiny New Anzac Idea**

It was now months since our first submission in 2014 but over that time we had become aware that there had been a cultural shift. By late 2014, as the first round of Gallipoli stories were finding their ways into public spaces, the talk of ‘Anzac fatigue’ was growing louder. The story had become repetitive, tired. Commemorating human endeavour during the World War I had begun to sound like a glorification not of spirit but of war itself and that war in particular. Significant amid these protests was what Brown (2014) argues and Brett (2014) summarises as:

> the profound ignorance among Australians about the nature of contemporary warfare, a general indifference towards our current military engagements, and no interest in serious discussion of the nature and justification of war (2014: 2).

We decided addressing these ideas would form the heart of a new play. Adopting Brown’s (2014) assertions as a guide, we would examine the difference between public adulation of the past and the private reality of the present in terms of morale and identity. If, for the military, Anzac belonged in the past, what had evolved to replace it? Choosing this exploratory path meant we would no longer be looking for ‘stories from home’. We would need to focus on life in the military as it is now. We applied for and received a much smaller grant to develop a verbatim script about the century since Anzac.

Locating our participants was difficult. After some considerable time we managed to find seven, all soldiers, all either retired or transitioning out of the Australian Army. Two had served in Vietnam, four had served in various policing operations and in Afghanistan and one, who yearned to be deployed, had been injured in training and was serving on base. The themes we chose to invite participants to comment on were ‘duty’, ‘leaving’, ‘mateship’, ‘returning’ and ‘identity’ and the men could interpret these themes in whatever way they chose. Over the months of collecting data it became clear we needed a female voice; opinions on the recruitment of women into the army varied widely amongst the men and at that time reports on sexual harassment within the military were receiving public attention (Broderick 2012). Because no women expressed any interest in contributing, I asked a personal friend, the mother of a Special Forces officer, to share her stories. She agreed. She spoke to the same themes as the men and so inadvertently we had re-introduced ‘stories from home’ as a counterbalance to stories of service.

From the very first interview, along with the hilarity of stories about army life, there was the continual undercurrent of dislocation, as men attempted to return to civilian life. And the prominence of Anzac, the myth, the legend, was a problem for all of them as it seemed to give them a sense of inadequacy. The following speeches are not consecutive in the current draft of the play; they are samples of the kinds of references to the Anzac legacy:

**Robbo:** Deep down inside soldiers are quite vulnerable. We don’t want the public to see that but we are. We’re not ten foot tall and bullet-proof.

... 

**Speedy:** This comes back to the Anzac stuff … there’s a lot of guys from the regular infantry that come back and they don’t want to talk about their deployments. Because they fear it doesn’t meet up with the expectations of the Anzac tradition. And that has a negative effect.

... 

**Wart:** Until you’ve actually been in combat or under fire, you don’t know what it’s like until you’ve had the bullets whizzing round you. Blokes running around, seeing guys get killed and a couple of your mates get killed, and you think: Oh My God! We’re boys! ... Everything changes after that first shot gets fired at you! They will cull me from the bunch ... The bunch will be stronger. They’ll put someone in my position, who is 10 feet tall and bullet-proof. I don’t blame them.

and ‘Robbo’ represent soldiers at either end of the spectrum: ‘Wart’ is a private and ‘Robbo’ is the most senior soldier and highly decorated. ‘Digger’ is also an officer, as is ‘Speedy’, who is also Special Forces and therefore the mostly highly trained. As the play evolves, ‘Sally’ becomes a universal mother figure and seems to speak to our conscience, our capacity for compassion. None of them, not even ‘Sally’, are negative about the army but all of them recognise their lives, their experiences, their contribution, their restlessness will probably never be understood in the wider community and nor does the prominence of Gallipoli in the national psyche help to generate such an understanding. In such circumstances, how do the men transition back into civilian life after years of service, years of a life built on adrenaline and order?

So our play, Seeking Joe Civilian, evolved.

**The First Draft**

It became clear as the data gathering process continued that it was not going to be difficult to present the Anzac legend as an issue for those who found themselves languishing in its shadow. But what also emerged is that the relationship to Anzac and to past wars generally is problematic: the battles of the past and the men who fought them are also a deep and profound source of inspiration and this sense of connection spans generations. It was not that the myth no longer served, because war is fought differently now, it was their exclusion from the myth that was the issue:

*Robbo: Now we know that Gallipoli, the First World War, was all a bloody beat-up. You know? No-one knows that better than soldiers. But we see the good things in that … that people would sign on the dotted line to go overseas and fight, more so for the adventure and that than any Anzac legend that come along. That means a lot to us … That people would make that sacrifice on behalf of the country. So when we signed up, we were wanting to make that sacrifice on behalf of the country and not really talk about it, keep modest about it. It was built on not so much the storming of the beaches of Gallipoli but basically the character of those people that signed up in the First World War, that signed up for New Guinea – my dad went to New Guinea.*

The participants mentioned their connectedness to a military heritage so frequently, while talking about ‘duty’, it was possible to interweave their testimonies and almost create dialogue:

*Robbo: You sign up to fulfil your duty.*

*Wart: Give back.*

*Sally: All war is filthy dirty but then the enemy was readily identifiable; in the First World War, the Second World War, Vietnam, the Middle East, the Korean War. They knew who the enemy was. That isn’t the case in Afghanistan … because they have green on
blue, right? You know about green on blue? Local Afghans that go sideways. Your son is shot in the back, perhaps, by someone he's trained.

Afghanistan is a whole other story.

Our intention, as stated earlier, was to make us question the dominance of the World War I and especially Gallipoli as the exclusive crucible for heroism, for sacrifice, for mateship at the expense of modern conflicts and in so doing, glorify the past and that particular war. In order to subvert Gallipoli, I made the decision to begin the play with a speech that celebrates it; a speech that tells the story an audience would expect to hear. This speech occurred early in an interview and it reflects the role of the Anzac legend in building allegiance:

Digger: We were born on 25th April, 1915; there’s no doubt about that. What is it about that disaster that was wrongly done, poorly executed, we went home with our tail between our legs, it was something we should have forgot about. We really should have forgot about … we did greater things in the Boer War, do you know what I mean, however that catastrophe, Gallipoli, forged a nation. But why?

It was because of mateship. That was it. There was nothing much else to it. Because your giving was greater than yourself. Because your giving was to everyone around you, total strangers, guys that have just come off farms or railway yards; they weren’t trained, they weren’t soldiers, but they were mates … it was just their duty, you signed the bit of paper and you do it and you beat yourself up if you don’t. The guilt complexes that you get if you’ve just strayed from your duty a bit, they’re not much fun at all; they’re killers, mate.

You talk about what separates us as soldiers? That was the defining minute. Fight like no other. We fight like no other. Australian boys will always take the fight to them; we will always take up the fight. Never leave anyone behind. Never do anything reckless, we’re a lot more calculating. Assess, adapt and overcome. It’s an Australian way.

Those guys came home with shellshock … But mateship was born and You Will Do Whatever It Takes to make sure your mate is okay. And you will give up your life gladly, not just be disappointed he died and you didn’t – that’s some heavy shit. We won our first VC the day Simpson was killed. May 14th. How ironic is that? Gallipoli made us. It’s our Christmas, it’s our Grand Final; if you can’t get laid on Anzac Day, you’re not even talking to a female.

We idolise our soldiers. Our history tells us that.

What ‘Digger’ does not say is that we idolise our soldiers but only those from the past; he doesn’t talk about soldiers now and their relationship to the public. From this point in the play the intention was to make the soldiers increasingly emotionally and spiritually disconnected from the story that inspired them. The ‘birth-of-a-nation’ story should have belonged to them; it didn’t. They didn’t measure up, they said. It was as if, referring to Bourdieu (Blunden 2004), in buying the cultural capital that emanated from its heavy investment in the Anzac legend, the State had disenfranchised and diminished those for whom this same legend had an existential purpose, those for whom it was an inspiration as opposed to an opportunity.

As participants, the soldiers may have felt they did not measure up but as characters in performance – they did. The actors grew in stature, they became soldiers in our eyes. And as soldiers they had a direct link with the past, with those same men running for cover and their lives at Anzac Cove one hundred years ago. Despite what the actors/characters said, once they were on stage in performance the archetype took over and they manifested the Anzac legend. In performance, we elevated the myth by giving it life in the present. We didn’t diffuse it, we made it resonate. The actors/characters might have talked about the stress of modern warfare but we, the audience, felt the past.

How did this happen and why did the play still make sense?

The Performed Reading

As a requirement of the community grant we received for this process, we were obliged to deliver a public reading of the play as a work in progress. A possible presentation date coincided with a local arts festival, so we entered our play in the festival program. Furthermore, we were extremely fortunate to have been given at cost access to a prestigious private property used for public forums and exhibitions. As the venue would be providing catering, we were then obliged to charge a fee for the rehearsed reading to be held on a Sunday afternoon. These factors – the prestigious venue, the fee, the community profile in the festival – all influenced the drafting process, which in turn influenced the unexpected outcome of the play.

We had one weekend to work on the text. Verbatim was an unfamiliar form of theatre to three of the five actors. The long speeches, where participants had internalised responses to events during the interviews, proved challenging in the little time available. The play faltered. Faced with the public reading the following afternoon, I, now as playwright, began a savage edit to prioritise the experience of the play rather than the text alone. Speeches went, the play was reduced from forty-five to thirty-seven pages and lines were re-allocated.
Scholarly reflection as well as arts practice supports such a shift in focus. Freeman (2016) notes that:

> Whenever we move from the act of research to the act of writing and performing the focus shifts from responsibility to the researched towards a relationship with the spectator. We decided what is important for spectator, even if or when it is at the expense of what is important in terms of accuracy (2016: 147).

But what was unusual in the editing process was my choice to cut text but not stage directions. I had imagined the play to be a very physical production, not just to counteract what can be the sedentary nature of verbatim theatre but also to remind the audience as well as the actors of the role of the body in soldiering. The body is after all what they are offering. Again, these comments are not sequential:

> Wart: Army life is down to kill or be killed.

...  

> Speedy: ... it’s that kind of job ... you can die doing it.

...  

> Robbo: You’re going to have to take a sight pitch at someone and you’re going to have to kill them. You close and engage the enemy and you kill them. That’s what you do.

...  

> Digger: ... if the enemy fires at you, you don’t turn to get out of the road, you turn into that fire. You turn into that danger... There’s no job for that, when you get out into civilian life. You get out, here’s your pay. Well, I’m really good at killing people.

And the choreography was demanding – the soldiers went on patrol in Timor, they swayed in unstable helicopters in Afghanistan, they sang as raucous boys of nineteen in the Vietnam sequence. Yet the actors managed it. It was their physicality, which contributed so powerfully to the re-creation of soldiers over time, from the anger of the men in and after Vietnam to the watchful, hesitant men in Afghanistan.

The body is recognised as a primary research site in performance ethnography (Alexander 2005; Jones 2005) and though verbatim theatre suggests that the primary mode of delivery is through word, the role the body plays for an audience engaged in the process of interpreting that word or the silences between those words or the action in which those words are embedded is equally important. It is the body, according to Jones (2005) that conveys ‘information, transmission and transformation’ (2005: 340).

I suggest therefore that these two decisions – the decision to favour the audience through the edit and the decision to keep the play as active as possible and therefore inadvertently sacrifice reflection for momentum – helped to deflect the original intention of challenging Anzac. We wanted to make words like ‘fear’, ‘failure’ and ‘inferiority’ ring out. Instead words like ‘combat’, ‘liquidate’ and ‘green on blue’ rose to meet them and the myth expanded to include men from another century. War continued to be glorified as an arena for extraordinary deeds and the myth consumed the present reality.

But it was because of these two decisions – the first one clarifying the text and second one prioritising action – that another theme emerged from the data. Although the myth remained intact, inclusive of modern soldiers despite their claims to the contrary, it was the myth-makers who were called to account and then, finally, us.

### The Unanticipated

Before the performance began the audience was reminded that only days before it had been announced that the number of post-Afghanistan suicides was now greater than the number of battle fatalities over Australia’s then sixteen-year participation in the Afghan conflict. As the actors/characters told their stories of suicide bombers and improvised explosive devices, we became aware of the corrosive nature of constant alert. And we needed to direct our anger on the men’s behalf.

Politics and politicians were rarely mentioned in interviews but one fleeting comment remained in this first draft in the last speech of the play, a speech of ‘Speedy’s’. It was supposed to be about attending an Anzac Day service and discovering that ordinary people, strangers, wanted to say ‘thank you’. It turned out to be about far more:

> Speedy: Armies are driven by politicians, who don’t really know much about Defence Forces... Just because [Afghanistan] is not on a World War I level, doesn’t mean they’re not sacrificing and serving their country as well.

The implicit disregard for soldiers’ lives united voices of the past and present. Perhaps it was because it was the same actors playing across history that the characters emerged as universal soldiers connected to each other by a profound sense of duty. As the Afghan stories accumulated, the futility of the West’s presence there became obvious but remained unexpressed. The contrast...
between those that made the myths and those that tried to live up to them now emerged as the play's story. The play was not only about the exclusion of modern warfare from the myth machine, it was about the exploitation of ordinary men in extraordinary circumstances, who could no longer speak for themselves, by politicians who could not see the human cost of war but only the rewards of commemoration. As Brown, observes: 'Like a magic cloak, Anzac can be draped over a speech or a policy to render it unimpeachable, significant, and enduring' (Brown 2014: 6). It was not the story that fatigued us, it was and is the voices that tell it. Ultimately it was the State that was implicitly called to account.

'Speedy' concludes his speech and the play with a personal invitation:

Speedy: I can see that they really wanted to re-invigorate it. Anzac. Bring it into the present. I can see that as being their intent. But it so heavily focused on Gallipoli. I can see it was very much over-done, especially on the commercial side. Everyone trying to have a bit of a buy-in. Anzac tomato sauce. And giving back to the soldiers. Well, how much are you giving back?

He asks us to be alive to the present, not to be swayed by the myth machine. He asks us to play an active role in a community that understands that the military is a weapon of last not first resort, not a servant to 'boots on the ground' rhetoric, and that we all need to support a soldier's return.

Conclusion

In developing this project, the choices I made along the way on one level can be seen as a series of arts practitioner’s responses to the dynamic relationship between product and process, between the conceptualised execution and the actual environment in which a performance is to take place. And prior to the performance I did not know that the choices I made during rehearsal would deflect the stated intention as much as they did. On reflection that intention was, I suggest, dwarfed by the emergent play; making Anzac inclusive is a step towards the bigger picture: making a community confront the human cost of service. And enabling a community to take back a story. But this realisation, too, is in keeping with the concept of intervention. It would seem that the change agent, the outsider, must expect to be changed as well. This project has highlighted that intervention is not necessarily a one-way experience; there is reciprocity involved. Otherwise, where is the discovery? Where is the drama?

References


Soans, R. 2005 Talking to Terrorists, Oberon, London.


Author

Through the University of Sydney’s Faculty of Education and Social Work, Dr Linden Wilkinson completed both Master’s (2008) and Doctoral (2014) degrees using performance ethnography as her primary methodology and verbatim theatre as a mode of research delivery. Prior to her return to university in 2003, she wrote both plays and television and performed extensively in major theatre companies across Australia. Her exposure to verbatim theatre particularly introduced her to the possibilities of exploring real as opposed to representational lives, as a way of understanding the worlds we inhabit.
The Impact of Participating in a Verbatim Theatre Process

Sarah Peters

Verbatim theatre involves interviewing a community of storytellers based on a topic or event, recording these conversations, and using the stories as stimuli to create performance. In 2014, I wrote and performed in a verbatim play titled bald heads & blue stars, and triangulated a documentation of this process through a Reflective Practitioner Case Study methodology to research a theory, model and impact of verbatim theatre practice for my PhD. I identified that there was a significant gap in the field of research concerning the impact that involvement in a verbatim theatre process had on a community of participants. To address this gap, my research included a series of anonymous surveys with the interview participants (who I refer to as the community of storytellers) who shared their stories in the creation of bald heads & blue stars. This community of storytellers were fifteen women from across Queensland who have experienced alopecia, an autoimmune disorder that results in varying degrees of hair loss. At three key junctures across their involvement in the verbatim theatre process the community of storytellers were invited to complete a survey about their experience. This article analyses their responses in reference to the broader academic field and suggests that involvement in a verbatim theatre process intervened in the storytellers’ self-awareness, enriched their interpersonal communication around the central themes of the performance, and created stronger community connections.

Introduction

bald heads & blue stars (2014) is a verbatim play that explores the female experience of alopecia, an autoimmune disorder that results in varying degrees of hair loss. Writing and performing in this play was the context for my reflective practitioner case study researching the theory, process and impact of verbatim theatre practice. This article focuses explicitly on the experience of the verbatim process from the perspective of the women who were interviewed. I refer to the interviewees as the community of storytellers, and explore the impact of three distinct moments throughout the creative development process: the initial interview, reading a draft of the play, and viewing the final performance. My verbatim theatre practice places emphasis on a community’s lived experience, and shares the stories of this experience through performance. I am therefore intervening in the community in order to create a performance that tells a story about that community, and in this case study the intervention was driven by the explicit agenda of exploring concepts of female beauty and the balding body. The case study data indicates that participating in this verbatim theatre process impacted the community of storytellers in a variety of ways. They express positive self-awareness, enriched interpersonal communication among family members and a stronger connection to the broader alopecia community. The responses were predominantly positive, however, there were also moments of discomfort and confrontation as the storytellers witnessed the re-telling of their stories. This article interrogates and analyses the various artistic practices and ethical considerations made across the process of writing and performing bald heads & blue stars, and how this practice directly impacted the community of storytellers.

A Review of the Current Field of Research on Impact

There is minimal research that explicitly investigates the impact of involvement in a verbatim theatre process on the community of storytellers. I have therefore drawn on research conducted within the field of research-based theatre and critical pedagogy to make parallels with the research conducted specifically around the impact of verbatim theatre.

Amanda Stuart Fisher, a pioneer in the field of research concerning the impact of verbatim theatre processes on the community of storytellers, argues that a verbatim theatre process can be ‘one based on reciprocity … grounded upon conviviality and of potential therapeutic value’ (2011: 194). She suggests that storytellers often choose to participate and ‘strongly [want] their experiences to be shared publicly’ (2011: 201), they ‘enter into this process willingly and do get something back in return’ (2011: 205). This ‘something back’ was perceived by the storytellers in her project as gaining a
critical distance on their experiences, allowing them to better understand and work through the implications of that experience, as well as an opportunity to connect with people who had similar experiences (2011: 206). Stuart Fisher’s method of practice ‘placed the empowerment and wellbeing of the mothers themselves at the heart of the project’ (2011: 198). This method manifested in an inclusion of the storytellers throughout the creative development process and a continual resolve to be reflective practitioners (2011: 207). Stuart Fisher suggests that this ‘ongoing process of self-reflection’ and questioning ‘why we are doing what we are doing and how we think it will benefit the participants’ (2011: 207) is a starting point for an ethics of practise for verbatim theatre, and I will shortly outline the theory of practice that underpinned my process in bald heads & blue stars.

Caroline Wake’s analysis of impact is grounded in the concept that verbatim theatre could be considered a form of realism due to its mimetic conventions, its ‘moments of mimesis or re-enactment’ (2013: 106) that are witnessed by the audience. She explores the impact for the actors and storytellers of the realistic aesthetics (performing in the style of realism) used in Ros Horin’s Through the Wire and suggests that mimetic witnessing, whilst ‘ethically problematic … was also politically efficacious’ (2013: 117), specifically, in the context of Through the Wire, the combination of autobiographical inclusions, casting one of the storytellers as himself in the performance and the avoidance of double silencing by only interviewing and writing four refugees’ stories into the performance, all contribute to Wake’s assertion that this verbatim work is an example of mimetic witness and realistic aesthetics. Mimetic witnessing is ethically problematic. It relies on the storytellers re-engaging with their experiences (which in Wake’s case study were considerably traumatic), can reproduce the ‘other’ as a spectacle (2013: 116) and, if the storyteller also participates as an actor, it can force them to function ‘as a signifier of authenticity’ (2013: 116), taking on a greater level of responsibility in the production than they may have anticipated. Wake’s articulation of impact on the community of storytellers is a unique contribution to the field as it explores what she perceives to be the negative aspects of impact.

Wake extends the discussion to include the political impact of verbatim theatre on audiences more broadly. She argues that it is precisely due to verbatim’s realist aesthetic that it can be ‘politically effective’ (2013: 118) as this helps to facilitate identification between audience and story. By making the performance more realistically familiar, the political elements of the story are made more easily accessible for the audience. While this identification or familiarity can be ‘potentially coercive, colonizing and collapse difference’ (2013: 118), as also cautioned by Stuart Fisher, it can act to destabilise what an audience thinks they know about a community. From this ‘destabilisation comes potential recalibration’ (2013: 118) which can potentially lead to political mimesis.

Wake defines political mimesis as occurring ‘where spectators respond to images of protest or political action by recreating them in another time and place’ (2013: 118), that ‘having had political activism modelled for them on stage, audience members felt able at least to attempt these actions off stage’ (2013: 119). Wake’s article effectively interrogates notions of realism and mimetic witnessing in relation to verbatim theatre and successfully makes a case for the political potential of this aesthetic, whilst simultaneously acknowledging its ethical complexities.

Engaged Verbatim Theatre Praxis

Research that analyses the impact of practice should also interrogate the ethics that underpin it. I have named my theory of practice Engaged Verbatim Theatre Praxis, and it is informed by the theoretical frameworks of critical theory, critical pedagogy and feminist theatre practice. A detailed explanation of how these frameworks inform my practice is beyond the scope of this article, however, I strongly advocate that articulating a theory of verbatim theatre practice contributes to its field of knowledge, creates a departure point for genuine critique and provides a theoretical framework for artists who claim kinship to reflect on and discuss their practice.

Engaged Verbatim Theatre Praxis is a decision to practice and create theatre inspired by a community’s verbal stories in a way that:

- values listening to and sharing personal experience and community stories so that people are heard, visible and empowered through connection and community;
- embraces collaboration, dialogue and experimentation with theatrical languages and conventions throughout the process of development to create innovative performance;
- challenges normative and oppressive ideals, broadening our consciousness and transforming our understanding.

I interviewed women about their bodies. Specifically about how they perceive those bodies, how they feel they are perceived by others, and how geography, relationships, context and time affect these perceptions. I wanted to place the evidence of their experience into performance to raise awareness, shape identity and transform or broaden the public’s understanding of beauty and what it means to be feminine. Through a collaborative devising process I have artistically rendered visible the inner workings and ideologies of these stories of experience with the explicit goal of consciousness-raising and social change. Bordo defines the body as ‘a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through
the concrete language of the body' (1997: 91). It can be further suggested that our bodies are a medium of culture, the way we ‘perform’ our body belies our discourse, our values and beliefs. Judith Butler states our identity is ‘tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts’ (1990: 270). The way these acts are read by others defines our relationship to our context and the other bodies in it. This is particularly pertinent in my verbatim theatre process in this case study. In my Australian contemporary context, baldness is most commonly associated with men or illness. For the women I have interviewed, performing their feminine gender (through the use of wigs, makeup, jewellery and tattoos) is an intrinsic part of their daily life, an active choice made each and every day. As Butler states, ‘gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end, the term ‘strategy’ better suggests the situations of duress under which gender performance always and variously occurs’ (1990: 273). Some of the women I interviewed experience this duress of cultural survival every day, feeling they are ‘compelled by social sanction and taboo’ (1990: 271). Through a discussion of the female body, particularly the bald/ing body, I aim to demonstrate an alternative symbol of beauty and femininity and enable the opportunity for a potential transformation of the way female bodies are inscribed.

At present, these bald/ing female bodies are continually being ‘memorised’ on, and memorised with ‘the feel and conviction of lack, or insufficiency, of never being good enough’ (Bordo 1997: 91). By exploring the ‘inner workings or logics’ (Scott 1999: 83) of these memorised experiences and working within the theoretical frame of gender and identity as culturally constructed and performed (Butler 1990), I have created a politically feminist performance that challenges normative understanding of beauty and strives, through the combined reflection and action of praxis, to transform notions of feminine strength and female identity. By researching the impact of participation in a verbatim theatre process I am investigating how effective my intentions as playwright have been, and how my practice has intervened in the lives of the community of storytellers.

Survey Responses

Involvement in this verbatim theatre project has had a significant social and emotional impact on the storytellers from the alopecia community. To investigate this impact the storytellers were surveyed at three key junctures in the verbatim theatre process: after the initial interview, after reading a draft of the play and finally after seeing the live performance. Including all of the survey data is beyond the capacity of this article, and I also acknowledge that data are specific to my case study. Derek Paget acknowledges that ‘it is always difficult, of course, to demonstrate specific ways in which the arts lever social change’ (2010: 176), however, the longitudinal approach incorporated into my impact research has enabled the induction of case study specific examples of transformation and social change within the storytelling community. By analysing the practice that led to this transformation, the findings from this research can be applied in other contexts.

Survey One – The Interview

The first survey (which was completed by fourteen of the fifteen storytellers) explored the storytellers’ personal response to sharing their experiences in the initial interview and how the practice of the playwright in this space impacted them. Thirteen storytellers indicated that the reason they initially contacted me was to help with my project, followed closely by a desire to raise awareness about alopecia (eleven out of fourteen) and thirdly because they wanted to share their own stories (nine out of fourteen). The responses focused on the theme of consciousness-raising through enhanced understanding, a value that converges with my discourse as an artist. Only four of the women indicated that their involvement was driven by an interest in theatre, indicating that the verbatim theatre process has the potential to engage those who may not normally attend or be involved in theatre and introduce them to this experience. A crucial learning for my practice as a playwright is therefore to understand that in a verbatim theatre project you may be working with people who are not familiar with theatre and theatrical literacy. This knowledge informed how I introduced the storytellers to the draft script later in the process, such as explaining that the writing in italics are stage directions, and that there were also lighting and sound directions written into the play.

I assumed that it would be important to the storytellers to be kept informed throughout the play writing process, and six out of fourteen indicated that this was ‘very important’ and six out of fourteen rated it as ‘important’. These responses prompted me to continue my dialogue with the storytellers across the project, such as communicating via email when I had settled on a title for the play, when the production company accepted the play as part of their season, and when promotional images were chosen. In the third survey at the conclusion of the process the storytellers spoke about feeling part of a community surrounding the play and its production, and I suggest that maintaining communication across the duration of the project assisted in the storyteller’s sense of belonging.

The survey asked if the storyteller found personal value in sharing their stories, and eleven out of thirteen answered in the affirmative with themes of connection, self-reflection and building awareness the most prominent responses. Their comments included:

Absolutely. I think sharing my alopecia story connects me to others who are also going through similar experiences (S1R1).
Found it therapeutic to put my story into words esp with someone who has been thru [sic] similar experiences (S1R9).

Yes I did. Very few people know about my condition and it was very liberating to talk about it so comfortably (S1R11).

These responses indicate that the interview created a ‘place for discussion where there has mostly been silence’ (Gray et al. 2000: 141). Significantly the answers indicate that the women felt they had learned something positive about themselves after sharing their stories:

As with every time I tell my story new things come up and I discover more about myself (S1R10).

Within the academic field the verbatim interview is sometimes problematised as a space of potential. Often used in a positive frame there is a ‘liminal quality heralded by the word “potential” – it can always go both ways’ (Heddon 2008: 7). Leffler argues that the verbatim interview could be a disempowering experience for the storyteller, suggesting the idea a theatre process might demand someone to ‘tell me your story’ has been misrepresented as a therapeutic dramaturgy and instead could be reminiscent of a Christian discourse of confession (2012: 348), designed to admit a perceived ‘wrongness’ about one’s character or behaviour (2012: 351) and is therefore a negative positioning of the storyteller. He argues that the verbatim interview establishes the framework for a self-deprecating discourse. This is something I sought to avoid by having the storytellers contact me if they were interested in being involved. The data reveal that rather than a discourse of confession, the storytellers experienced a discourse of connection, self-awareness and a desire for outreach.

As suggested by Anderson and Wilkinson, the verbatim theatre process celebrated listening to community stories, an act which values that community’s identity and builds individual’s self-esteem (2007: 15). Correlations can also be drawn to literature on narrative therapy to help validate the value of involvement in a verbatim theatre interview. Smith et al. explain that narrative therapy:

… is based on the idea that telling stories is the main way in which people make sense of, and communicate, their experience …They are, therefore, heavily influenced by our family, social and cultural contexts. There are always alternative stories that can be told about a single event (2012: 191).

This idea that we can re-think or re-story our experiences was evident in the storyteller’s response to question seven, where they were asked if the interviews affected the way they thought about their alopecia experiences.

Four out of thirteen indicated that it hadn’t, while nine out of thirteen responded that it had altered their personal view:

Some of the things that Sarah shared with me about her personal experiences made me open my mind with certain aspects of alopecia (S1R6).

It made me realise that I have come a long way in my acceptance of my alopecia. Meeting Sarah was very inspiration [sic] as she is such a courageous lady (S1R14).

Once again the theme of connection emerged:

It made me feel less isolated. It made me feel more positive about it (S1R1).

Smith et al. explain that expressions such as ‘offloading’ (S1R1) or finding conversation ‘therapeutic’ (S1R9) are indicative of the concept of catharsis, ‘the idea that expressing emotions is healing in itself’ (2012: 45) and that the value is amplified when followed with reflection and clarification. All thirteen of the women responded affirmatively that they would recommend others be involved in an interview like this. When asked to explain why, a number highlighted the value of sharing life experiences and used the lexicon of stories and sharing:

Yes, I think finding a voice for your story, even as it evolves, is a very large part of accepting and understanding yourself (S1R10).

Definitely … I think talking brings out suppressed issues and helps people find new ways of thinking about problems … problem shared is a problem halved (S1R12).

I was very interested to see if being involved in the interview had provided opportunities for the storytellers to extend their dialogue on alopecia with others. Eight out of thirteen indicated that a lot of their friends and family already know about their condition or that they ‘don’t have a problem with sharing’ (S1R2). Three of the women reflected that the interview enabled them to discuss their experiences with their family:

It was an opportunity to talk about it again, just a little, with my husband and daughter (S1R1).

This opportunity to further discuss their alopecia experience can be framed as an opportunity for the storytellers to reflect and clarify (Smith et al. 2012: 45) their experiences, further enhancing the positive impact of the interview as an opportunity for catharsis.
Survey Two – The Script

The focus of the second survey (which nine of the fifteen storytellers responded to) was to learn about the experience of reading a draft of the play. I was interested to know if the storytellers had read a play before, and whether I had provided enough introduction to theatrical literacy. Five out of nine storytellers responded that bald heads & blue stars was the first script they had read and all nine felt that they understood the format of the play. This indicates that the pedagogy applied in my email communication when introducing the play was effective, and also supports the finding that verbatim theatre is a unique way to engage people who may not normally have the opportunity to do so.

At the outset of the interview I had explained what my artistic intentions were for the stories and my approach to verbatim theatre. This included that some of their experiences may be re-told word-for-word and others may be used as stimuli for creating characters and scenes. However, I couldn’t be sure that how I explained the artistic process would transfer seamlessly to what they expected, which is why I asked them about this in question four. Seven out of nine storytellers responded that the script had turned out either as they expected or that it exceeded their expectations:

I would say it's turned out even better. I like that it's very visual and light hearted at times (S2R8).

In regards to sharing our stories, Sarah has done what I expected. Used our language and tales to make up suitable situations for her characters to describe. The format of having alopecia as a character was interesting and not something I expected, but a great idea (S2R9).

These answers respond to the inclusion of stage directions and this was something I had explicitly set out to incorporate. I wanted to paint a clear theatrical picture in order to give a sense of what the play might look like when performed. The storytellers also commented on the inclusion of alopecia as a character. Rossiter et al. discuss an ethnotheatre performance entitled The Work of Talk in which cancer is personified as a character. They hypothesise that:

... the emotional impact of this metaphoric presentation of cancer as a character may be far more significant than could be evoked by written text or verbatim enactments of data that are more realistic (2008: 136).

As is explored in the responses to survey three, the inclusion of a characterised alopecia in bald heads & blue stars was one of the most enjoyable elements of the performance for many of the storytellers as it enabled a

metaphoric and therefore highly accessible and engaging representation of their experiences.

Survey Three – The Performance

While verbatim theatre is often praised for its democratic potential and for its empowering of marginalised stories or validating of oppressed identities, Chou and Bleiker raise an important question: ‘[w]ho are the people actually attending these productions? Are they really those who are marginalised within society’ (2010: 573)? For all of its lofty goals, to what extent is verbatim theatre accessible, engaging or available for the very people it wishes to empower and validate? Due to the dispersed nature of my community of storytellers the live performance was not an accessible option for many of them. Of the fifteen women interviewed only seven were able to see the live performance in August 2014, and of these seven only five completed the final survey – one third of the total population of storytellers at the outset of the project.

However, as will be demonstrated through their survey responses, these five women found the performance highly engaging and a validation of their experiences and identity. They also each brought a number of family members with them (one storyteller brought fourteen people to the show). Through partnership with the Australia Alopecia Areata Foundation, the performance was filmed and copies of the DVD made available. However, Chou and Bleiker’s provocations is a pertinent point for critical self-reflection on behalf of the playwright in a verbatim theatre process. Have I done enough to share the performance with the community from which it came? By what scale do I measure ‘enough’?

Of the five storytellers who completed the final survey, three gave the performance a ten out of ten and two gave it nine out of ten. They described it as entertaining, humorous, thought provoking, and a good representation of the alopecia experience. The combination of light-hearted humour and tense sadness has been one of the most frequently praised aspects of the performance. While Stuart Fisher has explored the identification that occurred between the storytellers and the actors (2011: 200), this response indicates that the storyteller was identifying with the content of the play, with the knowledge that these stories emerged from the same process they themselves had been engaged in ‘together yet apart’ (S3R3). However, I suggest that the survey data indicates that the identification in my case study had...
similar effects to those experienced in Stuart Fisher’s, that the identification ‘was a positive, even therapeutic aspect of the project’ (2011: 200). One storyteller expressed ‘identifying with the other ladies [sic] stories’ (S3R3). This echoes the first phase of Freire’s theory of conscientization, when you realise that your own experiences ‘resonate with the experiences of others’ (Ryan 2011: 95). In Freire’s conscientization process, Ryan has identified three phases: awakening awareness, critical analysis and changing reality (2011: 95). The awakening awareness phase is when learners ‘come to realise that their experiences, albeit unique stories, resonate with the experiences of others’ (2011: 95). This new awareness (or to use the lexicon of feminist theatre practice, this process of consciousness-raising) leads to critical self-reflection and transformation. This theory of conscientization is a useful framework for analysing the learning and impact on the community of storytellers in a verbatim theatre process.

Staging alopecia as a character made the intangible frustrations and challenges of the condition a tangible bodily force that visually and physically had an impact on the other characters:

I enjoyed the confronting scene where the girl is screaming at alopecia. I felt it would truly demonstrate the desperate feelings that those with alopecia deal with, but people don’t see (S3R5).

This response reflects Rossiter et al.’s suggestion that ‘the act of theatricalizing data allows for a whole new form of interpretation and analysis, one that uses theatre’s fantastic, imaginative possibilities’ (2008: 136). For the majority of the women interviewed, their daily routine involves a painstaking process of hiding and covering their alopecia, so the act of making it visible was both a liberating and confronting experience. This is highlighted by the response to which part of the play they enjoyed the least:

The fight between alopecia and Laura [actor] was gut wrenching – although I didn’t cry – many did (S3R1).

It took me a while to ‘get’ the tussle scene between Alopecia and Violet as the performance prior to that had been mainly verbal without much physical but once I got it I could identify with the struggle (S3R3).

For one storyteller it was the intense authenticity of some moments that were least enjoyable:

The parts I enjoyed least reminded me of embarrassing moments I have experienced with alopecia. People praying for me, asking

stupid questions etc. Have [sic] said that, those embarrassing moments were really well explained! (S3R5).

The moments she refers to here were sections of the play that were performed in the present tense, rather than stories told from a reflective past tense perspective. This meant that the emotion, interaction and mood were designed to recreate those of an embarrassing moment on stage. This response suggests that the awkward and unsettling emotions attached to the real life version of these experiences was authentically rendered in the performance. Echoing Leffler’s discussion on the aesthetics of injury (2012: 351), the storyteller’s response here suggests that the pain of the experience is not only felt when a storyteller performs their own stories (as suggested by Leffler 2012: 350) but also when these stories are witnessed in the performance of others. There are also echoes to Gallagher et al.’s warning about the use of naturalistic re-creation in verbatim theatre and the potential that literal representations of difficult life experiences can be traumatising for storytellers in the audience as they may be forced into re-feeling the emotion of the initial incident (2012: 38). While the storyteller’s response in S3R5 does not convey a sense of having been re-traumatised (particularly as she qualifies the scene reminded her of similar events, they were not directly based on the specificity of her experiences) it is interesting to note that the scene on which she is reflecting was a naturalistic re-creation. This may provide insight and awareness for playwrights in their practice of translating interview material into performance.3

The Impact of Participation

The storytellers expressed that the performance prompted changes in how they perceived their personal experiences, stating ‘I have come a LONG LONG way in my ability to cope’ (S3R1), ‘hearing others experiences has give [sic] me a less alone feeling’ (S3R5) and ‘I am now more confident to go about as a “bald lady”’ (S3R4). Burns states that stories can ‘alter the way we think or feel about something’ and can also alter ‘something in our mind-body processing’ (2001: xix). Smith et al. extend on this, suggesting that these impacts are explained by the philosophy of social constructivism ‘which proposes that meaning is [instead] shaped by a society of a culture. People create their personal identity by identifying with some of the stories which exist in their family and broader culture’ (2012: 191). Viewing the verbatim theatre performance provided a unique opportunity for the alopecia community to witness stories from their broader culture.

Stuart Fisher suggests that the ‘strangeness’ of seeing a personal story theatrically interpreted can give ‘an almost uncanny glimpse of their own lives from another perspective’ (2011: 202). One storyteller commented
that being involved in the project influenced how she thought about her experiences, however, that this was 'only after seeing the play. Answering the questions and talking about it didn't change my perspective greatly, but hearing others experiences has give [sic] me a less alone feeling' (S3R5). Gray et al. suggest that the value of the live performance of experience has advantage over textual representations of experience because theatre ‘sustains connections to bodies, emotions and the full range of sensory experience’ (2000: 138). Rossiter et al. extend this argument suggesting that theatre is particularly adept at interpreting, translating and disseminating health-related knowledge as both the fields of health and performance ‘revolve around complex questions of the embodied human condition’ (2008: 131). As all verbatim theatre deals with human experience, and all experience is embodied, I extend on Rossiter et al.’s argument beyond solely health-related content and suggest that the impact of verbatim theatre on audiences is because of the similarity and proximity of form and content. Verbatim theatre is an actual embodied experience about actual embodied experiences, and this contributes to its transformational potential for both the community of storytellers and the broader audience.

Being involved in this project has created a sense of belonging for many of the storytellers, as expressed through their discourse on connection and ‘that I was not alone in how I feel. Really comforting actually’ (S3R2). In Vikki Bell’s introduction to *Performativity and Belonging* she states that ‘the term ‘belonging’ allows an affective dimension – not just be-ing, but longing’ (1999: 1). It implies not only finding a sense of self (identity) but also identifying with others. It is ‘an achievement as ‘one does not simply or ontologically “belong”’ (1999: 3), belonging is an effect of our understanding and performances of self. Verbatim theatre places a variety of performances of self on stage and when shared, influence a public and community's consciousness, resulting in one storyteller stating she finally felt ‘[u]nderstood’ (S3R5) and another that she ‘felt heard’ (S3R2). The verbatim theatre performance shares what Fortier describes as ‘practices of group identity’ and ‘marks out terrains of commonality and delineates the political and social dynamics of “fitting in”’ (1999: 42). The performance gave one of the storytellers hope that ‘these experiences can be explained and demonstrated’ (S3R5). This storyteller has conveyed a realisation that it is possible to authentically express her experiences, and that this may in turn lead to greater public understanding.

Verbatim theatre is a complex theatrical process and form. Through an analysis of the storyteller’s involvement at three key junctures, I suggest that involvement in a verbatim theatre process positively intervened in the storytellers' self-awareness, enriched their interpersonal communication around the central themes of the performance, and created stronger community connections. I have articulated and interrogated the artistic practices that led to this impact, such as the positive outcome of continued community immersion and communication across the process, as well as the problematisation of writing scenes with realistic and present tense aesthetics. Being aware of the kind of impact the performance may have for the storytellers can inform a playwright’s decision making process, and my research has provided unique insight into this practice and its impact. The findings of this research demonstrate the value and positive impact of verbatim theatre in areas of personal and community identity and consciousness raising around social issues. This transformational impact is particularly pertinent to verbatim theatre because of the similarity and proximity of form and content. It is an embodied experience about embodied experience.

References


Chou, M. and Bleiker, R. 2010 ‘Dramatizing war; George Packer and the democratic potential of verbatim theatre’, *New Political Science* 32.4: 561-574.


38       Social Alternatives Vol. 36 No. 2, 2017


Author

Dr Sarah Peters is a theatre artist and practice-led researcher, completing her PhD at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) in 2016. She now lectures in Drama at Flinders University and has tertiary teaching experience in theatre history, children’s theatre and community and political theatre. Sarah has written two verbatim plays, twelve2twentyfive (2013; 2015) and bald heads & blue stars (2014), and her latest work Eternity (2017) premieres in October at USQ.

End Notes

1. ‘Double silencing’ refers to a situation where a storyteller might have been identified as belonging to a community who rarely gets to have their story heard (and is therefore silenced by the broader community and media), but then after being interviewed their story is not included in the final production (and is silenced again).

2. Throughout my research I refer to the surveys as S1, S2 and S3, and when referencing a specific respondent I have coded the material as follows: S2R5, which would refer to the second survey and the fifth respondent to complete that survey.

3. Further articulating my playwriting practice in this verbatim theatre process is beyond the scope of this article, however I describe this practice as translating verbatim transcripts through the dramatic languages (elements of drama and conventions) into performance. The emphasis in this article is on acknowledging that how a playwright chooses to translate verbatim material into a script or performance can have both positive and negative impacts on the community of storytellers.

The Eater of Light

They will keep eating
until no planets are left
or stars to navigate by
unless we can lure
the Beasts into a portal
for vestal virgins.
Damp crows in a huff
at sunrise as my patience
shatters, the trouble with hope
is resisting its music.

DAVID REITER,
CARINDALE, QLD

At the Board Meeting

they tell her she’s no longer
effective, that her decisions are
not incisive anymore,
that her judgement is judicial
to separation and that from herein
they are appointing another
to take her place, until such
time as she can grasp
the be-all-and-end-all
like she once used to;
but, she stumbles,
tells them she cannot remember
everything, is struggling with names
as the cancer continues
to spread
heartless.

NOEL KING,
TRALEE, IRELAND
Hearts Are Trump’s: Post-truth as intervention

TIM PRENTKI

This article reflects on recent events in the macro-politics of Western Europe and North America through the perspective of intervention. It explores how populism has combined with (anti)-social media to reiterate a lie with sufficient force and regularity to create conditions in which a myth can take root in the popular imagination. The filtering processes of social media ensure that no contradictory perspectives get through to disturb the prevailing viral lie which consequently morphs into a discourse of post-truth that is taken up as the new master narrative of a politics combining nationalism, racism and crypto-fascism. The years of individualism and identity politics achieve their apotheosis in the personal interventions of post-truth.

The article proceeds to consider how theatre might be employed as an antidote to post-truth. I offer an analysis of my recent play, Lear in Brexitland, as an instance of an alternative intervention. This analysis encompasses writing, performing and reception to gauge how theatre can produce social alternatives to the anti-social manipulations of post-truth and the oligarchs who sponsor them.

The Resistible Rise of Capitalism

King Lear was written at the dawn of capitalism and Lear in Brexitland (Prentki 2016a), a play recently written for the UK-based One Hour Theatre Company, is a provocation at its dusk. It is intended as an intervention into the conventional wisdom which every passing day reveals itself as folly: namely that capitalism is the only system that enables our species to flourish. It is a strange kind of flourishing that not only allows the wildest of inequalities between individuals but also encourages us to bankrupt the natural resources of our planet with the result that all living things will face extinction before much longer. Shakespeare’s play ends in bleak irresolution but four hundred years further down the line we are asking the same questions about how to live and what it is to be human. Whether the age is pre-scientific, scientific, or post-scientific, we still struggle to admit that we can barely see enough to see how little we can see.

In a special issue on ‘Intervention’ for a journal titled Social Alternatives, it might at first sight be expected that readers will be greeted with an analysis of how ‘populist’ interventions of the past year have shaped politics across the world in countries as diverse as the USA, the UK, Italy and the Philippines. Within the narrow confines of political establishments these changes do indeed present themselves as socio-political alternatives. I would argue, however, that these events are the backlash from the worst excesses of the neoliberal model of globalisation rather than any genuine alternative to it. In the run-up to the UK referendum on continued membership of the European Union, the following incident was recorded as an example of the disconnection between those who have access to and influence upon political discourse and, to use one of Prime Minister Teresa May’s favourite phrases, ‘ordinary working people’:

There’s a lady I’ve been thinking about for the past few days, even though we’ve never met. She’s the central character in a true story told by the Europe expert Anand Menon. He was in Newcastle just before the referendum to debate the impact of Britain leaving the EU. Invoking the gods of economics, the King’s College London professor invited the audience to imagine the likely plunge in the UK’s GDP. Back yelled the woman: ‘That’s your bloody GDP. Not ours’ (Chakrabortty 2017).

The siren calls to ‘make America great again’ and to ‘take back our country’ woke up the nostalgia of the...
dispossessed for a supposed time past when working people – predominantly white, male, working-class people – had secure careers (Economist 2014). The votes of those said to be ‘left behind’ by globalisation in the UK, the USA and in France are their only means of exacting revenge for their plight upon those perceived to have caused it. These aspirations to turn back the historical clock are, however, interwoven with other tropes that suggest that the barriers to achieving them do not derive from the systemic operation of neoliberal capitalism but from the numbers of people not like ‘us’ – Mexicans, Muslims, Poles – who stand in the way of those goals. For example in the UK ‘Brexit’ referendum many areas with little or no experience of immigration voted overwhelmingly to leave the EU, while other regions with high immigration, and lived experience of cultural diversity, tended to vote to remain (Rosenbaum 2017).

It is no coincidence that the rise of neoliberal capitalism parallels that of individualism in the Western world since the late 1970s. Ronald Reagan’s ‘trickle-down’ economics and Margaret Thatcher’s ‘no such thing as society’ (Thatcher 1987) comment epitomised an era that has been marked by the advent of ‘identity politics’ under the slogan that ‘the personal is political’. Consequently, resistance to neoliberalism has tended to be characterised by assertions of individual rights in areas such as ethnicity and sexuality, perhaps at the expense of previous discourses, and agencies of group solidarity such as class affiliations and trade union membership (Fulton 2015). As traditional allegiances have dwindled, so it has become more difficult to mobilise coherent opposition at a time when the need to cooperate across the globe has never been greater.

In addition to the discontent deriving from the growing disparity in incomes in most countries (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010), the pressure of mass migration, religious fundamentalism and the fighting of proxy wars gives rise to a sense of instability comparable to the 1930s. It may, however, be somewhat premature to cast Donald Trump in the role of Adolf Hitler or depict Marine Le Pen as a latter-day Benito Mussolini. Nevertheless, the public mood in Europe and the USA is one of increasing intolerance towards anyone not conforming to a nationalist stereotype. In the UK this mood, fuelled by the EU referendum result, spilled over into violence with terrible consequences for Arkadiusz Jozwik, the Polish man who lost his life in an Essex street in August 2016 (Dodd 2016).

Anti-social Media and Post-truth

German playwright Bertolt Brecht, writing ‘Five Difficulties in Writing the Truth’ from exile from Nazi Germany in 1935, faced the same problem of how an artist can write truth in a world where lies, myths and half-truths predominate, as confronts contemporary artists:

Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. [1] He [sic] must have the courage to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed; [2] the keenness to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed; [3] the skill to manipulate it as a weapon; [4] the judgment to select those in whose heads it will be effective; [5] and the running to spread the truth among such persons (Brecht 2003: 148).

The insistent repetition of ‘the truth’ may strike a contemporary reader schooled in the discourses of subjectivity and post-structuralism, as somewhat old-fashioned but even by substituting ‘truths’ for ‘the truth’, it is easy to identify with the first four difficulties articulated by Brecht. I shall come specifically to the third and fourth difficulties later in this article. It is the fifth that is a particular preoccupation of the present. Today the spreading of lies and truth (news and fake news) has been exponentially accelerated by the invention of the digital platforms of satellite technology and the World Wide Web. More and more people ingest their world-view from the Internet via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Citizen journalists, bloggers and Twitter feeders abound as a consequence of the opening of multiple channels of communication to anyone with the desire to use them. If such opportunities stimulate the will to become involved in socio-political affairs, to transform the passive consumer into the active citizen, they are to be welcomed as a potentially progressive force for democratisation. However, turning the reporting and production of news into a cottage industry risks flattening out distinctions between fact and fiction, evidence and opinion, truths and lies. President Trump won a sufficient number of hearts, if not minds, of the US electorate, in no small part through swamping (anti-) social media with his mix of myth, selective truth and lies. In essence, he told people what they wanted to hear in return for their votes. This is the process termed ‘profiling’. The social media corporations build up a picture of each subscriber based on their history of use in order to ‘sell’ that person to the advertisers. Social media employ a process of filtering that helps to feed us the opinions, ideas, news and, most importantly, products that most accord with our desires. The advent of these media is the apotheosis of a seventy year-long transformation of the citizen into the consumer. Perhaps the end point of identity politics is that we become what we buy. Prejudices are confirmed and stereotypes solidified. The solitary consumer of digital communications is never challenged to consider another perspective or invited to enter the forum of collective debate.

Perhaps this is the force of the term ‘post-truth’, said to have been first coined by Steve Tesich in The Nation in 1992 (‘Post-truth politics’ n.d.). If our technologies have enabled a world where the truth is no longer discernible, where it is in effect buried under the sheer volume of lies,
One Hour Theatre Company (hereafter referred to as OHTC) was formed in 2016 as the practical intervention arm of the Performance and Civic Futures research group at Edge Hill University in the UK. The campus is situated in the small market town of Ormskirk, a short distance north of Liverpool. The founding members of OHTC are two professors in the Department of Performing Arts and myself, Visiting Professor in Radical Comedy. Its primary aim is to use theatre as a means of intervening in contemporary politics to engage both students of the university and a wider public in discussion leading to local, civic action to address topical issues. Its target is primarily, but not exclusively, young people. The founding members share a belief that theatre possesses qualities that fit it particularly well for this task because it is a medium which brings people together in live, not virtual, relations to share their experience, understanding and hope. This process occurs both between performers and spectators and among the spectators themselves. OHTC performances will always build in discussion time as part of the fulfilment of their brief. The choice of the ‘One Hour’ tag reflects our sense that concentration-spans in this age of hyper-communication have been shortened and that we should be able to make an effective communication within the discipline of time-constraint. Furthermore, it is the intention that the performance acts as a trigger for discussions in the tradition set by Brecht with the Lehrstücke, a tradition that has subsequently been carried on in many applied theatre instances (Prentki and Preston 2009).

Before exile from Nazi Germany in 1933 took away his access to and control of means of production, Brecht had been engaged in a series of theatrical experiments, the Lehrstücke. These plays were intended to use the art of theatre to make interventions into the heated and often violent political discourse of the day on behalf of communism which Brecht regarded as the bulwark against advancing fascism, the local manifestation of capitalism. ‘The learning-play is essentially dynamic; its task is to show the world as it changes (and also how it may be changed)’ (Brecht 2015:122). For Brecht, it was essential to take theatre to places where the future of the nation was at stake – schools, factories, political rallies:

The bare wish, if nothing else, to evolve an art fit for the times must drive our theatre of the scientific age straight out into the suburbs, where it can stand as it were open, at the disposal of those who live hard and produce much, so that they can be fruitfully entertained there with their great problems (Willett 1964: 186).

For Brecht, in the process of creating a theatre capable of staging the Marxist dialectic, there was no doubt who the participants and audiences for his theatre needed to be: those who had the biggest stake in social change. Today what does ‘an art fit for the times’ look like? Which people constitute the active agents of social change?

**One Hour Theatre Company**

One Hour Theatre Company (hereafter referred to as OHTC) was formed in 2016 as the practical intervention...
seeking further performance opportunities in a range of settings both within and outside formal education, before attempting an analysis of the recorded responses upon which to develop a public engagement strategy. In the spirit of Brecht, the company will be looking to take it to places where it may make other kinds of interventions along the lines of ‘those in whose heads it will be effective’.

The second play from OHTC is *Lear in Brexitland*. The draft script was completed in December 2016 and the company is now (spring 2017) negotiating with venues over possible rehearsed readings and performances. To date, I am the sole author but I will look to develop the script in response to feedback from target audiences. Therefore, we are seeking performance opportunities with working-class audiences around Liverpool and with young people in formal and informal educational settings. As with *Half Measures*, the strategy is to use a Shakespeare text as a jumping-off point into an intervention into contemporary politics. In this instance, the immediately topical discourse around identity and nationality in the aftermath of the UK’s vote to leave the European Union.

*King Lear* has often been reworked and recontextualised because many of its themes – familial dysfunction, corruption of power, nihilism – are perennial. The 2011 production of *King Lear*, created and performed by primary school children under the guidance of Western Edge Youth Arts in Victoria, Australia is one such example, relevant to the OHTC project and ‘focused on the contemporary resonance of Shakespeare, reinterpreting the work in its current socio-cultural context’ (Kelman and Rafe 2013: 283). Kelman and Rafe proceed to describe ‘the subsequent crafting of a hybrid text, combining Shakespeare with new writing generated from the devising process’ (Kelman and Rafe 2013: 284). In my case, the creation of a hybrid text stems not from a devising process but from the desire to use theatre to make an intervention into current politics. They speak of ‘a process of deconstructing Shakespeare’s play and reconstructing a new performance text’ (Kelman and Rafe 2013: 285) with the result that ‘[t]he final script included edited Shakespeare scenes, scenes interweaving Shakespeare with new writing and some wholly original scenes’ (Kelman and Rafe 2013: 284). Although this process bears close resemblance to my own practice with *Lear in Brexitland*, the aims of the dramaturgy are different. Whereas the principal pedagogic aim of the Western Edge project revolved around the needs and development of the participants, the main thrust of *Lear in Brexitland* is to present a situation to an audience through the structuring of contradiction. This follows Brecht’s notion, as expressed in the epilogue to *The Good Person of Setzuan*, that the intervention provoked by the drama is not to provide a solution to a socio-political crisis but rather to present the audience with a contradiction that must be addressed in the world beyond the theatre:

It is for you to find a way, my friends,
To help good men arrive at happy ends.
*You write the happy ending to the play!*
There must, there must, there’s got to be a way!
(Brecht 1966: 109).

The specific appeal of returning to *King Lear* at this moment for me resides both in the literal division of the kingdom and in the metaphor of division as a reflection upon the rise of ethnically inflamed nationalism in Europe and the United States. It is a work whose relevance resurfaces particularly in moments of political turmoil and moral uncertainty such as the world is presently undergoing.

**Scene 3**

*Lear:* Thus? Where are his eyes? Either his notion weakens, or his discernings are lethargied – Ha! Sleeping or waking? Sure ‘tis not so. Who is it that can tell me who I am?

*Fool:* Lear’s shadow. (*Fool curtseys*)

*Lear:* O Lear, Lear, Lear! *striking his head* Beat at this gate that let thy folly in
And thy dear judgement out.

*Fool:* If thou wert my fool, nuncle, I’d have thee beaten for being old before thy time.

*Lear:* How’s that?

*Fool:* Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.

*Lear:* O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! I would not be mad.

*The back projection shows people sleeping in the doorways of shops, jobcentres, etc.*

No! Rather I abjure all roofs and choose
To wage against the enmity o’ th’air –
To be a comrade with the wolf and owl –
Necessity’s sharp pinch!
The art of our necessities is strange,
And can make vile things precious.
Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous;
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man’s life is cheap as beast’s. Thou art a lady;
(*Lear addresses a particular audience member*)
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous
wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But for true need –
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!

Fool:
Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides,
Who covert faults at last with shame derides. [End of extract]

The Shakespearean scenes in Lear in Brexitland are pared down to dialogues between Lear and his Fool. These are framed within the visual setting of a wheelchair and bed-bound Lear as an elderly patient with mental health problems and the Fool as his nurse and carer. The decision to prefer a female actor for the Fool, though pandering to a gendered stereotype of care, is taken so that Lear can readily imagine that Cordelia is this figure. In scene 3, Lear represents the themes of identity and madness, while pointing directly to the contemporary phenomenon of extreme social inequality. The Fool's cryptic response of ‘Lear’s shadow’ is in line with her function of trying to awaken Lear to the actuality of his situation. I have analysed this moment elsewhere (Prentki 2012: 115-6). The Fool also inaugurates the trope of age and youth turned upside down as emblem of the wider disruption of the natural order which has a particularly current pay-off at the end of the play.

Scene 4
Lee is lying in a hospital bed, connected to a drip. There is a dim light. It is the early hours of the morning. Lee is tossing and groaning.

Lee: Nurse! Nurse! Is there anyone out there? My throat’s on fire. Nurse! Nurse!

After a pause, Alisha rushes in.

Alisha: Whatever’s the matter Mr Smith? Please calm down. You’ll wake the whole ward up.

Lee: No chance of sleeping in this place, anyway. That old bastard in the next bed’s been talking to himself all night. (He gestures towards Lear) I need a drink and some painkillers.

Alisha: That’ll be the anaesthetic. You’re dehydrated. Just be patient a moment, and I’ll get you some water and paracetamol. But first I’ll check your temperature and pulse.

Alisha moves into the light beside the bed and takes Lee’s wrist. He pulls it away fiercely.

What’s the matter? Be careful or you’ll dislodge your drip.

Lee: I’m not having no Paki touching me. This is England, ain’t it? I want an English nurse. No offence, love. Nothing personal. I’ve had enough of being buggered about by foreigners.

Alisha: As it happens, I am English and I do take offence. What’s more, I’ve never been to Pakistan.

Lee: Alright, alright. Take it easy. It’s a shock; that’s all. Like, like I wanna wake up in my own country after what I’ve been through. Home comforts. I ain’t never been touched by no black girl before.

Alisha: That’s a shame. I get to handle all sorts in this line of work. Now, do you want that water or not?

Lee: Yeah. I do. And, and thanks.

Alisha exits. Lee delivers his monologue directly to the audience from the bed.

I know what you’re thinking. You don’t rate me, do ya? Just another piece of white van trash from Essex. One of the ignorant. The left behind. A throw back. ‘Cos I don’t think like you. I’m glad we’ve got our country back. We’ve put a stop to all that multi-cultural, latte-sipping, London shit. It’s you lot tried to steal my birthright. Made me feel useless, out of place in my own place. When my mum and dad were growing up, England felt like England. OK there was immigrants but like, the numbers was small. A few Pakis in corner-shops round our way. Where there was lots of them, you know, like black and Asian ghettos, that was just in big cities – Smethwick, Southall, Bradford. People like me never went near them places. Now you can’t escape. It’s every fuckin’ high street: polski slop, signs in God knows how many languages. You’re lucky if you hear any English. It had to stop. Enough’s enough.

I’m a carpenter by trade, right? Did my apprenticeship with a construction company; stayed out of trouble. All set for a job. You know what? No fuckin’ job. Why not? Tony fuckin’ Blair opened the gate and Poles grabbed all them jobs. Ten years on benefits. Ten years of job seekers’ allowance. Ten years still living with me mum and dad. Scraping by on bits and pieces; cash in hand. Even then there’s an Albanian or some such who’ll
do it for less. Six to a room. They're grafters, mind you. Ye Polskis work bloody hard. Drink bloody hard too. See, what happened was the building firms knew they could get EU migrant labour for less than the minimum wage. 'Minimum' that's a laugh. No, don't get me started. So what they did, right? was use these agencies to hire cheap foreigners. I never even got on site. "Nothin' doin', son. You're too expensive".

Then, Brexit. Fan-fuckin'-tastic. Sent those bastards back where they belong. Work at last. Trouble is, see, building-sites had got used to crap safety. Nothing done by the book. Red tape my arse. No fuckin' tape at all. That's how I come to be here. I'm stuck out on this scaffolding, two stories up – lucky it weren't more – and the geezer operating the crane's bringing the bricks up too fast so as he moves them towards me the whole bloody thing swings into me and knocks me off. Last thing I clocked till I woke up in here. Ten years waiting for a job. Two weeks into it. Then this. Don't tell me not to be sorry for meself. [End of extract]

Although Lee articulates a stereotypical attitude of the white, British, formerly working-class to 'foreigners', a theatrical intervention can ensure that he tells his story, leaving the audience in a position where it can understand how that attitude is formed and, hopefully, take that understanding into the post-show discussion. Once exposed to the story, Lee exists for the audience not as a type but as a specific individual with whom a degree of empathy may arise. A contradiction is introduced between the specifics of Lee's life and the opinions he utters. It is intended to be a moment of what Brecht termed 'complex seeing' (Brecht 2015: 72) where the spectators are trying to juggle a response to the presence of the living human before them with their grasp of the wider social implications of what they are seeing and hearing.

Scene 6

Alisha enters with water and pills.


Alisha: You wouldn't be the first. Swallow these, then lie back and think of England.

Lee: You after my body, darling. Want a bit of white in you?

Alisha: Yours wouldn't be much use to me in your condition. I've seen straighter backs on a banana.

Lee: Plenty of those where you come from, I suppose.

Alisha: Really from? Who knows where they're really from? How long have you got? How far back should I go? Maybe to a tiny fishing village in Gujarat. Generations living off the fish they sold in the local market; each day the same. The women cooking, sewing the nets, keeping the hut clean; watching the red sun sinking into the ocean. Till one fine day, crashing into the peace, smashing the rhythm of life, the British army marches in; musket, fife and drum. Rule Britannia. Empire on which the sun never sets. All change. Men who'd never sailed out of sight of their native shore shipped off to East Africa. Backward, primitive Africa needed modernisation, industrialisation. Lazy niggers no use, so indentured labour of hard-working Gujaratis would get the railways built. The Desais've always been hard workers. 'Indentured labour'. More like slave labour. Survivors under an African sun. Free movement of labour? Forced movement of labour. No use looking back across the water. Make a home where you must. So we became Africans. The ocean where the sun set was now where the sun rose; still hot; still unforgiving. But the sun did set on the Empire and my family looked out for itself. Great-grandfather was a businessman. He started with a small shop in Kampala, that's in Uganda by the way. Then moved into import-export. Don't ask me what. All that stuff is beyond me. Then one not so fine day Idi Amin decides we are not real Africans. We must go. Home? Where's that? Just a minute. We’re subjects of the British Empire and we’ve the passports to prove it. Let's go home to the welcoming hearth of the Great White Mother. OK, so it was a council house in Colchester not a red carpet at Buckingham Palace but we were taken in, even maybe accepted, eventually. Grandad started over once again. Yes, the corner-shop cliché. Long before the supermarkets and the Sunday trading, he was always open, always an available, friendly face in the community. Smiling back no matter what shit was thrown at him. We prospered again. Daddy expanded the business. Gujaratis supported each other. Bit like a medieval guild. And always, always till I was sick of hearing it, the importance of education. 'Work hard at school, my girl. Get your qualifications'. I got them. Here I am. Alisha Desai, the English nurse. Know what? I've never even been to India and I like Marmite. What's your problem?

Alisha exits. [End of extract]
Through the telling of personal stories, the play is attempting to link perennial questions about good governance and the effects of social systems upon human behaviour with pressing contemporary issues around globalisation, the nation state and identity in order that audiences are presented not with the clear political choices of sound-bite rhetoric, but with contradictions to explore in their lives beyond the theatre. *King Lear* seemed a pertinent choice in view of the socio-political themes with which it wrestles. Lear’s journey in Shakespeare’s play takes him from the pinnacle of wealth and power as absolute monarch to the depths of material poverty where he loses both identity and sanity. It is a cautionary tale for our times where grotesque social inequalities, left unattended, may give rise to large-scale violence and the tearing of the social fabric. When Shakespeare was writing, those with great wealth in the form of land ownership were seizing even more through the enclosing of common land – a process in which Shakespeare was implicated as a shareholder in an enclosure at Welcombe (Bearman 2017), which added to the numbers of the dispossessed roaming the land without food or shelter.

At the heart of the play are fundamental questions such as: are human beings capable of governing each other justly? What kind of social system can enable all to prosper? *Lear in Brexitland* gives great prominence to the Fool because she poses these core questions about (in)human nature. She also takes us to the heart of issues around mental health. Lear’s retreat into (in) sanity marks out his only refuge from a mad world where extreme, vicious self-interest has become the norm. As a madman, he discovers his humanity, guided by the ‘world turned upside down’ insights by the Fool who comes to Lear out of a long medieval heritage, both in the theatre and beyond. The overturning of the official order to create a parallel or second world of carnival as an act of resistance to authority forms the basis for the argument of cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin:

> The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations and always contain an element of fear and of intimidation. These elements prevailed in the Middle Ages. Laughter, on the contrary, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and authority (Bakhtin 1984: 90).

In *King Lear*, violence is more or less synonymous with authority. It threatens to engulf the warring kingdoms and seems to define what it is to be human. Asked by Edmund whether he is up to the task of murdering the defenceless Cordelia in prison, the Captain replies: ‘If it be man’s work, I’ll do’t.’ (V.3.40). The Fool, knowing that overt resistance will only lead to violence against her person, opts instead to uncover the contradictions of authority through fooling:

> The idiom can, however, be used against authority not so much through overt opposition that is readily identified and therefore easily destroyed, as by the more oblique strategies of play, irony and allegory where ridicule is unleashed against targets who are removed historically or geographically from direct contact of daily, contemporary experience. This is, pre-eminently, the indirect mode of the theatrical which presents a mingling of fiction and reality through the devices of representation and disguise (Prentki 2012: 24).

In giving prominence to the Fool in *Lear in Brexitland* I am trying to suggest that the binary clashes of ‘them and us’ upon which the violence of group identity tends to rest can be destabilised by the Fool’s mode of irony and inversion and so give rise to ‘complex seeing’. Near the end of the play this habit of inversion extends to Shakespeare’s text which ends with Edgar saying, ‘The oldest hath borne most; we that are young/Shall never see so much, nor live so long’ (V.3.324-25). In the spirit of Bakhtin, the Fool in *Lear in Brexitland* reverses the sentiment: ‘The youngest hath borne most; you that are old/Shall never see so much, nor live so long.’ As the play has depicted, in the present age it is the young who are suffering most from the greed and violence of those who rule. Just before the end of *Lear in Brexitland* the Fool dies, broken-hearted at both the inability of Lear to recover a place in the world and of the world to accommodate her patient’s vision. She runs out of patience. However, in an echo of Edward Bond’s (1972: 84) Lear – ‘the man without pity is mad’ – this Lear recovers sufficient pity to invoke the return of the Fool as a ghost.

OHTC is only at the start of discovering the aesthetic possibilities of the project but already it is apparent that the telling of personal stories grounded in realism must occupy a fundamental element in the process. The discipline imposed by the one-hour format has meant that, to date, this narrative imperative has been realised through the medium of the monologue, forced into being by the contextual frame of the situation in which a particular character is held. The monologue creates a poetic condensation that allows the story to present the core elements that relate to the moral thread of the play without any of the distractions of psychology or sub-plot.

As the Enlightenment myth of progress or, as economists call it, ‘growth’ runs out, the Fool reminds us that ‘the rain it raineth every day’. Brecht placed his faith in a ‘scientific age’ of reason and material progress but still acknowledged that humans are contradictory, cantankerous and self-harming creatures. Like the Fool, our response is not to despair but to laugh:
The theatre of the scientific age is able to make dialectics enjoyable. The surprises of logically progressive or erratic development, of the instability of all situations, the wit of contradictory circumstances etc., all these involve enjoyment of the liveliness of people, things and processes, and they heighten both the art of living and the joy of living.

All the arts contribute to the greatest art of all, the art of living (Brecht 2015: 257).

Holloway (2010: 261) concludes his study of the deadly outcomes of capitalism:

Fight from the particular, fight from where we are, here and now. Create spaces or moments that walk in the opposite direction, that do not fit in. Make holes in our own reiterative creating of capitalism. Create cracks and let them expand, let them multiply, let them resonate, let them flow together.

The OHTC project is just one small crack. As such it is an effort to intervene in contemporary discourse to provoke people into imagining social alternatives to the appalling scenarios that confront us in the twenty-first century.

References
Bond, E. 1972 Lear, Eyre Methuen, London.

Author
Tim Prentki is Professor of Theatre for Development at the University of Winchester, UK. He is the author of The Fool in European Theatre and Applied Theatre: Development, co-editor of The Applied Theatre Reader and of the forthcoming Performance and Civic Engagement, and co-author of Popular Theatre in Political Culture. A member of the Advisory Boards of Research in Drama Education and Applied Theatre Research, he is also a writer of plays including Common Sense, Don’t Remember Him and Lear in Brexitland.

The Pyramid at the End of the World

Every trap you walk into is a chance to learn
where the arrow points
Power needs consent
so fake love is slavery
hacking into sex
Watch the Doomsday Clock
tick away the pyramid
that integrates our fear
Being smart is not
giving away your planet
for unconditional sight

David Reiter, Carindale QLD.
Articulating the Inarticulate: Performance and intervention in masculine gender (re)presentation

Shane Pike

There is an increasingly accepted connection between issues surrounding male identity and destructive and anti-social behaviours. These expressions of unhealthy notions of masculinity have been the focus of various initiatives and investigations into contemporary male health and wellbeing. Issues such as alcohol and drug abuse, violence against others, self-harm and suicide have been the subjects of official reports, research projects, social welfare campaigns and even television shows. The theatre, as a site for social intervention, can thus contribute to this increasing focus on, and attempts to shift, outdated and unhealthy understandings of 'what it means to be a man'.

This paper examines the interventionist nature of theatre to explore, unpack and attempt to alter perceptions of the contemporary Australian male identity through the fusing of Ethnotheatre, Ethnodrama and Theatre of Tensions. As a result, theatre can intercept long-held, traditional (re)presentations of masculinity in order to reinvent them, thereby offering perceptibly healthier alternatives to masculine ways of being.

Introduction

The project this article discusses consists of two main components. The first is a research exercise that involved interviewing young performers from around Australia. This group consisted of students studying various degrees in theatre at the University of Tasmania, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. The group included both male and female students aged between 18 and 30 consisting of various cultural, religious and social backgrounds as well as a variety of sexualities and nationalities. The students, or participants as they are termed, were asked about their perceptions, opinions and experiences with and of Australian male identity, and what traits they considered to be inherently masculine in an Australian context. The information the participants provided was then collated and common traits identified, paying attention to those qualities that may be harmful to male health and wellbeing. For example, excessive consumption of alcohol was expressed as a common and recognisably masculine trait, but is also unarguably detrimental to one’s health.

The second component of the project took these unhealthy traits and used them (or the kind of man they stood to represent) as the stimulus to generate a new dramatic work called Yesterday’s Hero. At this stage of the process, a core group of four male actors was assembled as an acting troupe to devise a performance that could:

a) highlight common notions of masculinity considered unhealthy, or detrimental to the wellbeing of men generally; and

b) suggest, through character and story, possible and more positive alternatives to these unhealthy ideas of what it is to be a man in Australia.

These two components – research and creation – were drawn together through the fusing of Ethnotheatre and Ethnodrama with Theatre of Tensions (see Taanteatro Companhia n.d.). An account of this fusion, and explanations of these theatrical forms, is detailed further below.

Lynn Butler-Kisber (2010: 136) writes persuasively about theatre as a regular site of social intervention, confirming that ‘for centuries, drama/theatre has opened up spaces for understanding, critique and social action’. Along these lines, the theatrical stage can be an effective medium when questioning, unravelling and diminishing the power of destructive notions of constructed identity(ies), as it may present those identities to an audience, through character, in a way that encourages
While it is acknowledged that ‘being a man means many different things to many different people’ (Curnutt 2004: 104), the term ‘masculinity’ is used in this article as an overall descriptor of maleness, encompassing those notions of male identity and what it means ‘to be a man’ that shaped the participants’ understanding of how men feel they are expected to behave. Ultimately, if men are successful in behaving in these expected/accepted ways, they will be recognised as masculine, and indeed as men, by those around them. This idea, that gender identities are ‘relational and contingent rather than self-determined’ (Strychaz 2003: 8) is at the crux of this work. Theatre, as a social medium that requires an audience in order to exist, does not place the responsibility of questioning and altering notions of acceptable masculine traits solely on the individual male. Rather, by engaging and presenting to an audience, theatre also confronts those responsible for the external enforcement and policing of such traits.

**Why Dramatic Intervention in Notions of Masculinity?**

Perhaps the most influential reason for the focus on young males is the knowledge that death from intentional self-harm amongst Australian men is three time higher than that amongst women (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). Indeed, statistics show that suicide itself remains the leading cause of premature death in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2015). Critical to this point is a study conducted by the Black Dog Institute and the National Health and Medical Research Council, Centre of Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention in 2014. Key findings from this study identified, amongst men, common risk factors and a common pathway leading to suicidal behaviour. One of those key findings was that many men interviewed relied on ‘unhelpful conceptions of masculinity consisting of stoic beliefs and values, which strongly influence decision-making’ (Player et al. 2015: 4). The authors of this study also write:

A common observation was that beliefs and values deriving from adherence to the ‘stereotypical’ stoic Australian male identity were unhelpful, especially when held in extreme forms. Almost all men reported that their masculine beliefs led to them isolating themselves when they were feeling down, for example, to avoid imposing on others. Failure to manage emotions, or live up to expectations of happiness or coping also often led to a sense of lost control or guilt, as well as anxiety about having these perceived weaknesses or failures [of masculinity] revealed. It was very common for family and friends to state that this tendency of men to adopt typically masculine responses to distress meant they were often unaware of warning signs for suicide, or misinterpreted suicidality as depression or anger (5).

Participants in this theatrical exercise reported the same reliance on what can be called traditional traits of masculinity – stoicism, for example – as clear signals of maleness (see Pike 2014: 26-78).

It is interesting to note that the image of the masculine Australian male painted by participants, and alluded to by the Black Dog Institute study, is also very similar to the description of the ‘typical Australian’ male provided by Russel Ward in his seminal book *The Australian Legend* in 1958 (1-2), with stoicism and heavy drinking just some of the indicators of Australian maleness that appear in both instances. Worryingly, notions of Australian male identity seem to be generally unchanged in over half a century – no wonder the contemporary Australian ‘bloke’, in all his diversity and complexity, is struggling to fit within an ideal from a bygone era. Indeed, it would be acceptable to consider whether this notion of manly ideology was entirely relevant even in the 1950s. This masculine image is also undeniably Anglo-Celtic. For all intents and purposes, Ward’s ‘Legend’ and the dominant notion of masculinity as it was uncovered amongst the participants in a contemporary context is a white man – an image that denies the reality of our first Nations people, and the influences of generations of immigrants from across the globe. A first step in addressing the inadequacies of this overarching male ideal, from a theatrical perspective, would be for our stages to champion more diversity when casting men (for a theatre-specific comment on this point see Bollen et al. 2008: 95-116, 139-159).

Similarly, Raewyn (formerly Robert) Connell (1979) discusses the existence of an exclusive, dominant notion of masculinity underpinning common understandings of maleness. This ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell 1995: 183-190) can be further used to express the problem with having rigid, heavily prescribed traits attributable to a singular notion of what it means to be an accepted, and acceptable, man. In particular, not everyone is able to replicate those traits in their own image, leading to
feelings of inadequacy within their own psyche as well as projected onto them from without regarding actions and interactions of and with others. While Connell later reflects with Messerschmidt that ‘gender orders construct multiple masculinities’ (2005: 835), favouring the view that hegemonic masculinities exist in the plural, the presence of a hierarchy amongst male identity, generally constructed along a least masculine to most masculine continuum, is undeniable, and only exacerbates issues associated with idealised masculine gender identification(s).

Traits associated with a dominant notion of masculinity are known to be detrimental to physical and mental health. Stoicism in the face of building issues of anxiety and stress often works to exacerbate those issues, rather than enabling the individual to navigate them effectively. Thus, the individual is destroyed – in a metaphorical but also potentially literal sense – by the very identity they define themselves by. Indeed, finding comfort in the bottom of a bottle rather than through talking with a mental health professional goes against common understandings of how to best resolve mental health issues, yet the former is a commonly accepted reaction to mental health issues amongst men. Rather than drown them, excessive alcohol consumption – an identified masculine trait – leads to ‘long-term serious physical and mental health problems. [Indeed,] alcohol can mimic or accentuate many of the symptoms of depression: low mood, low energy, changes in appetite, weight or sleep pattern, poor concentration, feelings of guilt or worthlessness and suicidal ideation’ (Patel 2010: 155).

Using theatre’s ability to reach a community through its audience, unhealthy notions of masculinity can be highlighted as both potentially destructive and outdated. By (re)presenting these attributes of mainstream manhood onstage to an audience, it was our intention to encourage reflection of them – is this how we want to promote acceptable identity traits to our young men? – and offer alternatives to them. This was in line with key directions of the Black Dog Institute study, which recommended, amongst other things, that:

- Education and intervention across the community should focus on:
  - developing awareness about warning signs
  - understanding behaviours related to aggression and risk taking
  - learning strategies for dealing with stress and depression
  - developing different resources for men with varying needs
  - challenging unhelpful ways that masculinity is presented in society (Beyondblue 2016).

Theatre, through its ability to reach audiences and ‘engage with society by dramatising its characters in a social context’ (Bollen et al. 2008: 2), has the potential to meet these recommendations by invoking its ability to open ‘up spaces for understanding, critique and social action’ (Butler-Kisber 2010: 136).

Perhaps the most pertinent of the above recommendations to a theatrical intervention, is how performance can directly ‘challenge unhelpful ways that masculinity is presented in society’. Theatre can do this effectively because of the interactions between audience and performer inherent in the medium, interactions that allow the exploration of both ‘what is already culturally available and that which is new’ (Magan 2006: 25): the traditional image of masculinity is available and recognisable to the stage, but can also be supplanted with new, more inclusive and healthier understandings of maleness via character and scene. Both the stage and the rehearsal room become the site of intervention, disrupting and attempting to alter notions of maleness through the exploration of character, and the inevitable (re)presentation of dramatised males, to an audience who are subsequently coaxed, through narrative and story, to question their own beliefs and expectations of behaviour from the men in their own lives.

But Aren’t Issues of Gender and Identity Universal?

Issues of identity politics and their connections to the destructive behaviours discussed here are not unique to men. Substance abuse, violence and self-harm are growing problems for young women. Indeed, Australian women are increasing their alcohol consumption at a rate faster than men, for example, bringing their dangerous drinking habits almost to parity with the male population (Slade et al. 2016). While this article does not focus on these issues amongst young women, the need to address harmful behaviour amongst all Australians is evident. Such an endeavour would be served well through an extension of this project.

I should also acknowledge what may be misconstrued as a broad assumption underlying this article: the idea that masculinity is specific only to those who identify with the biological label of male. Of course, masculinity is a construct far more complicated than this, existing along a continuum of both culturally and individually (pre)determined notions of behaviours attributable to any number of things. Indeed ‘there are literally hundreds of studies that have demonstrated significant correlations between individual differences in measures of masculinity and a range of other criteria’ (Addis et al. 2010: 79). Furthermore, concepts of masculine behaviour are often ascribed to both men and women, and even inanimate objects (power tools, muscle cars and plaid shirts, for example) are considered inherently masculine.
This article does not champion the entrenched stereotypes of masculinity that such assumptions support, however it does not deny them. Rather, it utilises these assumptions as intrinsically useful associations of masculinity, from which the dominant masculine construct can be firstly identified, then investigated, and ultimately deconstructed. This is done in the knowledge that ‘we [have] a real issue in Australia with cultures of young men’s mental health, which are clearly aligned with their thoughts and identification around masculinity’ (Rice 2017). The aim of the intervention here is to unpack and – to a certain degree – denounce old notions of masculinity and replace them, or at least attempt to begin a movement away from our society’s reliance on them.

Ethnotheatre, Ethnodrama and Taanteatro – Terms Explained

The descriptions of Ethnotheatre and Ethnodrama in the context of this work are quite specific, and may not adhere to some understandings of the terms. Here, definitions have been borrowed from theatre maker and academic Johny Saldaña (2003, 2011), specifically:

Ethnotheatre employs traditional craft and artistic techniques of formal theatre production to mount a live performance event of research participants’ experiences and/or researchers’ interpretations of data for an audience … [E]thnodrama, the script, consists of analyzed and dramatized significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, journal entries, or other written artefacts (2003: 218).

In other words, the Ethnodrama is the play created from the research phase of this project, and the Ethnotheatre is the mounted production of that dramatic work that was the second stage.

Furthermore, in the case of an ethnotheatrical performance of an ethnodramatic script, ‘characters … are generally the research participants portrayed by actors, but the actual researchers and participants themselves may be cast members’ (Saldaña 2003: 218). For Yesterdays Hero, the work created for this dramatic intervention in traditional notions of masculinity, the actors both contributed to the data collected as part of developing the ethnodramatic script, as well as (re)presenting the data provided by other participants.

Taanteatro is a method and theory of performance creation invented by the founders of the company Taanteatro Companhia, Maura Baiocchi and Wolfgang Pannek (2008). The fundamental theory of Taanteatro is that all things are connected, in both a metaphysical and corporeal sense, by a series of invisible threads (or rubber bands, if you will) that create tension on and between objects. By tapping into and manipulating these tensions, the performer/creator can benefit on several levels. This manipulation is achieved through the evocation of creative impulses, whereby creators can break down blockages to creativity and allow a free-flowing of ideas and improvised physical actions that ultimately form part of or contribute to the formation of a performance.

An awareness of these invisible tensions may also enable a performer to more believably and purposefully connect with fellow performers, an audience, their props, costumes and set in unexpected, interesting and impactful ways. An understanding of these tensions also allows an artist to more deeply explore the subtextual and hidden meanings within their own work, and to identify their individual creative credo – expressed through the envisioning of an artist’s mandala – for both an individual creative project and their creative practice overall (see Pannek and Baiocchi 2011).

Why These Modes of Theatre Creation were Chosen for This Site of Dramatic Intervention

Ethnotheatre and Ethnodrama were chosen for two main reasons: firstly was the emphasis on ‘traditional craft and artistic technique’ (Saldaña 2003: 218), which can be seen to imply a certain level of production value that some other forms of ethno (or applied) theatre may not offer. For example, Saldaña’s version of Ethnotheatre works best with skilled actors supported by scenographic stage design and technical elements (such as costume, lighting and sound effects). In comparison, theatre in a community, educational or therapeutic context may call on untrained audience members to take the stage as actors, or teachers and drama educators – rather than professional directors – to construct a dramatic world for participants to enter, often in a classroom or public forum setting with little or no theatrical effects and design.

As a theatre director, my practice and training is in the area of commercial theatre, which sits well with Saldaña’s requirements for traditional craft and technique. This also opens up the potential impact of the work, as commercial theatre audiences have the potential to be larger and more diverse than art created for artists, or a purely academic exercise designed for the studio more than the stage. Where the intention is to intervene in widespread, unhealthy notions of masculinity, high-production value with a wider audience appeal is useful. As Saldaña affirms, ‘this may be difficult for some to accept … theatre’s primary goal is to entertain – to entertain ideas and to entertain for pleasure’ (2003: 220). Without entertainment value, the research impact is potentially more limited, as the potential audience is more limited.
The other desirable aspect of this kind of practice-led-research is that the participants who provide the data can have their contributions and lived experiences shared and presented in an expert, professional manner with the full accoutrement of theatre design and craft – potentially giving them a certain sense of pride, achievement and validation that an improvised, off-the-cuff session of verbatim theatre, process drama or forum theatre, for example, cannot. Along these lines, ‘a researcher’s criteria for excellent ethnography in article or book formats don’t always harmonise with an artist’s criteria for excellent theatre’ (220). The opportunity to see aspects of their lived experience ‘up in lights’ as part of ‘excellent theatre’, has the potential to be quite empowering for participants. Of course, this outcome was made clear to all participants from the beginning and their consent to have aspects of their responses presented in this way was freely given.

The reason Theatre of Tensions (or Taanteatro) was chosen for this process is because of its ability to break down barriers to creativity and to generate ideas and creative content from what would otherwise be something quite inarticulate. The issue arose in this project that the common and generally identifiable masculine traits were often challenging to present in an interestingly theatrical way – stoicism, for example, does not easily lend itself to the use of theatrical rhetoric. Taanteatro provided the opportunity to approach the creation of character, and the (re)presentation of less-than-dramatic character traits, in somewhat unconventional and unexpected ways. It allowed this by unleashing unpredictable and surprising, yet believable, interpretations of the character through accessing parts of the mind and body that may otherwise be left dormant by methods of artistic expression and devising that I had previously been familiar with.

For instance, the devising method of Anne Bogart and Tina Landau (2005), known as Viewpoints, is often used as a basis for creating new dramatic works from a non-traditional creative stimulus – i.e. from an artefact rather than a script. Viewpoints, and its accompanying composition exercises, is based on a dance theory/technique crafted by Mary Overlie, yet the actor-participants and I found it very difficult to use this method to generate meaningful (re)presentations of an Australian male who is ‘sceptical about the value of ... intellectual and cultural pursuits generally’ (Ward 1958: 1), including the cultural pursuit of dance. It was almost laughable and not entirely believable to have our ‘bloke’ moving across the stage with the fluidity and abstractness that resulted from Bogart and Landau’s technique. Taanteatro, however, unleashed a different kind of creativity through a combination of techniques wound together in a series of embodied processes crafted by Baiocchi and Pannek, centred on mandala meditation and the induction of trance-like states through a sequence of exercises inspired by Japanese Butoh theatre, yoga and the uniquely Brazilian dance-fight, capoeira.

At the risk of over-simplifying the method, and upsetting its proponents, Viewpoints and its partnered Compositions may begin with the enactment of a series of still ‘images’, which are subsequently extrapolated and built upon to generate material for scene and story. In contrast, the method developed by Taanteatro allows the immediate accessing of the artist’s internal impulse and allows for an exploration of character that sees itself presented from a very primal place of understanding and expression, deep within the artist’s psyche. In this respect, it can be said that Viewpoints and Compositions are more external in their impact, whereas Taanteatro brings the creation from deep inside, initiating a profound connection between artist and creation. Indeed, the accessing of primal centres of impulse and creativity lent itself very well when experimenting with (re)presentations of masculinity based on traditional notions of manliness, particularly where participants had identified somewhat primal traits – physical superiority, reactive rather than reflective and brutishness over brains, for instance – as synonymous with masculine identity.

By accessing the character(s) in this way, it is possible to not only craft interesting (re)presentations that connected deeply with the artist’s own notions of masculinity – adding a sense of authenticity and connection that speaks to an audience – but also layer these men with complexity borne of the desire to present them as multifaceted rather than simply ‘type’. Having this deep connection with character allows an actor to believably access many elements of personality, and not just those normally selected to demonstrate masculinity. In life, where men may be forced to suppress their identity in favour of replicating notions of masculinity expected of them, there certainly exists a complexity of identity below the outward, manly exterior. Through Taanteatro, it is possible to access these suppressed traits in a meaningful and believable way, adding them to a character seamlessly and believably – inevitably working to offer alternative and healthier aspects of maleness through this process.

Was There an Intervention?

As with any artistic product, success or effectiveness is open to subjective assessment, in contrast to an objective conclusion. It is impossible to offer an objective assessment of this project and the level of intervention achieved. Similarly, it is uncertain as to how the project altered the audience’s perceptions of masculinity. Objectivity and art are, thankfully, still largely irreconcilable terms. Was there, however, any level of intervention amongst the audience, and subsequently the community, resulting from this research and its ensuing performance?
That can be answered in the positive.

One version of the production, *Yesterday’s Hero*, received a season in the Enright Theatre at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. Audiences were both at capacity and receptive each night. The most convincing evidence of intervention came in the form of a letter, written to me by an audience member. Not only was this individual moved enough by the work to investigate my mailing address and contact details, but their perceptions of male identity and the issues faced by the young men in their life received such intervention that they were compelled to express this to me in writing. The letter writer was a high school teacher, working in a suburb of the city of Perth that is generally considered to be a low socio-economic area. This person had no connection to me nor the participants, and had found out about the production through general advertising of the performance.

The audience member’s only connection to us and our work was seeing young men in their own life struggle with issues of identity, issues that were now laid bare before them onstage. They had seen these same behaviours, presumably borne of a desire to be accepted as a ‘real man’, lead to some of the destructive behaviours demonstrated through these characters. The most convincing evidence that this exercise in Ethnotheatre, Ethnodrama and Taanteatro acted as a site of intervention in this person’s life was their admission that they were reminded, by our production, of the young men at their school struggling with these sorts of issues, and were inspired to work with them as an agent of positive change in their lives and their perceptions of self. A more positive outcome for the project, there cannot be.

Some may argue that the letter of a single audience member is not enough evidence of impact. On this point, the idea of a ‘theatre of little changes’ can be borrowed from academic and applied theatre maker, Michael Balfour (2009). Here lies the messy and uncertain aspect of this kind of project, where hard-and-fast aims and outcomes intersect and complicate the discussion of the underlying artistic form. It is an easy trap to fall into where ‘the artistic dimension therefore is … relegated to the second division, a footnote to the value or purpose of the project’ (356). It is valid to suggest that the aim of little changes, where one person in a position of influence such as our letter writer is impacted by our work, is acceptable, without getting ‘caught in the habit of writing too many field notes and evaluation reports, [where] the concentration is on proving the social efficacy of the work, rather than analysing the affect of aesthetics’ (356). In this case, in an instance of change – little or otherwise – the artistic aesthetic of this work was the agent of change.

### Conclusion

Fundamentally, this paper – and the work it discusses – seeks not to pit one gender against the other by stating the issues of one are more severe or pressing than that of the opposite, nor does it deny the fact that a binary gender system itself is an outdated concept that fails to consider more recent enlightenments in individual gender, and non-gender, identifications ‘not all of which are easily comprehensible by a binary gender system’ (Landreau and Murphy 2011: 133). The underlying thrust of this work is based on the idea that notions of gender, identity and the complex behaviours that humans exhibit to navigate these concepts are wide and varied. We should be striving for an accepted multiplicity and openness in terms of individual gender identification, as both varied and fluid.

Theatre is a valid and effective method in breaking down traditional, outdated notions of what it means ‘to be a man’, particularly when working under the assumption that these old-fashioned expectations of male behaviour and ways-of-being are a significant influence on the destructive behaviours exhibited and experienced by young men. These behaviours harm both the individual and the collective community and through theatre, as an agent of social intervention, artists can work to both demonstrate how issues of masculinity and identity politics can contribute to these dangerous behaviours, as well as offer alternative notions of masculinity that may propose a more positive mindset for the individual and society at large.

As I have drawn on before, on a thesis assessing this same topic, through theatre there exists a ‘pathology of hope’ (Kershaw 1998: 81), where it ‘can significantly contribute to the collective and individual creation of autonomous subjects’ in favour of a single, idealised model of the masculine man. Theatre can promote and facilitate a freedom for positive notions of masculinities, in the plural, to be championed: ‘such freedom can be achieved through actions which combine resistant and transcendent ideological dynamics, which oppose dominant ideologies and also at least gesture to possibilities beyond them’ (Kershaw 1998: 81). By fusing Ethnotheatre, Ethnodrama and Taanteatro and drawing upon the stage as a site of intervention, I will borrow the words of anthropologist and ethnologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1990: 12), ‘I therefore claim to show, not how men think, but how myths operate in men’s minds without their being aware of the fact’. In doing so, theatre is seen to act as a proponent for changing those myths to a healthier, more positive and inclusive notion of masculine existence, befitting of the individual’s lived experience and desired perceptions of identity, instead of relying on largely externally policed, unhealthy notions of who they should be.
References


Bollen, J., Keiernander, A. and Parr, B. 2008 Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian theatre since the 1950s, Rodopi, Amsterdam.


Landreau, J. and Murphy, M. 2011 ‘Introduction to the special issue - masculinities in women’s studies: Locations and dislocations’, Men and Masculinities, 14, 2: 132-134.


Pike, S. 2014 ‘(Re)presenting Masculinity: A theatre director’s critical observations of, and theatrical experimentation with, (re)presentations of masculinity in selected works of contemporary Australian theatre’, Doctor of Philosophy - Performing Arts, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University.


Rice, S. 2017 ‘Saving our sons’, 60 Minutes, Channel 9, TV.


Saldaña, J. 2011 Ethnotheatre: Research from page to stage, Taylor and Francis, Abingdon.


Author
Shane Pike is an Associate Lecturer in Performance Studies at the Queensland University of Technology, and also a practising writer/director with an interest in contemporary Australian theatre. His research specialisation involves (re)presentations of gender in performance. Shane studied directing at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA), and is a Co-Artistic Director of the Matilda Award winning theatre company, Wax Lyrical Productions. He has directed performances nationally and internationally and his creative and written works are frequently produced.

Extremis

Without Hope
our scripts unfold
to the chants of Veritas
blood drops to portals
Without Witness
mysterious lights
outsmart our shining corners
book cages broken
Without Reward
the shadows test us
blind in our computer game
synapse to pixel = #Unreal

DAVID REITER,
CARNINDALE, QLD

No doubt, riots are on the rise in the West. London, Ferguson, Athens—there’s been a significant upswing of violent protests on our streets, flashing across our TV and computer screens in sensationalised bursts. In mainstream discussion, the word “riot” connotes danger, violence, amorality—outbursts that need to be neutralised as quickly as possible so life can return to normal. In fact, the media is so pre-occupied with the violence of riots that it can be difficult for us to notice anything else about them.

In Riot. Strike. Riot: The New Era of Uprisings (2016), Joshua Clover helps us see past the moral panic around violent riots. Throughout this smart, provocative book, the Californian communist provides valuable insight on why riots erupt when and where they do, and why they have emerged in recent years as a crucial mode of rebellion.

One of the book’s early revelations is that the media’s over-fascination with ‘violence’ serves to deny the riot’s political legitimacy, as well as the rioters’ humanity. Clover tells us that the sensationalised rhetoric of the violent riot “...becomes a device of exclusion, aimed not so much against ‘violence’ but against specific social groups” (2016: 12). By characterising rioters as thoughtless brutes, we perpetuate old prejudiced notions that poor and/or racialised subjects are animalistic, irrational and invalid. Furthermore, he tells us, how the “...insistence on the violence of the riot effectively obscures the daily, systemic, and ambient violence that stalks daily life...” for many of these marginalised subjects (2016: 12). Undoubtedly, violence is committed during riots. But, by focusing solely on the destruction caused by rioters, we lose any indication that these people are reacting to the structural harm inflicted on them by the oppressive mechanisms of the state.

The characterisation of riots as fundamentally violent and irrational also strategically strips rioters of their political legitimacy. Clover tells us that the equivocation of violence and riot is “...an essential tool in the political reduction of the riot, its cordonning off from politics proper” (2016: 39). In denouncing violent resistance, media pundits and political leaders often encourage kinder, gentler forms of protest; however, Clover tells us that, for the disenfranchised, the idea that a peaceful march, or a strike, can fundamentally alter their circumstances is pure moralistic illusion.

From here, Clover goes on to make perhaps the book’s boldest claim: that riots have become more prevalent, because in our modern neoliberal economies, pacifistic, labour-centred strategies are becoming more useless. He believes that populations can no longer confront the problem of their livelihood in the realm of labour struggle (i.e., through a strike), due to the cumulative effects of globalisation and political mobilisation against workers’ rights. In place of the strike, Clover writes, for the dispossessed trying to remake society, the riot has emerged as “the form of collective action through which struggle must pass” (2016: 123). With the imminent rise of automation and unemployment, Clover predicts that labour actions—like strikes or occupations—will only become more irrelevant to proletarian struggles. If there’s no work to refuse, and no workplaces to occupy, how can one possibly strike to improve the conditions of their life?

While Clover is right to decentralise labour as the context for struggle, one can’t help but feel that he’s being overly hasty (perhaps, decidedly controversial) in claiming that labour-centred struggle is dead and buried. It remains unclear whether he has seriously considered the ways labour movements could adapt to the changing structure of our economies. While it is difficult to imagine that labour organising alone can fundamentally transform society, if we are to witness revolutionary change in our lifetimes surely it will still be a vital element of such a practice. The kind of collective mass action capable of fundamentally transforming society will require the combined efforts of workers and disenfranchised subjects. Now, more than ever, we need strategies that will bring the working-class and the underclass together, and reassert their power to direct and change economies to suit their collective needs.

As Clover himself says in the book’s final pages, revolutionary change is “unthinkable without the modulation from traditional working class to an expanded proletariat. That is to say, it is not oriented by productive labourers, but rather by the heterogeneous population of those without reserves” (2016: 189). If there is to be an emancipatory future, we must look to forms of struggle which can bring together all marginalised peoples – both the employed and unemployed – in ways that address the changing economic landscape.

No doubt this is a very stimulating and intelligent work of political-economic theory. Despite its flaws, Clover has done something very important here: politically legitimising riots as a form of rebellion. Rather than being the domain of the unthinking and animalistic thugs, Clover gives the riot its due as a politically coherent form of protest. Considering the little room the media has for nuance, debate, and critical thinking around the nature and prevalence of riots, the book comes as a welcome relief.

Author: Jeremy Poxon
The University of Queensland

Social Alternatives Vol. 36 No 2, 2017
BOOK REVIEW


Tim Winton’s Island Home (2015) carries the sub-title ‘A landscape memoir’, and it will not surprise readers of Winton’s fiction that he handles the elastic form of the memoir with novelistic flair. He eschews conventional chronology, arranging a looser narrative mosaic befitting the mode of peripheral perception he celebrates: the power of ‘vision beyond mere glimpsing’, as he puts it in his earlier essay bearing the same sub-title, ‘Strange passion: a landscape memoir’ (1999).

In pairing the conventionally distinct modes of representation into a single generic form—the geographical and autobiographical, and we might say, the pictorial and literary—he immediately alters customary understandings of the memoir as a variation on the ‘life story’. The generic conflation serves his purpose of encouraging Australians to learn to ‘see’ in ways more attuned to concepts of land and place.

Winton’s public admissions that he is very much a reluctant environmental activist (though activist no less) might have earnt him the disapproval of the more radical political agitator or determined protester. Yet, it is the absence of dogmatic protest and moral vehemence in Island Home that award his narrative its full strength. His criticisms of the venal nature of contemporary Australian politics and the resulting distortions reflected in the wider social and cultural realm are expressed in forthright yet measured terms. Of the wilful neglect of Perth’s gravely ailing Swan River, Winton pulls no punch: “The Swan is desperately sick. And although a simple cure is ready to hand, the river is put on life support. Those pumps are emblematic of a city and political culture for whom the glit fix and the photo-op will always be first choice” (47). But then, by way of changing the subject, he concludes that, “[T]he land speaks to so many of us, and like any long-suffering parent it yearns for a little recognition. But not everyone is paying attention” (49).

Reliance on the powerful metaphor of family presents a challenge to the reader in both senses. To see the land in familial terms is to understand our relationship with country as one of profound responsibility: “This country leans in on you. It weighs down hard. Like family. To my way of thinking, it is family,” (23). It ‘weighs down hard’ for the very reason that the land supports us, and that we therefore rely on it in the most fundamental, mutually supportive sense.

For this reader, Winton’s continued experiment with the literary innovation of the ‘landscape memoir’ is entirely convincing, as much for his graceful mastery of the written word as for the animating energy of his genuine passion for his subject. True to his much-lauded literary talents, Winton holds up to the receptive reader a scenically vibrant, robustly dynamic picture of the vast and diverse land on which we are all camped, temporary visitors as all humans beings are. As he rightly insists, “It’s good for the spirit, to be reminded as an individual or a community that there will always be something bigger, older, richer and more than ourselves to consider” (27-8). In doing so, readers are spared the tiresomely confessional details, trivial gossiping and highly confected ‘dramas’ of the many ‘lives’ retailed in the heavily marketed memoirs of recent years.

It should be said that Winton’s insistence that Australia is ‘wild’ might rankle some readers; others might in turn question his at-times romanticised recollections of a boyhood enjoyed in the boundless bush of his now-suburbanised ‘homeland’ (even as Winton himself notes the tendency in himself to romanticise). The claim that Australians on the whole are beginning to ‘commit’ to the land ‘in a spirit of kinship to the place itself’ (222) also invites scepticism. Yet, the fact that Winton anticipates such criticisms, and matter-of-factly incorporates these and like objections into the narrative, bespeaks both a reassuring modesty and matured perspective.

Above all, the strength of Winton’s work is in the concentration on his deep moral concern with, and artistic commitment to, our collective human potential. In his view, this is inseparable from our collective need to foster “a mental step forward” in our understanding of our place in place: “an emotional deepening … [that] takes humility and patience to see what truly lies before us” (203). To see, in the nuanced, precise sense he encourages, is to nurture an awareness of one’s deepest connection to place; it is to begin to understand how one’s sense of identity and self is always ‘in-formed’ by this very specific place. “To be properly awake and aware of our place,” as he says in the essay ‘Strange Passion’, is to know hope; and to learn to be in place is to accept and cherish the fact that “this earth is our home, our only home” (xx). In Winton’s skilled hands, that simple and urgent message carries its full weight, not through didactic insistence but through the keen, unfussy lyricism of an assured literary artist.

References

Author: Stephen Harris
School of Arts, UNE
I see her first, through the kitchen window as I fill the kettle. She sits reading at the verandah table and, behind the folds of her navy scarf, I can just make out the skin of her cheek turned toward the sun. I pad silently back to the bedroom and close the door.

Blood pulses behind my eyelids and the sheets are cold on my legs. I pray Greg will stay asleep just a little longer, but his breaths are getting more rapid and shallow, as they always do before he wakes, like a steam train preparing to leave the station. There is a clamp on my chest. Finally he stirs, blowing a last, long, stale shot of sleep into the room, and I reach for him before he can get up.

‘Stay,’ I say.

He is groggy but doesn’t protest. I pinch my eyes shut as he rolls on top of me, and I try to remember all the mundane things that happened yesterday and the day before and the day before that, until I hear the click of the front door and know she has left to catch the bus.

The call comes before midday. They ring me first. I let it go to the machine, and stand next to the phone listening to the message. And then I return to bed with the handset and wait for Greg’s call.

‘Do you know what it’s about?’ he asks.

‘No,’ I lie.

‘Well, it can’t be anything bad. It’s Eden, after all. She’s probably won something again.’

‘Maybe.’

I agree to meet him at the school in an hour and then pull the blanket up to my chin.

We weren’t stupid. We had always expected some trouble along the line. We listened to our friends complain about their kids, about the drugs they had found, the insolence, the hidden tattoos, the porn on their computer history. And we shook our heads with them and said, ‘we know,’ measuring out the right balance of resignation and hurt. But we didn’t know.

We sometimes talked about reincarnation, how maybe Eden had already done life before and was back to perfect it the second—or third—time round.

Perhaps, we said, perhaps she had been a pickpocket in London, nimbly lifting wallets from the gentry on the cobbled streets. Or she had come to Australia on a ship and gotten pregnant to a convict behind her father’s mill. Perhaps she had been a flat-faced dunce, a cripple, a merciless bully. Occasionally, late at night, while her desk light cast a golden beam from beneath her bedroom door, we laughed to imagine our daughter, the school captain, in these roles. And then we slept soundly in self-congratulation.

Greg is waiting for me outside the administration building. He waves as I pull into the carpark and I look the other way. He raps on my window. ‘You’re late,’ he mouths.

We know where the principal’s office is. We have been there many times over the years, soaking up the credit for Eden’s various academic awards and sporting selections. The principal has become a friend of sorts, the way a pit crew might sometimes join the driver for celebratory drinks. But her telephone message that morning had been formal, and I lag behind Greg as he knocks on her door.

‘Come in,’ she calls.

Eden does not move as we enter, although I cannot be sure it is our daughter. Her hair is fully concealed by the hijab that falls in gentle tucks over her shoulders. I can tell Greg has not twigged yet, for he rounds the big desk and embraces the principal warmly.

‘Karen,’ he says, ‘Jeez, I owe you for getting me out of the office this fine day.’ I stand behind an empty chair and press my fingernails into the leather. And then he turns.

Eden is told to take the rest of the week off. ‘It will give you all some time to work through this properly,’ Karen said. Greg had just nodded and shook her hand weakly. He walks ahead of us to the carpark and drives away without saying goodbye.

‘He’s upset,’ Eden says, sliding into the front seat.

‘Yes, I expect he is.’

‘Are you?’ I don’t answer, and she puts her hand on my arm. ‘It’s okay, Mum. There’s nothing to be afraid of.’

‘I’m not afraid,’ I shoot back, then I realise with a shock that that is exactly what I am.

She looks out the window as we drive. I glance at her once or twice and am struck by how sharply defined her eyebrows are, how her nose has the same round tip as mine, how the line of faint acne on her jaw looks like braille. She has her father’s dark eyes, and without the curtain of hair, they seem much bigger.

‘Where did you get it?’ I finally offer.

‘The hijab? Online. I made sure I also got ones that matched the uniform.’

‘You have more?’ And I recognise how absurd the question is when there are so many other things I should know first.
We do not talk for the rest of the trip, but when I pull into the drive she smiles and says, ‘I’ll tell you everything when you’re ready.’ Then I watch this stranger unlock the house and go into Eden’s room.

I am surprised at the steadiness of my hands. When I’m ready? How could I ever be ready? Yet I find myself walking down the hall and knocking on her door.

Greg meets me at the Thai restaurant at six. He is already there when I arrive, a half-empty schooner sweating in his palms.

‘What the fuck?’ he starts. ‘Tell me it’s just a joke.’

I am suddenly tired, overwhelmed by a desire to crawl under the table and sleep. But instead I signal for a drink and tell him what I know.

‘You can’t just bloody convert to Islam,’ he says with a jagged laugh.

‘You can. And she has.’

‘But we’re goddamn Christians.’ I raise an eyebrow at this. ‘We are!’ he cries. ‘She goes to a Lutheran school. She tops Christian Studies.’

‘She tops everything,’ I murmur.

He bangs the table with his fist and the glasses jump. ‘I’m serious. It’s Eden. How could this happen?’

‘Apparently she’s been going to a mosque for a while. She’s converted, Greg.’

He runs his hands through his hair and I wonder if he is going to cry.

‘How can she be so stupid? Why can’t she just have been knocked up instead?’

We forget to order food and the waiters leave us alone through the night as we get drunk and hysterical, planning what we should wear when we visit her in the caves of Pakistan.

As agreed, Greg takes the next day off work so we can all talk together, but he hides behind his hangover till late in the morning. We do not talk that day, or the next. Instead, we drift around each other like space junk bracing for a collision with the moon. Eden just studies on the verandah, smiles when she catches us staring at her through the window, kisses us when we silently forfeit and prepare for bed.

On Friday, Greg calls me from work having read the letter first.

‘Well, that’s that then,’ he says, and I hear the relief in his voice.

He waits while I scramble to open my laptop on the kitchen bench and read the email that has been sent to both of us.

‘But they can’t do that,’ I say, and I am surprised. I didn’t expect those words to come from my mouth. Eden pauses at the fridge.

‘It looks like they can. She’ll just have to be a closet Muslim if she’s going to graduate. Or god forbid, rejoin the dark forces of Christianity.’

‘They can’t make me take it off, Mum,’ she says when I hang up the phone, and for a brief moment, she is my five-year-old daughter again.

That night, we fight at the dinner table. The roast chicken goes cold as we brandish forks in the air.

Greg skips the ideological approach. ‘We’ve paid nearly twelve years of tuition, for Chrissake. We’ve sacrificed holidays, renovations, everything for you. You can’t expect us to let you just throw it away.’

‘I’m not throwing it away. I’m not dropping out.’

But he does not hear her. ‘This is just a phase. You’ve got everything, your whole future at your fingertips and you reckon Allah wants you to sit at home instead?’

She flinches at this. ‘It’s a hijab, Dad, and I’m not dropping out. I’m staying at school, I’m going to university and I’m still going to study architecture.’

She had told me this before Greg got home, but still I realise I have been holding my breath until she said it again.

We had talked properly, Eden and I, that afternoon. She used language that had never been more than abstractions in our house: anti-discrimination, religious freedom, democracy. Yet, the whole time I just wanted to scream at her, what about your body?

We had driven to the grocery store earlier in the day. She wore a delicate floral hijab over jeans and a loose, long-sleeved shirt. I pushed the trolley slowly and sent her to fetch items at the other end of the store. I hid once, behind the cheese cabinet, and watched this child of mine search down each aisle, those giant black eyes looking for me through the glares of strangers, loping along as though nothing in this earthly world had changed.

I had always been proud of how Eden had shunned fashion’s trends and her lack of self-consciousness made her even more attractive. The curve of her breasts was never more than a matter of fact. I was ashamed to realise how proud I was of her body. I made that! She came from me! Why would she want to not show it off to the world? Surely women had come too far to now revert to this?

‘The school can’t make her leave if she keeps wearing the hijab, Greg,’ I interjected. ‘They can’t discriminate like that. Like Eden says, everyone has a right to equality.’

‘What does that even mean?’ he shouts, his peas shrinking on his plate. ‘Are we meant to all be the same or allowed to be as different as we want?’

‘It’s about choice, I guess. At least, it should be, to a degree. Anyway, she’s not hurting anybody by becoming a Muslim.’

‘Well, that’s obviously not what the school thinks.’

‘Is that what you think?’
His fork clatters on the plate and he pushes back his chair.

‘I don’t know what to think anymore,’ he says as he leaves.

We draft a response to the school together that night, draining a bottle of Shiraz as we debate appropriate word choice and tone. When we are finished, Greg slurs for Eden to come and approve the email.

‘You need a comma there,’ she says, pointing at the screen, and she kisses him on the back of his head and returns to her room.

‘You should have drunk like this when you were pregnant,’ he says to me. ‘Then we wouldn’t be in this mess.’

We are all up early. It is already hot and Greg fumbles at the back of the wardrobe for his suit, I know how hard this is for him.

We assemble in the kitchen as the sun is still shy on the horizon. We do not talk much. Greg adjusts the back of her hijab as she rinses her cup. ‘If you’re going to do this, you may as well do it right,’ he says.

We take one car. Greg is quiet during the drive, but he winds all the windows down and Eden grins in the back as her hijab flaps in the breeze.

The school carpark is still empty when we arrive, and so we wait with the air conditioning on. Finally, at twenty past eight, we get out of the car. I am careful of the hijab as I pull her to me. Greg grips her chin with his palm and just nods. Then we get back inside and watch through the windscreen as she crosses the carpark and disappears behind the shrubs into the administration building.

Ten minutes later she reappears and waves at us like a medallist on a podium.

‘That was quick,’ Greg says. We get out of the car. ‘Shouldn’t we have a battle cry or something?’

‘We can work on that later,’ I reply as we cross the carpark empty handed to where the principal sits, waiting for us, armed with an arsenal of policy and legislation.

Author
Kate Elkington is a Sunshine Coast writer whose work has appeared in Best Australian Stories, Meanjin, Overland, Westerly, Kill Your Darlings, TEXT, Tincture and others. Kate’s short story collection Wool Spin Burn was shortlisted for the 2015 Queensland Literary Awards (Unpublished Manuscript). She completed a creative writing doctorate in 2015.

Photographer Darren Smith, the Black and White of Reptiles: see more of his reptiles on the following pages in the gallery Showcase.
Since the dawn of photography there was no colour, only black and white, and some of the most intense stories in history have been told using this practice. Today it is an attractive and challenging part of artistic image making in which one of the strengths of black and white photography forces the photographer to concentrate on composition. Black and white photography, devoid of colour, asks the viewer to ponder just a little longer to reveal detail that would not normally be noticed.

Darren Smith is a professional photographer based on the Sunshine Coast. Commenting on how he became interested in photography, he says he was unable to draw, paint or sculpt and thus was drawn to photography out of a need to express his creative artistic urges. This is evident in the following series showing exceptional compositional framing, graphic shapes, strong contrast and textures of reptiles expresses the power of creative monochromatic photography. Showing strong connections to their prehistoric relatives, reptiles today display stunning armoury, beautiful shape and form. From the mesmerising curves of a coiled snake to the intricate patterns and variations of textural elements of the iguana, this series aims to explore these exquisite creatures.

Inspired by New Mexico-based leading animal photographer Brad Wilson, whose works are predominately animals on black backgrounds, Darren wanted to challenge his perception of portraiture. He has worked with animals extensively; generally these were restricted to domesticated pets.

By stripping out the colour, our senses can only be stimulated by shape, form, patterns, texture and tonality, where he feels shooting on black further heightens that experience. When shooting a photograph for black and white reproduction it is helpful to take time and consider each element and how it relates to other elements in the overall image. He takes the time to look at the quality of light in terms of tonal range, direction and specular quality for textures and then determine the optimal exposure that will augment these qualities.
SUBSCRIPTION FORM

☐ I would like to subscribe to Social Alternatives Journal

☐ I would like to purchase a gift subscription

INDIVIDUALS

☐ 1 year - 4 issues $50

☐ 2 years - 8 issues $80

INSTITUTIONS AND LIBRARIES

☐ 1 year - 4 issues $80

☐ 2 years - 8 issues $150

CONCESSIONS

☐ 1 year - 4 issues $35

☐ 2 years - 8 issues $60

Plus overseas postage of $50 per annum if applicable

PAYMENT VIA THE WEBSITE
You can subscribe or purchase a gift subscription electronically via the Social Alternatives website – www.socialalternatives.com.

PAYMENT BY EFT
Email Lee-anne@socialalternatives.com for details on how to make payments in Australian dollars to our bank account. Please include your subscription request and address details.

PAYMENT BY CHEQUE OR POSTAL ORDER
Send a cheque or Postal Order in Australian dollars to:

Social Alternatives
University of Sunshine Coast
Maroochydore DC Queensland 4556
Australia

NAME ........................................................................................................................................................................................................

ADDRESS ......................................................................................................................................................................................................

COUNTRY .................................................. POSTCODE ........................................

PAYMENT AMOUNT $..............................

BACK ORDERS

☐ I would like to order the following back issues:

Vol..............No........... Vol..............No...........

Vol..............No........... Vol..............No...........

Vol..............No........... Vol..............No...........

Vol..............No........... Vol..............No...........

Or tick which issue(s) you would like from the list over page.

PER SINGLE COPY:

Including Australian postage ............... $14

Including Overseas postage ............... $17

Subscription amount $.........................

Backorder amount $.........................

Postage amount (for overseas subscriptions) $.........................

Total amount $..............................

Please note that Social Alternatives is not obliged to charge or pay GST.
An extensive catalogue of back issues is available spanning over 30 years of publishing. BELOW is the list of issues.

- V21.1 Peace Education for a New Century
- V21.2 Nonviolence in Principle and Action
- V21.3 Unthemed edition
- V21.4 Control or Compassion? The Future of Asylum Seekers and Refugees
- V22.1 Bioethics: Cloning and Stem Cell Research
- V22.2 War, Gender & Sexuality
- V22.3 Indigenous Knowledge
- V22.4 Ideas at the Powerhouse
- V23.1 Is There a Left Left?
- V23.2 Terrorism
- V23.3 Big Lies
- V23.4 Globalisation, The Environment & Social Justice
- V24.1 Media, Mania & Government
- V24.2 Australian & International Feminisms
- V24.3 Humanitarian Intervention
- V24.4 Education for what?
- V25.1 Humiliation & History in Global Perspectives
- V25.2 Governance
- V25.3 Democracy in Danger
- V25.4 World Education
- V26.1 Counter Alternatives
- V26.2 The Nuclear Debate Revisited
- V26.3 Global Ethics
- V26.4 30th Anniversary Edition
- V27.1 Civil Society
- V27.2 Election ‘07
- V27.3 Justice & Governance in Water
- V27.4 Mental Health
- V28.1 The New Right Were Wrong
- V28.2 Global Governance
- V28.3 Australia and The Pacific
- V28.4 Utopias, Dystopias
- V29.1 Peacebuilding from below in Asia Pacific
- V29.2 Population Health in the 21st Century
- V29.3 Biodiversity in the 21st Century
- V29.4 The Visual Narrative: Alternative photographic exposures
- V30.1 The Value of Techniques
- V30.2 Shifting Cultures
- V30.3 Challenging Contemporary ‘Democracy’ and Identifying Problems
- V30.4 Pass Fail: Assessing contemporary educational reform
- V31.1 Community climate Action
- V31.2 Politics and Ethics in New Media
- V31.3 Disaster Dialogues: Representations of catastrophe in word and image
- V31.4 The Sustainability Prism: Explorations in Sustainability and Language
- V32.1 The Politics of Poverty
- V32.2 Beyond Y: The experience of youth in the 21st century
- V32.3 Refugee Policy: A highly charged issue
- V32.4 Animals, Fiction, Alternative
- V33.1 Music Politics and Environment
- V33.2 Social Alternatives Open Theme
- V33.3 The Wicked Problem of Violences in Mad Places/Spaces and People
- V33.4 A Year of Peace
- V34.1 Cosmopolitanism
- V34.2 Random Callings: Discerning the University Mission
- V34.3 Election and Aftermath
- V34.4 Youth and Precarious Work
- V35.1 Silence as a Power
- V35.2 Abbott’s War on Everything and its Casualties
- V35.3 Genders and Sexualities: Demilitarising the binary beachhead
- V35.4 The Renewal of Critical Social Work
- V36.1 Cross-Fertilising Roots and Routes
- V36.2 Performance, Community and Intervention