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A visual voice: communicating without spoken language

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Acronyms:

ASL – American Sign Language

BSL – British Sign Language

DEAFSA – Deaf Federation of South Africa

DTV – Deaf Television

FTH:K – From the hip: Khulumakahle

SANDA – South African National Deaf Association

SASL – South African Sign Language

USA – United States of America

A VISUAL VOICE: Communicating without spoken language

Introduction:

It was during my primary years of education that I first encountered the world of deaf people. The Catholic primary school I attended had annual athletics days with a deaf school in the Eastern Cape. Our school, together with children from the deaf school, competed in athletic games such as the 100 meter sprint, long distance running, high jump, long jump and javelin throwing, for a decent gold medal. I remember watching the deaf students from the grandstands as they used their hands to communicate with one another and I felt isolated. This language which I knew nothing of offended me because I desperately wanted to be a part of it. The teachers used a red flag to indicate the gun-shot which set us on our race. When it was my turn to run I tried my utmost not to listen to the gun shot and focused on that red flag instead as this would be my visual cue to run and I would be a part of that language, even if only for the split second it took for the red flag to shoot up into the sky.

Five years later I was sitting in my first South African Sign Language Studies class and that red flag opened my eyes to a world of many more opportunities. I began engaging with not only the language, but the culture of the Deaf, with Deaf communities around Johannesburg; and I completed the required three year course alongside my Dramatic Arts degree at the University of Witwatersrand.

In 2006 I experienced the work of From the hip: Khulumakahle (FTH:K), an existing theatre company in Cape Town which is nationally and internationally recognized for aiming to create work on an integrated level with Deaf and hearing performers. Their work is visually striking

and uses the theatrical style of clowning to integrate Deaf and hearing performers. Being aware of the language barrier between hearing and Deaf people, I was interested in the idea of researching a means through which Deaf people can be included in theatre. I constantly occupied my studies with means of finding and practicing a theatrical link between the language (SASL), Deaf communities, Deaf culture and Dramatic Arts. I worked within Deaf organizations when doing my Applied Theatre practical work and constantly challenged the work I created to serve as a visual experience before anything else. This research is one which has occupied my studies towards the end of my fourth year and was only able to grow through this experience of practice lead research.

I became increasingly more conscious of theatre in South Africa - the way it either includes or excludes multilingual audiences - specifically mainstream text-based theatre. By virtue of such theatre practices relying on spoken word to convey meaning, this type of theatre caters only for a hearing audience and is therefore less accessible to Deaf people. Conversely, theatre which is created by Deaf people is less accessible to hearing people. By virtue of it being a celebration of Sign Language it caters only for an audience familiar with the language. This problem of having one language dominating the other (South African Sign Language [SASL] and Spoken language) in theatre excludes audience members familiar with only one of the two languages.

FTH:K integrates Deaf and hearing performers, and I therefore consider their vision as one which is rooted in the development of Deaf and hearing performers, however, they do not aim at integrating Deaf and hearing audience members equally. The purpose of this research was not to create theatre exclusively for Deaf people but rather to find a balance through theatrical work

that is equally accessible to both Deaf and hearing audiences. I asked myself if it was possible to wave that red flag without a gun-shot in order for everyone watching to know that it was time to run regardless of whether they are Deaf or hearing. I began analyzing the language of physical theatre, an alternative vocabulary used within performance. This language is non-verbal and uses the human body in space to convey a message. This research looks at specific performances which are categorized as physical theatre and draws from their use of the body and visual elements. I constantly questioned whether these theatrical styles would work within a group of Deaf and hearing performers/creators if the group was established by me. I closed my ears and *listened with my eyes* (FTH:K slogan). Would the means in which these physical performances take shape allow the audience to be included equally regardless of their primary language? Thus the investigation began on a practice based level within the group.

The purpose of this study was not to create theatre exclusively for Deaf people but rather to find a balance in theatrical work that is equally accessible to both Deaf and hearing audiences. I conducted a survey within the Deaf community to find an approximation of how many Deaf people watch theatre, specifically in Johannesburg, as this is the geographical base/location of the research. This research began as an analytical investigation of an existing body of work that of physical theatre, that does not rely on the spoken word/text to drive a narrative. This study challenges what FTH: K calls 'theatrical clowning' and questions whether this form of theatre is ideal or limiting for a group of people with no background training in theatre. It also challenges the use of theatrical signing which has been used in companies (such as the National Theatre of the Deaf in the United States). Having analyzed both, this research is geared towards implementing proposed strategies in order to include both types of audience members.

The central aim of this study by was to create a theatrical group consisting of both Deaf and hearing performer/creators and through a devised process, to create a performance that is more accessible to a mixed audience of Deaf and hearing people. The group consists of the following people:

- a Deaf member of South African National Deaf Association (SANDA), who will be referred to as Joe for the duration of this study;
- a Deaf SASL tutor from the University of Witwatersrand (Wits), who will be referred to as IMO;
- two hearing Drama students from Wits studying SASL who will be referred to as Leonie and Mthokozisi;
- one hearing Music student from Wits, familiar with SASL who will be referred to as the musician;
- as well as an SASL interpreter from the Wits Sign Language Department who will be referred to as the interpreter for the duration of this study.

Over the past three years, I had undertaken either Applied Theatre or Drama projects with each of the above individuals. Based on this, I had already set up a relationship with each person before this study and as such, they were perfect candidates for this project. Each member had expressed a strong desire to increase integration between the Deaf and hearing worlds, both generally and specifically in relation to theatre. This research report is centered on ideas of Practice-based Research; an exploration of theory and practice in action; and an investigation of conceived strategies through which I have asked the following questions:

1. What theatrical styles can be used by Deaf and hearing performers for theatre to reach Deaf and hearing audiences equally?
2. Does the elimination of spoken language serve as the only integrated strategy?
3. How can the use of sound/music be generated to accommodate Deaf audiences?

(The main question that was asked during the practice of this research is related to the various studies that have already been done within physical theatre and questions how they could be modified and used to create an equal experience).

Terms used within the research

A number of terms are used throughout this research paper, these will be highlighted in the paragraphs below.

The writing of Deaf with an uppercase 'D' is most commonly used as this is used to indicate the cultural identity of a Deaf person, one who uses Sign Language (in South Africa: SASL) as a first language and does not acknowledge the use of lip reading and hearing aids. The lowercase 'd' is used for someone who uses spoken language as a primary language and relies on lip reading and/or hearing aids. It is separate from self-identifying with the language of the culture (Morgan 2008: 6).

A common error most people make is assuming that sign language is a universal language and it is important to state that this is not true. Sign Language varies in the same way that spoken language varies according to age or geographical location (Morgan 2008: 9). There are different dialects of sign language, for example in America they use American Sign Language (ASL); Britain uses British Sign Language (BSL) and South Africa uses South African Sign Language

(SASL). Throughout this research paper, the correct the correct name of the sign language being referred to will be specified, however when speaking of the language across the world in a general manner, the term 'sign language' will be used.

Dymphna Callery's book *Through the Body* (2001) has played a major role in the definition of physical theatre for this practice-based research. She argues that many practitioners who work through a visual language do not accept the term 'physical theatre' as the term defies conventional views of what makes up theatre (2001: 6). However, the term 'physical theatre' is used throughout this research because it focuses on one of the key features which falls under this category, i.e it challenges text-based theatre and shifts away from Stanislavsky's approach of interpreting a role (Callery 2001: 3). Physical theatre comprises many different practices put forth from various theorists, this practice-based research is a multi-layered practice and therefore the term 'theatrical style' is used throughout this research when defining a specific theatre practice used during the discovery of a working method. For example FTH:K uses the theatrical style of clowning, Jacques Lacoq explores the theatrical style of mime, Fresco Theatre uses the theatrical style of puppetry. The term could similarly be understood as genre, form or type of theatre practice.

CHAPTER 1

HEAR NO EVIL: Deaf people as a minority

Deaf people across the world have been pushed into the field of medical intervention and through this, forced into a system of acquiring hearing. This includes procedures such as cochlear implants, hearing aids as well as acquiring spoken language through speech and hearing therapy due to the theory that deaf people should interact with the hearing world (Branson and Miller 2002: 152). This mandatory entrance into mainstream society, which is predominantly a spoken language culture, has excluded deaf people across the world and has caused a struggle for deaf people to communicate effectively and efficiently within mainstream society.

Oralism and total communication used within schools for Deaf children has had a hugely negative impact on the lives of Deaf children (Morgan 2008:188). Oralism used in schools simply implies spoken language - students are required to lip read what their teachers are saying and answer through speaking. Total communication includes lip reading; spoken language and signed exact English which does not allow pupils to gain a primary language. Despite articulations in the South African Constitution of 1996, which states that Deaf people have the right to use the language and participate in the culture of their choice (Act No. 30, Chapter 2 of the constitution), communication problems are still evident in Deaf schools because most teachers are not fluent in South African Sign Language (SASL). The figures below, provided by DeafSA (Deaf Federation of South Africa), prove the lack of inclusive education and employment within mainstream society for Deaf people in South Africa. Karen Van Rooyen (2009) writes about these figures: South Africa has 40 deaf schools, 10 of which are academically focused and the remainder focus on practical skills such as speech therapy

(teaching learners how to acquire speech). 12 of these 40 schools offer grades up to matric (grade 12) and there is one college in South Africa, situated in the Western Cape (Worcester) which offers courses for Deaf people to study towards Diplomas in Cosmetics, Construction and Office Practice as opposed to mainstream higher degrees such as Law, Engineering and Medicine (Van Rooyen 2009). These figures not only confirm that Deaf people in South Africa are marginalized by mainstream society but they also inspire many countries including South Africa to fight for the rights to a language which exists within Deaf communities: a Signed Language.

Countries such as the United States of America and Australia have succeeded in this long struggle to gain the language official status. South Africa however only acknowledges the language (SASL) as a medium of instruction within the field of Education for some Deaf individuals but still fails to give the language official status.

> 1.6 million people in South Africa use SASL as a first language, this figure is higher than those speakers of four of the eleven official languages, namely Tsonga (1.3 million), Swazi (926 000), Ndebele (799 000) and Venda (763 00) (Crawhall 1995:2).

Despite the above figure, the language still remains marginalized. This in turn means that Deaf culture remains unrecognized. The failure to acknowledge the language has caused damage within the Education system for Deaf learners, and this damage penetrates into the employment system for Deaf adults as well. Of the 19 life stories shared by the Deaf people around South Africa in *Deaf Me Normal* (Morgan 2008), only one positive work experience within the hearing world emerged. However, the person who experienced the positive employment has sufficiently

good spoken Afrikaans and was an excellent lip reader, both of which aid her greatly in communicating adequately with hearing people (205).

With Deaf people experiencing difficulty communicating in the education, employment and political systems in this country, this research strives to put forward and attain an equal status for Deaf people within the Arts, to provide a style of performing which is inclusively available to a mixed audience. The Arts provides a platform for the communication of social and political issues and in addition also offers a platform for diverse, multicultural audiences to be entertained. These ideas began to connect the motivation and the practice for this research.

In America there has been full acknowledgment of Deaf culture and signed language, with developments and acceptance having gone as far as the establishment of the first Deaf University (Gallaudet University), which allows Deaf people to further their studies in an environment with lecturers who are fluent in American Sign Language. America has also established a Theatre (National Theatre of the Deaf in the United States), which performs a wide range of the world's literature in American Sign Language (ASL). Although this has integrated many Deaf performers into the world of theatre, unlike FTH:K, the performances created by the National Theatre of the Deaf in the United States has a dominating language: ASL. This leads to the main reason for conducting this research study: There is a need to find a theatrical style which allows theatre to be created for an audience mixed with Deaf and hearing people; and to provide a form of theatre which is inclusive without the dominance of one specific spoken or signed language.

Deaf individuals in South Africa do have access to mainstream theatre (they can purchase a ticket and watch a show), however due to the nature of it being text-based; spoken and/or sung, this research suggests that Deaf people are in fact excluded. Small independently established Deaf Drama groups exist in Johannesburg within schools and organizations. One such example is a group of children at Sizwile School for the Deaf situated in Soweto (South Africa's largest township). However, much like the National Theatre of the Deaf in the USA, they serve to make theatre for the Deaf community, excluding people unfamiliar with SASL. This research is necessary in order to achieve a level of equality within the Arts, so that as a country we can develop theatre which strives to create work with Deaf and hearing performers combined.

FTH:K, an existing company has been running since 2005 and aims to transform the South African theatre industry by developing Deaf and hearing actor-creators within the arts (publicity material 2006). The company uses the theatrical style of clowning and showcases work which does not contain a dominant signed or spoken language, therefore aiming towards inclusion for both Deaf and hearing audiences. As the only existing company in South Africa which does work with Deaf and hearing people, I have been interested in the ways in which the company has removed all language (spoken and SASL) and rather focused on the use of the body in space as well as the use of scenic devices (bringing life to objects). The company not only produces award winning performances but also integrates the Deaf into the performing Arts world through their Tell-Tale Signs program. This program, which is the spine of the company, trains Deaf artists in order to include them in the professional performing Arts industry (Surtees: 27 August 2010). This company has been used as a case study in this research and I have

attended the performances of their festival *Listen with your Eyes: a festival of the visual* held in Johannesburg 26 August – 26 September 2010.

Although the company has eliminated spoken language and SASL by integrating Deaf and hearing performers, it was through viewing their two new shows *QUACK!* and *Womb Tide*, that I became aware of the heavy dependence on a sound track. This is something that bothered me, as it automatically eliminates Deaf audience members because the sound is not visible in its making. Despite the common knowledge that Deaf people can feel vibrations, not every theatre provides amplified speakers under each chair or on the floor in order for vibrations to be felt, therefore any sound played is unheard and unfelt, thus making theatre less accessible. When interviewing FTH:K director Tanya Surtees (27 August 2010), I questioned why they provide such detailed soundtracks and background music if Deaf audiences cannot hear them. Her response was that they do not create performances for only a Deaf audience as a target market but rather aim to create a space where Deaf people can perform in the Arts to be viewed by a hearing audience, therefore creating work which includes the use of sound effects for a hearing audience to receive. This highlights the problem put forward through this research: Deaf and hearing audiences are unable to view theatre equally by virtue of the fact that sound and music are audible features, thus deaf audiences receive less of the performance. Mood is not only depicted by sound, therefore this study explores how live sound is able to create a visual language through visual rhythm.

A profound alternative theatre is developing across the world. This kind of theatre challenges text-based theatre and does not rely on words. This alternative space began with

theatrical work such as mime and has developed into many different schools. Mime has not existed on its own, there are many different names for this alternative theatre – 'physical theatre, theatre of objects, visual theatre' and all of these are courses in their own right (McCaw 2007: 9). It became evident, that these developments within alternative forms of theatre are most ideal to use when working towards a performance with Deaf and hearing performer/creators, as they do not rely on the word as a main means of carrying the message.

Callery suggests that physical theatre is constantly redefining mainstream text-based theatre - it seeks to find an alternative response through the body and not the voice (2001:3). In South Africa, the term physical theatre has been used to describe anything from contemporary dance to mime. Companies in South Africa such as Matchbox Theatre Collective, Fresco Theatre, Dark Laugh Theatre and Fortune Cookie have been using a more visual form of theatre rather than dance for the past six years.

On an international scale, Mummenschanz (a Swiss theatre group founded in 1972) can be seen as the first theatre company which set out to create a non-verbal theatrical language, a language that would go beyond barriers such as tradition, culture and nationality. The company uses familiar everyday material, such as cardboard boxes, toilet paper and refuse bags to create original costumes and highly expressive masks that change into captivating and funny creatures on stage. For more than three decades the company has produced characters portraying everyday situations and these performances have been effortlessly understood by audiences of all ages and across all cultures (publicity material 2011). I was fortunate enough to attend one of their performances in Johannesburg at the Joburg Theatre during their run 12-17 April 2011. I was

captivated by the visual language which unfolded in front of my eyes - children and adults of all races and cultural backgrounds responded in the same manner. It appeared that the performance was received by the audience on an equal level through the use of their visual language due to the united response of laughter and amazement. No spoken words were used. Instead whole body masks were used to create images in space and these served as the language through which they communicated. Mummenschanz has been successful for three decades using the approach of this alternative theatre of images. However the company does not serve to include exclusively Deaf and/or hearing audience members and it does not combine Deaf and hearing performers. This again highlights the importance of this research, which is to not only find a theatrical style which allows theatre to be created for a mixed audience of Deaf and hearing people, but to create this type of theatre with Deaf and hearing performers/creators.

This chapter has shown that deaf people are a minority group in South Africa with limited rights. They are a group of people who do not have the privilege of being included within mainstream society by virtue of this society being a hearing society which does not acknowledge the importance of SASL. Within the Arts, there has been much development around a theatre language which can be inclusive across all languages however, little has been done with the Arts to create theatre in which Deaf and hearing people come together both as performers and audiences. Furthermore little has been done in so far as the creation of a language for this kind of performance. To create a theatre culture of equality amongst deaf and hearing people, I set out a practice-based research theatre project that would explore the possibilities of a Deaf and hearing ensemble working together to create a visual theatre for all. I aimed and hoped to find a balance for such multi-lingual audiences. Chapter Two acknowledges

and analyzes the broad spectrum of physical theatre, locally as well as internationally, focusing specifically on visual theatre companies and their approach. Chapter Two also analyzes the theory of semiotics within theatre.

CHAPTER TWO

A THEATRE LANGUAGE: Concepts guiding this research

This chapter is divided into two parts under different headings namely: 'Words, Signs and Actions' and 'Bodies, Gestures and Pictures'. The section under the former heading considers theatre as a sign system to propose meaning and action. The latter section introduces the reader to physical theatre and genres within the field which guide this research. With examples from works created by physical theatre companies, this chapter explores the relevance of semiotics in their work.

Words, Signs and Actions

In Boal's chapter *Poetics of the Oppressed*, he discusses theatre projects in communities which experience language barriers and suggests that theatre offers an alternative vocabulary, a non-verbal vocabulary: the human body. Through this articulation, a clear point of departure became visible for this study, that it is possible to utilize the vocabulary of the human body within the multi-lingual group of Deaf and hearing performers/creators. 'All of us express ourselves – unconsciously or not, with or without the desire to communicate – by means of gesture' (Lecoq 2006: 6). Reading this, it is clear why productions such as *Pictures of You* by FTH:K (viewed at the National Arts Festival 2008) aim to include hearing and Deaf audiences because of the existing expressive language of gesture which Lecoq speaks of. The performance places everyday gestures on stage and with the actors wearing stylized masks, it theatrically becomes a silent film. This is one of the key theatrical styles used by Mummenschanz; through the use of everyday gestures on stage, the company effectively communicates messages and various emotions to the audience members.

However, Roland Barthes (1977) argues that we live in a culture of writing, that even when looking at an image we look at the linguistic message accompanying that image before understanding it. He further suggests that 'writing and speech continuing to be the full terms of the informational structure' (Barthes 1977: 38). Even cartoon comic strip language does not exist as an image alone, it makes use of linguistic messages such as the words "POW" and "KABOOM" which accompany the illustrations. One begins to question whether this type of language would be successful in theatre and to what degree it could serve, if at all as a theatrical style. Text and dialogue within a performance form part of the 'informational structure' for an audience to receive. By removing this as a sign-system with only the image as part of the informational structure, one is challenging the audience to view only the image and understand its meaning or subtext. This is a challenging concept, understanding theatre as a sign-system, specifically the reading of images and the design of a production. Yet it is not a new concept, physical theatre also requires an audience to actively interpret the meaning because it is dominantly 'scenographic' (Murray and Keefe 2007: 35). The set, props, costumes and stage space all make up the physical and visual signs of the informational structure. Murray and Keefe further suggest that theatre is able to comprise of a performance text in both structure and content, allowing theatre to not only be read through its text, but also through the physical and visual structures. It is a concept of theatre semiotics that has been developed over many years, one which the Prague School were first to recognize. Jiri Veltrusky, a scholar from the Prague School who wrote specifically on modernist avant-garde theatre, explains that in theatre a lifeless object can be seen as a performing subject because 'all that is on stage is a sign' (1964: 84-85).

Meaning everything placed within the theatrical frame has a meaning and can be included in the sign-system of theatre which physical theatre achieves.

In the production *Womb Tide* by FTH:K (viewed at the National Arts Festival 2010), the actors make use of scenic devices (props) to convey parts of the story which cannot be done physically such as the use of a balloon as an illustration of pregnancy and the spilling of egg yolk to create the image of a miscarriage. I use the words 'illustration' and 'image' because that is exactly what the performance becomes; a comic strip without the speech bubbles. This imagery within a performance without spoken language as a dominant conveyor of meaning is what can be called physical theatre. *Womb Tide* makes use of metaphor in the scenes illustrating conception, pregnancy and miscarriage without the use of a linguistic message accompanying the images, yet the illustrations are extremely simple to read and make sense of. The same metaphoric language is witnessed in the production *Le Carnival* (viewed at the Wits Theatre 2010) by Matchbox Theatre Collective in which the performers make use of an oversized bee drawing nectar from a large flower to indicate intercourse taking place. Both productions challenge Bathes statement 'we are still, and more than ever, a civilization of writing' (1977:38) because they make use of such scenic devices as an information structure to replace what could have been conveyed otherwise, through spoken word.

Barthes continues arguing that in order to find images without words one needs to go back to illiterate societies, 'to a sort of pictographic state of the image' (1977: 38). Examples of these kinds of societies are found throughout history – this is known through the various images of cave men and in South Africa, through the images of the Khoi and the San during colonial

times. While these societies are often described as illiterate, this research argues that, through their visual communication through pictographic messages, they were able to communicate as much as one who is literate does, through writing and reading. Connecting to SASL, many attempts have been made to study the linguistics of SASL, as it is a highly expressive language through signs and visual images. Oliver Sacks argues that on the surface the language may seem as simple as mime and gesture; however it is a language in space (Sacks 1990: 88). The term syntax refers to rules and principles which govern the sentence structure of any language.

When one looks at the syntax of SASL, it can be understood in three parts: the shape of the hand; the number of hands used and the signing space used. The same applies to a pictographic language; the pictures can be decoded depending on various aspects related to the image as is done in *Le Carnival* and *Womb Tide*. Theatre semiotics is a vital concept which relates to this study due to the nature of this work being highly visual but communicative. Physical theatre makes use of scenography as a theatrical style, borrowing from this concept, the understanding that everything and everyone placed on stage is significant to the style of work created for this study. The lights, sound, movement and scenic devices need to be carefully constructed in order for them to be used as part of the sign-system within the performance.

Bodies, Gesture and Pictures

In recent years, research in the area of nonverbal communication has verified that words comprise only about 10 percent of human communication while nonverbal behavior makes up all the rest (Moore and Yamamoto 1988: 1). What Moore and Yamamoto refer to is a type of universal language which is non-verbal, a language which is based on behavior and relationships.

This begins to form the idea of a visual language. Drawing from Lecoq's idea of gesture, Moore and Yamamoto suggest that human beings understand each other through non-verbal communication. Working within a multilingual group, this concept is essential to this study as the group needs to first and foremost understand communicating through body language. The notion of using one's body as an expressive tool in relation to performance is not a new one.

Physical theatre has many characteristics and is impossible to define. As mentioned earlier, physical theatre challenges text-based theatre and shifts away from Stanislavsky's approach of interpreting a role (Callery 2001:3). South African companies like Fresco Theatre, Dark Laugh Theatre and Fortune Cookie have consistently been creating theatre which challenges text-based theatre. This is especially evident in performances such as *The Travelers* (viewed at the National Arts Festival 2005), *The Butcher Brothers* (viewed at the National Arts Festival 2010) and *Kaput* (viewed at the National Arts Festival 2010). All three rely heavily on the use of visual images: mainly the set design as well as a sense of body language. Although *Kaput* makes use of spoken language, the set design and the use of puppetry sets up the metaphor of the story and emotions between the characters. *Kaput* uses miniature puppetry to portray specific spaces as well as activity which cannot be physically shown, such as the outside of the childhood house and moving to the current house or a man on a camel in the dessert. In an interview with Helen Iskander, who is the co-founder of the Fresco Theatre Company, Iskander mentions how the company begins to devise work by firstly thinking in pictures, and then approaches the story from the physical as opposed to Stanislavsky's notion of beginning with the psychological (Iskander: 10 August 2010).

The idea of thinking in pictures, a starting point for the work produced by the Fresco Theatre Company, is further developed by Callery who suggests that this is an ideal point of departure when conceptualizing a performance.

> The key point is that whether your starting point is a style of performance or an idea about content, the process begins with generating visual material: characters, action, images, all from physical improvisation (Callery 2001; 172).

Callery breaks down this notion of creating work without texts. She specifies how the main component of physical theatre is the devising part of the work and that the training exercises of the body offer an alternative way of working and discovering in the same way that writing exercises do (Callery 2001; 164). Working with a group of Deaf and hearing people, the creation phase of this research involved working through the body as opposed to using a text or writing material to begin developing a play without text. This process included firstly, working through the body as the group consisted of two members who were unfamiliar with the notion of the expressive body; in addition as the process borrowed from Iskander's ideas around thinking in pictures as a starting point for creating work.

> The emphasis is on the actor-as-creator rather than the actor-as-interpreter; the working process is collaborative; the working practice is somatic; the stage-spectator relationship is open; and the live-ness of the theatre medium is paramount (Callery 2001:5).

Callery suggests five key features which serve the broad model of physical theatre, placing huge importance on the role of the actor - one of these features is, to create the work during the process as opposed to interpreting a scripted text with the bodies. This is a core concept

throughout this research as the participants enter the working space as actors-creators. FTH:K makes use of this concept within their company naming their participants "performer-creators". In physical theatre, the actor-creator works alongside the choreographer/director during the process because it is necessary for the performers to be involved in the creation of the work. This is further explained as follows:

> A piece of theatre is, ultimately, in the hands of those who are performing it. The actors. It is they, not the director, who must have a whole piece in their every gesture, hearing the meaning in each word. And to do that I think, as an actor, you have to feel that you possess the piece. And to possess the piece you have to be part of its creation. Involved intimately in the process of its making (Irving 2003; 80).

The above quote expands on the idea of group collaboration. In this process, my role was not that of director of the performance but rather facilitator/director/researcher. I guided the participants through the process and then implemented certain aspects of theatre when required. The product was entirely in their hands, and they needed to be part of its creation becoming performer/creator and not just performer as in being told what to do.

Secondly, the creation of physical theatre work is done through a collaborative working method. The performance is made by 'an ensemble dedicated to discovering a collective imagination' (Callery 2001; 5) and it is therefore essential to build trust and have a closed group working together as if it were a theatre company. One of the key features of physical theatre is that it is devised theatre, meaning the performers begin without a scripted piece of work and generate the work throughout the rehearsal period or use an existing text as source material. This study is rooted in the creation of theatrical work and collaboration as a group of performer/creators as opposed to a written text translated into SASL. As Callery states:

> …for a company, training is time spent working to a common purpose, a way of enriching the ensemble and accessing a common physical vocabulary, a route towards collective creative energy (2001; 19).

A third feature of physical theatre is that the practice is somatic, meaning that the main way of creating work is through the body as opposed to through the mind because as Lecoq puts it, 'the body knows things about which the mind is ignorant' (as cited by Callery 2001; 4). The relationship between actor and spectator is a feature of physical theatre and Callery states that the actor-spectator relationship in physical theatre is one which is open.

In the production *Kaput*, which uses puppetry, space plays a major role in the actor-spectator relationship in the sense that there is a specific space allocated to the puppetry and a specific space allocated to the bodies in the space. The space sets up a convention that when the window shutters are opened, the audience can expect details of the story to be told through puppets and when they are closed the people performing are the main concern. The performance also makes use of eye-contact, including the audience in action and dialogue which ask for empathy from the viewers. The notion of the actor-spectator relationship being open drives this research towards an equal access by audience members. This research will not achieve complete equality from the mixed audience members if it is only received by the hearing audience or only by the Deaf audience in isolation as is evidenced through the work of the National Theatre of the Deaf in the USA.

The National Theatre of the Deaf in the USA features Deaf actors who communicate through ASL and "theatrical signing", which is an expansion of the conventional signs in order

to create a more dramatic effect. The sign is extended in various ways much like Sign Poetry, in other words a sign which is usually signed with one hand is done with two hands and conventional signs which indicate an action is taken into the whole body or dramatized by more than one person (Cohen 1989: 68). The actors for these performances are all Deaf and Hilary Cohen explains that the performance, which is intended for a hearing audience, is done in order to display the skill of Deaf actors as well as for the hearing majority to accept Signed Language (Cohen 1989: 69). Although it begins to create a stylized mode of expression (one that can be closely linked with physical theatre), this sort of theatre begins to exclude hearing audiences who have no knowledge of Sign Language. It fails to bring the two cultures together through theatre – a space through and in which an audience can share the viewing of various narratives. It ultimately perpetuates the idea that one language *"must"* dominate the other.

This chapter critically analyzed the concept of semiotics which provides an overview of the way in which signs are read in theatre. It also introduced key features of physical theatre and focused on the ways in which this might aid the working method used for this research. Chapter three introduces and justifies the use of practice-as research as a methodology for this research project and dissertation.

CHAPTER 3

A SUPPLEMENT TO, NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR: Practice-as-Research as Methodology

> The emergence of the discipline of practice-led research highlights the crucial interrelationship that exists between theory and practice and the relevance of theoretical and philosophical paradigms for the contemporary arts practitioner (Barrett 2007:1).

Estelle Barrett speaks of the rising research methodology which offers scholars within the Arts the ability to inform their practical research on a greater level. Through practice, this research methodology can be understood as a mode of academic research offering analytical inquiry into creative work. As Barrett further suggests, practice-as-research allows for both theory and practice to co-exist within the academic field. There has been much criticism regarding practical activities versus the academic, as the academic has been regarded as more legitimate due to it being text-based. The academic has produced written material unlike practical activities such as performance studies which is located in the moment the practitioner discovers something physically.

> A vexed issue for many artistic researchers is related to the need for the artist/researcher to write down about his or her own work in the research report or exegesis. In the creative arts, the outcomes that emerge from an alternative logic of practice are not always easy to articulate and it can be difficult to discuss work objectively given the intrinsically emotional and subjective dimensions of the artistic process. How then, might the artist as researcher avoid on the one hand, what has been referred to as 'auto-connoisseurship', the undertaking of a thinly veiled labour of valorising what has been achieved in the creative work, or alternatively producing a research report that is mere description or history? (As cited in Barrett, E and B, Bolt. 2007: 135)

Alternative ways of documenting a practical process need to be found and implemented. Some of the following could possibly offer entry-points to this process: detailed video footage, descriptive journaling, mapping out one's journey from start to end, having a focused group of people for whom the practical is intended and also perhaps, by choosing specific moments within the practice to theorize about the practice as opposed to describing each activity as a historical encounter. However for practice-as-research, there are no set guidelines for how scholars should conduct their research as long as their research is grounded in practice which forms part of the research. It must be understood that creative research practice is not by any means a substitute for written research, but it becomes instead a supplement to the written (Conquergood 1999: 318). This means that although it is grounded in practice, practice-as-research does not deny the importance of theory; and therefore performance pieces can stand alongside published research. Conquergood suggests multiple reasons for creative work to be developed:

> …they deepen experiential and participatory engagement with material for both the researcher and her audience; they provide a dynamic and rhetorically compelling alternative to conference papers; they offer a more accessible and engaging format for sharing research and reaching communities outside academia; they are a strategy for staging interventions (2004: 318).

The creative work for this specific research project was developed to provide a deeper experiential and participatory engagement with material for myself as researcher, the participants as creators and the mixed audience as a focus group. A deeper experiential and participatory engagement was sought through this research in the sense that the creative work consists of multiple theatrical styles and offers these theatrical styles as a working method for both a Deaf and a hearing group. The practice developed a greater understanding of signs in theatre and special relations for the audience through the experiment. It offers an audience mixed with Deaf

and hearing people access to and engagement with the research and thus the creative work is able to reach broader communities outside of academia for the purpose of entertainment.

In addition to the entertainment factor, the broadening of the audience also aided in the analysis of whether the theoretical ideas of the study apply or not, because the study is aimed at how the audience receives the performance. This deeper engagement with the performance piece by communities outside of academia will be further discussed in the reflection of how the audience received the performance, as a focused group discussion was held after the performance was attended.

John O' Toole writes extensively on drama research and has identified a means of research for Drama educators and facilitators. He speaks about practice-as research as a methodology for research enquiry, however he calls it 'Arts-based enquiry', which means creating a piece of artwork and using that process to examine a research question perhaps about the structure or processes of dramatic art' (2006: 58). I selected to operate within this research methodology because this research is about creating a piece of artwork in order to examine my research questions and these questions are entirely based on the process and the structure of a physical, visual theatre. Practice-as research allows me to stay within the borders of both academia and practice. This praxis offers a means for practice which consciously 'articulates the theory on which it is based, and in turn generates new theory' (O' Toole 2006: 21).

CHAPTER 4

LISTENING WITH MY EYES: Generating a working method

This Chapter offers a detailed description of the Drama process and examines the working method generated from the practice-based research. Having listened with my eyes, I have put the research into methodology and created a working method. This chapter breaks down the working method which has been generated from the case study FTH:K and various physical theatre companies as well as theorists such as Callery and Boal. I have analyzed the case study, watched an extensive amount of physical theatre, analyzed Callery's methods and I have borrowed from various theatrical styles and modified them to generate a practice which can be used in the process of the group collaboration. The research methodology originally consisted of five phases. This report has reduced the phases to three guiding stages to the research namely: *The Surveying Phase, The "understanding of the body" Phase and The Creation Phase.*

The Surveying Phase

It is an unfair assumption to make, that Deaf people do not in fact attend theatre. Therefore I created a survey through a questionnaire (see Appendix A) which posed questions to people in Deaf communities about the way in which they viewed the culture of theatre. Through this, the aim was to ascertain why it appears that a large majority of the Deaf community feels that theatre is for an exclusively hearing culture. These surveys were conducted specifically with members of SANDA and DeafSA in Johannesburg, as well as Deaf students studying at Wits University. This part of the research was done in order to offer a different point of view. The people who filled in the questionnaire were asked to attend the performance. This part of the research was not intended for the purpose of quantitative research as the sample numbers are

small; but rather to provide somewhat of an analytic impression. The Deaf community members from SANDA all responded in a similar manner - that they wish to watch theatre with Deaf performers in it. From this response, critical questions about the integration came about such as: whether it is in fact not the style used in the performance which integrates the two worlds equally (Deaf and hearing) but rather the integration and equality first and foremost seen on stage.

Part of the surveying included a post performance survey for the audience to answer (see Appendix B). The same group who answered the pre-performance questionnaire were invited to the performance to view it and to participate in the second questionnaire, after having seen the show. This ensured that the focus group remained the same and thus follow through could be related through answers from the same audience both before and after the show. However, after evaluating the questionnaires answered pre and post performance it came to my attention that many Deaf people have a low level of English literacy as they are not familiar with the language, both at the level of reading or writing, largely due to the Education system for Deaf learners. Therefore the questionnaire was less successful than anticipated and thus the outcomes were a limitation of this study. The importance and value of having a focused group discussion after the performance thus became even more important for the Deaf and hearing audience members to share their views of the performance and the research at hand. The focus group was recorded to form part of this research however, the footage is not included in this paper as the audio was of poor quality during the capturing of the discussion.

Although the research was process driven, the final product forms part of this research in order to answer the set research questions. The process feeds the product, the product feeds the

focus group and all three parts have aided in the compilation of this final research report. How the product successfully integrates both audience members (Deaf and hearing) could only have been answered by the audience. The conversation amongst the focus group was facilitated by a M.A Applied Theatre graduate (with an interpreter included) after the work was viewed. The audience engaged with questions around important concepts and conclusions from the practice as well as the questions asked in this research. An important factor was whether the music served as an integrating strategy or not, how it was received as well as how it could be further developed. These findings will be articulated in more detail in the concluding chapter of this research report.

The Understanding of the Body Phase

Dymphna Callery is one of the main theorists/practitioners used in this study as her practical guide to physical theatre begins with the understanding of preparing one's body. The book consists of exercises which begin to prepare one's body for it to tell a physical story in devising theatre without words. It was useful in this study as the Deaf participants in this research have no background in physical training. It was also useful as her writings offer newcomers to physical theatre (such as myself) a detailed understanding of creating work through the body resulting in a progressive journey during this process. During the interview with Tanya Surtees from FTH:K, she expressed concern with the training of the Deaf participants for this research. She suggested that I follow through with this research using a group of participants from their Tell-Tale Signs programme as it was not easy to train non-drama ready participants within a period of six weeks. However, I chose to decline her offer as I felt that this research could develop its own method of training and of creating of a theatre language. Another reason for

declining came from the notion that training in physical theatre is not necessarily as vigorous and technical as it may seem. As Callery expands:

> Ideally preparatory training should be a process of self-discovery as well as an opportunity to master skills…Physical training is a process leading to creative freedom rather than a prescriptive set of techniques…It is not body fascism. It does not mean 'gym-fever'…Preparatory training for actors is about attaining a more neutral body (Callery 2001: 19).

The Tell-Tale signs programme offers four levels of skills development which offers Deaf learners access to theatre training in order to facilitate the integration of these Deaf artists into South African theatre. Level one includes training within Deaf schools addressing drama and dance; Level two sources Deaf learners from the schools to continue on an intermediate training programme; Level three includes performing arts management skills and; Level four sources these graduates to fill full-time positions within the company.

As much as the Tell-Tale signs programme is the 'spine' of FTH:K, this research was a six week group collaboration and would not be a space for learning specific techniques such as mime and dance. It was a space for rediscovering the body; its suppleness, flexibility and sensitivity as these are 'the key aims for actors…the actor needs to be sensitive throughout the body' (Callery 2001: 19). In the same manner FTH:K produces a constructive background to their students in level one of their Tell-Tale signs programme, the bulk of the process working with the participants in this research was focused on the preparation of one's body such as an unturned musical instrument is tuned to present something solid. I divided the workshop up into different categories, beginning with building trust and introducing one another in order to create a strong ensemble. We then moved onto an understanding of the body which included

preparation of one's body for physical work. Further, theatre concepts such as character, objective, surrounding, etc. were unpacked. Only after having covered these basic concepts could we begin creating the performance. This served the participants in familiarizing themselves with the use of the body in physical theatre and understanding performative principles.

Building trust and containing the group was achieved firstly by ensuring that the nature of the group would be closed, meaning there would not be a continuing influx of participants. Because the process was a devised one, it was important for the group members to build relationships and trust with each individual without having to adapt to newcomers each week. New group members would have disrupted the trust built as well as the dynamics amongst the group members. Because the process was facilitated by me, it was important for the group to have an SASL interpreter present to avoid the complexity of facilitating and interpreting at the same time. The group met for two hours from Monday to Saturday for a period of 6 weeks. I worked very closely with the exercises inspired by Dymphna Callery. The first step was to ensure trust and create a working contract for our time spent together in order to create a strong ensemble.

Callery offers ensemble exercises related to a concentrated energy within the group, however she suggests these exercises at a later stage of her step to step guide to collaboration. One particular exercise, which would be repeated during the six weeks, provided the group with re-energised synergy and energy. This exercise is called "Pass the stick" and reads as follows:

> Pass the stick
> Standing in a circle, everyone holds a stick in their right hand.
> On the signal they pass the sticks clockwise round the circle.
> Each person takes a new stick in their right hand and passes
> it to their left hand before sending it on its way.
> The idea is to establish a seamless flow of sticks round the circle.
> On a signal, change direction and send the sticks anti-clockwise.
> (Callery 2001: 31)

The exercise proved to unite the ensemble once more each time they lacked commitment or energy as a collective. The exercise is used in order for the actors to gain a sense of each other's energy as well as to maintain the collective energy on stage as they perform together. Through her understanding of how energy is related to performance rhythm, this one concept allowed for Joe (one of the Deaf participants) to be able to be completely in sync with Mthokozisi (one of the hearing participants) and vice versa during their scenes together. Both maintained a sense of the collective during scenes with defined beats and moments of action.

The process moved into the preparation of the non-Drama ready group for physical work, especially creating awareness of one's body and how it moves. One of the many exercises used in identifying the body and isolating certain parts was an exercise by Tufnell and Crickmay (1990: 1-37) as it allowed for each individual to find calm within the body as well as elongation through the spine. Understanding that the exercise requires the participants to engage with their bodies and listen to the weight, pain and laziness in certain parts of their body, I modified the exercise to become somewhat of a 'check in' with each part of their bodies. Tufnell and Crickmay (1990) call it 'mapping the body' through which you place focus on a specific part of the body and place an image on that part. I asked the participants to lie on the floor and guiding them we focused on each part of the body by: tensing that part and releasing the tension; lifting

that part of the body and placing it back on the floor; asking the participants to put an image to that specific body part relating to the quality it has for example a bowl of water for the pelvis and lastly asking them to stretch that body part imagining air flowing through the bones and joints. Callery expands:

> Most of us accept the habitual ways in which we move without a second thought…For the actor, increased awareness of each nuance of the body and discovering new potentialities opens up a realm of possibilities, the most obvious being increasing the ability to control movement, maximizing the power of gesture and even creating physical character (Callery 2001: 40).

I modified many of Callery's exercises especially when they involved speaking in order for them to suit the language used within the group which was SASL. However, SASL was only used as the medium of instruction, and not during improvisation exercises when the participants were required to communicate silently. For example the exercises which focused on body language and communicating without speech were limited to silence and SASL could not be used as a form of silent language. It was too easy for the group to resort to SASL as it is not spoken and extremely visual. At one point, there was a clear indication of unequal status when the Drama students began to quickly grasp the concept of body imagery, while the Deaf participants resorted to using simple SASL to describe an activity they were portraying. As a facilitator in the early stages of the process, I refocused the group and created a space in which we needed to understand the importance of images in the space and how strong images can be. It was at this point that Boal's (1992) work strongly began filtering in through *Games for Actors and NonActors* acting as a strong reference. Contacting Tanya Surtees once more, she expressed the importance of their Tell-Tale Signs programme in which the main focus is training Deaf individuals in theatre and performance. This is a vital component when creating work and

therefore the process stretched further than understanding the body but rather understanding performance.

As the weeks continued, there was a clear shift towards understanding the concepts of storytelling, performance as well as theatre. It was at this point that the Deaf participants began appreciating the knowledge of characterization, objective, location and action. Our simple improvisations became scenes which were able to be played out within a theatrical story. However, this new found appreciation was accompanied by a new found energy in the working space and participants began to carelessly hurt one another in the exercises. We then began to revisit the idea of a collective energy in the space which includes concentration on the exercises being done. Being present in the activity has a major influence on the way the activity is controlled. Once the group overcame this carelessness we began focusing on what Callery calls 'the playful body' (2001: 71) and I used various improvisation games and exercises with the group to ignite their imagination and begin playing with one another.

> In both improvisation and text work, it is essential for actors to be able to assess and alter the levels of energy operating between two or more partners. This means working out what energy level others are playing at and learning to sustain the same level (Callery 2001: 101).

Callery places most of her physical training on energy, one's own energy; the collaborative energy as well as the energy within a scene. The following is an example of an improvisation exercise which allows participants to pick up an existing state of energy and change it for someone else to then pick up.

> Changing gears
> X comes on stage and establishes a physical level of energy.
> Y enters with a new level of energy and X responds.
> Both X and Y play at the new level.
> X exists and Y sustains the new energy level alone.
> Z enters with a new and different level of energy, Y responds.
> (Callery 2001: 102)

This exercise was modified when I asked the participants to enter, keeping in mind character, activity, objective and location seeing as we had gone over these concepts of drama. The exercise was done in silence and proved to be highly successful as the group showed a deep understanding of one another's energy. In fact, this improvisation later became part of the content in the final product. Boal's *Games for Actors and NonActors* (1992) offered various exercises which build on the notion of character, location and objective. Had I not included his exercises, the process may have been somewhat different. I specifically focused on his exercises that ask of the participant to not use speech, therefore connecting theatricality to the work done on body awareness. The exercise mentioned below specifically builds on Callery's changing gears exercise:

> Building character relations
> One actor starts an action. A second approaches and, by means of visible physical gestures, establishes a relationship with him, in keeping with the nature of the role he has chosen – brother, father, son etc. The first actor must work out what this role is and respond accordingly (Boal 1992: 143).

Another one of Boal's exercises which we engaged with during our time discovering character, objective, business and location was characters in movement:

> Characters in movement
> One actor enters the space and does various actions to show where they come from, what they do and where they are going. The others must try to understand

> them by these few actions; they have come in from the street, they are in a waiting room, they're about to extract a tooth (Boal 1992: 143).

These exercises allowed the group to critically engage with performance and this process enabled the group to further create scenes and material in silence using only our bodies to communicate.

Moving from trust towards knowing our bodies better and eventually understanding concepts within performance I introduced working with objects. This entire study borrows from various physical theatre companies and a company such as Mummenschanz has often been labeled theatre of objects as they make use of everyday objects and transform them. Using this notion, I invited the group to engage in an exercise in which they would transform an everyday object into something else. Callery includes this exercise in her book and mentions that clarity is important when changing an object as the group needs to recognize what they are being shown (2001: 107). I then further instructed the group to allow the first person to pick up the object, transform it and then all engage with the 'new life' of the object. We often used a plastic bag or a broom stick as objects during this exercise. Another exercise which aided the group with object work was bringing into the space multiple objects and, following the instructions of Callery (2001: 98), the group members each chose an object and identified other means of using it as well as using it to create a visual story. IMO picked up a multi-coloured umbrella and told a visually striking story about a peacock. This focus on objects would serve the group later when we began exploring puppetry.

I came across a striking theatrical style used by the physical theatre company Dark Laugh Theatre: mask work. *The Butcher Brothers* makes use of mask work which then allows for the physicality of the characters to be the language of communication between performers and audience members. It is performed without spoken language and makes use of the body yet it is dependent on a soundtrack to accompany the images viewed. The same is witnessed in the FTH:K productions *QUACK!* and *Pictures of You*. The masks serve in various ways which Callery suggests, firstly the mask aids the actors to separate from their own identity in order to access new areas of inspiration for the character, 'having something to hide behind means, paradoxically, that they no longer need to hide and can therefore take greater risks' (2001: 46). This is witnessed in the above mentioned productions, where the mask work enables the action of the body to be simplified and amplified, compelling the actor to move away from habits and clichés. Secondly, the masks serve in the training of control and precision, which allow actors to portray detailed character types (Callery 2001: 46-47). Certainly mask work enables the actors to find a strong gestural language and is a strong theatrical style one can use when creating work that is visual and gestural without spoken language?

We investigated this concept during our understanding of the body phase and one exercise which stood out the most was one which focuses on the neutral mask, allowing clarity of the actors' movement and expression through the body.

> <u>Brown paper bag</u>
>
> A volunteer sits in a chair facing the group with a brown paper bag over their heads. They sit with their back firmly against the back of the chair and feet flat on the floor, their hands resting on their thighs and head facing ahead. Once they are comfortable they raise their one arm slowly and point in any direction and

> return their hand to their knee. The group observes the power of this gesture (Callery 2001: 54).

We did this exercise more than once, changing the gesture to a yawn, or a wave and even entering and exiting the room. I noticed how IMO's gestures would bring about a great reaction from the others, as he had the ability to hold suspense and power with his gestures. This then lead to the process of his mask work, had he not shared with us his great potential to express through his body behind a mask this theatrical style would not have been used as the rest of the group found manifestation of characters through facial expression. We continued working with masks and IMO triumphed over the others offering detailed character masks when we created our own masks out of cardboard. At one stage the group made a variety of one-dimensional masks and in an exercise we explored an exchange of these masks. The group did not find the exercise useful as Leonie, Joe and Mthokozisi expressed that their emotions are usually shown through facial expression. I accepted this, as this process did not only focus on mask work alone, it was in fact a process of combining different theatrical styles and establishing a working method where Deaf and hearing actors can come together to create.

The discoveries mentioned above, can be summed up as group ensemble and equal status amongst participants; highlight the importance of my role during the process. The training and facilitating in a group of both non-Drama ready and Drama students needs to combine an understanding of collaboration and group energy during the process of learning the Art. Facilitation should provide both the resources as well as a structure for participants to explore and develop (Rooth 1995:3), balancing both enables the group to work through the group

dynamics. For the purpose of this research, being a facilitator meant that I needed to create a well structured space for understanding and discovering.

The Creation Phase

At this point of the process we began brainstorming what type of story we as a collaborative group would like to explore. Each person brought in pictures from newspapers, magazines or the internet relating to any theme they felt necessary to explore. We placed those pictures on a chart and began improvising short scenes using previous exercises, yet set in an image chosen with those specific characters and themes. After three rehearsals of brainstorming, the group decided on the theme of greed. It was clear that the group wanted to explore comedy as well as metaphor as a means of relaying the story. The idea of metaphor, which was influenced by the performance *Womb Tide,* offered the group a different approach to visual language. The group was given the task of creating an image which could be used as a metaphor for sex, rape, violence, abortion or any action which could not be enacted physically on stage. This task seemed to be fruitful as the participants brought in objects which signified various activities and uses, for example, Leonie brought a baking bowl and began mixing ingredients for a cake. She then added whiskey and cigarettes, which in the end created a flop in the final outcome of the cake. Keeping both metaphor and comedy in mind, we went back to the board, using big sheets of blank paper and I introduced Helen Iskander's concept of 'thinking in pictures' (10 August 2010).

We had multiple sessions of meeting with blank pieces of paper and drafting our story through pictures. This frustrated the group as they wanted to explain their ideas as opposed to drawing them. I asked them to see the story in their heads while bearing in mind that their

bodies and the overall picture on stage would communicate their image. Once a picture was drawn, we moved to the floor creating various improvisations using action and signs to serve as the informational structure. This did not work every time as all the participants found the picture hard to recreate with their bodies. The plane crash is a perfect example of when a picture was drawn and difficulty to recreate the picture occurred. I reminded the group that objects can serve as signs and symbols in the work we were creating. Offering them the alternative to their bodies, they began to introduce puppetry. Much like Fortune Cookie theatre does, the group made use of puppetry to portray moments they were physically unable to create on the floor. We began creating theatre as a sign-system without any linguistic information, using our bodies as storyteller and visual puppetry as a visual.

Throughout our process of rehearsing and brainstorming, I recalled the various other experiences of Deaf or hearing performances I have seen. I have been observing the work created by FTH:K since 2006. After being introduced to FTH:K, I began looking for the 'red flag' in all the work created and performed by them at festivals and I began listening with my eyes in every other physical theatre production as well. I would close my ears and image how this could be done differently to suit people who did in fact have to *listen with their eyes* (FTH:K slogan). After becoming more and more observant, one of the biggest observations was that all the work produced by FTH:K relies on a detailed soundtrack. For example, in *QUACK!* , the lights are dimmed and sound effects of the night begin playing (crickets, wind etc.). Although this allowed for mood and darkness to be understood by the hearing performers, it excluded the Deaf performers as no indication of a moon or stars were set up to create the mood of an isolated place at night time. Another example of this is during *Butcher Brothers* (Dark Laugh Theatre

Company) when the police have driven past a man who has stolen a baby, the hearing audience is aware of this because of the police siren, yet there is no visual cue such as blue lights for those people listening with their eyes. However Dark Laugh Theatre does not create work with or for Deaf people but it is one of the many South African Physical theatre companies which uses a visual language and silent characters.

For this reason, I began looking at the role of music during a performance more deeply, questioning how one can recreate music and sound effects by using live musicians in order to include Deaf audience members. The use of lighting could also serve as a strong visual element as used in the example of how *Butcher Brothers* above, the lighting of the show could have served as *the red flag* to indicate police cars approaching.

However, it was only at a later stage of the process that we brought in a musician to view the visual work and begin experimenting with the idea of visual sound. The reason for bringing the musician in at a later stage was based on the fact that the group consisted of two hearing performers as well as one Deaf member who has partial hearing. I wanted to avoid the group finding physical rhythm based on the sound they heard. Once we discovered our physical rhythm the musician needed to accompany it. For the musician there was a shift, from letting the sound accompany the visual towards allowing the sound to be part of the visual. This concept was not an easy one to grasp for the musician, in the rehearsals she often felt as though she was accompanying the performance to give it ambiance. Often I would have to prompt her to be a part of the performance as well. She began mimicking the performers to create a visual sound.

An example of this is when the performers mimed walking. The musician used her hands in the same physical manner as the performers dragged their feet dragged across the surface of the floor. She mimed walking with her feet across the surface of the drum creating a dragging sound of footsteps. There was the performance space and then there was her space which needed to be highlighted as part of the performance space. Space then became an essential concept to focus on.

Space can be used and changed in many ways. One of the major shifts away from mainstream theatre is the reinvention of space (Schechner 2002:71). One can use a conventional theatre in unconventional ways for example, by placing the audience on stage. Physical theatre too challenges the notions of conventional theatre spaces and many South African choreographers perform in site-specific spaces redefining the concept of a theatre space. The work created by Mummenschanz is highly visual and due to their popularity they perform to huge audiences in theatres which seat as many people as possible. They make use of brightly coloured full-body masks in order for the audiences seated on the balcony of the theatre to capture the visual action. Yet a performance of *The Butcher Brothers* required a smaller more intimate space as the work was very detailed in gesture, and the slightest twitch of the finger needed to be witnessed by the entire audience. Resulting in the actor-spectator relationship being open and direct. Artaud proposes that:

> We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind, which will become the theatre of action. A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it (1938: 96).

What Artaud asks of us is to re-imagine and re-invent the conventional theatre space in order for the performance to connect with the audience on an emotive level. For this research re-imagining and re-inventing the conventional theatre space was done for multiple reasons, such as ensuring that the musician is part of the performance; ensuring that a connection exists between audience and performer as well as, distinguishing between levels of the visual performance. The levels consist of the space where the musician performs, the space where action occurs from the performers and the space where the performers operate puppetry. I decided to divide the space into these three parts in order for the viewers to establish specific locations on stage, in the same way that sign language does.

Location is one of the five parts which make up the language and can serve various functions. One in particular is that space can be used for referential functions (Valli 2005: 74). This means that a location in space can be associated with a person or environment and in linguistics this is called a nominal. Once a location in the signing space is set up, if during continuous points in a conversation, a point with the index finger to that space will continue to be referred to as the nominal initially set up (Valli 2005: 73). Borrowing from this, the performance space for the production is set up in the beginning and we used lighting as our index finger pointing to the environment being used.

Part of our creation phase was building a visually striking set design and using interesting and striking costume throughout. The building of the set as well as the props, puppets and masks were vital to the process, as it was important the performers built a relationship with the puppets as they operated them. Callery comments on the building of mask work and the same can be applied to the building of puppets:

> Getting involved with the design and construction of masks gives actors a tactile contact which begets familiarity with the evolving psyche of a mask character…pupils learn to model their own mask, and their attempts serve as research, sharpening their knowledge of facial expression, deepening their understanding of how the face works (2001; 47).

IMO focused his energy towards his mask, and the group made puppets out of forks; plastic bottles and large pieces of styrofoam. Through this process our energies moved towards the design. This involvement of the design and construction of the set and its props is part of the working method, it serves as an exercise in which familiarity and ownership of the work can be achieved.

Once our picture board was done, our objects were created and once the physical enactment was created on the floor, we added visual music. A problem occurred during the rehearsal of the product as it seemed to me as if the Deaf participants were content with the quality of the performance and the hearing Drama students were unsatisfied. This shifted the working energy and synergy in the group. The Deaf participants lost an urgency to commit and began to focus on their daily lives outside of the rehearsals, resulting in missing rehearsals and providing reasonable excuses to not attend. The building of props was predominately created by the Drama students and they became frustrated with the lack of interest from the Deaf participants. This brought up the question of equality again - for the Drama students this was work, so did this mean that for the Deaf participants this was just an extra activity and not a possible field to work in? There was thus an evidently clear discrepancy between the value placed in the process and the work. It highlights the social and cultural issues between the Deaf and hearing worlds. For Deaf people, theatre is exclusively part of the hearing culture and therefore is seen as a part-time

activity as opposed to a full-time field of work. As the two Deaf participants expressed - the once a week, one hour program DTV is confirmation that there is no prospect for Deaf people in entertainment. We went back to the purpose of this study as well as the contract we drafted together in the first week. I needed the group to 're-find' and regain a purpose for their participation in this process. I asked the group the following question: What is it that they wanted to ask, discover and share? Joe replied that he wanted to break the battle between Deaf and hearing and indicated that he didn't want either language to dominate, he wanted this language to dominate. The language he spoke about was this theatre language, the use of sound, space, masks, bodies and puppetry. The group was in agreement. This was not only a turning point but a pivotal moment that signaled that as a group we could continue.

Chapter four has described in detail the various performances, theorists and concepts from which I have borrowed specific theatrical styles for the purpose of conducting this research. These theatrical styles are specifically: sound, space, bodies, puppetry and masks. The chapter further describes the processes which occurred as each theatrical style was explored putting research into a working methodology with the group. Chapter five is a reflection of the performance, including recommendations and limitations discovered from the final product witnessed by the focus group. It includes some vital questions and observations brought to the surface by the audience.

CHAPTER FIVE

WAVING OUR RED FLAG: Afterthoughts on the performance

This chapter is a reflection on the performance including both recommendations for how the work can continue; and how the methodology could be viewed as a working method used with a group of Deaf and hearing performers. It also highlights the limitations for such a collaborative project and offers the answers to the research questions in this study.

Firstly, I had not anticipated the large number of responses I would receive from the audience. The group performed and immediately after the performance the entire group engaged in a discussion with the audience. It was well appreciated and from the discussion it appeared to have successfully included both the hearing and Deaf audience members. The audience was made up of a combination of hearing and Deaf people from different backgrounds, some of whom are familiar with theatre and others who are invested in the Deaf community and deaf research. No two groups of people were the same as each individual had their own concept of what this study would entail and entered the space without any preconceived ideas of the work performed. Yet the response was equal in that the work served its purpose and the common reaction from Deaf individuals was that they understood the performance. One of the highlights brought up in the discussion was that the music served a particular purpose for the Deaf community, their response is explained in detail further in this chapter. One of the Deaf audience members mentioned how confusing it was at times when the performance space shifted from one space to the next, despite having made use of lights as an indicator perhaps this was something that needed moments of blackouts as pauses before the next space is lit up. Again,

this concept is further unpacked in the latter part of this chapter. Based on the delight from audience in the post-performance discussion, it is clear that the Deaf community did not feel alienated from the experience and neither did the hearing audience. The group worked towards finding a balance in theatrical work which is equally accessible to both Deaf and hearing audiences. This was achieved and what remained was to understand how this was achieved in order for it to become a practicing method.

Achieving a balance throughout the theatrical work could not only be achieved by creating the visual language but by ensuring that balance is executed within the process of collaboration with each other as well. With the many titles of a facilitator/director/researcher, my role was multiple; however, focusing on the fundamental skills required of a facilitator, I was able to balance these roles.

> Facilitation refers to the non-directive art of providing the right stimulus for a group to participate fully in their own growth and move towards greater involvement in their communities. The focus is not on telling participants what to do. Rather the emphasis is on asking the right questions that enable participants to see the possible results of changing behavior or expanding on behavior patterns (Rooth 1995:3).

Rooth expands on the fundamental skill required of a facilitator to remind a group about purpose and community behavior patterns. The participants needed to find value in this process in order for them to change the way theatre is viewed. Once it is changed, these behavioral patterns have been erased we can together begin to 'see the possible results'. Therefore, as a facilitator,

emphasizing the importance of what they wanted to achieve constantly needed to surface during the process.

The fundamental question asked throughout this practice-based research was whether eliminating spoken language served as the only integrating strategy. Language, when looked at as a complex term cannot be specified as spoken. Within this research, the term has been used as a tool to communicate a message from a sender to a receiver. In performance it is the performer who communicates a message to the audience. The elimination of spoken language however does not amount to the elimination of language as a whole. Despite Barthes's (1977) theory of images relying on a written text to convey a complete message, this research focused on eliminating the written/spoken text and exploring the outcomes of using the image on its own.

The image consisted of a variety of languages to describe a message, namely some of the following: a gestural language, a spacial language, the language of theatre, a musical language, language of objects and, a pictographic language. By eliminating spoken language one needs to ask whether there is space for language in this form of theatre and the answer is yes. Below is a short reflection on each of the languages listed above, including information on its limitations and uses.

What in this research has been termed 'gestural language', has been strongly derived from physical theatre and the use of the body to convey action and meaning. However, during the process of understanding this notion of communicating through our bodies, it appeared that the Deaf performers offered bigger and more exaggerated gestures, whereas the hearing

performers used smaller simple everyday gestures. I questioned whether this was a result of SASL being a language of facial expression and visual communication and thus the Deaf participants were more familiar with the gestural language during training. The gestural language for the Deaf participants became an over-stylized SASL which is used by the National Theatre of the Deaf in the USA. Borrowing this technique as part of the training would be useful for creating this type of theatre as the idea is to have a balanced understanding of communicating with our hands, face, movements with both Deaf and hearing participants. I found the hearing participants to be 'lazy' in their expressions - they needed to grasp the concept of a stylized SASL before eliminating the language completely. In order to develop this training with a combined cast of Deaf and hearing, working from a signed language could become a base for physicality. This was, however explored on a separate level regarding the use of space in SASL and its function.

We can understand that the use of space in sign language functions on different levels, one being referential. Where the location of the subject and the object in a sentence is placed in specific signed areas by continuously pointing in that direction, the person signing refers to the initial subject placed in that signed area. This can be witnessed in the production as the performance space is separated into three parts: musician space, performance space and miniature puppetry world. The performance space is further divided into two areas on the island: the cave of the witch and the scenery of the island. This was done specifically for referential purposes so that the characters could be identified in their specific spaces on stage. The idea is further expanded on in the miniature puppetry world where the miniature island mimics what is seen on stage. Space is an important component of sign language and in order to guide the

audience and their eye gaze, I made use of lighting to point in the direction of the space being used. As a reflection, I believe that the moments where the lights guide the audience to the performance space was not adequate enough in terms of time. Quick flashes to the next space or crossfading theatre lighting techniques do not work when one is using a broad landscape of space. Instead, perhaps moments of blackouts and then lighting the specific space might work better. None the less, with regards to space, this is one example of how sign language can become a core principle in the training of physicality. As well as using the language in a stylized manner, it could be explored in the initial stages of the training in order for the hearing participants to be on the same level of expression.

Pictographic language was also very useful and important in the performance. The group began using this language through the workshops for their performance. As discussed in a previous chapter, they were asked to draw pictures of the story and they then recreated the images through actions on the floor. There were moments in which this became difficult for the group to do as they wanted to share with the audience their reasons for the researchers going to the island but they did not know how to portray this with or through their bodies. Consulting Barthes, I rediscovered the pictographic state of language, how pictures and symbols in pictures could illustrate meaning. We opted for the incorporation of this kind of narrative as a group.

The reason the researchers were going to the island was to find a plant. This plant, according to the researchers, offered a possible cure for HIV/AIDS. Initially the language seemed simple enough, using mathematical symbols such as the addition and subtraction symbols that we could communicate. Yet it had not occurred to me that the iconic red ribbon

could denote various meanings and understandings which misled some of the audience members into thinking that the performance was solely an HIV/AIDS driven story. As the Prague School identified, everything presented to the audience within the theatrical frame is a sign (1964: 84-85), therefore the process of signification should be controlled to some extent. Aston and Savona give the example of a performer with a bandaged hand in a performance. Audience members decoded the bandage as an externalization of a wounded heart, yet the performer was injured and the bandage had no significance in terms of the performance (1991: 100). Although the red ribbon was deliberately used and had value for the work, using such an iconic symbol on stage as a sign put the story in danger of being a badly organized sign-system as Aston and Savona comment on (1991: 100).

The use of visual music as a language was an experimental process during this research. *Listening with my eyes* (FTH:K slogan) during the performances from FTH:K, I constantly asked myself how the use of sound/music could be generated to accommodate Deaf audiences who were also watching. If we are searching for a purely visual way of communicating then we need to look at music as a possible visual form as well. The body movements of a drummer or a violinist as they play their instruments depicts mood and has value in a silent world. Keeping this in mind, the musician and I aimed to make the music part of the visual performance. The way the music was received was unexpected as one audience member referred to the musician as the 'soul of the characters' while others commented on the musician as 'one of the performers in the play'. These understandings of what the musician created proved that a visual sound can be referred to as language, communicating a message from one person to another.

As was mentioned earlier in a previous chapter, Deaf people can feel vibrations. Unbeknownst to me, the performance space allocated to us was on top of the music pit. This spacial arrangement allowed for the audience, who were seated on the pit, to feel the vibrations of the drums. The pit is hollow and the sound from under the drum echoed along the floor allowing each person to feel the vibrations. However, not every instrument achieved this, certainly the shakers were not felt yet the musician mimicked the performers and followed their every action with a shaker in each hand. This is yet to be explored further but definitely forms part of an integrating strategy for a Deaf and hearing audience. Sound/music is largely modified by accompanying physicality from the way the musician plays. The musician needs to be part of the performance space, included as a performer and the musician needs to create sound which is part of the visual not solely the audible.

To answer one of the research questions I sought out through this practice, what theatrical styles can be used by Deaf and hearing performers for theatre to reach Deaf and hearing audiences equally? One needs to breakdown the umbrellas of physical theatre. Physical theatre as an alternative theatre has a language of its own. It can be broken down into various genres such as clowning, mask work, dance, movement etc. Each genre of physical theatre includes various styles, for example mask work consists of the neutral mask, whole body masks and character masks. However, these genres overlap and often the styles used in the mask work are used in clowning, or the physicality of the body is used in the form of movement studies. The term physical theatre is ‘not codifiable’ (Callery 2001:5). In order to find clarity for the working

method, below is a list of theatrical styles used from within these genres of physical theatre: Caricature (a visual representation of a character); the grotesque character mask; mime; gesture and puppetry. All of these make use of the body, an ideal starting point for language without text. This then places focus in the training of our bodies and how they are used through the above mentioned theatrical styles.

This chapter as a reflection from the performance has highlighted the questions asked during the research and has critically listed limitations within the practice. The chapter has attempted to answer the three research questions and has included recommendations for ways in which this practice could be a well structured working method. The following chapter concludes the paper, summing up the entire study.

Conclusion:

This paper has covered the broad spectrum of Deaf culture, language, physical theatre and semiotics. All four are connected as they serve to communicate a message either through dialogue, images or signs. In chapter one I presented the understanding of Deaf people as a marginalized group as well as my interest in creating theatre of equality, providing reason and purpose for this study. Chapter two introduces the concepts of a physical theatre language, how our bodies and objects in space all read as signs for the audience. Chapter three theorises practice as research as a suitable methodology for this research and Chapter four puts research into methodology introducing the process in a detailed manner. Chapter five combines the performance and the focus group discussion in order to take the study further and identify answers to the research questions.

This research set out to achieve a balance in theatrical work that is equally accessible to both Deaf and hearing audiences. I was pulled towards physical theatre as a means to provide a practicing method as well as theatre semiotics as a tool to decode the practice. This research successfully integrated the audience members and the practice for doing so is filtrated through Chapter four and reanalyzed in Chapter five. The practice is grounded in language and serves to produce a non-verbal, non-signed language through the body.

This can be achieved by firstly placing focus on SASL as a stylized language, using the language within a group in order to create a balance between the Deaf and hearing participants because the Deaf participants seem to have an understanding of total expression through their faces and signs. The second part of the process is to achieve a deep understanding of the body

and how the body works. This is crucial as neither the hearing nor the Deaf participants may be comfortable with the body as a tool for communicating. To prevent a misunderstanding of theatre and its elements, it is vital that the process moves towards understanding character, objective, location and relationships within Drama. This can be achieved through working with objects, masks and spacial arrangements in the room. The training moves towards devising a performance which consists of using story boards and drawing pictures before improvising the action. The introduction of music and discovery of visual performance in the sounds created happens once the performance has been pieced together. Lastly, the building and creation of the set design and becoming familiar with the objects used in the performance forms part of the working method.

This research has the potential to further scrutinize physical theatre and sets out numerous possibilities of working with a group of Deaf and hearing performers/creators. As long as the product consists of multiple *red flags*, the audience will be able to read the visual. Equality becomes an ethical principle which this type of theatre aims for, the practice in achieving that has been explored in this research. I am not proposing a complete step-to-step guide when working with both Deaf and hearing people, I am however, presenting one method which has been discovered and practiced throughout the working process of this research. I have presented this method linking to the theory of physical theatre and theatre as a-sign-system to ensure praxis. Theatre should not serve individuals specifically either Deaf or hearing, there is space for theatre to expand across multiple languages of space, gesture, objects, pictures and sound. All of which are presented in this research report, with a language beyond spoken words *A Visual Voice* can be used to communicate across the language barriers.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire: Cover letter

A Visual Voice: Communicating without spoken language

Thank you for taking the time to answer the questions below. Please answer the questions truthfully and please note: this questionnaire will form part of my Masters Research Report, therefore the answers you provide will be used within the research paper.

This research is a study looking specifically at Deaf theatre goers in Johannesburg and aims to create theatre without a dominating spoken or signed language with Deaf and hearing performers/creators for an audience mixed with Deaf and hearing people. The central aim of this research is to create a performance more accessible to a mixed audience of Deaf and hearing people.

Your participation in this survey will aid my research specifically in the understanding of Deaf theatre goers in Johannesburg.

Your participation in this research does not necessarily end with this questionnaire; you are invited to attend the performance of the final product in February 2011 and will be asked to answer an evaluation of the performance. Details of the performance will be posted to you via email, therefore you will be asked to give your email address on the questionnaire in order for you to receive further information regarding the performance. You also have the option of anonymity, to avoid usage of your name within the research paper.

I GRANT PERMISSION FOR THE RESEARCHER TO USE:

NAME ☐ **or** **NOTHING** ☐

(please fill in your name if you ticked the box NAME) _____

EMAIL ADDRESS:_____

1.HAVE YOU EVER WATCHED A THEATRE PEFORMANCE?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

IF 'YES' WHAT SHOWS HAVE YOU WATCHED?

_____

_____

_____

2.WHY DID YOU GO TO THE THEATRE?

_____

_____

_____

3.DO YOU FEEL THEATRE CATERS FOR YOUR NEEDS?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

4.WHY?

_____

_____

_____

5.WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THEATRE?

_____

_____

6.HAVE YOU WATCHED ANY THEATRE WITH DEAF ACTORS?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

APPENDIX B

Evaluation:

1.DID THE PERFORMANCE CATER TO YOUR NEEDS?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

2.HOW?

_____

_____

3.WAS THE STORY CLEAR AND EASY TO FOLLOW/UNDERSTAND?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

4.WHY?

_____

_____

_____

5.WOULD YOU WATCH THIS TYPE OF THEATRE AGAIN?

Yes ☐ **No** ☐

6.WHY?

_____

_____

_____

7.WHAT DID YOU ENJOY AND WHAT DID YOU NOT ENJOY?

_____

_____

_____