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Abstract

This research report entitled Performance Studies, Personal Experience and Knowledge: Affirming Personal Experience as a Resource in the Study and Creation of Performance explores the idea that theatre performance has within it the capacity to transform the theatre performer and consequently, the audience member and a greater society. This written component is derived from the observation of-as well as the participation in- two theatre-based case studies namely, Self, Play, Imagination and Story- a tertiary level performance studies course and Happy. Period. As in, FULL STOP! - an interactive theatre performance. Consequently, this report is practice-based research.

The research analyses the use of personal experiences as resource material for theatre making within a South African context and provides a framework for the exploration of suitable methods for working through theatre and education to address personal transformation. This research offers a learning paradigm that affirms the use of personal story in creating theatre work and shows an example of how personal experience can play a role in addressing social issues through the interaction of theatre performers with each other and with audiences. This research finds, in its conclusion, that theatre that enhances the expression, ownership, and reflection of personal narrative can play a significant role in transformation.

**Performance Studies, Personal Experience and Knowledge: Affirming
Personal Experience as a Resource in the Study and Creation of
Performance.**

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2. CHAPTER 1

A Personal Journey: Introduction

My name is Ayanda Khala and I am a theatre practitioner and educator. In my opinion, that makes me a teller of stories and an idealist who believes in the infinite potential of human beings to act, reflect and then transform each time they acquire or create knowledge. At the break of many a dawn, I find myself delightfully immersed in the writing, telling and performing of stories about myself and about the world around me in order to entertain and to educate. The stories I tell are most often in response to the many stories I have seen and heard shared by ordinary people living in my immediate community and in my country. In this story, I aim to demonstrate what I believe is theatre's potential role in personal and social transformation.

Speaking to students at the University of Cape Town, renowned South African theatre director and playwright, Mike Van Graan, stated the following regarding 21st century South Africa:

Ours is a society in which the answers are not as clear cut as before; where there is no single right way; where values and ideas are being keenly contested. And all of these have direct implications for the people who inhabit our society, for the story of each individual plays itself out against the backdrop of the bigger, unfolding narrative. It is here that I generally seek to locate my work: in the exploration of how the bigger socio-political narrative impacts on the individual narrative, how that individual story in turn impacts on the macro-story, in the dialectic between the personal and the political...

¹(Van Graan, 2006)

¹ Van Graan, M. 2006. University of Cape Town. *From Protest Theatre to the Theatre of Conformity*. Keynote address. August 11.

In his address, Van Graan describes the place in which I live. A country birthed anew through the transformation of a violently prejudice system of governance into what, in embellished rhetoric, has come to be spoken of as 'the rainbow nation'. This is a term alluding to South Africa's multi-cultural society and an aspiration of unity within that diversity. Similar to Van Graan, my interest is in the capability of a single story to make an impact on a broader community. On one hand I am inspired as a result of witnessing, to site but one example, the impact of the sharing, with the general public, of countless personal stories of loss and tragedy by ordinary South African citizens as part of the transformative intervention of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. On the other hand, my interest is motivated by the hopeful persuasion that the work that is yet to be done- since transformation is an on-going process- might continue through stories told in the theatre.

Fortunately, I have seen the notion of a story told in the theatre to make a social impact work well. For example, in 2003, the premier of Lara Foot Newton's *Tshepang*- a story about infant rape based on a real child-rape case in Louisevaleweg Northern Cape- was helpful in bringing to light the plight of many children abused within the very home environments that are expected to provide them with protection. Presently, *Tshepang* continues to increase its scope and impact on communities across the globe and is critically acclaimed as a result.

I believe theatre's success in portraying real-life stories in ways that engage audiences is largely due to the fact that, in any given society, each person's personal story is most often than not derived from their lived experiences. These lived experiences inevitably contain traces of the story of a broader community in which the connections from one individual to another may not be as pronounced in everyday living as they can be if portrayed in a theatrical environment.

In my own lived experience of theatre-making, I have found that when we focus our attention on an individual's personal story, we are sure to find the nuanced characteristics of not only that person but of the society from which they come. Most often, the key issues to address in order for transformation to occur on a social scale are found first and foremost on a personal level, in the individual's story. Having said that, I have also come to identify and appreciate a particular relationship between theatre, education and personal story. The relationship is one that enhances the role of theatre storyteller to that of change-maker. In my experience, every occasion in which education or theatre has achieved notable strides in their intended purposes, each one has been supported by the personal story of theatre-makers, performers, educators and learners, respectively. As a consequence, education plays a key role, alongside theatre performance, in my hypothesis. Here I refer to education in a very specific sense- which will be explained in a forthcoming chapter- since my participation in theatre and performance work has introduced me to a distinct perspective on the meaning of the term.

Henceforth, I aim to demonstrate how the affirmation of the personal experience of the theatre performer (and of the audience member) as a resource for creating performance work within an educative environment, can be used to highlight two important things. First, it can work to demonstrate that the kind of relationship formed between performer and audience member can be one that enables change and consequently, that theatre can play a more meaningful role in addressing overall social transformation by transforming one theatre participant at a time.

My inquiry is centred on a conversation between critical pedagogy scholar Paulo Freire and renowned theatre-activist Augusto Boal. Boal's (1982) stance is that theatre performance is a means of sharing, debating, negotiating and re-constructing cultural knowledge about social relationships and therefore creating the space for social change. Freire (1971) believed that education that aimed to liberate the learner would lead to transformation in individuals and in society. At the heart of both their arguments is the use of the lived experiences of the participating person in order to achieve the most effective results. In order to show their theories at work in the classroom and in the theatre space, I use two case studies. The first is a theatre performance class I tutored and observed at the Wits School of Arts (WSOA) entitled Self, Play, Imagination and Story (SPIS). In this course, the personal stories of a group of students were a focal point in the development of performance work. The students, aged 18 to 22, were required to create theatre performances based on the combined attributes of stories taken from their personal experiences. The process used in this performance class is most interesting in how it demonstrates the value of the personal archive of each participant with regards to making meaningful work.

The second case study is a scene developed from the personal experience of a performer from Happy. Period. As in, FULL STOP (HPFS), a self-scripted interactive play I performed with two colleagues in Johannesburg 2007 and 2008, and in Gaborone 2009. The scenes we created in the play were primarily derived from personal experiences. Through my reflections on the work done in both the course and the performance, I have found ways to explore both Freire's ideas on education for social change and Boal's ideas on theatre for social change. These ideas are explored as a means to show evidence of my hypothesis that theatre is able- through the relationships created between performers and between performers and audience members, as well as the affirmation of the personal archive of all those participating in the theatre experience- to do the challenging work of confronting difficult social issues and thus encouraging people to act to affect change.

I strongly believe that this relationship that Van Graan identifies, between the personal and the political, is one which, when played out on a stage, clearly marks the implications of the interconnected relation between human beings which, I argue is theatre's doorway to birthing transformation. Since both HPFS and SPIS became areas of academic research for me subsequent to and as a result of my involvement in both case studies, my research methodology is qualitative, ethnographic and also action research. In both case studies, the role of praxis- "*...the action and reflection of people upon their world in order to transform it*" (Moore *et al*, 2008, p. 211) - is evident.

The structure of my story will begin with a detailed explanation of my theoretical framework and will including key terminology as well as a detailed explanation of my methodology. It will then continue to two chapters where both the proceedings of the course in the classroom as well as those in the performance space will be explored. In each chapter, the relevant case study will be described in detail and subsequently followed by theoretical and critical analysis. This will be in order to demonstrate the value of my argument. This discussion will end in a chapter that will complete my argument and summarize the key findings of this story as well as the implications thereof. In the following chapter I begin with the theoretical framework.

3. CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework

Earlier in the process of writing up my research, as a result of my appointment as a Drama lecturer at the Wits University's School of Education, I began engaging with theories on education by Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire. For some months I had been involved in various educational expeditions and had discovered that I enjoyed few activities as much as learning and teaching. It was in my interactions with Freire's theories that I first recognized education as a tool of politics. Freire identified education as a method of either attaining 'liberation' or achieving domestication (1971, p. 62), the first being a condition where the learner, as a result of receiving education, became a critical thinker who was able to act, reflect on their actions and transform accordingly, and the latter describing a scenario where the learner receives education that discourages her from questioning reality but rather promotes a passive acceptance of the status quo. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (in Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003) explains his concept of education for the purposes of domestication as follows:

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry.

(Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003, p.58)

Indeed, on the oppressive side of the scale, 'banking education' equates to a system where students are mistakenly treated as empty deposit boxes into which knowledge is transferred and 'banked' for safe keeping by an all-knowing teacher.

For Freire (1971), the skewed power relationship in banking education is a major hindrance to achieving the liberating goal of education. Freire believed education's highest purpose was the intellectual and political liberation of its receivers, and he termed the liberating method of learning and teaching '*problem-posing education*' (Freire in McLaren *et al.* 1993). Contrary to banking, this mode of learning (and teaching) creates a learning environment that recognizes the students as independent human beings who carry knowledge within them and also have the potential to create new knowledge. According to Freire, this knowledge is generated in a relationship of partnership with the educator who learns together with the students as she shares her valuable yet limited knowledge. On problem-posing education, he states the following:

The problem-posing offers a search for knowledge. In this mutual search, the teacher and students develop 'co-intentionality', that is, mutual intentions, which make the study collectively owned, not the teacher's sole property

(McLaren *et al.* 1993, p. 26)

Freire believed in education that involved or led to social intervention. Moreover, what stands out the most, for me, is his definition of consciousness- that which arises from problem-posing education- as 'intentionality towards the world' (Davis.1980, p. 58-59). According to Freire, the consciousness of a learner involved real and effective action. It could not simply remain a philosophical idea that exists within the parameters of the student's mind. Freire promoted the idea of education as "*praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it*" (in Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003, p. 62). Just like Freire, I am an advocate of education that enlightens learners in ways that enable them to identifying areas of social existence that need to be changed.

I believe in education that encourages the learner to take steps towards making those changes happen. As a consequence, Freire's ideology forms the basis of my exploration of SPIS. Paulo Freire's education for freedom directly addresses the ways that learners are taught in SPIS. His philosophy is translated into performance education in order to encourage the performance students in the course to create performance work that is motivated by consciousness. As he states (in Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003):

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in The world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings, and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed.

(Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003, p. 64)

I believe that through performance education, an attitude of working from a place of consciousness can be cultivated so that would-be theatre directors and performers create from a place of true intention, and therefore contribute to the journey of social change in South Africa. For Freire this can only be possible through the relationship of a partnership between the teacher and the student. Regarding the student-teacher relationship, he expresses the following:

To be a good liberating educator...you need above all to have faith in human beings. You must be convinced that the fundamental effort of education is to help with the liberation of people, never their domestication. You must be convinced that when people reflect on their domination they begin a first step in changing their relationship to the world.

(Freire. 1971, p. 62)

When I compared the purpose of Freire's ideal method of education to theatre-activist Augusto Boal's perception of the stage actor as an agent of social change, I discovered that theatre and education perform precisely the same function. Augusto Boal's (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed* (TO) empowers the audience by challenging them to create relevant and plausible solutions to the social problems that they themselves have identified. Boal's Forum theatre, specifically, encourages ownership of the process of social change. And the ownership is a collaborative effort amongst community members which highlights the significance of the inclusion of every citizen in the journey towards creating a better society. Just as Freire (Davis.1980) posits an idea of an individual's intentionality towards the world, Boal (1995) believes that theatre material must be sourced from a genuine thought in one's mind and from real lived experiences. This generates the energy required to move thought and intention into real action. Boal describes theatre as "*...the passionate combat of two human beings on a platform*" (1995, p. 16). This description immediately suggests yet another relationship: this time in theatre between human beings, their passion, and the platform on which to perform. I agree with Boal's statement that:

...theatre studies the multiple interrelations of men and women living in society, rather than limiting itself to the contemplation of each solitary individual taken in isolation.

(1995, p. 16)

Boal sees theatre as I do: as a community enterprise between human beings, created within the context of relationships. There are several relationships within the theatrical experience, from which, through the analysis of HPFS, I will concentrate on three.

First, there is the relationship between the actor and the character that she will play. In this case specifically, the character is created from the real personal experiences of the performer. Secondly, I focus on the relationship between the performer and the audience member, in accordance with Boal's idea that theatre is an experience that belongs to both a single individual as well as a group. Lastly, there is the relationship between theatre and reality, which is where I anchor my argument that wherever communities can create changes that reflect reality on stage, they can in turn bring those changes to life in the real world. This is possible because in Boal's theatre, nothing that is implausible in the real (though it can be explored) can be taken as a plausible intervention on stage. The aim is always for the stage to reflect achievable options available in reality. Therefore everything people do on stage in Boal's Forum theatre should be possible to do in real life. In Boal's theatre, as in HPFS, the story of the individual in society is the starting point of the relationship between reality and the stage. And this relationship is what is at stake in the conflict or confrontation that Boal identifies within his theatre work:

In Theatre of the Oppressed, reality is shown not only as it is, but also, more importantly, as it could be. Which is what we live for- to become what we have the potential to be. This vital element is entrusted to the creativity of the audience...substituting themselves with the protagonist, and trying to find viable solutions for real problems.

(1992, p. 6)

What this means, in theory, is that where the representation of reality on stage opposes what exists in reality, people are motivated to act accordingly to create what they have seen is possible.

Although HPFS is not Forum theatre, it borrows its structure from Forum theatre and utilizes audience interaction and feedback as the means to create the intervention needed on stage. The play also utilizes direct address to the audience and facilitation: also key features of Forum Theatre. Continuing with the subject of Boal's passion and with specific regards to my argument, I believe the personal story of each individual in a real community gives birth to the aspiration of or challenge to that individual, which then in turn can also become the passion on stage which Boal refers to. He describes it as "*...a feeling for someone or something, or an idea, that we [human beings] prize more highly than our own life*" (1995, p.16). This passion is necessary, as it is the driving force of human action and that which motivates human beings to invest their time and effort.

In my story here about Theatre and Education, social transformation is the passion, and it is represented by a young woman's personal dilemma in HPFS. With regards to *platform*, Boal adds an interesting dimension to the traditional notion of a platform as a space designated for performance action to take place separately from the area where the observer of the performance resides. He subscribes to the idea of performance platform, the qualities of what he coins the *aesthetic space* (1995, p. 18). The aesthetic space is solely defined by the fact that it is a place where an act or action is performed as well as observed. This means that theatre need not take place in an auditorium with special lighting and sound mechanics.

According to Boal, theatre can happen anywhere- on a train, in a classroom, on a church pulpit, even in a political rally, as long as there is an act and the observation of that act occurs simultaneously in the same space. Furthermore, the act of observation and the act of performance need not be designated to an actor and a separate spectator. Boal perceives both observation and performance as events that can occur within the same person. In other words, the performer can act and observe her actions, or the effects of her actions and those of others. And in the same manner, the audience member may observe an action on stage and also become part of the stage action, thus becoming Boal's *spec-actor* (1995, p. 18). This perspective on theatre highlights the sharing of power between the performer and the audience member in their joint effort to solve a social problem, initiated by the theatre performance. Finally, Boal (1995) argues that the aesthetic space is essentially a space where the creation and observation of human action motivates the exploration of both *imagination* and *memory* in the human beings involved, the result of which is the construction of knowledge:

The aesthetic space possesses...properties which stimulate knowledge and discovery, cognition and recognition: properties which stimulate the process of learning by experience [therefore] Theatre is a form of knowledge.

(1995, p. 20)

And it is upon this foundation- that theatre occurs between all human beings in relationship with each other; that theatre cannot exist without the involvement of imagination and personal experience in the form of memory; that human beings are motivated to action by that which means something to them; and that theatre as relationship is a form of knowledge- that the my argument that theatre can play a more significant role in social transformation in South Africa is based.

Supported by the role of performance as a way of acquiring knowledge about the world, and how to live in the world, theatre can begin to address the *how* question of transformation as designed by the very people living in the communities that desire or need the change.

While the conceptual thinking behind consciousness, education, theatre and spec-actor are core to the demonstration of my hypothesis, I wish to draw attention to other conceptual terms that are central to the development of my argument. First amongst these is *personal experience*. According to the South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (2006, p. 870), the definition of the word 'personal' is "*of, affecting or belonging to a particular person or involving the presence or action of a particular individual.*" The same source denotes the word experience as "*practical contact with and observation of facts and events*" (ibid, p. 406). It further describes experience as "*knowledge or skills acquired over time*" and as most significantly as "*an occurrence which leaves an impression on one.*" As a result, for the purposes of this study, experience is defined as action as well as knowledge. Experience is also something that has the potential to influence one's perception about life and the world around them. Thus it is my position that consciousness manifested as one's intentionality towards one's outer environment cannot exist outside the weight of one's personal experience. The definition of 'education', for the purpose of this argument, includes skills and knowledge acquired from personal experience.

With regards to theatre performance, I will add to this definition the notion that it is the personal experience of both the person doing the act of performing as well as the person observing the action. The next important term here is 'narrative', which connotes story and the meanings people construct about who they are, and what the world around them is about, using story. As insightfully stated by Monk *et al*:

Stories serve a meaning-making function...we both create stories about ourselves and become positioned in storylines that other people have created about us.

(1997, p. 85)

In my argument for theatre and education promoting social change, story plays a vital role as a tool for the creation of the HPFS theatre performance as well as the primary resource used in the SPIS course. Reconstructing and deconstructing personal narratives through theatre and education is therefore the method through which I suggest social transformation can begin to be fostered.

Finally, we have the term 'praxis', which by definition is inseparable from transformation. In fact, praxis is transformation in action, as it "...involves action and reflection where each element builds upon the other...from action to reflection and from reflection upon action into new action" (Moore, Mitchell (eds.) 2008, p. 199). In other words, transformation occurs as a result of praxis. Praxis here..."requires both active reflection and reflective action" (ibid, p. 211). Consequently, Drama praxis, which according to Taylor (1997) denotes "...the manipulation of theatre form by educational leaders to help participants act, reflect and transform", has as its core elements the people, passion and platform of Boal's theatre.

In this chapter I have explained the theoretic framework from which my argument is derived and have attempted to clarify the meaning of key conceptual terms in order to facilitate a process of meaning making for the reader. In the next chapter, I shift the focus to my research methods as I continue to develop my argument.

4. CHAPTER 3

3.1 Methodology

I think [that] it's the Arts as a methodology [that] opens up those stories, opens up those possibilities and unlocks the memory.

MATCHETT, S. 2007. Interview on 4 December 2007, Johannesburg

Using the arts- specifically, theatre performance and performance education- I investigate the value of theatre performance in social transformation. My research methods also include action research, critical analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. As a result of the style of presentation of the work, I submit it, overall, as an ethnographic report, for reasons I will discuss here: Firstly, *"Action research involves the participation and investigation by practitioners in and of their own work in order to reflect on and analyze the impact of their work"* (McNiff. 2006). Therefore, this is my primary research methodology in the analysis of my second case study (HPFS). Accurately described as *"...more than just doing activities..."*, action research is about *"...data gathering, reflection on the action as it is presented through the data, generating evidence through the data, and making claims to knowledge based on conclusions drawn from validated evidence"* (McNiff. 2002, p. 16). Accordingly, I participate in and investigate the effects of my work on myself and on the audience in the performance. The structure of the theatre production, as I will argue, also utilizes action research as a tool that the audience uses in order to participate and to create social change. That said, however, action research is not as prevalent in the first case study. Nevertheless, what both studies have in common is my participation, observation and reflection, which all fall under the discipline of ethnographic research.

Secondly, the work is qualitative, since it is collected mainly through experiential, practical means. As Hammersley (1995) states, ethnography is “...concerned with [the] analysis of [such] data that are systematically selected for the purpose” (ibid, p. 1), of which “...observation and/or relatively informal conversations...” (ibid, p. 2) are the most dominant methods of collection. In HPFS, in my role as the performer, I share how a personally experienced event changes my life. In SPIS, I share my observations of the process in the classroom setting. Since the collection of my data is largely through my own personal observation, it is what Hitchcock *et al* (1995) identifies as ethnographic fieldwork. Fieldwork is articulated as “...the means by which the product, the ethnographic description of a group, organization, culture, or set of practices, comes into being” (ibid, p. 118). Therefore, both the journal entry of my performance in HPFS and my observation in SPIS, together with the background story explaining the creative process within the performance as well as the work done within the course, respectively, are all samples of my fieldwork- all of which is conducted for the purposes of a critical analysis about education and theatre in both SPIS and HPFS, with regards to the subject of theatre for social transformation.

Thirdly, although the focus of this ethnographic research does not completely adhere to the general agenda of ethnographic study: to “...grasp the native point of view, his [the subject under study] relation to life [or] to realize his vision of his world” (ibid; p. 119), I have found that of the six features prescribed by Hammersley (1995), which characterize ethnography, this body of work holds five, which are essential.

We have already identified the method of data collection through fieldwork research, as well as the primary intention of understanding the 'native' perspective. Hammersley's third characteristic is that the focus of the research must be, predominantly, on a single unit, group or setting, whilst the technique of data collection is described as being '*unstructured*' and not limited to a detailed plan that is set-up beforehand. The focus of my research is two, single units of theatre performance work which I will analyze in close reference to each other specifically, with regards to the use of the personal archive as a resource for theatre making, as well as the parallel relationship between student and facilitator and that of the performer and the audience member. None of these parallel relationships were established beforehand. I came to make this comparison through my observation and involvement. Another source of empirical data, collected in an atypically unstructured manner, is an account of my own personal experience as a performer in HPFS, a play that displays similar value ascriptions to the personal archive as the SIPS course, the purpose of this being to compare my experience to that of the SIPS student as a means of demonstrating the significance of the ethos of the course, with regards to the mindset that I propose it cultivates in the theatre performance student. This falls in line with Hammersley's fourth feature of ethnography that requires that the examination of the data gathered is done through interpretation, by the researcher, of the various events observed and the behaviour of the human beings involved. Most important is that in this analysis the "*...quantification and statistical analysis [plays] a subordinate role at most*" (1994, p. 2), which is true for my research work.

Hammersley's fifth feature is that the information collected should appear in circumstances that are as ordinary, for the subjects being observed, as possible, and not constructed under any kind of "*experimental conditions*" (1994, p. 1). Although I acknowledge that in my analysis of the students in SPIS and their participation, the fact that I was present as an observer of the class cannot be assumed to have had no effect on the student's behaviour and choices, the observations were made under ordinary circumstance for the students in so far as it is true that they would have been attending the class, with me as a tutor, even if I had not chosen to use the course for research purposes.

With regards to the HPFS, the journal account mentioned earlier includes the response of the audience to the work. This account was documented after the performance, prior to the write-up of this paper. The audience responses were neither pre-determined nor constructed, although the structure of the play could be classified as a kind of experiment on the grounds that we constructed the performance, at the beginning of our creative process, with the intention of encouraging as spontaneous an outcome as possible from the relationship that would occur between the facilitator talk-show host, the characters on stage, and the audience. The result of this 'experiment' will form part of the argument and although the experiment was created for the purpose of the theatre performance itself and not for this work, it will also form part of my ethnographic account.

3.2 About the case studies

For the purposes of analyzing the first case study, SPIS, in a chapter entitled *Inside the Classroom*, I present a detailed description derived from my observations of a typical classroom experience, as well as an analysis of each activity that formed part of the lesson. A large amount of the work covered in the course has regrettably not been referred to in this paper. However, what has been cited is a lesson that included exercises that I think are most representative of the kind of work that took place in the rest of the course. This serves as a means to provide an experience of the classroom atmosphere, in order to enhance the understanding of my argument. Included are interviews I conducted with the creators of the course to gain insight regarding its pedagogical foundation. Through an investigation of the intention of the course's creators as well as my analysis of the course ethos and activities, I show the significance of the Freire model of education within the study of theatre performance.

Finally, I put forward my hypothesis of the impact of such a school of thought on a greater society, should theatre performance be used as a social transformation methodology. In the chapter that follows, *Inside the Performance*, a detailed journal entry that I wrote as a performer in HPFS provides the means by which I depict the events of the second case study. A scene in the theatre performance is used to explore the effects of interactive theatre techniques on the audience as well as the performer.

Some key principles of Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* are expanded upon in relation to the play, specifically with regards to the role of both the theatre performer and the audience member in achieving personal and social transformation. In both case studies, research is conducted using the personal stories of the students, performers and audience, respectively, to generate new knowledge. In my overall argument, the case studies in which I participated are the data from which knowledge about theatre performance and its relationship to social transformation is drawn and constructed. In the Conclusion chapter, I draw parallels between the two case studies. I create this relationship through my own analysis and interpretation in building a case supporting my argument. My own subjective point of view will not be hidden in this process since the voice of my own personal archive forms part of the rationale of this study.

Having stated my intentions, described my research methods and provided a brief outlook of the structure, the next step is to begin the analytical journey. As mentioned earlier, the account that follows is my personal description and analysis of the activities experienced in SPIS.

5. CHAPTER 4

Inside the Classroom

Theatre is born when the human being discovers that it can observe itself...observing itself, the human being perceives what it is, discovers what it is not and imagines what it could become.

(Boal. 1995, p. 13)

The debut performance of SPIS took place in mid-February 2007 at the Wits School of Arts. It was specifically targeted at first year Drama students. The third module of Performance Studies One, a course which included both a Voice and a Movement segment, SPIS was the segment in which the students would learn about performance as acting. At the time, the objective of the selected section of the course was to teach the students about the basic building blocks of dramatic performance: the Elements of Drama (Clansen, 2000). As mentioned earlier, my involvement in the course came through my appointment as a tutor, as part of my accreditation requirement as an MA Dramatic Arts student at WSOA. There were two main reasons the performance work I had been witnessing in the course had made an impression on me. First, most of the students were fresh out of high school and therefore, by implication, considered amateurs in university level theatre knowledge. However, the course focused on what the students *did* know- their personal experiences- in order to teach them about what they did not know- the basic elements of Drama. Secondly, the course required the students to create their own original performances devised from these personal experiences. In other words, the students used their own experiences to create theatre and to learn about what they as individuals could achieve through theatre performance.

The group I worked with consisted of twenty students, ranging between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one. The students were together in one of five classes, referred to as the *blue group*, within the entire group of approximately one hundred WSOA Performance Studies first year students. For purposes of the course, the students were explicitly divided, by the course coordinators, to ensure diversity in race, gender, sexual orientation and cultural background in each group. Over a period of eleven weeks the students embarked on a process that began with them introducing themselves, to each other, through the use of a timeline that each student created with a partner. This timeline was made up of real life events from each student's life, arranged in chronological order and as the student remembered them. The process was scheduled to end with the students creating ensemble performances based on the stories they had shared about the memories listed in the timeline. Each lesson would begin with a warm-up session which eased the students into the main activity. The end of each lesson was marked by a time of reflection where students voluntarily gave feedback on what they had learnt and experienced during the lesson.

In most lessons, I participated fully in the warm-up and reflection of the class. During the main body of work, however, in lessons that allowed group dialogue, my primary role became that of observer, as I moved from group to group listening to their discussions. Many times I would make a comment about the work they were doing, if I was asked, as well as when I felt my input would make a difference- whether by introducing a new thought that would enhance the work or one that would complicate the debate or discussion held.

My aim in doing so was to encourage a reflective spirit that ensured that students were thinking about the choices they were making, were considering the various options available to them and were constantly bearing in mind that the most important part of their work was the effective communication, to an audience, of the ideas they had discussed and debated. As often as I could remember I would bear in mind the probability that my presence as a post-graduate student, in a course where most of the students were only starting their higher education, was highly influential. Therefore, I tried to encourage the students to trust their own intuition as much as they trusted mine. I took it for granted that any insecurity the students held about their own opinions could, understandably, be based on things that I said or did during those classes, so I tried to work in ways that I felt were the least invasive and most empowering for the students.

With specific regards to the following account, I have found it important to describe my experience of the lesson, in detail, as each exercise unfolded. I hope it will serve as a means of demonstrating how the process encouraged the exploration of meaning from the perspective of the students, which becomes more and more significant as this study continues. As mentioned earlier, in a previous lesson each student had worked with another member of the class and created a timeline of memories of their own life story. The students were then tasked with selecting a memory they wished to explore and work with for a lengthened period. The students were also asked to find an object, at home, that best symbolized the memory that they had selected.

The objects used in the following exercises were thus the objects chosen by the students to represent the memory they had decided to use. The following account is written from my point of view as a participant-observer of the class proceedings.

Performance Studies I Acting Week 4 5 & 6 March 2007

Lesson 2

Warm Up: Circle of Rhythms

The first exercise- Circle of Rhythms- was used to encourage concentration, play and connection. It was the way in which the facilitator led the students into the work of the lesson and it was marked by a conscious effort, on the part of the students and the facilitator, to relinquish all thoughts of things that lay outside the classroom that could be perceived as a hindrance to the work.

Before the activity began, the facilitator encouraged the students to take off their shoes, to relax and set their minds on the work that needed to be done. When each student found their place on the floor, the entire class of students stood in a circle, facing each other. The facilitator handed a ball to one of the girls while she explained how the game would work. One by one, the students were to throw a ball to another person in the circle.

Once the ball had been passed to every student in the circle, the facilitator tasked the group with repeating the pattern in reverse. So, instead of the exercise being a random series of decisions to throw the ball around the circle, each student was required to focus on where the ball had already been and the direction in which it would travel once it left their hands. A few moments later, much to the delight of the students, the facilitator added a second ball to increase the level of intensity of the exercise. A new pattern was created and repeated with the second ball, simultaneous to the play of the first ball. The game required concentration from each student and despite people dropping the ball on some occasions the class seemed to take on the challenge with ease. This particular warm-up exercise, like many others I saw the facilitator include in other lessons, was used as a method of channelling the energies of all the students towards one common task. I had a strong sense, when observing the class that the exercise was equally for the purpose of mental alertness as it was for the physical preparation of the body. More often than not, the warm-up exercises in the course would be conducted with the students standing in a circle, facing each other.

It was important that the circle was formed in a way that allowed each student to be able to see every other student in the circle, throughout the activity. This emphasized the co-existence of the individual self and the group. In line with this ethos, the course co-designer Warren Nebe confirms the intention of the course designers to affirm an individual self in each student, while simultaneously creating a space where the students pay particular attention to the existence and presence of others who are also individuals in their own right.

I think that some of the power of that course, is not only honouring who the students are, but asking them to honour each other and to find connections with each other... I think those kind of notions are also saying something about the kind of theatre we're interested in – of allowing the individual and collective voice.

NEBE, W. 2007. [Personal communication] December 4.

As Nebe had stated, I came to understand that using a circle format for the warm-up session worked to create a sense of acknowledgement of each student in the lesson by all the other students, right from the start. This (as well as many other activities which I will mention later) also served as a reminder that the students would be working as one team. Confidentiality and sensitivity were also highlighted as essential working principles in order for effective team work to take place. The facilitator spoke of this in an explicit manner and on a regular basis. Working with the students, I had a sense that each person understood how important the principles were. Indeed, the nature of the work soon revealed itself as dependent on people's real feelings and experiences as the materials through which they would learn. And so it was crucial, in terms of the learning process, that every person felt comfortable to express themselves without fear of rejection or judgment. I found that there was always some significant symbolism in the warm up activity. In Rhythm of Circles, the ball represented something the class was to share- energy, memories, empathy- and the passing of the ball personified the collective connectedness to the single entity that would be shared. Each time a person made contact with the ball, it emphasized the ability of that individual to respond and influence the direction of the shared entity within the structure and context of the greater group.

Since each student was accountable to the others, in terms of memorizing the pattern in which the ball had travelled around the circle, the end goal was a shared goal. The game ended when the balls, having travelled through the entire circle, returned to the first people who had thrown them.

Step One: Object Circle.

In the next exercise, an object was passed around the circle from one student to the next. Each student was required to transform the object using their imagination. The object was a wooden stick. One tall, dark-haired girl stood up and pretended to hit something with the stick. The class was then given the opportunity to guess what she had transformed the stick into. The students had a few answers. Some thought it was a baseball bat, while others felt it was a golf club. The facilitator then asked some members of the class to give a justification for the answers they had given. After much debate, one student expressed how he felt that the girl who had demonstrated the transformation could have included the use of facial expressions and hand gestures to communicate her idea more clearly. Many students agreed. And thus, it was concluded that although much of the work of transforming the object happened in the mind of the performer, communicating and expressing the transformation of the object needed to be done through the performer's body and its relationship to the object. The facilitator agreed this was essential if the objective was for the new idea to be communicated clearly to an audience.

The class also spoke about how gestures could be read in different ways by different people, thereby resulting in varying opinions about what the new object might be. This process was repeated until everyone in the group had had the opportunity to transform the object. The facilitator was conscious of giving the group enough time to discuss the work. In retrospect, it is clear how this simple exercise might be seen as a method through which various individual interpretations were affirmed. It was a way to remind the class that the working space in the classroom allowed and encouraged difference, and diverse points of view. It was clear, by the end of this activity, that each person held a personal ability to communicate an idea and, simultaneously, to interpret one. The exercise that followed highlighted how the lesson had been planned so that each activity was smoothly integrated into the next, like a series of building blocks. Each exercise, and its learning objectives, was carried out in such a way that the result impacted or influenced the comprehension of the work in the next exercise. In my interpretation, this made the process accessible for each student regardless of their background in terms of Drama work.

Step Two: Image work with objects.

As a result of the classes being intentionally integrated as mentioned before, they consisted of students who came from a variety of educational backgrounds. Some had been exposed to Drama work in high school and understood some fundamental principles, while others had never encountered the subject at all.

Furthermore, many of the students were learning alongside peers belonging to racial groups, as well as social and economic backgrounds, that were vastly different from their own, and for the very first time. Ironically, the intention behind the planning of the course was that the very things that made these students different from one another should emerge as the students worked together on their personal stories. As a result of these circumstances, it was of the utmost importance that the lessons were structured and facilitated in such a way that these differences did not hinder the work or inhibit the students from doing the work, but rather that difference would enlighten and encourage investigation. The facilitator was always well prepared for this environment since she herself had designed the lesson, as well as the overall course. On this subject, the facilitator makes the following statement:

Maybe somebody else's story in relation to my story changes my understanding or opens up a new possibility for me. So I think that thing of my story being reflected in your story is also a very important part of the course particularly because we're dealing...we're in a multi-cultural classroom setting where people have been completely differently socialized.

MATCHETT, S. 2007. Interview on 4 December 2007. Johannesburg

The idea that difference can create new possibilities, despite its obvious ability to create conflict, is what makes Matchett's work so compelling, from an observer's point of view.

Her approach is one that coincides with Freire's ideas on the educator who invests in problem-posing education.

Freire (in Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003) explained the role of the ideal educator as follows:

The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the doxa is superseded by true knowledge at the level of the logos...the former attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness; the latter strives for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality.

(Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003, p. 64)

In the next exercise, the students were instructed to create images using the objects they had brought from home. The facilitator began by asking each student to find their own space on the floor of the classroom. She asked the class to make sure that, as they worked and moved around the classroom, they were conscious of creating a distinct space where they could work as individuals, even though they were surrounded by their classmates. Once again a sense of individuality within the context of the group was acknowledged and affirmed without negating the idea that the class was still working as a team. In this task the students were asked to walk around the classroom space, at a relaxed pace, while focusing on and thinking about the memory that their object symbolized. The students were allowed to place and hold the object as they pleased, as long as they were aware that they were in constant relation to it in some or other way.

At the sound of a hand-clap, made by the facilitator, the students were required to freeze and create an image that somehow echoed the mood or any other aspect of the timeline memory they had chosen. At the next sound of a clap, the students would resume walking around the class. This action was repeated several times.

The facilitator encouraged the students to try as many different poses, between object and body, as possible, and to focus on how meaning was created through each image they made. One student had brought, as her object, a samoosa in a pie-wrapper. In one of her images, she stood leaning on her back leg, feet apart, with the arm that did not hold the samoosa on her waist. The other arm, samoosa in hand, was lifted toward her chin. Another student had brought with him a guitar which he held so delicately that it seemed he wished to communicate that the instrument had a hidden fragility that was not apparent at first glance.

A third student brought a journal in which she wrote poetry. In an image she created, it seemed, from my interpretation of her body language in relation to the journal, that the journal not only provided much solace in times of despair and confusion, but that it signified some great aspiration for her. Some other objects included a silver charm bracelet, a toy gun and a TV remote control. The next step involved the students introducing movement to the still images they had created. The facilitator suggested that the students try to find an action they could repeat that would enhance, or even change, the meaning of the still image. As time went by she added to the work the option of finding a word or phrase that could be repeated as the action and image were repeated. For twenty minutes, the students walked around the classroom doing this exercise. Following this task, each student was asked to work with a partner.

The students were told to join forces but maintain a strict focus on their individual work as well. They each needed to continue creating images accompanied by actions and phrases and, simultaneously, associate their work with the work of their partner.

All the work was to be created only in a spirit of spontaneity. Each object was to be worked with, in relation to two bodies and another object- without any prior planning or discussion. The relationships formed between the moving bodies, the spoken words and the objects created very interesting physical and thematic conversations between the students. Throughout this exercise the facilitator's intention was to allow the students to explore symbols and memory and how they could be used in creating dramatic meaning and telling a story. As each student moved their object from one position to another, some students became so engaged when juxtaposing their work with that of another student, that the verbal phrases that they had originally selected to be repeatedly spoken, were consciously and subconsciously exchanged with the phrases that their partners were using. For me, the progression of this exercise highlighted the relationship of the object to the body as flexible rather than static. Furthermore, with the addition of a new body and another object, the meaning that any object held was shown to be variable and influenced by the context in which it was placed. Since each object was initially selected to represent a larger memory, this exercise also worked to highlight the idea that there were various ways in which to interpret memory and the original story. Once again, an awareness of difference and varying interpretations was created and avowed through the performance process.

Step Three: *Create a collage/sculpture using the objects.*

The third section of the lesson plan engaged the students in another image-building process, this time involving groups of about five to six students. At first, each person shared the story behind their object with the group to which they were assigned. This was done in order for everyone involved to understand the meaning and significance of each object. In one group a girl had brought an official document that she said contained her Matric academic results. She described, in depth, the anxiety she had felt prior to receiving that document, as well as the joy her mother had expressed when receiving the news that she- the daughter- had passed her final year in high school. A boy in the same group displayed a set of keys attached to a shiny silver key-ring and explained, with pride, how the keys were handed to him when he bought his first car. The exercise continued until every member of the group had shared their story. The students were then tasked with creating a collage using all their objects. However, they were not permitted to *verbally* discuss the decisions they were making as they created this collage. Ironically, however, they were required to reach a group consensus on the presentation of the final product.

During this activity, it was astonishing to watch how some groups found various non-verbal ways in which to effectively communicate their ideas to each other. One group, predominantly consisting of female students, found it fairly simple to create their collage.

Among their objects was a samoosa, a pie-wrapper, an elegant and petite container that looked like a jewellery box and a small purse mirror.

When creating their collage, it appeared as if they had similar ideas and therefore translating their thoughts to each other, using gestures and facial expressions, seemed effortless. Another group struggled with the placement of the final piece of their collage. One person moved the object to the front of what looked like a pathway, created with coloured stones that were carefully placed so that it seemed that the words on the open pages of the poetry journal leaped off the paper and became the shiny stones that established the starting point of the stone path. Moments later another student moved it to what looked like the rear end of the collage where a long string-like ribbon was placed in a circular shape. The two students persisted in moving the object back and forth until the course facilitator announced that their time was up.

The most exciting part of the lesson unfolded when the facilitator asked the class to imagine that they were at an art exhibition, where each collage was a featured work of art. In this spirit, the students moved around the performance space as a collective body and each collage was viewed by the class. Various students offered their perceptions on what each collage symbolized. The interpretations varied from metaphorical and abstract symbolism to very literal translations of what was viewed. Some students debated the accuracy and value of certain interpretations, while others simply observed and listened to the points made by their classmates. Although there was some rigorous debate at times, none of the interpretations were unanimously deemed incorrect or inaccurate.

This was further emphasized by the facilitator's conscious effort to repeatedly remind the students that her point of view was in no way superior to any other. She engaged in every debate by listening and then giving her perspective.

Step Four: *Using the object collage, create 5min scenes.*

The students were then required to create scenes using the work they had just developed. This meant adding dialogue, movement and staging to the images they had created in groups. Now that the students had expanded on their content material, the primary objective was to create scenes that clearly depicted the elements of Drama. The students were learning that these were the basic building blocks of storytelling in theatre performance. The primary element was the development of characters and the relationships that existed between characters. This translated into determining the roles of status and power in those relationships which created the necessary Dramatic tension. The students, in their groups, made these necessary decisions. The other building blocks were place, time, focusing on a central theme or issue and the creation of symbolic meaning, which was already established through the use of the objects the students had brought from home. Although during this exercise the students were permitted to make reference to worksheets they had previously received, on the topic of the Elements of Drama, it proved to be a challenging task to communicate the elements as well as depict the story of each of their objects truthfully. This required that the students be as creative as they were pragmatic.

The scenes needed to be understandable to the audience and so some students used the literal meaning of the object rather than referring to the memory that the object represented, while others excelled at depicting their memories in performance. What followed the performances was a class discussion where each group received feedback from the class about their performance. This led into the final part of the lesson.

Step Eight: Wrap up and reflection.

The conclusion of each lesson began with the students returning to the class circle formation. Each student sat on the floor and eased their way into the class discussion that was held as a means of reflecting on the activities of the day. This part of the lesson was created in order to give the students the opportunity to share with each other, and with the facilitator, what they felt they had learnt. Led by the facilitator and conducted in a fairly relaxed manner in order to promote openness, the discussion involved all the students. The students who shared their thoughts and feelings did so on a voluntary basis. Once again, the facilitator reminded the class of the need for open-mindedness and honesty in order for the conversation to be enlightening and non-discriminatory. This reflection time provided the facilitator and me with the opportunity to communicate any of our own thoughts that came up as a result of our simultaneous roles as observers and participants. It was also during the reflection part of the lesson that many students, who had initially felt insecure about the validity of their stories and objects, openly expressed feelings of gratitude for the lesson's activities.

Many felt validated by how their perceptions were received and even challenged by others, but never rejected or made to seem insignificant. This was especially meaningful to those students who had no previous experience of doing theatre work. The comments they made indicated that there existed a general feeling amongst the class that the fact that every interpretation was taken as legitimate was highly appreciated and that part of the value of the process was that it had implied that each of them had something of value to bring and share that enhanced and moved forward the learning process. Some students used this time to express some concerns about the work they had done.

One boy spoke of his frustration about the fact that, despite his efforts to communicate a very specific concept, his group members had created something different from what he had in mind. Furthermore, the audience had also failed, to his dismay, to read, from the image his group had created, what he believed to be the main message of their work. He was concerned with the nature of abstract image work and how a specific interpretation of the work could be guaranteed. Consequently his observations opened up a discussion that yielded other perspectives for the students and it was precisely for the purpose of recording these perspectives that the reflection phase of each class was followed up by a journal entry that each student was expected to write in their own time. As a result of an agreement of confidentiality, none of the work written in the journals of the students has been included in this report.

However, the journal of each student was agreed to be a space whereupon a selected reader of the journal, usually the course lecturer, and the student to whom the journal belonged could converse and share thoughts. On several occasions I was entrusted with the role of being a selected reader where I observed that, for the most part, journaling provided a much needed private space for the students to evaluate the experiences they had in class. Most students documented their feelings and perceptions about the activities they had taken part in. Valuing, acknowledging and understanding one's own experience, while seeking to understand that of others, was very clearly a fundamental part of what the students taking part in this course understood performance work to be about. This was a direct result of the nature of the course and the intentions of the course creators. I also believe that the value of this course lies in the fact that the course enables the performance students to create knowledge about themselves and others, as they exchange their personal stories and create performance work together.

According to Moore *et al* (2008), there is a direct relationship between the act of narrating a story and of constructing knowledge. As stated:

...narrative is a way of knowing, a search for meaning that privileges experience, process, action and risk. The shared roots of both storytelling and knowledge indicate the way knowing is shared through action.

(2008, p. 202)

Here, I wish to put forward that a way of knowing- in this case SPIS- that “*privileges experience, process and action*” is a way of knowing that creates transformation.

As depicted earlier, the students created new meanings and understandings of the key themes and issues presented by their memories through a process of narration and action. Furthermore, my stance is that SPIS is an example of Freire's educational philosophy in action because it uses performance as a pedagogical tool to encourage reflection as well as critical thinking. These, in turn also lead to change. As Freire (in Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003) states:

Problem-posing education affirms men as beings in process of becoming- as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality...

(Darder *et al* (eds.) 2003, p. 66)

SPIS asks its learners to think of themselves as participants in an unfinished story: as students in the present, as people with past experiences and as creators of a future through theatre. For Freire education is a means to transform the reality in which men find themselves and this statement, with regards to SPIS, is supported by Howard's (2004) statement about the intention of theatre practitioners working with performance as a form of critical pedagogy:

Practitioners [of critical performative pedagogy] work to examine where authority lies, to diffuse authority, to encourage exchange, and to give voice to those who have not been able to express.

(2004, p. 2 of 13)

SIPS's creators explicitly state a commitment to encouraging a relationship of mutual exchange between all the students, despite their varying backgrounds. This provides each individual with the opportunity to express themselves.

Furthermore the course affirms the ability of all participating students to generate knowledge in this way and also encourages the students to think critically about their world which includes both their experiences as well as those of their peers. In this way, SIPS encourages performance students to create from a place which responds to the issues presented by their own life experiences and the lived experiences of their peers. Allowing oneself to reflect on the experiences of another in order to act is in itself transformational. A student participating in the class supports this finding, albeit with some regret.

A lot of times we don't want to listen to other people's sad stories, we don't want to share in their sad stories. Because I know that if you tell me now that something bad happened, it will affect me and I really don't want to put your baggage on me, I have my own, do you know what I'm saying...Once I start to look at the other person and realize what they're going through then it changes my life. It changes my opinion, it changes my perspective cause now I'm seeing from my point of view, my incidents, my accidents, my life experiences and this other person's as well. Yes, it's from an external point of view but it answers some questions in my life.

MOTSOATSE, T. 2012. Interview on 5 December 2007. Johannesburg

Clearly, the richness of this course lies primarily in the relationships that it creates. Since the primary source material is the personal story of each student, which through the guidance of the educator and the collaboration of other students is interpreted and re-created by the student themselves, the power dynamics in the student-educator relationship as well as from student to student are neutralized. No one is greater than the other, even while it is clear that each has their own unique role to play in the process.

Freire's education has this relationship at the heart of its value system. Many scholars of Freire appreciate this most about his approach. As McLaren and da Silva state in their discussion of *Critical Pedagogy and Counter Memory*:

The strength of Freire's pedagogy is that it presents a way of transcending the unacknowledged violence inherent in the binary that positions the 'colonizer' [banking system teacher] against the 'colonized' [banking system recipients].

(McLaren, Leonard. 1993, p. 80)

For Freire, the student is a researcher, capable of discovering and devising knowledge along with the educator. In his perception, "...students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (Darder et al (eds.) 2003, p. 64). Freire believed that as a result of the students understanding the problem in a broader social context and not as some theoretical hypothesis, the need to respond could be created at a more meaningful level, thus enabling the students to see themselves as committed members of a larger community than that of the classroom space.

SPIS asks the students to remember their lived experiences - and therefore the meanings that these lived experiences hold for each student - in order to use these stories to learn. The ability to understand difference through the empathetic process of hearing and learning from shared personal stories means that the theatre interventions created by the students are generated from the mutual understanding, witnessing and questioning of their social environment.

Moreover, this happens within the safe context of an educational setting. Consequently, as Friere's concept implies, the classroom becomes a place where, albeit on the level of personal reflection, social citizens are trained for social action. SPIS also ensures the participation of the educator as a *facilitator of learning* (Rogers, 1979) rather than a figure of absolute knowledge and authority. This too is done to ensure a level of self-determination on the part of its participants. An education expert and avid advocate for learning that is self-initiated- Carl Rogers- encourages the recognition of the autonomy of the student in effective learning and thus agrees with Freiren education. Rogers states the following:

It seems reasonably clear that for learning of the sort we are discussing, it is necessary that the student, of whatever level, be confronted by issues which have meaning and relevance for him.

(1969, p. 130)

Rogers suggests that the facilitator (a term he uses to avoid the power dynamics associated with the term 'teacher') acknowledge and seek out, *from the student*, issues and problems about the subject material that are relevant to the student. This is done in order to validate the student and to create a motivation towards the seeking of knowledge. He applauds learning that encourages and allows "*self-initiated, experiential learning*" (1969, p.105) and believes that the key to creating this kind of education lies in "*human interpersonal*" relationships, specifically involving the educator's decision to invest in a relationship of trust.

On this Rogers writes:

If I distrust the human being then I must cram him with information of my own choosing, lest he go his own mistaken way. But if I trust the capacity of the human individual for developing his own potentiality, then I can provide him with many opportunities and permit him to choose his own way and his own direction in his learning.

(1969, p. 114)

For Rogers, it is the educator's responsibility to *facilitate* continuous self-learning in the student and to create an environment that promotes a sense of self-determination in learning. In SIPS, the young people in the class are the ones writing and telling their stories and then transforming these stories into performance work on stage. Indeed when one considers discussions by Moore and Mitchell (eds.) (2008) around praxis, defined earlier as "...*the action and reflection of people upon their world in order to transform it*" (2008, p. 211), SPIS is an effective form of praxis. Moore and Mitchell (eds.) continue to explain the nature of praxis:

In praxis, the facilitator draws participants into a process of critical reflection by first discovering the generative themes that are the common experience in one's social milieu, developed by people to make sense of the world around them. Once discovered,...participants work together to initiate new understandings of what is going on and one's place within it. The goal is to determine appropriate action and change.

(ibid, p. 199-200)

In my experience of the course, I found SIPS is to be one such example of the above described process of critical self-reflection. Like Freire and Rogers, I am firmly convinced that the relationships between human beings is at the heart of transformative education and I found SPIS to be a theatrical platform upon which Freiren attitudes towards education are explored and practiced.

The relationship between learner and educator is tailored to the goal of achieving the most effective learning process, and self-inspired, problem-posing education is made possible through the use of the personal story. By incorporating subject material that belongs to the lived experiences of each student as well as their imagination, the classroom becomes a place in which the students explore the value of their own experience, interpretations and intentions as they learn.

The students learn that performance can be a means of creating knowledge about themselves, for themselves and for others. They learn to create new knowledge via the acknowledgement of the knowledge that they already possess as a consequence of their experiences and in relationship to new knowledge contributed by their peers as a consequence of their own experiences. Although speculative, what is most interesting for me are the possibilities birthed through such a process. I am especially intrigued by how the personal stories of the students could work to reveal the dynamic complexities of socially constructed knowledge which, without very personal and context-bound experiences can easily be taken to mean singular, well-recognized yet uncontested truths. In my perception, the work that is created by students doing this course has an enormous potential to reveal theatre's ability to alter and challenge aspects of the public mindset because it asks that the performer look within in order to play a role in the construction and de-construction of what we may claim to "know" about ourselves as a society.

What is most inspiring with regards to the possibilities of this work is a statement made by Ms Motsoatse about the SPIS work, expressed in contemplative reflection in conversation I have with her about the SPIS course a few years after our first interview:

The person grows as well as the performer because you're going from the known [the personal story] to the unknown [the collaborative exploration of personal story] and in the unknown you're finding more about the known, you're finding more about Tumi because other people are bringing different things...And as a person you like don't really let go of the past but you create a future. So then you go from past to future. And it's a transition...to an imagined future...

MOTSOATSE, T. 2012. Interview on 23 July 2012. Johannesburg

In this chapter I have explored the value of personal story as a theatrical tool used to motivate learners to create theatre work that is relevant to themselves as a way of reaching an audience. In the following chapter, I turn my attention to a theatre performance also created from the personal experience of a performer. In this case study, I hope to demonstrate the ability of theatre to generate transformative dialogue amongst all its participants- performers and audiences alike.

6. CHAPTER 5

Inside the performance

Theatre [is] frequently concerned with strategies of self-empowerment that enable communities and individuals to move from one place to another; a transition which may involve crossing one or more borders. These borders may appear in many guises: psychological, racial, sexual, sociological, professional; as well as geographical.

(Prentki, Preston. 2009, p. 251)

The following account serves as data for the enquiry I make regarding the significance of the relationship between personal experience and theatre. It is also an effort to demonstrate the effectiveness of the use of personal experience as a resource for creating theatre work that visibly and directly impacts an audience and generates knowledge. In order to understand the proposed perspective, the mindset one must develop is an attitude that appreciates and understands theatre performance as more than just the act of putting something onto a stage for an audience to witness. It is important to see performance as process and as a relationship between what happens on stage and what happens in real life. As Schechner states:

Performance is used in politics, medicine, religion, popular entertainment and ordinary face to face interactions. The complex and various relationships among the players in the performance quadrilog- authors, performers, directors and spectators - ought to be investigated...

(Bial [ed] 2004, p. 7)

And so, performance as a way of acquiring knowledge- about the social world and how to live in it- is what I explore in the following story.

Happy.Period. As in, Full Stop is a play I created and performed in 2009 with two dear friends and colleagues, Refiloe Lepere and Juanita Azannai. The performance was staged to function as a talk show that involved a live audience in its performance process. A vibrant and bold female character named Stella, played by Azannia, took on the role of hosting the show, while on stage Lepere and I played multiple characters who engaged with the audience as well. For the duration and purposes of this reflexive report, I will be speaking about the performance in the present tense. The motto on Stella's show is "*A speaking audience is a speaking nation and a speaking nation is a healing nation*", and through her interaction with the audience, Stella encourages a consciousness in the audience that is unique to the show. Her audience is expected to exercise their intentionality towards the characters on stage. Stella insists on the participation of the audience. It is the only way her show can successfully achieve its aim: to empower the characters on stage to make life-changing decisions using the comments and suggestions taken from the personal experiences of the audience.

The performance generates interesting discussions on various pertinent and controversial social issues- including, amongst others, sexual abuse, xenophobia, domestic violence- depending on the brief given to us (the performers) or the context within which we perform. The scenes are created to stimulate robust debate and the content of the scenes is always taken from our (the performers) lived experiences and observations about social life. Furthermore, people in the audience share their heartfelt advice and memories from their own experiences in an attempt to offer the characters on stage new perspectives on the situations they find themselves in.

The play is 90 minutes long and consists of three scenes. In each scene, our major question to the audience is about the pursuit of happiness and the ways in which it can be created, achieved and understood. We ask our audience to help the characters on stage to come to a state of happiness with “*no fine print, no ifs, no maybes and no buts*”. What our characters seek is “Happiness. Period. As in, full stop.” Our performance seeks to investigate the views of the audience about the meaning and methods of pursuing happiness despite the dire injustice and oppression we see in the world. Scenarios of some of these oppressive situations are depicted on stage through the use of story and character.

The first scene gives the audience a chance to debate personal happiness and how a career-driven, heterosexual female character can achieve her goals despite her guilt and despair at the infidelity that plagues her marriage. The second scene is about a woman whose friendship with a Zimbabwean illegal immigrant forces her to make life-changing decisions with regards to her family and their prejudice. This scene results in a discussion about the social implications of xenophobia and the role that power plays in relationships. The final scene is a quest to find the meaning of happiness and purpose when a character is faced with depression. In every scene the central characters are female. This is a conscious decision we make as female artists. Our decision is based on our conviction and commitment to creating work that is heartfelt and authentic. We believe that this kind of work is rooted in our personal experiences and those of other women with whose stories we can identify and are familiar.

Under our theatre company name, Azannai and I perform the following scene, in the Maitisong Festival in Gaborone, Botswana, in April 2009. The journal account is extracted from my journal writings and is therefore written from my point of view as a performer.

A Journal entry:

The lights were dimly lit and yet the stage space felt strangely over-heated. It was the final scene, and I walked onto stage nervously in the guise of a young woman named Sarah. Sarah is a character in desperate despair. She is extremely unhappy despite having what appears to be a perfect life. She has a good job, a loving family, a fiancé, as well as faithful friends. She is pursuing a career she is highly passionate about. And yet Sarah struggles with issues of self-worth. So much so that she feels isolated and powerless to overcome these deep feelings of unhappiness. When the audience first meets her, she is tired of fighting her own disillusioned mind in order to feel a sense of fulfilment and purpose.

It was not at all difficult for me to portray Sarah's emotions. I knew exactly how she felt. Sarah is a character we created twenty four hours ago, before the performance when they [my colleagues] read a suicide letter I had written several days before our meeting. I brought it to share my feelings, perhaps hoping for precisely what happened next. After we talked and I cried, she [Lepere] suggested we transform what I had written into a scene in the play.

At first, I was ashamed and didn't want to have to expose myself in that way. I thought of all the people who would come to see the performance.

I imagined they would sense, somehow, that the story we told belonged to me. I shared my fears with my friend and for a long while we debated, back and forth, the value of telling my story. That evening when Sarah walked onto the stage, I knew it would be one of the hardest and most meaningful performances I would ever have to do. On stage, I was immediately comforted by the soft texture of the blanket I felt beneath my toes, laid across the centre of the stage as a prop for Sarah to use. I chose all the props for the scene. I was also very aware of the solid wooden floor beneath my feet, firm and strong. Perhaps it provided the security I needed. It probably did.

Although the audience was not aware of it, Sarah's story was my story. I was the person in desperate need of some word of comfort, though that made me feel weak and pathetic. I needed someone to say what I was feeling was normal; that there was a way, a method I could learn to overcome the overwhelming feeling of helplessness and self-loathing that I knew so well. I tried to think of the many times I had faced it in silence, alone. I told myself that at least this time I was doing something different. Something that could help me. Slowly, doing my best to focus on the character, I delivered Sarah's monologue: a revised rendition of my letter. Ironically, I delivered it as a prayer, though I couldn't remember the last time I had prayed. On stage, the audience witnessed a conversation between Sarah and God. During her monologue, Sarah stood still and addressed the audience as if they were that same God with whom she spoke.

I remember I tried to make the audience understand that Sarah has decided to end her life after much effort to find a real, fulfilling sense of happiness. I didn't want them to misjudge her (rather me) as someone who did not realize how fortunate she was. I wasn't another spoilt brat who didn't realize that others had bigger problems, some diseases that meant they could no longer live. I wanted to have them understand me. I recited my letter with as much control as I could muster, and then slowly lifted a handful of white Tic-Tacs (that we were using to represent medicinal tablets) towards my mouth. I was about to swallow the handful of tablets when Stella ordered Sarah to stop. "Do we want her to die?" she asked, placing the responsibility of choosing whether or not to intervene in the hands of the audience. When the audience replied in unison, "No!" I wanted to cry.

Stella breathed a sigh of relief. "Alright people, let's get to work!"

"I have a question, Stella," a young handsome man in the front row said.

"Go right ahead."

"Sarah", he began, very starkly, authoritative, as if to wake my character from her momentary paralysis. "Yes..." I responded, preparing myself for what I expected would be a harshly judgmental comment. I kept my eyes focused on my hand: the hand that had, up until that moment, represented Sarah's freedom, and mine as well.

"You're in a relationship right? Have you told your fiancé how you feel?"

"No."

Despite my strained effort to avoid it, my eyes frantically panned across the audience and found the face of my partner, who had come to see the performance and had no idea of my pain. Did he know it was me?

“I have a wife and am wondering how you think it would make him feel if you went ahead with your plans.”

“Devastated,” I managed to say. I was taken aback. When I wrote the letter, I had thought very little of how it would affect him. My thoughts were only of ending the battle in my mind. The man’s comment suddenly made me aware that I hadn’t spent enough time thinking of how a suicide attempt would affect the people who cared about me.

“Isn’t it very selfish of you then?” he said, disturbing my thoughts.

Before I could answer, Stella came to my defence. “I think it’s important that we remember that this is not about the people in Sarah’s life. This is about her. So what can we do to help her?”

Then a bald white man seated in the back raised his hand.

“Stella, why are we so frightened by the idea of someone making this kind of decision?”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“I don’t think it’s a mistake that we were given the ability to make the choice to be somewhere other than here.”

“So you’re saying we should let her die?”

“Yes. Maybe this world is not a good place for Sarah. Perhaps she does not want to be here anymore. Shouldn’t that be her choice to make outside of our judgments and opinions? If that’s what she really wants, I think we should respect that.”

It was such a controversial comment. I felt anxious at his frankness but also relieved that someone in the audience understood how badly I wanted to stop feeling so depressed all the time. The audience started talking eagerly amongst themselves. Someone else spoke.

“I think the danger of seeking happiness is in the idea that it’s this utopia you can stay in forever,” the young woman said. “My sister and I have just been talking about it. I think seeking happiness all the time can be dangerous if we think it’s the only way we’re meant to feel. I think the depression, the frustration that she is feeling, is very normal. And I don’t think suicide is the solution.”

“I’m loving it!” Stella exclaimed. “All of us debating it, like this. That’s exactly what Stella’s show is about. But can someone please talk to Sarah. We seem to be talking amongst ourselves here!”

“Do you have someone you can speak with about how you feel?” an elderly lady asked. She had a calmness about her that seemed to permeate the tension in the auditorium.

“I used to talk to my therapist.”

“Why did you stop?”

“It seemed pointless after a while. The same things would come up all the time. It seemed like I wasn’t getting anywhere. And every time I was doing well, it was only a matter of time before I felt like this way again.”

“I think you need to find someone else to talk with, someone you know or trust. Someone older and wiser, who has been through what you are facing and is on the other side of it.” She paused and then turned to the host. “Stella, sometimes just knowing someone has been through what we’re dealing with, someone real, that we can see... that goes a long way.”

“Do you have someone like that, Sarah?” Stella asked.

“No.”

“Can you think of someone who would be willing to listen?”

After a brief moment, I answered, slowly, “Yes”. And I realized that I meant it. Without thinking, I dropped my arm and the white tablets fell to the ground. The woman in the audience continued to speak but her words were lost to me, muffled by the excitement I felt growing inside of me. Such a wonderful feeling having my faith restored again. And it was beautifully fitting that the audience erupted into a tension-releasing applause when my thoughts returned to the stage performance.

Stella smiled broadly. It was obvious that whatever the old lady has said was enough to alter the direction that Sarah’s life (and mine) was taking. The audience was relieved. So was I.

Looking back at my professional career, I can think of a no more profound and life-changing performance for me. I marvel at how powerful my own work as a theatre-maker is. It began with the willingness and the choice to share a personal experience with the audience even when I had so much to lose.

Even though the audience was unaware of it, they were instrumental in changing the course that my life was taking that day. Also, my colleagues and I will never know who else in the audience needed to hear that message.

End of journal extract: May 2009, Gaborone, Botswana

Although it is difficult telling this story (because it makes me vulnerable to the reader—their judgment, suspicion and pity), it is nevertheless the most genuine personal contribution I can make to this research work in order to demonstrate theatre’s capabilities in the journey of personal transformation. I experienced it myself.

An oppressive situation I was facing was successfully alleviated by the contributions of a community willing to listen and share in a theatre space. But what makes the theatre space so unique? To answer this question, Boal speaks of the dichotomy of the theatrical space which I credit for theatre’s ability to intervene in the reality of my life.

He says the following:

[In theatre] we are dealing with a space within a space: two spaces occupy the same place, at the same time. The people and the things which are in this place will be in two spaces...the aesthetic space is dichotomic and creates dichotomy, and all those who penetrate it become dichotomic there.

(1995, p. 23)

This means that in theatre, the actor is both the character *and* herself, and that the auditorium is both a space in reality and a world created for the stage.

Furthermore, because of the interactive nature of the performance, the audience member is both an observing member of an audience in reality and an active participant in the performance. Boal further elaborates on the precise workings of this dichotomy in transforming the lives of human beings. He uses the term 'protagonist' to mean "...*the character whom the author wishes to link empathetically with the public*" (1985, p. 181) and explains the transformative function of dichotomy thus:

When she [the protagonist/performer] lives a scene in her own life, she tries to concretise her declared desires...but when she relives the same [as the one in reality] scene in an aesthetic space, her desire becomes dichotomic. She wants simultaneously to show the scene and to show herself in the scene... Her desire, because it is aesthetic, transforms itself into an object which is observable, by herself and by others. The desire having become a thing can better be studied, analysed, and transformed.

(1995, p. 24)

In other words, the ability to observe the scene in which I am the protagonist-performer is what empowers me, as the person, to better understand and see my own problem. However, now I perceive the problem scenario from the point of view of the 'I' who stands outside of the 'suffering' me: understanding, accepting, seeing the suffering but also through the point of view of others, since they give their various interpretations of the situation. Therefore, in HPFS, I do not achieve this transformation by my own efforts only. All of the participants in the performance use their imagination and memory to help Sarah [me] find a solution. Therefore, not only is the entire auditorium in which HPFS is staged an example of Boal's aesthetic space, but also the knowledge on how to change my / the character's situation has been created within that space through the sharing of information between all the participating spec-actors.

That said, it is imperative to consider- in order to move onto examining how this personal transformation is beneficial to people who are not the protagonist- what Boal explains about the remainder of the process for the protagonist:

The dichotomy obliges the protagonist...to choose who she is: Is she the 'I' she has been and to whom she is referring (the referent), or is she the present, referring 'I', (the referee), 'I' before or 'I' now...the choice has already been made: the protagonist is the 'I' who tells of the 'I' she has been...she could not be the 'I' who lived the scene being recounted, since that would be denying the space and time separating the two scenes.

(1995, p. 25)

Once the protagonist has chosen her 'I', she is immediately recognised, and recognises herself, as a victor over the oppressive situation rather than as a victim of it. But what value lies in this journey for the other spec-actors? As much as that gained by the protagonist, if we take into account what Boal (1995) terms the “*Catharsis in the Theatre of the Oppressed*”. The term ‘catharsis’ here refers to the feelings of purification and restored balance experienced by an audience as a result of witnessing a theatre performance where the spectator has had a relationship of identification with the protagonist (Boal; 1985).

Boal (1995) argues that the cathartic experience of the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is unlike the catharsis of the classical genre of Greek tragedy, which he believes has survived even to the Hollywood films of the 21st Century (Boal; 2006) -where the protagonist is a tragic hero whose downfall or conflict is caused by his own socially unacceptable flaw.

Boal (1985) explains that what is central to the functions of tragic catharsis is that the protagonist is altogether virtuous and very likable, except that he has a *'hamartia'* - a bad trait which *"...is the only thing that can and must be destroyed, so that the whole of the character's ethos may conform to the ethos of the society"* (1985, p. 34). Boal argues that this type of catharsis is a tool for the domination of the audience in order to encourage conformity, because the spectator observes and vicariously absorbs the predestined journey of the 'other' [the character], and therefore suffers with them for their flaw whilst admiring their virtue [which are, by extension, also your flaw and your virtue for the duration of the performance]. Finally, the spectator is coerced into passively accepting the protagonist's [now also the spectator's] tragic fate as the result of their socially unacceptable flaw.

The effectiveness of this process is that the relationship established with the audience is one of passive empathy. This relationship, according to Boal, *"...provokes...a delegation of power on the part of the spectator, who becomes an object in relation to the character[and]...assumes a 'passive' attitude, delegating his ability to act"* (1985, p. 102). He argues (2006) that empathy's ability to assist the audience's vicarious experience of the emotions and psychological journey of a character can be dangerous if the relationship is between, for example, the spectator and a superhero character, whose world is characterised by violence.

To elaborate, he states the following:

It is not the violence per se which causes damage to the viewer, but the lack of rationale for this physical activity...when rational foundations of physical acts are not there, empathy turns into a relationship of pure irrational animality. Continuous intimacy with brutality tends to form brutes...violence is bad when unaccompanied by reason...or supported only by simplistic, standard pre-conceived ideas. But it can be didactic when rationalised and when its causes and its Ethos are laid bare.

(2006, p. 23)

And so, TO's catharsis is introduced as an alternative, since it does not aim to dominate or pacify its audience. Boal describes the cathartic effect of the identification and empathetic process in TO.

The goal of the Theatre of the Oppressed is not then to create calm, equilibrium, but rather to create disequilibrium which prepares the way for action. Its goal is to dynamise. This dynamisation, with the action which results from it...destroys all the blocks which prohibited the realisation of actions...That is, it purifies the spectator, it produces...the catharsis of detrimental blocks.

(1995, p. 73)

In other words, TO's catharsis purifies the audience of the inhibitors of action that exist within. The spectator in TO is asked to explore other options available for the character in order to change the fatal ending, as well as the moralistic implication it holds for the spectator. Therefore, in the case of a shared point of view regarding a particular injustice identified by the spectators of a theatre performance like HPFS, the opportunity to create options for the character, because of the workings of empathy, become the options that are available to the spectator as well. Furthermore, precisely because in HPFS, and any performances based on Boal's TO principles, nothing that is implausible in real life (though it can be explored) can be taken as a plausible intervention on stage, the options explored on stage become rehearsals for real life.

The aim is for the stage to reflect achievable options available in reality so that every option the protagonist can take on stage is possible to do in real life. It is made clear in this kind of theatre that all it will take for transformative action to occur in real life is the willpower and courage of that community to address the social injustice they wish to transform, once they have already explored ways to address the issues onstage. Ultimately, the hope is that the discrepancy or conflict caused by the fact that what the community of spectators creates on stage is not what is currently being practiced or reflected in reality will be the motivation to bring the experience into reality, based on the fact that it has been rehearsed in theatre and proven to be effective. Of course, there are those conditions in the real world that will differ from a staged performance. However, the assimilation on stage will have aimed to be as close to reality as possible.

Another element of the theatre that makes it an ideal platform for the addressing of pertinent social issues is the ability of performances to generate knowledge. Conquergood writes the following on the subject of performance:

Performance studies struggle to open the space between analysis and action and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice. This embrace of different ways of knowing is radical because it cuts to the root of how knowledge is organized...

(Bial (ed) 2004, p. 312)

For Conquergood (Bial; 2004), “*knowledge is not just literacy*” and as a result, he appreciates and acknowledges the *doing* way of acquiring knowledge that he says is intrinsic in theatre performance.

In the last two decades, various non-profit organisations and wellness initiatives, such as Themba Interactive and Drama for Life, both based in Johannesburg, have utilised performances as a methodology for addressing sexual behaviour change and sharing information about HIV and Aids. Through interactive performance, information has been shared with communities for whom literacy material was [and for some still is] inaccessible either due to economic constraints or a lack of literacy skills. This performance as knowledge method, as observed, involves a 'hands on' approach to learning rather than distant observation or analysis. They involve people actively doing things, like role plays, quiz-show style information dissemination, condom demonstration and workshops. Conquergood argues that the perception of knowledge in books as being superior to activity or practice-based knowledge negates a world of skills and information.

In *HPFS*, the potential of knowledge construction inherent in theatre work is evident. The audience gains information through their experience of the theatrical performance, which empowers the community with the life skills necessary to navigate their way through various social pressures and problems. This knowledge is generated by the audience's involvement in the performance as well as the real life-inspired scenarios that the performers on stage create. Furthermore, because it enables individuals to construct solutions for life's various challenges, that are then acted out, the knowledge constructed from such a theatre environment is an example of Freire's kind of education- born from and leading to consciousness.

The principle of knowledge and transformation through performance is also recognized in the core processes of Drama Therapy, according to Phil Jones (1996). He describes the human body as a means of communicating feelings, ideas and identity in a social context and points to the relationship between body action and transformation within Drama processes used for therapeutic means. This is based on the principle that participation in dramatic activity results in the mind and body working together in a process of discovery.

Embodiment in Drama therapy is the client's physical encountering of material through enactment, and combines the knowledge to be gained through sensory and emotional feeling with the knowledge to be taken from more abstract reflection.

(1996, p. 114)

In other words, performance work produces knowledge that encompasses both cognitive and psychological information. The process of enactment of a character, for example, is one activity that enables the process of transformation within the client in therapy. Jones (1996) explains that by hiding one's identity in the act of transforming into the body of another, the client is able to explore new ways of relating to the content material on both a cognitive and emotional level. This process is very similar to Boal's description of the transformation that occurs within the protagonist in the aesthetic space. In most instances, the described process creates the safety needed for the client to interrogate or respond to the content material in ways they may feel are too risky in real life. Consequently, discovering new knowledge through a 'foreign' character using their own body encourages the client to take similar risks in real life once they have stepped outside the role.

As Jones (1996) explains, “...*the physical change in identity and experience in the dramatic world can result in changes in the client’s usual identity and real life*” (1996, p. 114). This is made possible through the ability of performance to present new ways of being, and new possibilities, to the client, on both an emotional and intellectual level.

One other core principle of Drama Therapy evident in HPFS [and in SPIS, as a matter of fact] is the use of Dramatic Projection (Jones, 1996) to create work. In theatre this is presented through the process of identification with a character, or an event depicted on stage, experienced by the audience when watching a performance. Once again, these ideas have been explored by Boal in his discussion about empathy and catharsis. In Drama therapy, the audience [made up of clients or patients] projects their feelings, perspectives and experiences onto what they see on stage because of the similarities of that experience with their own. Similarly, the performer [now in a public, theatrical set-up] who is to take on the role of a character, especially if they are to work in a realistic style, must find ways in which to form a closer bond with the character in order to portray an authentic, believable performance. The performer also goes through a process of identification and projection of his or her own motivation and attitudes onto the character.

In therapy, this projection is used to encourage transformation in the client. The act of identifying with and then projecting one’s emotions onto a role is yet another way of enabling one to step outside of themselves and to simultaneously see themselves.

Thus, as Jones states:

As a result of the content and action we witness, we may shift our relationship with the projected feelings during or after the engagement with the performance. This may, in turn, affect the way we understand and feel about the parts of ourselves which have been engaged with in the projection.

(1996, p. 100)

It is clear that the empathetic relationship between character and audience is very significant in Drama Therapy, in Boal's TO and [as Boal argues] in all forms of narrative performance where the audience is asked, whether explicitly or coercively, to identify with the protagonist. What is important here is how this empathy is used, as well as the position of the audience in relation to the protagonist. In theatre for transformation, the audience cannot be passive spectators, absorbing the value ascriptions and moral implications dictated by the work of the director or writer. In theatre for social transformation empathy cannot connote the passive acceptance of a reality that is less than what the audience of that given community aspires towards. Theatre for social transformation beckons the audience to make a stand, to speak out, to actively create the transformation they want to see.

The environment is safe enough for people to make mistakes and to try out various options until the point where they find a plausible, believable solution for the problem areas they wish to address. It is an empowering theatre process that creates mutual responsibility [between all participants] for social change, whether one chooses to speak or act or not [since the opportunity is offered to all and choosing not to act does not exclude people from being participants].

Hopefully it will also create a sense of mutual accountability between participants who belong in the same community, outside of the theatre space. An increase in this kind of theatre in South Africa will no doubt provide a much-needed platform to address pertinent and resolvable issues. Of course, how far the implications of theatre for social transformation will go will vary from community to community, depending on the willingness of people to participate.

7. CHAPTER 6

Conclusion:

In a keynote address made by renowned South African playwright and activist Mike Van Graan at the 13th Time of Writer Festival at the University of Kwazulu Natal in March 2010, entitled *The State of the Arts*, he spoke of a dilemma faced by South African artists that he felt paralyzed their innate ability to create work that interrogates and challenges the socio-political status quo.

Reported in an online article entitled ²*Penned in or Breaking Out*, his speech focused on the story of the boycotting by then Arts and Culture minister, Lulu Xingwana, of a photographic exhibition of images depicting intimate relationships between black lesbian women. The reasons the minister is said to have given for rejecting the work were that it contravened the national goals of social unity and nation building. She is said to have found the work offensive because it showcased stereotypical representations of black women. Van Graan argued that this act not only exposed the Minister's prejudice and homophobia but that her rejection of the work-an exhibition which has received various international accolades in praise of the artist's vision and skill- as well as the response of artists and politicians to the incident, indicated an environment of silence regarding the implied censorship of artists. He argued further that the exhibition was an example of art that spoke to and reflected the lived experiences of a marginalised community of South Africans.

²Zvomuya Percy. December 14 2011. *Penned in or Breaking Out*. Mail and Guardian Online, [Online]. Available: URL. (<http://mg.co.za/article/2010-03-12-writers-penned-in-or-breakingout>). [3 December 2010]

And in fact, in light of the increase in what has come to be referred to as 'correctional' rape- which in itself depicts the role of language in perpetuating incorrect perceptions of sexual violence-of lesbian woman in South Africa in recent months, as reported by, the exhibition was very much within the agenda of nation-building and social cohesion, as Van Graan stated. In addition to creating a space that acknowledged the right of homosexual women to be counted as legitimate members of South African society, its placement at the Constitutional Hill also worked to remind the greater society of the entitlement of every South African, regardless of race or sexual orientation, to lay claim to every human right stipulated in the South African Constitution. Judging from the minister's reaction, it is evident that in our current political climate art is always in danger of being viewed primarily from the lens of the dominant political issues of the ruling class. As a result, a concern I share with Van Graan is the way many artists respond to this problem. As Van Graan states:

Artists are complicit in their own disempowerment by keeping silent, by seeking to align their interests with those of the ruling elite. Censorship is enforced today not through apartheid-era censorship boards, but through informal forms of intimidation and the threat of withholding public funds; the resultant self-censorship compromises the practice of freedom of expression and shrinks democracy.

(Van Graan *op cit*)

So we find that although in the short term the financial gain that comes with cooperating with the political elite is beneficial, and often times necessary for the compliant artist, it is detrimental in the long run to the community as a whole.

Indeed, what will become of the ordinary citizen who relies on the artist to voice the opinions they cannot express, and to highlight oppression where it exists? What of the person who enjoys art precisely because it works to shed light on the social issues that would otherwise be overlooked or hidden? Although I am not suggesting that social transformation should be the sole mandate of every artist, or that all art is aimed at social commentary, I agree that artists like me can play a vital role in this aspect of our country's development. I believe we should. My excitement at theatre processes like Happy. Period. As in, FULL STOP! and Self, Imagination, Play and Story is because they encourage the acknowledgement and expression of the personal narrative, which inevitably responds to and reflect the story of a greater society. This, I believe, will create platforms for artists to continue to engage in the work of social commentary and social transformation in creative, authentic and thought-provoking ways.

It may be argued that personal experience is a primary resource for *every* performer, that one cannot function as a performer without using information and life skills obtained by virtue of the fact that when they are not on stage, performers are ordinary individuals living everyday lives. It would also be reasonable to argue that personal experience may even be an obstacle to creating genres of theatre work that aim to challenge social norms and expectations, beginning with those that exist within the very individuals doing the performance work. However, it is not simply the use of personal experience as a resource that makes the class and the play I am studying unique.

What is special is the conscious choice of the designers of this academic course and of the theatre performance to highlight personal experience as a resource for theatre work that enlightens the students-performers and their audience. Personal experience is used in the study and creation of performance work as a tool to demonstrate the significant educative and transformative capabilities of theatre. In *Self, Play, Imagination and Story*, there is a deliberate choice to put personal experience on centre stage in order for the students to gain understanding of how theatre performance work is created and how it relates directly to the reality of the performer's (as well as the audience's) experience. It is also the pedagogical approach of doing group-centred work that makes the work of this course important. This decision results in a situation where each participant can say, "I see find my story in yours, and you find your story in mine". The implication for such work is that audiences that see the work will relate in a similar way to the work.

In Happy. Period. As in FULL STOP! personal experience is used to show the powerful communicative and community-building value of performance work. The students and the performers involved access information from their personal archives consciously - that is with *intention*. Through both processes the participants are aware of their own stories, their own histories and subjectivity, and how these affect their understanding of performance and of their social world.

Furthermore, the use of personal experience acts as validation that each performer is a person with a personal context and a point of view of their own, and that this personal aspect can add value to the quality of the work they do. The use of personal experience further affirms the value of the presence of the audience member who has come to see theatre work and engages with the work through an acknowledgment and sharing of their own experience in HPFS. Consequently, just as it was in SPIS, personal experience here is paradoxically affirmed by the collective pedagogy.

In the two case studies, theatre's ability to transform society is shown, exactly in the way Prentki and Preston (eds.) state:

The underlying principle in all [the] various applications of the theatre process is fundamentally the same: to enable the participants to (re)discover their innate capacities for play, for imagining, for creating, for relating to others by exploring the self in the other and the other in the self. Theatre is being applied in a world where being human has been reduced to a set of transactional economic relations. It is therefore an activity of resistance, of crossing the border between objectification and subjectivity. Participants are invited to re-create themselves in ways which the daily business of economic existence constantly thwarts.

(2009, p. 252)

It is clear that the capabilities of theatre to transform are acknowledged even beyond the confines of the two case studies analysed here, with the key principle being the acknowledgement of the self and the personal experience of the human beings involved. Not all theatre practitioners agree with this perspective, however. My view of theatre is especially controversial when viewed in light of Zarrilli's (Zarilli *et al*; 2006) observation about the role of the actor according to renowned theatre practitioner, Jerzy Grotowski.

Grotowski is famous for his perception of the actor as *holy*. For him, the actor's work is worthy of being ascribed with sacredness and he speaks of the actor as "...an ascetic athlete of the soul" (Grotowski, 1968). However, Grotowski's ideal actor achieves his ability to do his work through self-denial. Zarrilli explanation of Grotowski's concept is as follows:

The actor was to sacrifice personal psychology and eliminate in the body any resistance to full expression through a via negative- an eradication of the self to expose primal truths.

(Zarrilli et al. 2006, p. 456)

As a result of my involvement in both case studies, and in various other theatre performance productions, I believe there is an immense amount of knowledge and research material lost when an actor sacrifices who they are in order to honour a role or character that they must play. It seems far more beneficial to the actor and the audience member when the performer is perceived as a real person relating to a real world. Contrary to Grotowski, the designers of the cited course also believe that there is value added to performance when performers, especially students learning about performance, are encouraged to approach their performance work without denying the self but rather by acknowledging their personal psychology. This course aims to explore the performance of identity in the context of South Africa. The original course coordinator and Head of the Drama Department at WSOA, Warren Nebe:

...the trajectory that we're creating... is to ensure that by the time performers get to fourth year, students are able to create their own work in ways that are incredibly imaginative, cutting edge; that speak to who we are as South Africans and Africans.

NEBE, W. 2007. [Personal communication] December 4.

I believe the course and the play I have cited are both examples of work that reveals who we are as a society, and that can therefore speak to who we are as a society. The stories that the participants share are reflections of their social environments. Personal experience-based performance acts as the evidence of a social awareness on the part of those involved in the process of its creation. This means that actors and audience members participating in theatre work inspired by their personal stories and intentions are enabled to practice Freire's consciousness in the exploration of the performance of identity and while on stage. The case studies also serve as evidence of performance as a means of studying and *knowing* the world which the performers will ultimately impact. I am excited about the possibilities of the influence of this kind of work on, specifically, the broader community of South Africa; if, as I suggest, South African theatre makers invest in creating more theatre work as praxis, as in the examples of the two case studies. As Moore *et al* states, regarding praxis:

Praxis is not merely behaviour, it is the possibility of doing something that has not been tried before and that can only be understood in terms of the commitments that informed it. Thus interventions are rich concrete instances of 'what might be possible'.

(2008, p. 205)

Ultimately, the transformation of each individual is the responsibility of that individual. Both Self, Play, Imagination and Story and Happy. Period. As in, FULL STOP! provide the potential and playing field for personal change in the performer and in the audience member, yet each allows individuals to assess and shape their own participation and development within a community of diverse individuals.

As Boal concludes:

The human being not only makes theatre, it is theatre...theatre- or theatricality- is this capacity, this human property which allows man to observe himself in action. The self-knowledge thus acquired allows him...to imagine variations of his actions, to study alternatives...

(1995, p. 13)

What this means is that we can all participate in and be affected by theatre; that is, if we give theatre a chance to do what I believe theatre can do. Transformation is a process which requires the acknowledgement of existing knowledge, action in line with that knowledge, and reflection which gives birth to new knowledge. Theatre allows us, as a society, to see ourselves and change ourselves because we see ourselves. It has the capability to facilitate and provide a process such as that shown in the two case studies, particularly through the investigation and reinvention of the personal narrative.

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