Theatre, Therapy and Personal Narrative:

Developing a framework for safe, ethical, flexible and intentional practice in the theatre of personal stories

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been
identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved
for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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Abstract

Contemporary theatre has crossed boldly into therapeutic terrain and is now the site of radical self-exposure. The recent and expanding use of people's personal stories in the theatre has prompted the need for a robust framework for safe, ethical, flexible and intentional practice by theatre makers. Such a framework is needed due to the risks inherent in putting people's private lives on the stage, particularly when their stories focus on unresolved difficulties and cross into therapeutic terrain. With this ethical and practical imperative in mind, and in order to create a broader spectrum of ethical risk-taking where practitioners can negotiate blurred boundaries in safe and creative ways, this study draws on relevant therapeutic theory and practice to re-connect therapy and theatre and promote best practice in the theatre of personal stories.

In order to promote best practice in the *theatre of personal stories* (a term I will use to cover the myriad forms of theatre that make use of people's personal stories), I describe a new framework that synthesises theory and practice from the fields of psychodrama, attachment narrative therapy, and theatre and performance studies. The benefits of this integrative framework for the theatre practitioner are that it promotes safer, more ethical and purposeful practice with personal stories, and encourages more confident and creative artistic expression. The framework provides these benefits because it offers a structured model for decision-making by theatre practitioners who work with personal stories, and suggests ways that the practitioner can explore fresh artistic possibilities with clear intentions and confidence about the boundaries and ethics of the work.

The integrated framework has been developed through the grounded theory process of *reflective inquiry,* using in particular the models of *action research,* the Kolb *experiential learning cycle* and *applied phronesis.* The framework has four elements, which are explored respectively in chapters one to four: 1) *History:* understanding the roots of the theatre of personal stories in traditions of art, oral history, social activism, theatre and therapy; 2) *Ethics:* incorporating wide-ranging ethical issues inherent in staging personal stories; 3) *Praxis:* structuring participatory theatre processes to regulate the level of personal disclosure among participants (a model for structuring practice and regulating personal disclosure is offered — called the Drama Spiral); and 4) *Intentions:* working with a clear focus on specific intentions — especially bio-psycho-social integration — when working with personal stories. The study concludes, in chapter five, with a critical analysis of two exemplars of practice, examined through the lens of the Drama Spiral.

Key words: *applied theatre and performance, ethics, theatre of personal narrative, therapy, psychodrama, attachment narrative therapy, bio-psycho-social integration*

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Note about the use of my writing that has been published elsewhere: Chapters one, two and three of this study contain excerpts adapted from a chapter I have written for *Risk, Participation and Performance Practice,* edited by Alice O'Grady (Baim, 2017a). The entirety of that book chapter was written by me during the course of this study, i.e. since 2011. In addition, chapter four contains some excerpts adapted from writing that is exclusively mine, written during the time of this study, and published in Baim (2013, 2014, 2015a, 2017b).

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

Quid rides? Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur

Why do you laugh? Change only the name, and this story is about you.

Horace, *Satires*, I. 1. 69

The rapid rise of the theatre of personal stories

In recent decades, there has been a rapid hybridisation of theatre forms and approaches that draw directly on the personal stories of participants, performers and audiences (Martin, 2013; Snow, 2016; Foster, 1996; Leffler, 2012; Salas, 1993; Heddon, 2008). From autobiographical drama to investigatory and tribunal plays, from theatre of witness to self-revelatory forms, theatre makers are drawing on lived experience and creating powerful work that is transformative for participant-performers, for auto-ethnographic performers, and for audiences and spect-actors (Pendzik et al, 2016; Boal, 1979, 1995; Cohen-Cruz, 2006; Emunah, 2015).

While real events have been a subject of the theatre going back to the plays of ancient Greece, since the latter part of the twentieth century there has been a distinct shift within the theatre that amounts to a genuine innovation in the way that stories are sourced and presented in the theatre. Since the late 1960s, and accelerating since the 1990s, something genuinely new has been taking place on the international stage, a step-change that foregrounds individuals and the particulars of their lives, their personal stories, their subjective experience and their personal struggles as the subject matter for theatre making (Snow, 2016; Landy and Montgomery, 2012; Heddon, 2008). The proliferation of forms and artists presenting such work is vast and increasing, showing every sign of being here to stay. As Guardian theatre critic Lyn Gardner has written about

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autobiographical performances on the stage, 'as audiences, we like the idea that we are getting something from the horse's mouth and that what we are being told is true' (Gardner, 2016). This work takes place in theatres, in schools, in community centres, in hospitals, in prisons, in care homes, in corporate settings, at conferences, in university drama departments and dramatherapy programmes, in comedy venues and spoken word events, in voluntary sector agencies and on the street. Johnny Saldaña has identified more than eighty closely related sub-genres all rooted in personal stories and non-fictional events, including autodrama, self-performance, performing autobiography, documentary theatre, factual theatre, living newspaper, memory theatre, performed ethnography, reality theatre, and many others — plus his own specialist focus on ethnodrama and ethnotheatre (Saldaña, 2011: 13-14). Many of the sub-genres he identifies focus on the use of people's personal stories to create theatre. Pendzik et al (2016) have recently added the terms *self-revelatory theatre and autoethnographic therapeutic performance.* The many genres and artists intermix and develop ever more hybrids. This is not to mention the accelerating profusion of reality and reality-based programmes on the internet, television and radio. While the many sub-genres focused on people's personal stories could be set within the broader genre of *theatre of the real* (Martin, 2012, 2013; Forsyth and Megson, 2009), the proliferation of forms is so great that the theatre of personal stories could probably be said to form a genre in itself.

This rapid proliferation of personal stories on the stage, in their myriad sub-genres and hybrids, has meant that practice has raced ahead of theory. Where once we could make what seemed like clear distinctions between dramatherapy, psychodrama, and theatre practice (including applied theatre), this is no longer the case. To highlight this point, in 1996 Phil Jones could justifiably write that 'the chief difference between theatre and Dramatherapy […] is that the Dramatherapy experience allows for the exploration and resolution of projections whereas the theatre only invites an expression of projected feelings' (Jones, 1996: 135). As this study will demonstrate, this distinction no longer holds; theatre practice has moved on considerably since the 1990s, and the older distinctions between theatre and

therapy have been thoroughly reconstituted and problematised in the crucible of the theatre of personal stories. Mainstream and applied theatre now includes personal stories where people recount, deconstruct, work through, problematise, reflect on and, yes, sometimes even resolve (see Jones' quotation, above) all manner of difficult and painful human issues that might previously have been thought to be the exclusive purview of therapeutic settings. These stories are often portrayed in autobiographical fashion by the person themselves. The themes that are addressed in these personal stories include people sharing their experiences of trauma, addiction, violence, crime, illness, pain, torture, abuse, prejudice, oppression and many other difficult, painful, horrific or life-threatening experiences. The theatre of personal stories includes many positive stories, too; I am highlighting the difficult and painful themes because they are the themes likely to raise the ethical questions I am addressing here.

When I say that practice has raced ahead of theory, I am simply pointing out that we need ways of theorising the why, how, where, what, when and who of such performances, and to find a way of structuring our thinking and our processes around such radical self-disclosures in front of audiences. To offer perhaps the most startling example I have yet come across, we are now at the point in the contemporary theatre where a wounded former soldier — a double leg amputee in his early 20s who was wounded on a tour of duty in Afghanistan with the British Army — reenacts in front of 900 people in a public theatre the moment when his legs were blown off by an improvised explosive device. (The scene is played through a thin veil of fiction that changes superficial details, e.g. he is called by another name.) The scene shows the moment of the explosion and its aftermath of screaming, smoke-filled horror and confusion, and carries on to show the soldier's rescue by his platoon. For me as an audience member, this harrowing scene was almost unbearably shocking because the soldier was essentially reenacting his own near-death experience. This scene was in the highly acclaimed production *The Two Worlds of Charlie F* by Bravo 22 Company, with a script by Owen Sheers, which toured to packed houses across the UK in 2012 and about which a televised 'making of' documentary was filmed, presented by Alan Yentob (Sheers,

2012). The main reason for the public notoriety of the production was that it featured a cast mostly comprised of wounded war veterans, including infantryman Daniel Shaw, the young soldier described. In my conversations with members of the production team after a performance in Wolverhampton, they referred to the theatre-making process and the production of *Charlie F* as 'rehab drama' — in other words, an integral part of the soldiers' rehabilitation for psychological and physical wounds suffered in battle.

The Two Worlds of Charlie F is just one of the many and increasing examples of radical self-exposure in the portrayal of personal stories of extreme distress on the stage. At the moment when we see people reenacting on the public stage their experience of being mutilated in battle, followed by standing ovations in packed houses, all bets are off and we need to completely reexamine previously accepted notions of the boundary between theatre and therapy. Seemingly no topic is off limits in the theatre of personal stories, and this has serious ethical, theoretical and practice implications for theatre practitioners who work with peoples' personal stories (including their own), and is a primary impetus for this study. And *Charlie F* is by no means an outlier at the extremes of self-exposure on the stage. In this study, I will provide examples from my own research watching a selection of plays addressing highly personal topics that are just as significant as that represented in *Charlie F.*

To summarise: Set against the backdrop of the wide range of recently emerging genres and sub-genres foregrounding personal stories, this study examines the ethics and intentions of theatre where the personal stories of participants are used, and offers a framework to support best practice. This framework is relevant to all theatre practice that uses personal story, whether it is mainstream theatre, autobiographical theatre or applied, participatory, socially engaged, community oriented or therapeutic forms of theatre.

A note about terminology: In this study, I use the umbrella term 'theatre of personal stories' as a term of convenience to include all of the theatre-based forms

which include people's personal stories. It serves the purpose of encompassing what Pendzik et al have called the 'nomenclatorial overabundance' (Pendzik et al, 2016: 7) of the many genres and sub-genres identified by Saldaña and others. The theatre of personal stories is a new term, as far as I can discern; it has not yet appeared in publications, although there are several theatre practitioners of Playback Theatre who use the term to describe their work on their websites. In addition, regarding terminology, I will use the term 'participant-performer' for people who are participants in drama workshops and theatre-making processes, who may also present their work to other people, either at a small scale, e.g. to the other people in the participant group, or to larger groups such as invited, special-interest or public audiences.

The impetus for this study

I come to this study with a background as a theatre practitioner with a primary interest in the uses of theatre in criminal justice, mental health, social work, educational and therapeutic contexts, and also as a senior trainer in psychodrama psychotherapy and a specialist trainer in developmental attachment theory and attachment-based, trauma-informed practice. My first training and career was as an actor, theatre director and social / community theatre practitioner producing and performing theatre in prisons with Geese Theatre Company UK (the term 'applied theatre' was not yet coined when I started my career in the mid-1980s). My later training led to becoming a qualified teacher, a psychodrama psychotherapist and, more recently, a senior trainer in psychodrama psychotherapy, certified by the British Psychodrama Association and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy, with later training in the treatment of trauma and attachment-based narrative interviewing, assessment and principles of treatment with the Family Relations Institute. My training in multiple fields has allowed for the development of a purposefully eclectic approach that values the

overlap of the three approaches that are central to this investigation, namely the theatre of personal stories, psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy.

Having this background of training and practical work has informed me as I have sought to develop an integrated approach to the theatre of personal stories. This study encompasses an integrating theme running through my professional work over thirty years. My work in seventeen countries in hundreds of settings including criminal justice, mental health, social work, educational, corporate and voluntary sector agencies has continually shown the value and importance of combining theatre-based approaches with psychodrama and attachment-based narrative techniques (Baim 2000, 2004; Baim et al, 2002; Baim & Morrison, 2011; Baim & Guthrie, 2014). As my training and practice incorporates mainstream theatre, applied theatre and performance, psychodrama psychotherapy and attachment-based narrative approaches to therapy, I recognise that this relatively unusual combination of training and practice positions me in such a way that I can speak from personal and professional experience in offering a bridge connecting the theory and practices of theatre and therapy. This study is comprehensively bound up in my own personal and professional biography and parallels the arc of my career as a practitioner using applied theatre, psychodrama and attachment-informed therapy over the past thirty years. This is not a study that I could have undertaken at an earlier point in my career, because it integrates three decades of training and practice in theatre, psychodrama and attachment-based practice. This combined approach places particular emphasis on the healing potential of people telling — at many levels of implicit, metaphorical or explicit communication — sharing, enacting, reviewing and re-integrating their personal stories, using verbal and action-based methods, including theatre approaches, within safe and supportive groups and with appropriate levels of guidance and support from facilitators.

However, my integration of these fields of practice has to date been largely instinctive and more a pragmatic combining of skills, methods and techniques based on professional judgment. A deep-level, methodological integration of these

three fields of practice — the theatre of personal stories, psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy — is thus a key aspect of this investigation, which demonstrates that psychodrama and attachment narrative approaches are highly relevant fields of practice for the theatre practitioner working with personal stories. Indeed, the impetus for undertaking this investigation came from my having received enquiries from universities and drama schools, requesting that I teach their students the distinctions and commonalities between theatre (including applied theatre) and psychodrama. Such workshops have consistently shown that theatre students are acutely interested in the whole range of inter-related specialisms, across the entire spectrum of theatre from fourth wall traditional theatre to spectator-as-protagonist (psychodrama). Finding such kindred spirits, hungry for practical knowledge and interested in an integration of theory across the drama spectrum, was a key impetus for starting this investigation. Finally, I would add that this study has allowed me to expand and deepen ideas about theory, boundaries, methods and participatory structures that I initially explored with colleagues in Geese Theatre Company UK as we co-wrote the *Geese Theatre Handbook* (Baim et al, 2002).

Five key episodes that prompted the study

As I reflect on the origins of this study and my focus on integrating the personal, the theatrical and the therapeutic elements of the theatre of personal stories, I notice that I have been continually drawn back to five particular moments in my life. Looking back, I see that these five episodes were key moments that provoked my interest in doing this study, and my reflections on these moments have sustained me through the years of research, development and writing this study has entailed.

   The first episode took place when I was 22 years old and co-running drama workshops in prisons across the USA with the original Geese Theatre Company. In one of these workshops, in upstate New York, I recall asking a young man to play the role of his victim in a highly personal role play — a reenactment of his

violent crime. While he was willing to do this, and there were no discernable bad effects from the work, I knew instinctively that I was at the outer limits of my competence as a young practitioner, and that I needed more skills and training to be able to do what I was doing safely and ethically. I did not know, for example, that I was drifting into using psychodrama techniques (I had not even heard of psychodrama at this point) and that there was already a vast literature and research base within the profession of psychodrama, supporting what I was doing and providing copious guidance about safe practice. My ignorance was vast, and at least I recognised that. But I did not know where I needed to go next in order to learn the needed skills.

Two years later, after having established Geese Theatre in the UK in 1987, I learned about psychodrama via a fortuitously timed flyer, forwarded to me from a member of our Board of Trustees (I thank him to this day for forwarding the circular to me). I followed my instincts and attended a five-day psychodrama workshop in the north of England. After watching an expert practitioner of the method (Dr. Elaine Sachnoff, who trained with J L and Zerka Moreno), and participating as an auxiliary and protagonist in her psychodrama sessions, I knew that this was the next necessary step for me and that I was going to train in this method. The dramas directed by Elaine that week included themes such as finding the strength to say 'no' to an abuser, and themes of grief, loss, recovery from trauma, celebration, regret and remorse, exploring ancestral roots, finding new roles after one's children have flown the nest, searching for love, and laying to rest old ghosts. I had never experienced such a depth of communal experience, or such powerful drama, as people worked on their personal stories and their personal challenges with the support of Elaine and the members of the group. This was what I had been looking for. By 1999, eleven years after my initial introduction, I qualified as a psychodramatist, and I was able to practise with confidence across the whole spectrum of theatre, from the fictional to the highly personal, including work with peoples' traumatic stories. I had answered that early need for further training and development that I had recognised at age 22.

The third episode occurred during my training as a psychodramatist. I recall being a protagonist and working on what was for me, at the time, a deeply traumatic event in my early life that occurred to me and my whole family. For the purposes of this discussion, the details are not important; the relevant factor is that this was an event that had largely been locked away inside me and I had been unable to speak about it for twenty years. In the psychodrama, I was able to share this event and indeed parts of the episode were reenacted, but safely and in such a way that I was able to express the emotions that I needed to, and tell the story that I needed to, without being overwhelmed. At the same time, I received enormous support and comfort from my fellow group members (my colleague students on the training course). This was a profoundly healing experience for me, and I often use this episode as a reminder of why the method of psychodrama is so useful as a group method, and how the processes of theatre can be used to help people to work through, understand and resolve troubling, painful and difficult experiences. As a theatre practitioner, I knew well the power of theatre and had enacted very intense emotions on the stage. However, it was an entirely different experience to be a protagonist at the centre of my own drama, working through and experiencing emotions that had long been buried inside me because of how overwhelming the original experience had been. This is something that I always remember when I reflect on what it means to be a psychodramatist, facilitating sessions where people explore their own personal stories and unresolved issues.

The fourth episode also took place during my training as a psychodramatist, right at the start of my training. Being aware that I was facilitating drama workshops in prisons as part of my work with Geese Theatre UK, my psychodrama trainer instructed me at the start of my traineeship that, for the first two years of my training, until I was more skilled, I must *not* facilitate personal role plays where people were looking at any aspects of their personal history or life experiences. For the first two years of the five year training, if I was working with peoples' personal material, I was to focus only on the present and future. I took her at her word, and complied with the requirement. After all, I was a beginning student of psychodrama, and I was there to learn the proper way of doing things. I

later learned that this injunction was not just for me; it was an across-the-board restriction for all new trainees. In essence, the message was that theatre practitioners must never address peoples' personal history because they are not skilled or equipped to do so. Only fifteen years later, during the early workshops that formed part of this study, did I manage to formulate a clear understanding as to why this injunction was too broad, and missed important opportunities for safe practice. This insight came during the field work for this study, when I was able to make the distinctions between positive stories (stories of strength), stories of resolved difficulties (stories of survival, recovery and resilience), and stories of difficult and unresolved issues (stories that are still traumatic or destabilising). These three distinctions now form the basis of rings four, five and six of the Drama Spiral, which is the centerpiece of this study and which is described in detail in chapter three. On page 101, I describe this three-part distinction in more detail, and describe the ways in which this distinction can help theatre practitioners to work safely with personal historical material while keeping to important boundaries around the types of stories that are gathered in workshops. Theatre practitioners certainly *can* work with personal material from people's personal history, but there are important parameters around this.

The fifth episode occurred just a few years before I began this study, and was one factor prompting me to start the research. The event was a performance by a group of young black women visiting from South Africa and performing at a conference in the USA. The performance was drawn from their own experiences and dealt with issues of trauma, rape and oppression within their families and their communities. At one point in the performance, one of the cast members was relating her story with such emotional rawness that she had a panic attack on stage. It was clear that this was still a very active and unresolved traumatic experience for her. While the audience remained respectfully attentive as witnesses, several of her colleagues in the cast gently led her off stage. I have long reflected on the many other choices that could have been made in order for this member of the cast to let her story be told, but in more appropriate and less damaging ways. My recollection of this performance has stayed on my mind as I

have reflected on the aims and potential outcomes of this study, in particular the study's focus on better ways that personal stories can be worked on in theatre workshops or presented on the stage.

The key questions, argument and aims of this study

The key questions addressed in this study

This investigation addresses the central question: how can theatre practitioners help participants and performers — including themselves, if they are performing autobiographical work — to access, share and enact their personal stories in safe, ethical, flexible and intentional ways, particularly when their stories might focus on difficult and unresolved issues? With this question come two related questions, both aimed at turning theory into praxis: Firstly, how can we articulate a graduated and reflexive model of practice that provides clear guidance to theatre practitioners who are working with participants' personal stories? This is the subject of chapter three. And, secondly, how can the psychotherapy modalities of psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy — both of which use personal narrative as a healing element — provide a well-theorised model of bio-psycho-social integration for theatre practitioners who are working with personal narrative? This is the subject of chapter four. Implicit in these questions is the intention to promote excellence in theatre practice where personal stories are used. Regarding the other chapters: as I will describe later in this introduction, chapters one and two examine the history and ethics pertaining to the theatre of personal stories, and chapter five describes two exemplars of practice.

My central argument in this study

My central argument in this study is that, while the theatre of personal stories arises from a confluence of emergent trends across a wide spectrum of socio-cultural, economic, historical and artistic forces, and while it is a type of theatre that has many uses and great potential impact for audiences and participants, at

the same time it is a type of theatre that requires serious attention to ethics and psychological safety in the process of theatre making, and competent, reflexive practice on the part of theatre practitioners. Given the highly personal and exposing nature of much of the material that is used in such processes, it is imperative that theatre artists interrogate the ethics of this work and develop models of practice that maintain sound ethics, stay within appropriate boundaries, and avoid exploiting and harming participants, performers, and audiences (LaFrance, 2013; Rifkin, 2010; Barnes, 2009). Moreover, I argue that the extraordinary growth of the theatre of personal stories in recent years necessitates the development of a robust framework for historically informed, ethical, responsive and intentional practice that draws on necessary and relevant theory and principles of practice from the fields of psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy.

The key aim of this study

The ultimate aim of this study is to offer theatre makers a pragmatic and well-theorised framework for safe, ethical, flexible, and intentional practice where there is some degree of focus on the real-life experiences of participant-performers. My intention is to contribute to theory, research and well-informed practice in this emerging and evolving specialism. The practical outcome resulting from this aim consists of the four-part framework I discuss below, and also, within this framework, a new practical model I have developed as an outgrowth of this study and which is presented in chapter three. The model, called the Drama Spiral, is a readily accessible tool for decision making and for articulating safe and flexible practice across the entire range of theatrical and drama-based forms. Perhaps controversially, the Drama Spiral includes within the scope of the theatre practitioner topics that are ordinarily presumed to be the exclusive domain of qualified therapists, most particularly psychodramatists, dramatherapists and other expressive arts therapists. I will explain why and how even the most vulnerable and risky topics (and people) should remain — *with necessary safeguards,*

including appropriate training for and supervision of the practitioner — within the purview of theatre practice.

The need for a framework of practice

Why is such a framework necessary? Simply put, participants in the theatre of personal stories deserve to know that the theatre professionals they are involved with ascribe to sound ethical principles and work under the aegis of well-informed professional practice and standards. This is because, in the theatre of personal stories, participants are likely at various points in the process to reveal highly personal material about their private lives and their personal histories. This is very precious material, and needs to be revealed and respected within a context informed by sound theory and well-supported, robust frameworks and principles of ethical practice. Similarly, audiences and other stakeholders, including relatives and friends of participant-performers, and also commissioners of services and other financial supporters, deserve to know that the theatre process involving people's personal stories has been conducted in ethical, well-researched and respectful ways, and that the practitioner has a clear idea about the intentions, benefits and potential negative impacts of the process.

I am not alone in identifying the need for a robust framework of practice. Rifkin, for example, in her report on the need for clear ethical guidelines in participatory theatre, writes that 'the absence of a consensus on what the nature of an ethical approach might be has become problematic' (Rifkin, 2010: 5). She makes a powerful case for the need for a specified ethical framework for participatory theatre practice when she writes,

> There is little to protect the freedom of competent practitioners to set working methods, agree agendas with participants, choose and develop ways of working, evaluate in appropriate ways, work creatively with notions of uncertainty, bewilderment and discovery. There is practically nothing to indicate to employers and other practitioners by what standards competence and ethical standards might be understood.
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> (Rifkin, 2010: 6)

I return to Rifkin and focus on her study in chapter two, which focuses on ethics. Barnes, in her Oval House Theatre publication entitled *Drawing the Line: A discussion of ethics in participatory arts with young refugees* (2009), also addresses the need for clear ethical guidelines and offers a form and structure for doing so. I also give full coverage to her model in chapter two. And Landy and Montgomery support the notion that applied theatre practitioners should explicitly address the therapeutic aspects of their practice when they offer the compelling suggestion that applied theatre practitioners and dramatherapists should probably have overlapping trainings, where students of both methods could share core courses and experiences. They suggest a model where dramatherapy and applied theatre students 'would be privy to a broad conception of the psychological, social and political aspects of essential theatrical concepts' (Landy and Montgomery, 2012: 178). I address these points more fully in chapter two, on ethics, and chapter three, which describes the Drama Spiral. While these and other authors have called for firmly stated ethics and training on the distinctions and commonalities between theatre and therapy, and others have explored the history and aesthetics of the theatre of personal stories, this study is, as far as I have found, the first time a framework integrating history, ethics, praxis and intentions has specifically addressed the use of personal stories in the theatre.

While there are many positive reasons for incorporating personal stories in theatre making and drama workshops, and indeed many examples of good practice, there are also examples of exploitative, voyeuristic and sensationalist practice that have left audiences, participant-performers and collaborative partners feeling used, bitter, uncontained and deceived (Rifkin, 2010; Thompson, 2005, 2014; Salverson, 1996, 2001; Cohen-Cruz, 2006, 2010). The theatre of personal stories has inherent risks because it often crosses into therapeutic terrain and, indeed, into therapeutic settings (Pendzik et al, 2016; Landy and Montgomery, 2012; Bishop, 2006). It is also often conducted with vulnerable or marginalised people. Even when groups are not identified as vulnerable or at risk, the nature of the stories shared, the culture or context in which one is working, the processes used or the manner in which the story is presented to (and critiqued by) audiences

may make participants vulnerable. Working with people's personal stories in the theatre is a special and specialised field, and therefore theatre practitioners facilitating work that elicits personal stories need to extend their level of awareness and skills in relation to issues such as ethics, safety, duty of care and safeguarding, reflexive practice, the self-awareness and psychological health of the facilitator, transparency, boundaries, structure, containment, supervision and oversight, distance regulation and bio-psycho-social integration — all of which are addressed in this study.

Equally important for consideration in this study are the multiple intentions of theatre making that involves personal stories, and awareness of the multiple discourses around the ethics and uses of applied, socially engaged and participatory theatre. This includes an informed understanding of the uses and misuses of personal stories in the theatre and the limitations inherent in the use of personal stories — including circumstances where encouraging the telling or presentation of personal stories, or any level of personal disclosure by participants, is inappropriate, culturally insensitive or potentially oppressive or dangerous. This also includes an understanding of how autobiographical theatre overlaps with and becomes therapeutic performance and where it overlaps with dramatherapy and psychodrama (Pendzik et al, 2016; Jennings, 2009).

In making this argument in favour of guidelines for practice, I realise that this could be mistaken as an argument for limiting the scope of free expression or creativity or limiting the types of topics or themes that can be portrayed in the theatre. This is precisely the opposite of what I intend. The guidelines offered in this study are not intended to constrain. On the contrary, they are meant to enhance theatre practice and free practitioners and participant-performers to create stimulating, aesthetically rich, emotionally impactful and satisfying theatre while working safely and ethically. My true intention is to celebrate and support the extraordinary flourishing of this energised form of personal and communal expression in the theatre, which is challenging norms and exploring new frontiers. At the same time, I also want to try to demarcate aspects of ethical practice and

other ingredients of best practice so that the various forms of personal story theatre do not harm participant-performers or audiences. One of the most rewarding aspects of carrying out this study has been watching and participating in truly innovative, radical, activist, imaginative and transformational theatre drawn from personal stories. A key aspect of the research underpinning this study has also been the fieldwork where I have facilitated workshops and drama-led projects that have informed the development of the Drama Spiral and the integrated framework that surrounds it. In developing the integrative framework and the Drama Spiral, I have tried to strike a balance between supporting openness, artistic risk-taking and freedom of expression within the theatre of personal stories on the one hand, and ethical awareness and clarity of boundaries and intentions on the other. My hope is that, at the very least, practitioners making use of the framework and guidelines proposed here would have an informed awareness of the ethical issues and the possible effects of the processes on participants, audiences and themselves when they create such personal forms of theatre. My more ambitious hope is that practitioners may find the Drama Spiral useful as a practical model, and also that they will find rich inspiration in the integrative framework offered, from the coverage of what has come before, and from the various ideas intended to prompt fresh artistic exploration.

A note about the title of this study: The title, *Theatre, Therapy and Personal Narrative* is meant to capture the three main strands of research and practice that are brought together and integrated in the creation of the four-part framework I have described in this section. The title includes 'theatre' because the study is about theatre theory and practice. The title includes 'therapy' because the study includes key theory and practice from psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy. These two separate but related fields of therapeutic practice are included specifically because they overlap in significant ways with the theatre of personal stories. Psychodrama, which is explored in chapters one and four, provides a very useful reference point when we try to explore the boundary areas between theatre and psychotherapy, especially when the theatre work is focused on people's painful, difficult and unresolved stories. And Attachment Narrative Therapy is

highly relevant to this study because it focuses on peoples' self-narratives pertaining to their life experiences and relationships and tries to help them to work through emotionally difficult material, find the internal and inter-personal resources they need, and to move forward. These therapeutic approaches offer important insights, ideas, techniques, tools and practical guidance for theatre practitioners. Perhaps most importantly, the guidance that can be drawn from these two fields of practice includes guidance about the boundaries between and the common features of theatre and therapy. This is crucial knowledge for theatre makers working in the area of personal stories. Finally, the title includes 'personal narrative' because the focus of the study is on how personal narratives are used in the theatre.

A note about the coverage of dramatherapy in this study: The question could be raised as to why I have not included the field of dramatherapy on an equal footing alongside my inclusion and analysis of psychodrama's role in the theatre of personal stories. While there are a number of places in this study where I include reflections on how dramatherapy theory and practice can also be integrated with theatre practice which is focused on personal stories, these references are brief compared with my more detailed integration of psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy in chapter four. While dramatherapy and psychodrama share much in common, they are distinct modalities with quite separate trainings, theory, techniques and traditions of practice (Davies, 1987; Landy and Montgomery, 2012; Jones, 1996). The reason that I have not included dramatherapy within this study to the same degree as psychodrama is primarily because I am a trained psychodramatist and I am able to speak from experience as well as theoretical knowledge when discussing psychodrama. Even so, I do draw upon dramatherapy authors in specific places, particularly related to contexts where dramatherapy is theorised in relation to personal narrative, such as in Pendzik et al (2016), Jennings (2009), and Emunah (2015). I have tried to remain aware of how dramatherapy relates to the discussion throughout this study, and I think, on reflection, that most of the observations I make about the links between the theatre

of personal stories and psychodrama would also apply to the links between the theatre of personal stories and dramatherapy.

Key methodological approaches used in the research

Reflective inquiry

In deciding on the research methods to use for this investigation, I have used as a guiding principle the idea that the research methods used should examine and make meaning from close observation of practice and should also reflect the principles, values and modes of operation of the practice that is observed. Furthermore, I hold to the principle that research should link theory with practice and inform the improvement and updating of practice. These are over-arching concepts and principles espoused by key writers in the fields of performance studies, notably Professor of Theatre Studies at Freie Universitat, Berlin, Erika Fischer-Lichte in *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2008), and performance-based research, including the many and varied authors offering case studies of practice-based research in John Freeman's *Blood, Sweat and Theory* (2010), Barrett and Bolt's *Practice as Research* (2010) and Kershaw and Nicholson's *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (2011). Drawing inspiration from these key texts, I use as the primary research approach in this investigation the method of *reflective inquiry* (Lyons, 2010; Freire, 1970, 1974; Dewey, 1933; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Schön, 1983; Kolb, 1984). I have chosen to utilise the method of reflective inquiry because it most closely fits the aims of this study and is most suited to supporting the argument I offer here, which is based on an integration of my practice with that of other theatre practitioners, combined with a selection of authors, scholars and researchers in the fields of theatre and performance, psychodrama and attachment narrative practice.

A range of authors including Schön (1983), Willower (1994) and Muraro (2016) cite John Dewey as being one of the originators of the concept of reflective inquiry,

although its roots go back much further to Aristotle's exploration of the types of knowledge and how knowledge and wisdom are acquired and developed (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2004; Callard, 2018). Reflective inquiry is a way of structuring and critically assessing our acquisition of knowledge by inquiring into how we learn, how we learn to think, how we know what we know, and how we can use our critical consciousness to interrogate the contexts of our knowledge. Reflective inquiry is in this sense a way of knowing (Schön, 1983), and a way of investigating and uncovering deeper knowledge by examining political, social and cultural contexts, as well as personal and subjective contexts, of knowledge and understanding (Lyons, 2010). My use of reflective inquiry has involved four distinct focal points:

1. Reflecting on a detailed search of the relevant literature (taking into account theory, practice and research) on the history, ethics, practice and intentions of using personal and collective narratives in theatre. These searches are primarily reflected in chapters one and two, addressing history and ethics respectively. I have set my reflective inquiry within the context of a wide range of reading about theory, practice and research in the fields of performance studies, applied and participatory theatre, theatre history, psychodrama, dramatherapy, social theatre, attachment narrative therapy, ethics, philosophy, historiography, ethnography, narratology, discourse analysis and social research.

2. Reflection on my own practice and experiences of staging personal narratives — my own and those of other people — for more than thirty years. As part of my reflection on my own process as a scholar-practitioner, I have included consideration of the socio-cultural and political context in which I grew up and through which I emerged as a theatre practitioner, psychodrama psychotherapist and specialist in attachment narratives. I have drawn on ideas about autoethnographic research from writers such as Adams et al (2015) and Bochner and Ellis (2016) to formulate and structure this self-reflection.

3. Critical observation of a selection of twenty-five mainstream and applied theatre and performance projects that have utilised personal and collective stories. My critical observation includes

watching the performances and also reflecting on dramaturgical analyses of these productions, reading programmes, blogs, articles and other material written by practitioners and participants about these projects, and also having conversations with practitioners and participants.

4. An iterative process of discussions and field testing with students, teachers and practitioners, where feedback informed modifications and further testing as the Drama Spiral developed towards its current form.

Throughout the project, I have attempted to link theory and practice in a back-and-forth dialogue, with one informing the other in a recursive loop, as is typical in the process of action research (described below) and which is at the heart of practice-based research (Kershaw and Nicholson, 2011; Freeman, 2010; Thompson, 2003: 121-146; Moreno 1946). As Freeman observes:

> Writing about one's own practice is an act of critical reflection that is becoming increasingly established as a key aspect of experiential knowledge across a range of subject areas. […] Within the study of theatre, drama and performance we are seeing researchers paying focused attention to the knowledge of their own creative and cognitive processes, to the extent that a metacognitive practitioner awareness is now widely accepted as providing invaluable links between 'knowing about' and 'knowing how.'
>
> (Freeman, 2010: xiii)

It is in this spirit of seeking 'practice knowledge' (Morrison, 2009) and 'metacognitive practitioner awareness' that chapter three offers an account of how the practical processes of workshop facilitation and action research led to the formation of the Drama Spiral. What emerges is a demonstration of how theory and practice are interwoven at each stage of the dramatic process. Rather than requiring an overlay of theory, chapter three shows that theory and practice can to a very large extent co-occur in both implicit and explicit ways (e.g. using the principle of transparency with participants) during drama workshops, rehearsal and performance. It is worth noting that this approach to research, interweaving theory and practice, resonates with autoethnographic approaches such as that espoused

in Willis and Trondman (2000) and the sociological approach of insider-outsider theory (Lindbeck & Snower, 1990).

Practice knowledge and the performative turn

My process of reflective inquiry has been inspired on the whole by the *practice turn* in many fields including social sciences, science and technology, cultural studies and education (Kershaw et al, 2011; Schatzki et al, 2000). The practice turn emphasises the importance of capturing *practice knowledge* — that is to say, knowledge and theory that emerges from reflection about practice. Practice knowledge is knowledge gained from experience that is integrated with externally codified bodies of knowledge. It is a type of knowledge that bridges the academic-practice divide by integrating knowledge that is drawn from external sources such as empirical research, academic writing and other forms of scholarship, and balancing this with knowledge derived from practice, sometimes called 'practice wisdom' (Morrison, 2009; Schön, 1983; Ruch, 2005; D'Cruz et al, 2007; Lyons, 2010; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Given that the primary aims of this study are oriented towards an integration of theory and praxis, it was important to use a mode of investigation designed to draw in and integrate the experience of the scholar-practitioner in order to support my central argument. From an epistemic viewpoint, practice knowledge is most crucial in conditions where uncertainty, ambiguity and indeterminacy predominate (Eraut, 1994; Raelin, 2007; Kahneman & Tversky, 1974). This is because such conditions typically call for pragmatic, in-the-moment adaptations based on a wide range of factors that emerge during complex processes. Going 'by the book' or making decisions based primarily on theory is often insufficient to the task at hand, or even worse, may lead to insensitive, unjust, counter-productive, inadequate, damaging or dangerous processes (Flyvbjerg, 1998, 2001, 2004).

There has to date been significant research and theory establishing the importance of practice knowledge in fields such as social work, education, organisational management and the medical professions. Authors such as

Sheppard (1998), Fook et al (1997), Tenkasi and Hay (2004) and Leinhardt et al (1995) offer a range of ideas about the role and importance of practice knowledge. The role of the scholar-practitioner should be seen as a crucial component of a developing profession or specialism, as it complements 'pure' theory and strict quantitative approaches by taking a recursive and relationship-based approach to generating knowledge and building theory.

I suggest that it is possible to take the notions of the scholar-practitioner and practice knowledge and make the case that it is an essential feature of theatre practice — including mainstream as well as applied theatre — that theatre makers are also practical theorists. The practical wisdom that emerges by combining formal and reflexive knowledge is a crucial quality that defines the accomplished practitioner. Expert practitioners are able to make use of abstract knowledge and empirical research, combine this with theory, and integrate and apply this to practice. To do so, according to Kirk and Reid (2002), professionals draw on three types of knowledge: theory, facts and practice knowledge (i.e., professional know-how). If one were to make the case, as I am, that theatre facilitation around peoples' personal stories is an emerging professional specialism, an essential component would be the inclusion of practice knowledge and the development of the roles of the scholar-practitioner and practitioner-researcher as being central to the development of this specialism. This is a point emphasised by Dwight Conquergood when he writes that 'performance studies struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice. This embrace of radical ways of knowing is radical because it cuts to the root of how knowledge is organised in the academy' (Conquergood, 2002: 145-146). In his 2002 article, Conquergood argues powerfully for an approach within theatre and performance studies that captures, analyses and articulates 'subjugated knowledges' (a term he borrows from Foucault) in order to 'include all the local, regional, vernacular, naïve knowledges at the bottom of the hierarchy' (ibid: 146). He thus provides a compelling case for the importance of practice knowledge in theatre and performance studies.

I also note that my reflection on the use of personal stories in the theatre is very consciously set within the context of the *performative turn* in the arts that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was the start of the process which led, as Fischer-Lichte notes, to 'the dissolution of boundaries in the arts and between art and non-art' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 182). While on the one hand valuing the enormous energy and valuable innovation that emerged and continues to emerge from the dissolution of such boundaries in the arts and between art and non-art, I am at the same time arguing that there is an inherent need for boundaries — or at the very least clear guidelines for practice, training, supervision, and principles of ethics and transparency — when the blending of 'art and non-art' means the art is blending into the terrain of psychological therapy (Seymour, 2009). In considering such boundaries, there is also an important distinction to make between art that is applied in social contexts to address social concerns, e.g. applied theatre, and art that challenges the distinctions between art and non-art and explores the boundaries of the aesthetic. Given this distinction, we could consider applied theatre, and the theatre of personal stories, as inhabiting the space between 'art' and 'non-art.' In other words, there is a crossover between theatre applied in social contexts, where the intention is to use and apply theatre, and art turned into performance, where the main aim may be to challenge the very distinction between art and not-art.

Epistemic paradigms used for generating practice knowledge: *The Kolb Cycle, Action Research* **and** *Applied Phronetics*

To provide a framework for this reflective inquiry, I have used three epistemic paradigms for generating practice knowledge and new understanding. All three paradigms are orientated towards action and practical outcomes — a primary concern of this investigation — and all are contained within the general domain of reflective inquiry.

First, the model of generating practice knowledge that I have relied upon most closely is Kolb's *experiential learning cycle* (Kolb, 1984). This model describes the process of knowledge and theory generation and action planning as following the

four-part cycle of *experience; reflection; abstract conceptualisation / analysis; and action / experimentation* (see figure 0.1). Kolb's model is strongly influenced by the pragmatic approaches of John Dewey and Jean Piaget, and is widely used in fields such as social work, psychology, education and organisational systems management. I have found this model to be a highly effective and practical means by which to structure reflective inquiry and knowledge generation. Kolb's model is very close to Graham Gibbs' model of experiential learning (Gibbs, 1988), which is already used in research pertaining to applied theatre and performance (Rifkin, 2010). In chapter three, which describes the Drama Spiral and the process of research which led to my development of the Spiral, I explain how the field research and my reflections about forms and processes of guidance for practitioners and participants was aided by the structure of the experiential learning cycle.

Second, I draw in methodological ideas from *action research* (Lewin, 1948; Marrow, 1969; Herr & Anderson, 2014; Anisur Rahman, 1993; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996) and the closely related method of *co-operative enquiry* (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1998). These are methods of reflective inquiry that are particularly suited to drama processes because they are action oriented, creative in their approach and emphasise feedback, cooperation, co-investigation and co-production between researchers and participants. They are also particularly fitting methods of research for this study because they strive intentionally to use democratic, non-oppressive, emancipatory and anti-discriminatory processes (Maiter et al., 2008). They are forms of research that are done *with* people rather than *on* people, where professional researchers strive throughout to democratise the process by involving the local interested parties (the stakeholders) as co-researchers (Greenwood & Levin, 1998). Moreover, the use of action research is a particularly apt approach with theatre projects because theatre in itself — and most specifically, participatory theatre — can be thought of as a form of research in itself. As Thompson observes:

> *Theatre* is an *action* that is *research*. Theatre 'invites: it belongs to all and is costless, familiar, fun and easy to alter'[1] and is the process of people exploring, debating, searching and changing their own lives. It is where people's own stories can be presented, heard and transformed.' [Original italics.]

<div align="right">(Thompson, 2003: 122)</div>
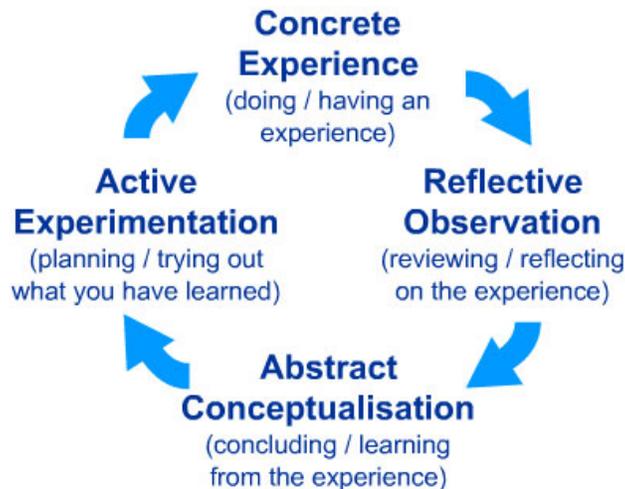
Fig. 0.1: David Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984)

Thompson offers the term 'Theatre Action Research' (ibid: 121) to advocate for front line theatre practice as being essential for on-the-ground, meaningful, relevant and democratically-inspired research that is oriented towards positive change (as defined by the locally interested parties, not by the researchers), as compared with more abstracted, one step removed research which can easily lose touch and become irrelevant ('pale scratchings') to the communities being researched. Thompson summarises this point when he writes that 'theatre is the research method itself, not the method to be researched' (ibid: 121). One important ramification regarding how democratically inspired Theatre Action Research might be implemented is that life as portrayed through participatory scene work should be 'as rich as the lives of those present; it should not assume what is important

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[1] Thompson is here quoting Chambers (1997: 152)

and what is trivial. The process should not create a hierarchy between performances of the micro and those of the macro' (ibid.: 136).

The method of action research, leading towards practical action, generally follows the sequence:

1. The researcher works collaboratively with participant-researchers (the local stakeholders) to identify an initial idea to explore and research.
2. Reconnaissance or fact finding. Pooling knowledge among all participants and stakeholders.
3. Explore, question and analyse concerns, revisit steps one and two as needed, and plan first action step.
4. Take first action step (intervention).
5. Evaluate.
6. Amend plan.
7. Take second action step …
8. When appropriate, consolidate findings, share analyses, decide implications and next steps, integrate new knowledge, and, where needed and appropriate, move on to develop and institute change, and / or new matters to investigate.
9. Repeat as necessary.

This sequence of action research steps is typically presented as either a flow chart or as an ever-extending spiral of recursive steps. Thompson (ibid.: 124 and 140) also refers to the spiral form of action research. The action research model informed the creation of the Drama Spiral, and key aspects of the structure of the Drama Spiral have been inspired by the recursive structure of action research.

Third, I use the notion of *applied phronetics* and *phronetic planning research* as described by Flyvbjerg (1998), Flyvbjerg et al (2012) and Kirkeby & Flyvbjerg (2011) in order to provide an over-arching frame for my reflective inquiry. Applied phronetics is a concept of knowledge generation and decision making based on ideas arising from Aristotle about the different types of knowledge and the hierarchies of knowledge (Petersen and Olsson, 2015). *Phronesis* was described by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as holding primacy over other forms of intellectual virtue because it represents *practical wisdom oriented towards action*, i.e. an integration of evidence-based, factual types of knowledge and technical

skill, balanced with value-based rational judgment. Flyvbjerg describes phronesis and phronetic planning research in this way:

> In Aristotle's words *phronesis* is an intellectual virtue that is 'reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man.' *Phronesis* concerns values and interests and goes beyond analytical, scientific knowledge (*episteme*) and technical knowledge or know how (*techne*) and it involves what has been called 'the art of judgment,' that is to say, decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social actor.

> (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 3-4)

Flyvbjerg is explaining here that, for Aristotle, phronesis was the most important of the three intellectual virtues: *episteme*, *techne*, and *phronesis*. As Flyvbjerg goes on to explain, Aristotle considered phronesis the most important intellectual virtue because it balances and integrates the analytical and technical modes of thought that come with the virtues of episteme and techne, and moves towards practical and wise actions.

Flyvbjerg goes on to describe four key questions that specifically focus on power relations when setting about planning based on phronetic principles:

1) Where are we going with planning?
2) Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?
3) Is this development desirable?
4) What, if anything, should we do about it?

> (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 302)

These questions, which are central organising questions in Flyvbjerg's approach to phronetic planning, demonstrate that applied phronetics is a particularly useful conceptual paradigm for the development of theory emerging from practice which is focused on ethics, safety and power relations. This is because in Flyvbjerg's approach to phronetic planning, great value is given to drawing in broader ideas from multiple perspectives among stakeholders at all levels of power (see, for example, question 2, in the above quotation, where Flyvbjerg asks, 'Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?'). In addition, Flyvbjerg is a

strong advocate for turning analysis into narrative, as he explains that, 'a central task of phronetic planning research is to provide concrete examples and detailed narratives of the ways in which power and values work in planning, with what consequences to whom, and to suggest how relations of power and values could be changed to work with other consequences' (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 302). For Flyvbjerg, generating these detailed stories of what is happening, what the power relations are, and who is being affected by the process, are critical in making planning situations clear. Such stories become the main link joining research, planning and praxis. This can apply on the micro or macro scale — for the building of a new school or the planning of a hydro-electric dam that will affect tens of millions of people.

One aspect of Flyvbjerg's work that particularly interests me is that he draws on Aristotle as a central pillar in his formulation of applied phronesis / practical wisdom. Given the context of this study, it is particularly fitting to draw on Aristotle as the basis for the research method in this study, given that his *Poetics* is the earliest surviving example of drama theory and literary criticism. Taking this point further, if we re-work Flyvbjerg's four questions just slightly, in order to apply them directly to the ethical, safety and power related questions that pertain to the theatre of personal stories, we could ask of any theatre process that utilises personal stories:

1) What are the intentions and potential outputs of this theatre-making process?
2) Whose interests are being served and what are the power relations embedded in this process?
3) Is the process helpful or integrative in some way?
4) What do we need to keep in mind, and what changes do we need to make, to keep things on course and to ensure the process is responsive to all perspectives?

A satisfying feature of this formulation of phronesis as practical wisdom oriented towards action is how well it aligns with the turn towards practice wisdom described above. This is why Flyvbjerg's formulation of applied phronesis was a

key influence on my thinking as I developed and refined the iterations of the Drama Spiral — described in chapter three. I also draw significantly on the insights and ideas about applied phronesis and practice wisdom when I focus on history and ethics in chapters one and two, and intentional practice and the integrative potential of working with people's personal stories in chapter four.

To sum up the approach to research and knowledge creation used during this study, it is an approach that focuses on the important role of practice knowledge and the role of the scholar-practitioner in generating new theory. Theory should be created *from* practice, and not just *for* practice, and practitioners should be seen as producers as well as consumers of knowledge. It is understood that knowledge and theory arising from practice is always provisional, tentative, emergent and subject to complexity and refinement in differing contexts. Practice knowledge must be based on critical reflection, emotional awareness and inter-personal skills, and demands commitment to ongoing learning and dialogue with colleague professionals and other stakeholders.

Key theoretical and practical reference points
for the research, chapter by chapter

In this study I address five main themes, spread across five chapters titled *History, Ethics, Praxis, Intentions,* and *Exemplars*. The first four chapters describe the four elements of the proposed framework mentioned above. The fifth chapter focuses on two illustrative exemplars of practice. Each chapter includes a number of theoretical and practical reference points.

Chapter one focuses on history and context. In order to answer the central question of this study, which aims at developing a framework for safe, ethical, flexible and intentional practice in the theatre of personal stories, it is first necessary to provide an historical context for the theatre of personal stories. In chapter one, I argue that best practice and creative innovation in the theatre of personal stories is enhanced when theatre-makers are well informed about the

web of influence connecting the theatre of personal stories with traditions of art, history, social activism, theatre and therapy processes across the centuries. Understanding these histories also includes understanding the competing and evolving discourses within and between these domains of knowledge and practice. I also argue that aesthetic inspiration can come from an understanding of the web of influences that preceded and continue to contribute to the current wave of innovation in the theatre of personal stories.

Chapter two focuses on ethics. Again, this is a key element of the central question of this study, particularly the aspect of the question aiming at safe and ethical practice in the theatre of personal stories. In this chapter, I argue that best practice in the theatre of personal stories incorporates the wide-ranging ethical issues inherent in staging peoples' personal stories, particularly stories of unresolved difficulties. This includes a wide variety of ethical discourses addressing power dynamics in the rehearsal room, cultural hegemonies, working with people who are vulnerable or at risk, including survivors of abuse, the boundaries between theatre and therapy, and even the complex issues of copyright ownership where personal stories are used in collaborative processes. I draw on the work of key authors on the ethics of participatory theatre and present a broad outline of ethical considerations for practitioners to hold in mind when working with personal material. A particular concern in this chapter is the potential risk of reinforcing oppression and unequal power relations in the very process of staging vulnerability and risk.

Chapter three focuses on turning theory into praxis. In this chapter, I argue that best practice in the theatre of personal stories means structuring participatory theatre processes in explicit reference to the level of personal disclosure being used. As mentioned above, I describe a new model that I have devised, called the Drama Spiral (the *Spiral*), intended to support and inform structured decision-making around personal disclosure. The Spiral offers a structure for regulating distance across the full spectrum of dramatic distance, from purely creative drama, to the use of fictionalised stories, to the presentation of highly sensitive personal

experiences. The Spiral has developed as an outgrowth of this study and represents an integration of theory and practice knowledge from applied theatre, psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy. The Spiral is a structured model of drama facilitation which also includes practice guidelines that can help to maximise safety while preserving flexibility and creative freedom when working with personal and collective stories.

Chapter four focuses on the intentions and potential benefits of the theatre of personal stories. In this chapter, I argue that best practice in the theatre of personal stories means working with a clear idea of the intentions of the theatre-making process. This becomes particularly crucial when working with personal stories focusing on difficult and unresolved issues, including unresolved trauma. Expanding this point, I argue that best practice requires that practitioners should focus on the key concept of promoting *bio-psycho-social integration* when working with personal stories of unresolved difficulties. In order to provide essential theoretical and practical support for this argument, in this chapter I demonstrate how psychodrama, attachment narrative therapy and the theatre of personal stories can be combined, with a specific focus on how the notion of *bio-psycho-social integration* is a useful reference point when considering the overall intentions of theatre practice that includes personal stories. I specifically consider how and why the processes of accessing, recollecting, sharing, enacting and presenting a personal or collective story can be helpful to people. As part of this exploration, this chapter draws on authors including Dallos and Vetere (2009) and Crittenden (2015), who address the power of narrative and working with personal narratives in order to foster therapeutic working through and personal transformation. The chapter considers how theatre practitioners who use the personal and collective stories of participants can learn lessons from the wide-ranging scholarship and research within the field of psychodrama, and to augment this understanding with the integrative processes inherent in attachment narrative therapy. The chapter demonstrates that cross-disciplinary learning between these fields of theory and practice can deepen and enrich theatre practice and provide

parameters for practitioners and participants who are involved in drama processes that draw on personal and collective narratives.

Chapter five focuses on two case studies, one from my own practice and one drawn from my observations of theatre practice focused on personal stories. In presenting these two case studies, I examine them through the lens of the Drama Spiral and demonstrate how the Spiral offers a clear model that can enhance both the creation and the critical analysis of theatre focused on personal stories. In the first case study, I theorise and offer a summary of a collaborative project with young people leaving care, consisting of several workshops leading to a period of ensemble script development and then a performance for an invited audience. This case study is used as an example of how the Drama Spiral can be used in a transparent and collaborative way with participant-performers, so that they can take an active part in the structured approach to regulating distance and many other aspects of the theatre-making process where personal stories are used.

The second case study focuses on the 2014 performance of *Memoria* by Cardiff-based Re-Live Theatre. In my analysis of *Memoria* I will theorise the production and demonstrate why it stands as an example of best practice. I analyse the production through the lens of the Drama Spiral and I also consider the ways in which co-artistic directors Karin Diamond and Alison O'Connor incorporated sound ethics, explicit integrative intentions and a highly evolved and reflective sensibility demonstrated in a wide range of staging techniques. I argue that *Memoria* is a clear example of how theatre methods can be used in safe, ethical, flexible and intentional ways at the innermost ring of the Spiral, where people present difficult and unresolved issues.

Chapter One: History

An archeology of the theatre of personal stories

Acknowledging the past through sharing one's personal story is the single most powerful action in the battle against the silence of indifference or fear. To testify not only uncovers what lay hidden in a regime's enforced silence — but heals the speaker and the listener alike. Theatre is the ambitious sister of testimony. It strives to heal through truth.

<div style="text-align: right;">

Archbishop Desmond Tutu
Foreword, in Farber (2008)

</div>

Introduction

In order to answer the central question of this study, which aims at developing a framework for safe, ethical, flexible and intentional practice in the theatre of personal stories, it is first necessary to provide an historical context for the theatre of personal stories, i.e. to explore what has come before, and how this has influenced the recent proliferation of personal stories on the stage. Exploring the archeology of personal stories in the theatre is necessary because best practice and aesthetic innovation in the theatre of personal stories is likely to be enhanced when theatre-makers are well informed about the web of influence connecting the theatre of personal stories with artistic, therapeutic and socio-cultural developments across time. I join with authors such as Gareth White (2015) in offering the view that ahistoricism in the theatre represents a lost opportunity and is likely to lead to impoverished aesthetic creation as well as historically uninformed, less relevant and less impactful productions. Theatre practitioners can draw inspiration from the creative well of what has come before, in order to innovate from an informed position, rather than unnecessarily (and inadvertently) reconstituting stale tropes. In thinking about these reasons for including the historical perspective in the integrative framework, I am mindful of how Jill Dolan,

Professor of English and Theater at Princeton University, neatly summarises the benefits of introducing theatre students to historical contexts: 'I get these students who want to be actors, who consider themselves artists, and they don't know the first thing about what came before them. So I try to present it as [a message that] they shouldn't reinvent the wheel. But what I've also seen happen is that when they find out about people who have been working in alternative and avant-garde forms before them, it really just opens their eyes to the various ways in which they can be artists, and the various ways in which they can be artists who believe in things' (Perlgut and Warden, 2017).

This chapter begins with an overview of the many burgeoning forms of the threatre of personal stories. A list of more than forty sub-genres is offered in order to make the case that the theatre of personal stories is not a small, niche category of theatre; it is widely varied and broad in scope. It includes performance-oriented forms as well as process-focused forms where there is no intention to produce a performance for audiences.

This is followed by an 'archeology' of the theatre of personal stories, i.e. a description of the historical roots and the modern trends that have led to this particular moment in the history of the theatre, where personal stories are so ubiquitous. This section starts with a brief introduction to the trend within the theatre towards experimentation and performance art, part of which led to a reconstitution of the boundaries between art and non-art, acting and non-acting, audience and performer, and the relationship of personal narrative and fiction / art. This discussion segues into a description of emergence of psychodrama as a form of theatre that harnesses the power of theatrical reenactment for therapeutic purposes aimed at healing individuals, groups, communities and whole societies. This is followed by a description of some of the key historical developments in documentary and activist theatre aimed at political and social change. This description is included in part because documentary and activist theatre provided many of the tools and approaches that have become central to the theatre of personal stories, including verbatim approaches and performances developed

from ethnographic research. The other reason for the focus on documentary and activist theatre is because there are important recent examples of activist theatre drawn directly from peoples' personal stories, where the potency of the activism is increased because of the personal, non-fictional nature of the stories shared. Several recent productions are described in this section.

The description of documentary and activist theatre is followed by a section looking at the long view of how theatre and therapy have been interwoven since the beginning of western theatre in Ancient Greece, and how applied theatre in part reflects ancient uses of theatre. The fifth trend described is the emergence of the use of personal story itself, beginning with Spalding Gray's monologues in the 1980s and developing on towards the many and expanding forms of the theatre of personal story that we have today.

Burgeoning forms of personal and collective narratives in the theatre

Where we once had what seemed like clear demarcations between what is theatre and what is therapy, such boundaries have been thoroughly reconstituted and the situation has become far more complex since the 1990s. How have we arrived at this cultural moment, where people's personal stories are so commonly used on the stage in mainstream theatres as well as in community and applied theatre contexts? What confluence of socio-cultural and artistic trends has led to this creative outpouring focused on putting people's private lives on the stage? More pointedly, how has it come to pass that theatre is now commonly the venue for wrenching personal stories of even the most harrowing and traumatic experiences — often portrayed and reenacted by the very person who endured the original experience?

To answer these questions, we first need to get a sense of how widespread these related forms of personal storytelling are. In this section, I list a number of the varied forms, many of which have emerged since the early 1990s, with the

caveat that the distribution into categories is largely for ease of reference and is not intended to restrict any of these forms into a single category. The *theatre of personal stories* is an intentionally broad genre that encompasses any theatre or drama-based practice where people present or explore their personal stories, or where people's personal stories are dramatised and performed by others. This can be directly personal material, or it can be fictionalised ('based on a true story') in order to create aesthetic distance, preserve confidentiality, protect vulnerable participants, or for other reasons. The theatre of personal stories is broad and ever-changing; it is a genre characterised by proliferation, innovation, cross-fertilisation and counter-reactions.

I acknowledge that some of the authors cited below may well prefer to differently position their area of focus. Emunah (2015), for example, in focusing on self-revelatory performance, emphasises its focus on autobiography and also its healing and therapeutic effects in helping people to grapple with personal struggles. Pendzik et al (2016) take a similar approach to auto-ethnographic theatre, considering the intersection between theatre, auto-ethnography and therapy. So the following distribution into categories is provisional at best, and largely for purposes of convenience, in an attempt to begin to make some useful distinctions.

In creating this distribution into groupings, I have tried to place the differing forms based on their primary emphasis, recognising that most have multiple emphases and applications. Cross-blending of these forms, and the generation of new forms, is continuous and ongoing. The main reason for including the following list of sub-genres is to demonstrate the variety and scale of the *theatre of personal stories*. This is not a small and niche category of theatre; it is highly varied, widely used and steadily expanding.

After offering this list of related forms, I will then focus in the rest of the chapter on tracing some of the inter-connected trends and influences that have led, over time, to this proliferation of forms.

Autobiographical theatre

In the various forms of *autobiographical theatre*, the performer presents their own, personal story to an audience, or, in the case of Playback and Lifegame, they tell their story to performers, who spontaneously play the story back in front of an audience. In some of the sub-genres, the story may be presented in a fictionalised form. The key factor here is that the teller of the story – i.e. the 'owner' of the story - is present, either as the performer or as the teller of the story. The performance of *Memoria,* by Re-Live Theatre, which is described in detail in chapter five, is an example of autobiographical theatre (specifically, it is an example of *life story theatre*). *The Two Worlds of Charlie F,* described in the introduction to this study, is an example of autobiographical theatre where a thin veil of fictionalisation is used (Sheers, 2012). On pages 74 to 77, I describe several other productions of autobiographical theatre, including the work of the theatre company It's Alright to be Woman, Jane English's *20b,* Tim Stitz's *Lloyd Beckmann, Beekeeper,* Scottee's *Bravado,* and Linda Catalano's *One Suitcase, Four Stories.*

Sub-genres include:

- Self-revelatory performance (Emunah, 2015)
- Autobiographical and Auto-ethnographic theatre (Heddon, 2008; Stephenson, 2013; Pendzik et al, 2016; Hattenstone, 2017)
- Life story theatre (O'Connor & Diamond, 2014)
- Testimonial theatre (Forsyth, 2013; Manzoor, 2017)
- Ritual Theatre (Schrader, 2011) and Transformational Theatre (Linden, 2013)
- Autobiographical storytelling (Gray, 1985; Sissay, 2017)
- Veteran drama (O'Connor, 2015, 2018; Sheers, 2012)
- Refugee performance (Balfour, 2013; Jeffers, 2008, 2011, 2013)
- Reminiscence theatre (Schweitzer, 2007) and Living History Theatre (Bailey, 1987)
- Playback (Salas, 1993)
- Lifegame (Johnstone, 2015; Dudeck, 2013)

Documentary and investigatory theatre

In the various forms of documentary and investigatory theatre, actors present the true stories of people who are, ordinarily, not present in the theatre during the performance. Typically, the stories portrayed on the stage are gathered during theatre workshops and from interviews, eyewitness accounts, news articles, court

transcripts, embedded ('fly on the wall') observation, archival research and other types of research. The story may be presented as directly biographical or in a fictionalised form (e.g. changing names, altering details, combining events, combining characters). The key distinction here is that the teller of the original story is not typically onstage or present in the theatre during the performance. Examples include *The Laramie Project* by Tectonic Theatre Project (an example of chronical / eyewitness theatre), *The Exonerated* by Erik Jensen and Jessica Blank (an example of verbatim and investigative theatre). These productions are briefly described later in this chapter, on page 62. *London Road*, by Alecky Blythe and Adam Cork, is an example of verbatim theatre which is also a musical.

Sub-genres include:

- Theatre of witness (Sepinuck, 2013; Farber, 2008)
- Biographical theatre (Canton, 2011; Cantrell & Luckhurst, 2010)
- Documentary theatre / drama[2] (Innes, 1972; Paget, 1990; Forsyth & Megson, 2009; Cantrell, 2013; Cantrell & Luckhurst, 2010) and documentary performance (Smith, 2001, 2006)
- Chronicle / eyewitness theatre (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018; Kaufman et al, 2014);
- Living newspaper (Moreno, 1924; Piscator, 2007; Innes, 1972)
- Investigative / journalistic theatre (Mead, 2015; Peterson, 2012; Paget, 1990)
- Verbatim theatre (Hammond & Steward, 2008; Brown, 2010; Belfield, 2018; Paget, 1990)
- Ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2005) and Ethnotheatre (Saldaña, 2011)
- Tribunal theatre (drawn from court transcripts) (Brittain et al., 2014)
- War and battle reenactment, museum theatre and restored village performances (Schneider, 2011; Martin, 2013)

Theatre and drama-based workshops that use personal story

In this category are those forms of theatre and drama-based workshops and groupwork where people meet as a group and explore their personal stories with each other, but they do not typically present their work to people from outside the group. These workshops and groups are typically aimed at the education, personal growth, skills development or psychological healing of individual participants and

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[2] In film and television, the equivalent term is *docudrama* (Paget, 2011).

groups. Personal stories are often used, adapted or explored as the basis of the work. The key distinction between this grouping and the previous two is that, here, there is typically little or no focus on creating an end product for presentation to audiences.

Sub-genres include:

- Psychodrama and psychodrama-informed drama workshops (Moreno and Moreno, 1975; Dayton, 1990; Linden, 2013)
- Therapeutic enactments (Balfour et al, 2014)
- Theatre of spontaneity (Moreno, 1924)
- Dramatherapy (Jennings & Minde, 1993; Jones, 1996; Jennings, 2009)
- Theatre-as-therapy (Evreinov, 1927; Iljine, 1910; Jones, 1996; Walsh, 2013; Boal, 1995; Casson, 1997, 2004)
- Sociodrama and socio-psychodrama (Zuretti, 2011; Wiener et al, 2011; Sternberg & Garcia, 1989; Figusch, 2009)
- Narradrama (Dunne & Rand, 2006)
- Theatre with trauma survivors (Van der Kolk, 2014)
- Issue-based drama workshops focused on individual change (Landy & Montgomery, 2012; Jennings, 2009; Baim et al, 2002)
- Role play (Van Mentz, 1983; Kipper, 1986; Yablonsky, 1976; Yardley-Matwiejczuk, 1997)
- Applied improvisation (Blatner & Blatner, 1988; Blatner & Wiener, 2006)

Theatre and drama-based workshops where personal and fictional stories are used

This category is less specific than the previous three, and encompasses theatre and drama-based forms that typically work between the fictional and the personal. *Prison drama* and *issue-focused theatre*, for example, may include fictional (often interactive) performances that lead on to participatory workshops exploring more personal material. *Community-based performance and social justice theatre* may include devised performances (sometimes very large scale, with hundreds of performers) based on personal as well as collectively shared stories, such as the story of a whole community. *Senior theatre* may include a months-long, embedded and immersive exploration of a myth (such as in Basting et al, 2016), with personal reflections and responses from participants throughout. *Applied theatre workshops and residencies* may interweave the fictional and the personal, leading in some cases towards presentation to audiences.

Sub-genres include:

- Prison drama (Thompson, 1998; Baim et al., 2002; Balfour, 2004; Shailor, 2011; McAvinchy, 2011)
- Issue-focused theatre (Cossa et al., 1996)
- Community-based performance and social justice theatre (Coult & Kershaw, 1983; Haedicke and Nellhaus, 2001; Govan et al., 2007; Holzman, 1999)
- Senior theatre (Basting, 1998, 2009; Basting et al, 2016; Mello & Voigts, 2012)
- Applied theatre workshops and residencies (Baim et al., 2002; Bradley, 2004; Prendergast & Saxton, 2009; Prentki & Preston, 2009)
- Forum theatre and related forms (Boal, 1979; Rohd, 1998; Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 1994). Includes 'forum role play' (Dransfield, 2001)

While this list of sub-genres within four categories may seem long, it could go on for much longer; as mentioned in the introduction to this study, Johnny Saldaña has identified more than eighty related sub-genres all rooted in real events. He lists forms including *autodrama, factual theatre, memory theatre, performed ethnography, reality theatre,* and many others, including his own specialist focus, *ethnodrama* and *ethnotheatre* (Saldaña, 2011: 13-14). Most of the eighty or so sub-genres listed by Saldaña would fit within the first two categories listed here, *autobiographical theatre* and *documentary and investigative theatre.* With such a profusion of forms, the notion of 'influence' — as in, who influenced who, or who 'invented' which form — will inevitably be contested and subject to multiple points of view. I do not wish to imply that each form was clearly influenced by another, or indeed that these are the only forms relevant to the current discussion. Instead, I suggest that these manifold forms and inter-related influences exist in what Rikke Gürgens Gjærum, professor in applied theatre at Oslo Metropolitan University, has called a 'socially constructed room in which coincidences and intentions live side by side' (Gjærum, 2013: 349). I agree with Gjærum when she suggests that a useful way to make sense of this broad network of interconnected influences is by using Michel Foucault's concept of analysing the history of ideas using an 'archaeological' method (Foucault, 2002; Gutting, 2005). In this approach, we trace ideas and influence through a family tree — indeed a veritable forest — of ever-extending and inter-connected branches, recognising that certain concepts

and ways of perceiving the world emerge in their particular context and at a particular time. Foucault calls into question and problemitises ideas such as the notions of 'traditions' of knowledge and ideas, the 'evolution' of ideas, and also the notion of 'influence,' as in, one artist or movement influencing another. As an alternative, he advocates that we should proceed with an awareness of how ideas and cultural phenomena are subject to 'recurrent redistributions':

> Recurrent redistributions reveal several pasts, several forms of connection, several hierarchies of importance, several networks of determination, several teleologies, for one and the same science, as its present undergoes change: thus historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves.
>
> (Foucault, 2002: 5)

Here, Foucault reminds us that each generation rediscovers the past in its own image and makes sense of the past filtered through its own cultural contexts, ideas, values and perspectives. He reminds us of the importance of avoiding easy traps of simplifying or over-stating the notions of influence, evolution, groupings and schools of thought, and encourages us to instead focus on the discrepancies and discontinuities — for example, where artists differ and break with what came before, and how ideas are continually redistributed. By using such a process, we can find a more nuanced and respectful appreciation of the particular performance, text or work we are focused on. In the following section, I describe five areas of socio-cultural and artistic development where 'recurrent redistributions' have occurred and where 'coincidences and intentions' have proliferated in such a way as to provide constant cross-fertilisation between the many sub-genres of the theatre of personal stories.

Socio-cultural and artistic contexts: An archeology of the theatre of personal stories

The question of *why* there has been such an expansion in the theatre of personal stories is a fascinating question that has been explored by other authors such as Martin (2013), Zarilli et al. (2010), Nicholson (2014) Foster (1996) and others. Taking a cue from these authors, we can see that a series of large-scale movements within the theatre and a convergence of artistic and socio-cultural trends both ancient and modern have contributed to the recent expansion in theatrical forms that dramatise personal stories. In this section, I offer a summary of five of these broad trends and trace some of the historical intersections between them. In describing these five trends, I acknowledge that this is only a selective reading; each of these areas is considered in a sort of 'highlights' fashion, a focused reading of what is a complex and long history. This reading is this highly selective because it is intended to support the primary motive of this is study, which is to integrate the theatre of personal stories with key insights and principles of practice from the arena of therapy — most specifically, from the fields of psychodrama and attachment-based narrative therapy.

Experimentation in theatre, performance and performance art

In the theatre, in keeping with modernising trends across all of the arts from the 1830s onwards, and developing on from movements including naturalism, realism and the avant-garde, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of theatre as the site of experimentation and innovation (Favorini, 1995). The notion of the theatre as a laboratory gained prominence, and experimentation was valued as an end in itself (Innes, 1972; Croyden, 1974). This coincided with the emergence — under Stanislavski's influence — of the theatre director as an important artistic contributor to the overall aesthetic process of creating theatre, whereas previously the role of the director had been primarily a technical role (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 184-5). Within this laboratory context, directors, actors and playwrights sought to break free from what were seen as the outmoded praxes of traditional theatre and,

in one strand of development, began to emphasise authenticity and to hold as the highest value that the actor must put us 'in contact with the real' (Cull, 2009: 5) and be, in the words of Kama Ginkas, 'personal and confessional' (Ginkas & Freedman, 2003: 7). While Artaud saw the actor signalling through the flames, baring his soul in extremis (Artaud, 1977), and Vakhtangov encouraged his actors to bring their personal authenticity and imagination to the role (Malaev-Babel, 2011), Stanislavski (1961) encouraged his actors to draw on life experience in the service of developing character and action, and more vividly bringing to life the internal landscape of the characters into the theatre space. Likewise, Grotowski encouraged his performers to search their 'personal experiences and associations, [selecting] those elements that reveal' them (Schechner, 1988: 58), and then to imaginatively expand life experience and recalled emotion in order to bring authenticity to the character and the play (Kumiega, 1987; Richards, 1995; Milling & Ley, 2001). With these innovations, the personal experiences of the actor are explicitly drawn upon as a key to unlocking authenticity and emotional truth in performance. In this respect, the theatre becomes a place of self-revelation for the actor, a place where the personal and private world of the actor becomes public, filtered through the portrayal of a fictional character. This is a significant step towards the theatre of personal stories, where the fictional filter is removed.

A corresponding feature of the turn toward the authenticity of the actor is the trend towards 'non-acting' — even to the point of using non-actors or actors who specialise in 'not acting' (Garde & Mumford, 2016). Companies such as Berlin's Rimini Protokoll, Documental and Re-Live in the UK and Theatre Doc in Moscow are just four examples of many theatre companies around the world which emphasise 'non-acting' as part of their commitment to offering unvarnished reflections of real people, real lives, real behaviours and real speech. Moscow's Theatre Doc, for example, which offers vivid portrayals of the stark realities of everyday life in Russia, prides itself on its authentic reproduction of the exact speech of interviewees in its verbatim productions. The theatre company has as its slogan, 'the theatre where nobody acts' (Ash, 2015). In a related development, the theatre director and teacher Paul Binnerts has developed the notion of 'real-time'

theatre, where the emphasis is placed on the presence of the actor as him or herself, and also as the character — at one and the same time. This approach is a deliberate attempt to synthesise Stanislavsky's identification technique with Brecht's alienation technique, in order to arrive at a form most suited to the postmodern theatre, where the actor is present in the *here and now* of the theatre space, as *him* or *herself*, in the *present moment*, in *character* and in the *reality of the stage*, and in *proximity to the audience* — all at the same time (Binnerts, 2012).

The experimental approaches in the theatre co-occurred to some extent with the *performative turn* in the arts from the 1960s onwards. For key authors including Erika Fischer-Lichte and Richard Schechner, the performative turn is an attempt to better understand the ways in which social life functions and human beings express their agency in social situations. The performative turn is a way of understanding how culture is dynamic and shifting. Fischer-Lichte offers the observation that the performative turn 'led to the creation of a new genre of art, so-called action and performance art' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008: 18). She traces the influence of the performative turn on visual and performance artists such as Joseph Beuys, Hermann Nitsch, the FLUXUS group of artists, and performance artists such as Marina Abramović, whose confronting and influential work has challenged the distinctions between role of performer and of audience, at times relying on audience members to physically intervene and protect her from serious injury during the course of her performance (ibid: 11). Fischer-Lichte goes on to assess the influence of the performative turn across all of the arts, noting the rise of interactivity as being a staple of the arts from the 1960s onwards. She offers examples from the fields of music (e.g. John Cage with his invitations to audience members to participate in the aural experience of his audio-events), interactive novels, author readings, collective readings of poets and novelists by reader groups, and experiments in the theatre which 'aspired to re-define theatre by redefining the relationship between actor and spectator' (ibid: 20).

Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre and Richard Schechner's Performance Group are two of the more notable North American examples of this trend toward interactive performance in the theatre. Summarising the performative turn in the arts, Fischer-Lichte notes that the performative turn represented 'the dissolution of boundaries in the arts and between art and non-art' (ibid: 182). This increased focus on interactivity, audience involvement, multiple perspectives, indeterminate outcomes, and consideration of competing discourses, which were all part of the performative turn, offered more opportunities for what Marvin Carlson, in his introduction to Fischer-Lichte (2008) calls *autopoesis*, meaning self-creation ─ that is, the 'unique self-producing operations of living systems' (Carlson, 2008: 7). Carlson highlights how the performative turn, as conceptualised by Fischer-Lichte, has as its aim — within the context of its emphasis on interpersonal encounter and the breaking down of barriers between art and 'life itself' — to help human beings to challenge their own view of themselves and their relation to other human beings and to the world around them. We can see here a very strong link with the emergence of the theatre of personal stories, where people present their own life on the stage as a challenge to themselves and to their audiences. Looked at in this light, the theatre of personal stories is an echo of the catchcry of the 1960s where 'everyone is an artist' and the focus turns from art (as object) to performance (as event, and experience, to be subjectively created and consumed).

The emergence of psychodrama

A second trend contributing to the emergence of theatre focused on personal stories is the emergence of psychodrama and, more generally, the field of psychotherapy (Feltham and Horton, 2012). Sigmund Freud's ideas about unconscious processes had an enormous influence on twentieth-century theatre. Playwrights and directors began to examine in explicit and intense ways the inner workings of the mind and the impact of personal histories and personal traumas on human relationships and human functioning (Freud, 1953; Walsh, 2013; Campbell & Kear, 2001; Neuringer, 1992). In this newly emergent context, where the trend

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towards experimentation and innovation in the theatre gained such prominence, and the focus of actor training increasingly included an exploration of the inner archaeology of the actor, we can see that it was only a small further step to entirely discard the fictional, scripted element of theatre and performance and to move the actors themselves — rather than the fictional characters they normally portray — into the protagonist role, complete with their complex psyches, inner landscapes of emotion and individual histories. This brings us into the realm of psychodrama, perhaps the most radical theatrical experiment of all.

Psychodrama, which dates from the 1920s, developed from the theatre experiments of Dr. J. L. Moreno (1889–1974) in Vienna and later in New York, where Moreno placed the personal lives of the actors themselves at the centre of the action (Moreno, 1924; Moreno & Moreno, 1975). Later, Moreno went one step further and developed a theatre without actors, which he termed *psychodrama* — derived from Greek root words *psyche* and *drama* meaning approximately 'the mind in action.' He went on to develop many concepts related to psychodrama and co-author many papers with his wife and collaborator, Zerka Toeman Moreno. Psychodrama is a method that has had deep and wide-ranging influences on the fields of theatre, improvisation, psychotherapy, psychology and sociology (J. D. Moreno, 2014; Scheiffele, 1995; Blatner, 1997; Nolte, 2014).

The radical concept at the heart of psychodrama is that *the audience members become the protagonists* and the dramas that unfold are focused encounters that develop directly from the protagonist's perceptions, memories and experiences (Moreno & Moreno, 1969). This is a form of theatre that goes far beyond Brecht's notions of alienation and takes the audience themselves and places them on the stage in the protagonist role. It is a theatrical form that eliminates the playwright, the actors, the producers, the designers and the process of rehearsal, in order to provide a space for the impromptu exploration of people's lives under the guidance of a trained facilitator who is called the director or the psychodramatist. In this way, psychodrama can be seen to anticipate by more than eighty years Jacques Rancière's powerful call for a 'theatre without spectators, where those in

attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become *active participants* as opposed to passive voyeurs [emphasis mine]' (Rancière, 2009: 4). As Zerka Moreno et al write:

> Everybody who has ever participated in a psychodrama is both fascinated and stunned by the impact of spontaneous play. This *form of theatre* starts on an empty stage with no script, no professional actors and no rehearsals. There is only the protagonist with his or her story which through the unique psychodramatic techniques expands into a full play, be it tragedy, satire or comedy. The psychodrama has a strong psychological impact on the protagonist, the co-actors, and the group present [emphasis mine].

> (Z. T. Moreno et al, 2000: 1)

I would draw the reader's attention here to the authors' use of the phrase 'form of theatre,' i.e. that Zerka Moreno and colleagues describe psychodrama as a 'form of theatre.' And this is not writing from long ago, during the early development of psychodrama. This was written less than twenty years ago. This is a crucial aspect of the argument I am setting forth in this study. As I will further elucidate in chapter four, J. L. Moreno conceived of psychodrama as being a *therapeutic application of the theatre* — not separate from the theatre, as it has become. While psychodrama is now a widely practised method, with many thousands of practitioners around the world, in most countries where it is practised it has to a large extent lost sight of its theatrical roots and is mainly confined to the mental health professions. This separation has historical roots, in that J. L. Moreno was a psychiatrist and therefore the method was associated from the start with both the theatre and with the medical and psychological professions. This has led to some countries seeing psychodrama as the exclusive territory of medicine and psychology. This is a very regrettable turn of events, with far-reaching consequences and lost opportunities. And it was never Moreno's intent; as I will explain in chapter four, when Moreno was inventing psychodrama in the 1920s, he envisioned that future psychodramatists would emerge from the theatre institutes as well as from specialist psychodrama training centres (Moreno, 1924: 16). Psychodrama needs to rediscover its theatrical roots and be reclaimed by theatre

artists, as there are many insights and practical approaches that can be of mutual benefit to both fields if they rediscover their common heritage.

Moreno had a global vision for psychodrama and the related methods he created, such as sociodrama and sociometry. His aim could not have been more ambitious when he writes, 'A truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind' [sic] (Moreno, 1954: 3). He saw psychodrama as being relevant to the psychiatric clinic but equally to the public sphere and to the whole of humanity (Moreno, 1946). Indeed, for more than two decades he simultaneously operated a psychiatric hospital in upstate New York, where the psychodrama stage was a centerpiece of the treatment, and a public theatre of psychodrama in Manhattan. His public theatre of psychodrama was open six nights per week from the late 1940s to the early 1970s and became a well-established fixture of Manhattan life, furthering Moreno's vision of making the therapeutic theatre available to all (J. D. Moreno, 2014). Moreno's theatre had a significant impact on actors and directors, as has been documented in Jonathan D. Moreno's (J. L. Moreno's son) biography of J L Moreno, *Impromptu Man* (2014). Furthermore, if one looks to countries such as Brazil, 'social psychodrama' is practised in the streets and in public facilities (Fleury et al, 2015; Wiener et al, 2011). The director Peter Brook considers psychodrama to be a 'necessary' form of theatre and identifies psychodrama with his concept of the *Immediate Theatre* in his seminal and highly influential work, *The Empty Space*:

> A true image of necessary theatre-going I know is a psychodrama session. […] In the circle, soon, everyone will have his role — but this does not mean that everyone will be performing. Some will naturally step forward as protagonists, while others will prefer to sit and watch. […] This is true drama because the people on their feet will be speaking about true issues shared by all present in the only manner that can make these issues really come to life. […] When they leave the room, they are not quite the same as when they entered. […] This is how I understand a necessary theatre, one in which there is only a practical difference between actor and audience, not a fundamental one.

> (Brook, 1968: 148-150)

It is interesting to note that Brook, one of the directors most identified with experimental theatre from the 1960s to the present day, first published this commentary in 1968, during a time of many radical experiments in the theatre and some of the first examples of people using their own lives as the basis of the performed material (Roose-Evans, 1970; Kent & Carter, 1974). In the 1960s, Moreno's public theatre of psychodrama was also in its heyday in Manhattan. Many actors, directors and writers associated with the experimental theatre of the 1960s attended the theatre of psychodrama and were influenced by the psychodramas they witnessed and participated in, although much of this influence has not been credited in the theatre world (J. D. Moreno, 2014). As Kent and Carter comment, 'The extent of Moreno's influence is staggering. The literature abounds with evidence of his impact on psychiatry, sociology, philosophy, education, and psychology. Conspicuously absent are references to his influence on theatre' (Kent & Carter, ibid: 80). This has to some extent been rectified in later publications such as Scheiffele (1995) and J. D. Moreno (ibid.).

There will be additional coverage of psychodrama and its relation to the theatre of personal stories in chapter four, which focuses on intentions of theatre-making where personal stories are used.

The rise of documentary and activist theatre aimed at political and social change

An important development in the early 20th Century theatre was the shift towards documentary themes and approaches in play production. Documentary theatre can be dated as far back as 492 BC and the production of Phrynichus' *The Capture of Miletus* — a play about the Persian War — and later through Shakespeare's history plays and Georg Büchner's *Danton's Death* (1835), which makes extensive use of verbatim speeches by politicians and other primary historical sources (Favorini, 1995). Büchner's work was part of the pre-revolutionary Vormärz movement in Germany, in a period when authors and artists were becoming increasingly interested in using their work to foment political and

social change. The earliest example of stage documentary in 20th century Europe is Erwin Piscator's *Trotz alledem!* (*Despite All!*). Staged in Berlin in 1925, this was a propagandistic documentary review about the Communist Party which included multi-media technology, recorded speeches, photographs and newsreel montages and film of staged reenactments of historical events (Innes, 1972: 49-50, 109-110). This production and Piscator's later directing of landmark plays including Heinar Kipphardt's *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1964), and Peter Weiss's *The Investigation* (1965) proved to be a strong influence on British documentary theatre makers. Piscator also had a large impact in the USA, where the Depression era Federal Theatre Project (part of Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration) and the experiments with The Living Newspaper drew inspiration from Piscator's German political documentary approach to theatre.

These documentary productions were part of an interconnected movement towards agitprop and workers' theatre projects in Britain, Germany, the Soviet Union, France, Japan, Canada, the USA and many other countries. In the Soviet Union, the Workers' Youth Threatre and the widespread Blue Blouse agitprop theatre collective movement in the 1920s and 30s spread news and propaganda in support of the Soviet system. Germany saw the development of Workers' Theatre troupes during the Weimar Republic, including Piscator's *Red Revel Review.* The international agitprop movement had high aspirations for change at a global level and led to the formation of The International Union of Revolutionary Theatres and even an international Olympiad of Revolutionary Theatre in Moscow in 1933 (Filewood, 2011). The early work of Bertolt Brecht should of course be included in this trend, as he placed the emphasis on the theatre's role in questioning traditional power hierarchies and what is considered 'normal' in unequal or unjust societies, i.e. the injustices committed in the name of justice (Brecht, 1964). In his 1948 manifesto *A Short Organum for the Theatre,* Brecht calls for theatre to go beyond the realm of art and explicitly into the realm of politics and social change. His call to arms was part of the vanguard movement of a number of theatre artists, and indeed artists from many fields, calling for radical social change — which also meant change in the theatre.

In the United States, the Roosevelt administration's New Deal programme of the 1930s saw the creation of the Federal Theatre Project and the Federal Writers' Project, operated under the aegis of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration. The Writers' Project focused — in one part of its programme — on the creation of a portrait of everyday life in America (Banks, 2015). This led to the creation of two important archives: *American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 - 1940,* and the seventeen volume collection entitled *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*. The Federal Theatre Project launched new writers, produced established plays and also focused significantly on the production of living newspaper performances across the country. With the Federal Theatre Project, documentary theatre became an established feature of the American theatre scene.

The profound shifts within the theatre towards documentary forms and agitprop occurred in the context of wider cultural and social forces that played out in the aftermath of the two world wars. The emergence of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation saw the widespread politicisation and the rising political consciousness of younger generations determined not to repeat the pattern of blind adherence to corrupt authority or to fall victim to nationalistic propaganda or oppressive political regimes (Harries & Harries, 1997; Zinn, 1980). Related to this were developments within the Labour movement, campaigns for workers' rights, protests against racial discrimination and the adoption by the UN of the International Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In Britain, landmark events such as the 1936 Jarrow March against poverty and unemployment in the northeast of England promoted a sea change in the public understanding of the necessity to listen to the voices of people who are otherwise forgotten in the predominating political agenda of economic advancement, capitalism and privatisation. Across economic divides, there emerged a widespread support for the notion of holding power to account, and challenging the status quo.

In the theatre, emerging from this context from the 1920s to the 1960s and continuing to this day, a range of politically committed theatre companies focused

on social issues and social problems (Blau, 1964; Innes, 1972; Croyden, 1974; Boal, 1979; Itzin, 1980; Coult and Kershaw, 1983). In Britain, the Actresses' Franchise League made an important contribution towards Women's suffrage in the era before World War One. The 1920s saw the development of the Hackney Labour Dramatic Group, which later became the Workers' Theatre Movement, which was affiliated with the International Union of Revolutionary Theatres. In 1931, Ewan MacColl formed *The Red Megaphones,* touring to protest gatherings in the north of England. Joan Littlewood, with her widely acclaimed and pivotal production *Oh What a Lovely War!* (1963) drew inspiration from Piscator's approaches to documentary in the use of songs, documents, propaganda and photographs from the First World War (Leach, 2006; Piscator, 2007; Willett, 2007; Cantrell, 2012, 2013). Littlewood in turn had a significant influence on South Africa's Barney Simon, who worked for her in the 1950s and later founded the Market Theatre, the radical and activist theatre that broke norms by including multiracial casts. Littlewood's influence can also be seen in a more recent and highly acclaimed work of documentary comedy, *The Wipers Times*, (the title is taken from the common mispronunciation of Ypres by British soldiers fighting in Belgium) by Ian Hislop and Nick Newman, which is set in World War One and follows the true story of a satirical newspaper published in the trenches. In the popular theatre, a focus on the lives of forgotten, excluded and overlooked people gained traction in the 20th century with playwrights such as Lorraine Hansbury, Clifford Odets, Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neill, John Osborne and many others. These playwrights were often explicit about promoting political change and social justice, and defending the interests of the powerless in the face of oppression, inequality or unjust power structures.

Technical innovations such as the invention of the portable tape recorder made it more practical to do recorded field interviews. This new tool for capturing stories and voices facilitated developments such as Peter Cheeseman's verbatim documentary productions at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent between 1962 and 1984. As Cantrell (2013) has observed, Cheeseman's *Fight for Shelton Bar* (1974), which focused on a campaign against the closure of a steelworks in Stoke,

is the first example of a verbatim play. Cheeseman was strongly influenced by the work of Joan Littlewood and equally drew from the radio documentary approach exemplified by the Radio Ballads produced by Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger for the BBC between 1958 and 1963. In this radio documentary format, Parker, MacColl and Seeger captured oral histories using what was, for its time, a revolutionary approach, where they used the voices of working class people and used the authentic sounds effects from the environment and folk songs as additional means of expression (Long, 2004). Inspired by this approach, Cheeseman in *Fight for Shelton Bar* used the verbatim words of the steelworkers, some of whom appeared in the stage production and many of whom attended the public performance in Stoke.

From the 1960s up to the present day, theatre companies continue to use and develop the traditions of agitprop, documentary, activist and verbatim traditions. In the UK, companies such as Banner Theatre, Red Ladder, Cardboard Citizens, People's Palace Projects, Camden Peoples' Theatre, Belt and Braces, 7:84, Welfare State International, Inter-Action, and many others (the first five in this list are still producing), were formed with explicit missions that were, with varying degrees of emphasis, emancipatory, activist, anti-capitalism, anti-fascist, anti-racist and promoting concrete change in socio-economic and political systems (Hillman, 2015; Itzin, 1980: 5; Kershaw, 1992, 1998). In recent years, in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2009 and the massive bank bailouts, the creeping realisation of the true scale of inequity built into neoliberal power structures has continued to fuel socially and politically motivated theatre. Theatre Uncut, formed in 2010, is one recent example. This trend, encompassing mainstream theatre, applied and community theatre, theatre in education, agitprop and political and activist theatre of many stripes, is underpinned by extensive interrogation of the status quo and of the politics of power and oppression. Such an interrogation of the status quo necessarily includes the individual and collective stories of people who are marginalised in complex systems or exploited by more powerful forces (Flyvbjerg et al., 2012; Butler, 1997).

Verbatim, documentary and activist forms of theatre have also become a significant feature of mainstream theatre in many countries. Such productions have been featured in high profile theatres including Britain's National Theatre, the West End and Broadway, and have typically taken activist stances in relation to highly charged political issues. In the USA, Anna Deveare Smith is perhaps the most prominent performer and playwright using journalistic interviews to create dramatic portraits of her interviewees with a distinct inflection towards activism and social change (Smith, 2001, 2006). Emily Mann is also a key practitioner using oral history to create verbatim, testimonial and documentary forms of living social history inflected towards social justice and political change (Dawson, 1999). Also in the USA, Tectonic Theatre's widely acclaimed *The Laramie Project* (2000) uses a verbatim and documentary / investigative approach in examining the aftermath of the notorious kidnap and murder in 1998 of Matthew Shephard and its impact on the small town of Laramie, Wyoming. Similarly, Erik Jensen's and Jessica Blank's *The Exonerated* was developed from interviews with former death row inmates who had been exonerated. The interviews focus on their experiences of being wrongly convicted based on their forced confessions that were obtained through torture and deceptive police and prosecution tactics. The highly acclaimed play came at a time when there was a sea-change in many US states which halted executions based on a large number of wrongful conviction cases. In the UK, one of the more prominent recent examples of verbatim approaches being used to address current political themes is the National Theatre's post-Brexit verbatim play *My Country, A Work in Progress,* which toured the UK in 2017. Using interviews of people from many parts of the UK, plus speeches from party leaders and additional text by Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy, the production uses professional actors to speak the words of the interviewees and attempts to capture the depth of feeling and range of views associated with the Brexit vote.

The broad movement of socially progressive and political theatre during the past 100 years has often been the subject of contested debate regarding how idealistic or utopian the aims of such theatre are, and how much impact such forms of theatre have really had as agents of change (Hillman, 2015; Itzin, 1980;

Kershaw, 1992). Much of this debate centres on the extraordinary flourishing of political and activist theatre from 1968 onwards. The spirit of the May 1968 student rebellions in Paris, and the related students revolts internationally, represented a period of 'unprecedented political consciousness and activism' (Itzin, 1980: 1). It was the year of the Prague Spring and of Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech. It was the year *Hair* opened on Broadway, when the Viet Nam War was at its height, and when 'tear gas and tanks' confronted political protesters in Chicago during the infamous Democratic Convention of 1968 (Itzin, ibid: 1-4). The international protests galvanised political, agit-prop, alternative, TIE and counter-cultural theatre in many countries.

Reflecting on the context of this study and our focus on how peoples' personal stories are used in the theatre, I would argue that the use of the stories of specific people offers a powerfully charged paradigm for political discourse in the theatre. For example, Hillman (ibid.) explores the notion of small battles and big battles: Do we advocate at the small scale for the preservation of an allotment scheme, or fare wages for local nursery workers, or do we strive at the large scale to end a war, change societal structures or overthrow oppression? A powerful way to begin answering these questions is to focus on the specific stories of particular people affected by these issues. Why might personal stories add to the political punch of a theatre piece? Such personal stories have the potential to add to the power of activist theatre by focusing on the stories of real people and their real struggles. Personal stories can sharpen the 'concrete analysis of the concrete situation' that Lenin spoke about in his analysis of Marx. Moreover, to analyse concrete situations and real, lived experience, 'is not an opposite of "pure" theory, but, on the contrary, it is the culmination of genuine theory, its consummation — the point where it breaks into practice' (Lenin, cited in Lukacs, 1924: postscript). And when a real person's story is on the stage — and even more so, when they themselves are on the stage and telling their story — the debate can be very specifically focused, more pragmatic and direct, and in some cases more effective in fomenting change. A case in point is the recent production *Land of the Three Towers,* performed in 2016 at the Camden Peoples' Theatre in London by a

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theatre company comprised of young mothers who have experienced homelessness and housing activists from Focus E15 Campaign (their slogan: 'social housing, not social cleansing'). The play mixed verbatim testimony with songs, and celebrated the story of the occupation by a group of mothers of four empty council flats on a London housing estate. Their campaign garnered significant national attention and gained re-housing for some of the families involved.

Linked to the advances in activist and political theatre focused on social issues and people's personal narratives, in the early to mid-20th century new trends in social history, cultural criticism and academia emerged which focused on ordinary people and the concerns and experiences in the everyday lives of people. Related developments within academia include the emergence of reflexive sociology and ethnography, examining the power dynamics in societies and across generations (Bourdieu, 1990; Goffman, 2014), liberation sociology (Feagin et al, 2016), and intersectional / positionality studies (Crenshaw, 1989; England, 1994; Merriam et al., 2001; Collins and Bilge, 2016). These highly influential developments contributed to similar trends in historical research where history has become increasingly focused on history gleaned from people in the street, in the home, in the community and in the workplace. In academia in the 1930s, researching the lives of under-represented and under-served people gained prominence and respect as an area of human activity worthy of serious research (Garfield, 2005; Jennings, 2012). This is history focused not only on the headline history of famous events and people, but also the little known 'micro-histories' of local movements, smaller events and personal lives. This approach to history is typified in the prolific work of historian Howard Zinn with his *A People's History of the United States* (1980). In the UK, a similar tradition of social history emerged in the 1950s and 60s, exemplified by the work of historians such as Edward Palmer Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, Harold Perkin and others. This approach to social history has sometimes been called 'doing history from the bottom up' (Lynd, 2014) — a way of thinking about history not only in terms of accessing the history of the ordinary

citizen, but also a form of history that is *usable*, i.e. a usable past that provides useful information and context that help to address the problems of today.

In the theatre, there are many examples that echo this approach to social history. A recent example of such a production is the currently (as of 2017) touring documentary play *We Are the Lions Mr. Manager.* Written by Neil Gore, this is Townsend Theatre Productions' rendition of the story of the formidable Jayaben Desai and her inspirational leadership of the infamous 1976-78 Grunwick Film Processing factory strike. The play comes from a powerfully activist stance towards social history and uses drama, comedy, music and audience-interaction (at one point, audience members are called to the front to join the picket line outside the factory) to tell this true modern day David and Goliath story.

Alongside the developments in social history came the inclusion of new approaches to making meaning and integrating competing narratives based on the analysis of semiotics, embedded processes of coercion and control in politics, history, the media and in popular culture. Along with this came the development of cultural theory, feminist theory and multi-cultural studies which offered critical analysis of power hierarchies of knowledge and hegemonic discourses (Hall, 1997; Gramsci, 2000; Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Foucault, 1980; Hofmeyr, 1994). These progressive developments across many domains of knowledge and activity coincided with global social and political movements that advocated human rights including civil rights, equal rights for women, gay liberation, antifascism and anti-war protests, and which culminated in international developments such as the United Nations' Human Rights Commission and the International Bill of Human Rights (1976).

In the theatre, one manifestation of the effects of these combined emancipatory forces, which followed quickly on from the UN's adoption of the International Bill of Human Rights, is the 1978 staging in London of *The Biko Inquest.* This dramatisation was based largely on the transcripts of the inquest held after the suspicious death in custody of South African anti-apartheid activist

Bantu Stephen Biko. His death made news around the world and is seen as a key contributing factor in the eventual collapse of South Africa's apartheid regime. A 1984 production at the Riverside Studios in London was directed by and starred Albert Finney. *The Biko Inquest* stands as one of the earliest examples of tribunal theatre, later made popular by playwrights such as David Hare (Brittain et al, 2014).

The relationship between theatre, therapy and applied theatre: A long view

Applied theatre is highly germane to this study because it links in important ways to our discussion of how theatre links with therapy and the theatre of personal stories. As a rule, applied theatre practitioners are very careful to make the distinction that applied theatre is not therapy (Jennings, 2009; Walsh, 2013; Prentki & Preston, 2009). Such distinctions come just as fervently from the other side, with dramatherapists and psychodramatists claiming clear distinctions between therapeutic applications of theatre-based and theatre-informed techniques, versus theatre that is used for other ends (Seymour, 2009; Jones 1996, Holmwood, 2014; Jennings & Holmwood, 2016). However, this is a contested distinction, and recent developments in the theatre of personal stories have heightened a tension within this debate that goes back to the origins of western theatre.

To offer some historical context, the term 'applied theatre' was coined relatively recently and has been consistently problematised and debated since its inception. Rikke Gürgens Gjærum, cited earlier in this chapter, notes that, 'according to interviews with [Helen] Nicholson, [James] Thompson and [Adrian] Jackson, the term *Applied Theatre* somehow came into use during 1996-1999 at a conference during this period, though no one seemed to remember exactly when and by whom' (Gjærum, 2013: 347). Given that the provenance of the term is generalised, with no specific author claiming ownership, the term *applied theatre* is open to many interpretations. Looking across the dynamic and prolific scholarship and practice which uses the term, a broad consensus seems to have emerged that

applied theatre and performance as a concept encompasses the full range of theatre and all its constituent methods and processes when these are used to meet identified needs or to serve an educational or social (e.g. transformational, activist, rehabilitative, advocacy, interventionist, consciousness-raising, justice-orientated or community-engaged) purpose, often but not exclusively with non-traditional audiences or within a specified context, setting, group, classroom or community.

Being cognisant of the range of contested definitional issues highlighted by Ackroyd (2007), Thompson (2003, 2009b), Ukaegbu (2004) and many other scholars and commentators, particularly the way in which these authors highlight the issues of definitional hierarchies and exclusionary discourses, I will for the purposes of this investigation consider the term 'applied theatre and performance' in its broadest sense as a term describing a wide range of socially engaged and aware practices and processes that are 'responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities' (Prentki and Preston 2009: 9). Stated another way, applied theatre is theatre done *with, by* or *for* a community — however that community may be defined (ibid: 10).[3] This definition is intentionally broad and I recognise that applied theatre as a term is still contested and evolving. As such, no single definition is likely to capture the full range of intentions and processes utilised by practitioners around the world. Most specifically, I deliberately use the broadest definition in order to avoid an exclusionary and hierarchical trend spotted by O'Toole who observes, by way of critique, that 'the use of the term *applied theatre* is often restricted to settings where theatre is being used for explicit social benefit' (O'Toole, 2009, as cited in Ackroyd, 2007).

Reflecting further on the competing definitions within and around applied theatre, it is possible to see that the definition may be so broad and contested that

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[3] On a strikingly similar note, J.L. and Zerka Moreno referred to psychodrama as 'the psychotherapy of the people, by the people and for the people' (Moreno & Moreno, 1975: 12). This reflects a deep concurrence between applied theatre and psychodrama, both approaches being committed to promoting participation, human agency and justice by using active methods and theatre-based approaches that are *of, by* and *for* the people.

it no longer serves to identify a distinct field or body of practice. Authors such as Prentki and Preston (2009), Preston (2016), Prendergast & Saxton (2009), Nicholson (2014), Jennings (2009), Jones (1996), Taylor (2003) and many others have offered detailed definitions of applied theatre, and many authors have problematised the definition to the extent that the use of the term 'applied theatre' has become so contested, so poked, prodded and reconstituted that it calls into question its usefulness as a term to define a field of work any longer. Consequently, I am inclined to agree with Thompson (2003: 177-179) when he suggests that the term 'applied theatre' should be taken to be a descriptive term, rather than a field, a specialism or an area of consolidated and explicitly defined terrain. Rather, it ought to be seen as a lens through which to see any theatre practice. Seen in this light, applied theatre is understood as a way of thinking about and understanding one possibility for the way that theatre can work, and that within that, there are myriad ways of working — indeed, all theatre possibilities are open. In light of this perspective on applied theatre, which looks at the whole of the theatre but through a particular lens, in this study I reference authors from across the field of theatre and not just those who write specifically in reference to applied theatre.

Having said this, I also want to honour those scholars, researchers and practitioners who use the term *applied theatre* to describe their work. Writers on applied theatre have, within a short span of twenty years, created a compelling, rigorous and steadily growing body of theory, research and practice. Authors such as Hughes et al (2011) and others have noted how applied theatre is now at a point where it does have a history and no longer needs to be called 'emergent.' It has emerged. As such, this is a point in time where the communities of practice known as applied theatre, socially engaged theatre or community theatre (the latter term is more commonly used in North America) are taking stock, looking back, and reflecting on trends and inter-relationships over time. One of the advantages of doing so is that practitioners, researchers and scholars of applied theatre can make informed observations, as Hughes et al do, about the socio-political positions of applied theatre, the strengths and weaknesses of various

approaches, and the connections between applied theatre and other domains of theory and practice.

My own preference, given the focus of this study, is to take a step back from the debates about the definition of and utility of the term 'applied theatre' and to look at the long view in order to consider the connections between applied theatre, mainstream theatre and therapy. One could argue, when taking the long view, that western theatre is rooted in real events and that it has in some senses been 'applied theatre' since its start. Doerries (2015), Scott (2014), Allern (2017) and others remind us that the origins of western theatre and democracy are intertwined, and that theatre has been radical, political and oriented towards justice, therapy and healing since the plays of ancient Greece. For example, playwrights such as Aeschylus, with *The Persians,* and Euripides, with *Trojan Women,* were writing about recent history. These plays were engaged directly with Athenian politics and daily life (Shay, 1994, 1995, 2002). In *The Persians,* first performed in 472 BCE, the Athenians hear the perspective of the Persians who they had defeated in battle just eight years before. This is in the context of democracy having been established only a generation before, in 510 BCE. The message of the play is a warning, to beware of hubris and to reflect on what they may take for granted. In effect, the message is that 'we too could fall like the Persians.' More starkly, Euripides ca. 416 BCE, in *The Trojan Women,* shows how the women of Troy are reduced to barbarism with the sacrifice of Andromache's son. This comes just one year after the Athenian defeat of Myklos and the Athenians' massacre of all the men of Myklos and the enslavement of the women. Given the context and the timing of the play, it can be seen as a highly political play, prompting reflection and debate about justice, power and oppression. This shows us that ancient Greek theatre was highly political and asked tough questions, forcing the audience to face a problem, and make a choice: 'What do you stand for?' 'What will you do?' (Drama after all comes from the Greek word for action — to *do*, to *act*, to *perform*.) These plays and others from the time, including Aristophanes' *Lysistrata,* and Euripides' *The Bacchae,* deliberately question authority. Sophocles' *Antigone* can be understood as a play very much focused on

how one can debate and argue the critical issues of the day, and how authority can be challenged through the force of argument and will (Allern, 2017). In *The Libation Bearers,* when Orestes — faced with the dilemma of whether or not to kill his mother Clytemnestra as revenge for her murdering his father Agamemnon — asks 'What shall I do?', he poses a question simultaneously to himself, to the gods and to the audience. In effect, Orestes is asking 'what would you do in such an extreme situation?' Contemporary accounts tell us that there was frequent interaction between audiences and actors in the ancient amphitheaters, and it is not difficult to imagine the shouts and cries towards the characters onstage from audiences of many thousands, resounding in debate about matters of life and death. We can hear within this the ancient echo of the challenge posed in performances of Forum Theatre today, and in interactive plays of many types, when audiences are encouraged to become involved in the drama and the dilemmas faced by the characters onstage. The ancient is modern, and what we might think of as innovations in the theatre may be as old as theatre itself.

While I would not go so far as to say that these plays were based on personal stories, nevertheless they will have felt very personal to the audiences seeing them in their original context. Even more so, the actors and the playwrights themselves would be able to relate strongly to the characters and the themes. Aeschylus and Sophocles were veterans of war. Sophocles was a general in the Athenian army, then an author writing — in *Antigone* — about the desolate aftermath of war, the competing allegiances and the difficult moral choices wrought by war (Doerries, 2015; Shay, 1994, 2002). It is not difficult to imagine how personal these themes must have been to Sophocles and to his audiences, comprised primarily of citizen-soldiers who could relate all too powerfully to the theme of a fallen brother. Observing the preponderance in ancient Greek drama of war-based themes and characterisations of soldiers and former soldiers who would be, in modern parlance, diagnosed with PTSD or combat stress, authors such as Meineck and Konstan (2014), Doerries (2015), Shay (1994) and others have concluded that ancient Greek drama was a form of therapy for the masses, a large scale encounter with the horrors of war and its aftermath, for the purposes of

communal witnessing, catharsis and healing of the polis. This conclusion is very much in keeping with Aristotle's *Poetics* and his analysis of tragedy as promoting the cathartic release of pity and fear. The central importance of this healing form of drama can perhaps be grasped with the recognition that those ancient Greek tragedies that survive were all written within approximately a 60-year time span, during which Athens was almost continually at war (Palaima, 2014: 262). Added to this fact is that the plays were written by citizen-soldiers, performed by citizen-soldiers, for mass audiences of citizen-soldiers and their generals (the generals being seated in the place of honour in the front row), on themes typically focused on war and its traumatic aftermath. This is theatre of, by, and for the people, about matters of immediate concern — one definition of what we now call applied theatre. The conclusion that can be drawn from this understanding of the context and intent of ancient Greek drama is that theatre has, in a crucial sense, been 'applied' theatre from the start.

To elucidate this point further, in ancient Greece, theatre and healing were so intertwined that in approximately 420 B.C., during the great plague of Athens (based on dental records, most likely to have been typhoid fever), the sanctuary of the healing god Asclepius (the ancient Greek version of a hospital) was built immediately adjacent to the Theatre of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis in Athens. This was a pattern of construction later repeated throughout the Greek world (Mitchell-Boyask, 2009). In the mind of the ancient Greeks, songs could heal, and the tragic poets were healers of the body and also of the body politic — 'healers of the city' (Mitchell-Boyask, 2009: 375). To offer just one practical example of how the theatre was used to offer healing, it seems clear from the construction of the healing sanctuary and the Theatre of Dionysus immediately adjoining each other that patients in the sanctuary of Asclepius (Fig. 1.1) could easily hear the healing songs of the chorus, and most likely the words of the actors, coming from the adjoining theatre of Dionysus. This seems certain to have been an intentional positioning in order to make use of the healing potential of the songs and the plays being presented (Doerries, 2015). Landy and Montgomery emphasise this point when they note that, 'as part of the healing, the patients were

required to witness performances and sometimes participate as actors in the chorus' (Landy & Montgomery, 2012: 168). Reflecting on this historical observation, we can see a clear link between theatre-based approaches to physical and mental healing in ancient Greece that are akin to modern day approaches such as dramatherapy, applied theatre, psychodrama, and related forms.
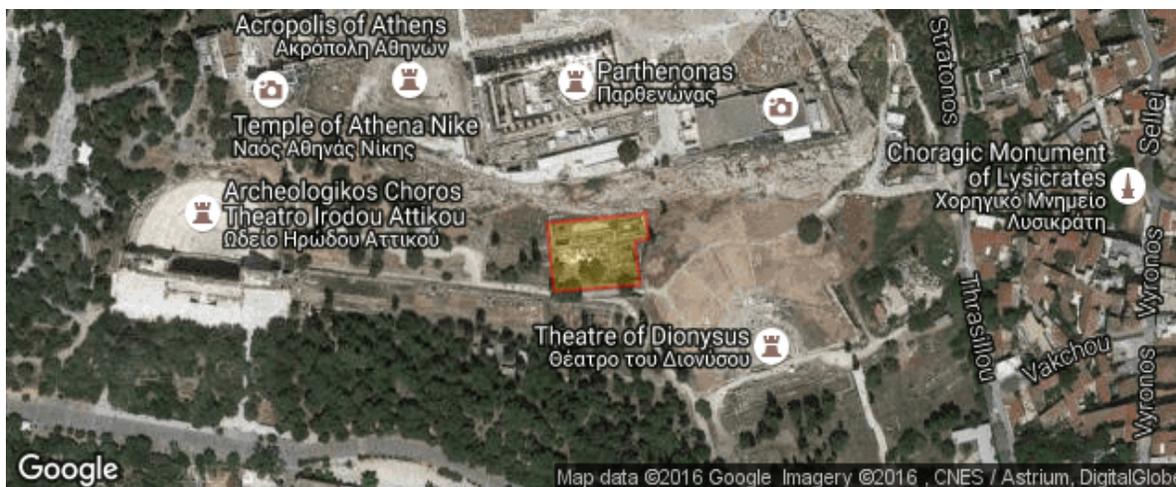
Fig. 1.1: The Sanctuary of Asclepius, or Asclepieion, (highlighted), showing its position adjacent to the Theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus, in Athens. Credit: Google images.

There is a longstanding debate within the theatre and arts community regarding instrumentalism and aesthetics (Nicholson 2009a; Thompson, 2009b; Schechner, 2013: 80). This is a dynamic discourse that has existed within the theatre for thousands of years, which reflects theatre's multiple purposes back to the origins of theatre in ancient Greece and even long before in shamanism and storytelling (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, 2010; Doerries, 2015; Nicholson, 2014; Thompson, 2003, 2009b; Davey, Day and Balfour, 2015) While on the one hand it may be thought that 'theatre' and 'therapy' are two distinct fields of human endeavour, on closer examination one finds numerous examples in current practice and professional discourse from each side of this dichotomy which problemitises and adds complexity to the attempt to draw a clear boundary. Theatre has, since its origins, had an aesthetic and also a therapeutic / instrumental intent (Harrison, 1912). In complementary fashion, therapy has, since

its origins, had an aspect of performativity and performance, from the spellbinding and catharsis-inducing performance of the healing shaman through to the contemporary adaptations of theatre for specifically psychotherapeutic aims in dramatherapy and psychodrama.

I would include here those forms of participatory theatre which not only cross into therapeutic terrain but which also explicitly use techniques that are commonly used in psychodrama, such as Boal's cop-in-the-head and Rainbow of Desires techniques (Boal, 1995; Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 1994). In psychodrama terminology, cop-in-the-head and Rainbow of Desires would be considered to be conserved forms of psychodrama, that is to say, specified processes for using psychodrama techniques. Boal was familiar with psychodrama, having participated in psychodrama groups in the 1960s (Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, ibid.). While he made explicit distinctions between his work and psychodrama, the overlap is clear to anyone familiar with Boal's approaches and with psychodrama. With Boal, we have another clear example of how applied theatre and therapy have become deeply intermixed.

Today it is increasingly common for artists, singers and performers, including clowns, to visit hospitals in order to cheer up the patients, to help them to feel better within themselves, to have positive interactions with people as part of their overall healing process, and to offer a distraction from their suffering (Sextou, 2010). There is a direct link here with understandings from ancient Greece about the same properties of the arts, including theatre, to offer healing.

To summarise, there has been therapy within theatre and theatre within therapy since the origins of each. As Walsh writes, 'theatre has been a source of inspiration for therapy since the latter's rise in the West in the late nineteenth century, and […] theatre has mined, developed and extended this connection right up to the present day' (Walsh, 2013: 3). When theatre is understood from this historical perspective, we gain a deeper understanding of why the theatre of personal stories — whether it is considered to be a part of mainstream theatre or whether it falls under the rubric of applied theatre — crosses so easily into the

terrain of therapy. Theatre is in a long term and ongoing dialogue with therapy (Walsh, ibid: 73).

The turn towards autobiography and self-revelation in the theatre

One of the earliest examples of radical theatre that used autobiographical narratives combined with agitprop and experimental techniques was the all-woman theatre collective It's Alright to be Woman, which toured to community centres, women's centres, college campuses and non-traditional theatre venues up and down the east coast of the USA from 1970 to 1976. The group used their own lives as the basis for their plays, addressing, for example, their own experiences of inequality, of balancing the multiple demands of work, motherhood and marriage, of oppression, of rape, and of the fear of coming out as a lesbian (Case, 1988; Kent and Carter, 1974; Segal and Sklar, 1983). In the early 1970s, it was considered novel for performers to present their own stories on the stage. Contemporary commentators made particular note of the ensemble members' use of their own stories, such as in this review in *TDR*: 'The powerful effect the group has on its audience is due in part to the willingness of individual members to use their own lives as the basis for the material they perform. Each theatre piece is derived directly from the life of one of the members of the group' (Rea, 1972).

The 1980s saw the rise of the full-length autobiographical monologue focused on poignant memoir, social and political commentary and artistic re-visioning of one's personal experiences. Spalding Gray, who was once a key figure in Richard Schechner's Performance Group and later the Wooster Group, is often cited as the first and foremost among the performers of memoir as art. He gained notoriety for his ground-breaking autobiographical monologues, including *Swimming to Cambodia*, *Gray's Anatomy*, *Rumstick Road* and *Monster in a Box* (Demastes, 2008; Martin, 2013: 45-58; Young, 2012; Snow, 2016). Gray's monologues were a watershed moment, and popular storytelling formats such as the highly successful Moth Radio Hour (strap line: 'True Stories Told Live') and the related Moth storytelling formats can trace their influences to Gray's work. Gray's

autobiographical performances were so widely reviewed and so popular that their impact is hard to over-estimate; his work was a kind of tipping point in the history of personal stories on the stage.

In recent years, the use of personal stories on the stage has expanded to such an extent that it is now an established part of mainstream theatre. Recent examples in the UK include *20b,* an autobiographical play devised and performed by Jane English, which toured in the UK in 2016 and 2017. In the play, Jane explains her process of trying to track down former neighbours in the social housing project in London where she lived as a child (she and her mother lived in flat 20b, hence the name of the play). She and her mother were forced to move when the housing project was demolished by the local authority for urban regeneration. The play includes themes of identity, community, social cleansing, local and national politics, loss and nostalgia, and offers a powerful evocation of a community lost in time, and reclaimed through Jane's persistent detective work in tracking down the former residents of her housing block. One stand-out feature of this production is the interactive element: members of the audience are invited at various times to contribute dialogue by reading from cards handed out to volunteers. In one instance, the cards contain the text of emails sent by her former neighbours to Jane during her search. The technique promotes a rich form of encounter on at least four levels: First, Jane is present and telling her story directly to us. Second, members of the audience become actively involved in the dialogue when they read out the emails and hear Jane's reply. Third, Jane is interacting directly with us, particularly during these moments of interactive dialogue. And fourth, the story that she is sharing with us, and the people whose emails we are reading out aloud, are real.

Using a similar approach but in a more confrontational way, in his performance piece *Bravado,* the performance artist and provocateur Scottee has audience members read long sections of his own monologues in the first person, as if they are reading their own stories. The monologues recount some of the most harrowing experiences of prejudice, abuse and physical attacks suffered by

Scottee. The effect is to bring audiences into more direct contact with his experiences of violence and oppression, while also challenging audiences. The encounter is paradoxical and highly confronting: Scottee is open and direct with audiences, asking them why they have come to hear his stories of abuse and why they are willing to read these accounts out loud and in front of fellow audience members. As he says in a radio interview, 'I tell this stuff and people will pay for it. And it's capitalist, and it's ugly, but the truth is, middle class audiences love this stuff. And so what I'm doing with *Bravado* is going, 'Here is the stuff that you love. But why? But why are you here? What are you getting from this?' (Scottee, commenting on his show, 'Bravado' - BBC Radio 4, 1st November 2017, 'The Gamble').

Tim Stitz, in his highly acclaimed solo performance piece *Lloyd Beckmann, Beekeeper,* which toured in Australia in 2009 and 2010, takes a different approach to telling his personal story and interacting with his audience. Stitz spends almost the entire performance in role as his own grandfather, the eponymous Lloyd Beckmann. The set is designed to simulate the effect of the audience being seated in Lloyd Beckmann's living room in Queensland. We are seated on couches, stools, chairs and cushions as if we are guests at his home. During the play, Stitz as Lloyd Beckmann treats us as his guests, converses with us, serves us refreshments, and even lets us sample the honey obtained from his bees. Remarkably, we are told that this is the actual honey from the actual bees looked after by the actual Lloyd Beckmann. This spoonful of honey is a rare form of communion-at-a-distance with a man we feel we are getting to know through his grandson's performance. In perhaps the most poignant moment of the performance, Stitz briefly comes out of role as his grandfather, and into his own role, to ask his grandfather a question about what it was like for him when he lost his son (Tim's father) in a car accident, when Tim was still a child. Suddenly, we realise that the entire play is an encounter between Tim and the grandfather who raised him after his father's death, an attempt to understand the process of loss, and an honoring of the man who raised him under such traumatic circumstances.

From this angle, the play was almost indistinguishable from psychodrama; it was psychodrama in theatricalised form.

Continuing the theme of food tastings, in Barking Spider's one person performance *One Suitcase, Four Stories,* which has toured for several years and continues to be performed around Australia, the autobiographical performer Linda Catalano shares stories and recipes that her grandmother — an Italian immigrant to Australia — taught her. During the performance, Catalano, who performs in a working kitchen, cooks the recipes she is describing, and audience members eat the food as it comes from the pot. We are seated at tables as if we are in Catalano's kitchen at home, and as we eat, we are told the story that goes with the recipe. As with *Lloyd Beckmann, Beekeeper,* the audience interaction brings direct encounter with the performer, while also bringing a close encounter with someone who is not present by eating something that they have in some sense produced. It is an engrossing mix of involvement, direct encounter, sensory experience, food tasting and encounter-at-a-distance.

Other examples of autobiographical performance pieces playing to public audiences in the UK in recent years include Urielle Klein-Mekongo's *Yvette*, her semi-autobiographical solo performance about 'what it means to be a black girl from a single parent household' (Vile, 2017); Julia Voce's *Ishbel and I,* exploring Julia's childhood and her family members' experiences of mental illness; Caroline Horton's *Mess*, a performance based on her experience of living with an eating disorder; and Rachel Bagshaw's *The Shape of the Pain*, a semi-autobiographical piece based on her experience of living with chronic pain (Platt, 2018; China Plate, 2017).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the web of influence connecting the experimental theatre with psychodrama, and furthermore the connections between these innovations and activist and political theatre, social history, applied theatre and therapeutic uses and of theatre traced back to ancient Greek drama. How

does this archeological exploration help us to understand why we begin to see on the stage, particularly from the 1960s onwards, such varied forms of theatre based on biography, interviews with ordinary citizens, and personal stories of all descriptions? While not wishing to overstate the notion of influence, I would nevertheless argue that the confluence and complex, recursive intermixing of movements within the theatre, combined with wider socio-cultural and artistic trends, and innovations in theatre-based forms of therapy (i.e. psychodrama and dramatherapy), may provide us with some measure of understanding regarding why the proliferation of reality-based and autobiographical forms has occurred in recent decades. These trends can be seen as an interconnected web of influences, crossing and intersecting over time and across cultures. Another way of putting this is to borrow from Linda Catalano and use a cooking metaphor: if we were to stir these multiple themes of experimentation, psychodrama, activism, history, theatre and therapy into a cooking pot, and leave the ingredients to simmer, so to speak, it would be entirely predictable that out of this admixture would emerge a form of theatre and performance focused on personal story which also contains activist, progressive, experimental and therapeutic impulses.

Reflecting on the productions described in this chapter, and the threatre of personal stories more generally, there is no mistaking how closely many performances of the theatre of personal stories resemble psychodrama in the sense that people are presenting their personal life upon the stage and, if not actually working through their issues, they are presenting the results of a great deal of reflection on their life. We see in the theatre of personal stories that no topic is off limits and there is no limit to the amount of self-disclosure people bring to the stage. This has important ramifications for theatre practitioners, particularly practitioners who work with participant-performers who may wish to present aspects of their life on the stage. If there are now no limits to the amount of personal disclosure on the stage, how can we define ethical practices and work within guidelines for safety? Chapters two and three will focus on these important questions regarding ethics and guidelines in the theatre of personal stories.

Chapter Two: Ethics

Principles and guidelines for ethical practice when using personal stories in the theatre

Who needs metaphors for hell, or poetry about hell?
This really happened, here on this earth.

Spalding Gray (1987)
Swimming to Cambodia

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the ethics of using personal stories in theatre workshops, rehearsals and performances. I attempt to answer the key question: What guidelines and ethical standards from the fields of theatre and therapy pertain to the use of personal narratives in theatre, particularly when the stories are focused on the lives of vulnerable people, or on difficult or painful personal stories?

Looked at more broadly, this chapter is written to serve two purposes at once: first, as a survey of existing scholarship regarding ethics, and second, as a starting set of ethical principles and guidelines for practitioners who work directly with peoples' personal stories. A particular concern of this study is the potential risk of reinforcing oppression and unequal power relations in the very process of staging personal stories — particularly personal stories of vulnerability and risk. Therefore, this chapter also explores the question of how to conceptualise risk and vulnerability in the context of theatre and performance that draws on personal and collective stories.

Defining and contrasting traditional and modern ethics

In the classical tradition, moral philosophers have defined ethics primarily in relation to questions of obligation: How should I act? What are my responsibilities and what are their limits? How do my actions affect others? What is a good act, and what is a bad act? These are questions of practical morals, and for many centuries there have been examples of codes for moral and ethical behaviour in pragmatic, religious and philosophical texts (Downing & Saxton, 2010). The classical tradition of ethics has more recently been problematised and deconstructed by philosophers such as the contemporary analytical philosopher Martha Nussbaum and continental European philosophers such as Levinas, Derrida, Foucault, Badiou, Lacan, Deleuze, Braidotti and others (Garber et al, 2000; Downing & Saxton, ibid.).

In modern ethics, received moral codes and guidance about ethical behaviour are seen as outmoded because — to cite just one line of critique — these codes derive from 'ethical ideologies' (to use Badiou's terminology) that may lead to moral actions in some circumstances but which, in other circumstances, may be deeply inappropriate or harmful. In the continental tradition, ethics is instead conceived of as 'a process of questioning rather than as a positivistic exercise of morality' (Downing & Saxton, ibid: 3). Further elucidating this point, Marjorie Garber, Beatrice Hanssen and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, in *The Turn to Ethics*, write that ethics is 'a process of formulation and self-questioning that continually rearticulates boundaries, norms, selves, and "others"' (Garber et al, 2000: viii). Garber et al define ethics by placing emphasis on ways of responding in our encounters with other people. Their definition is particularly suited to our discussion of ethics because it is iterative, responsive, reflexive and open to learning and questioning at all times — and is therefore open to ongoing improvement. As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, their definition also coincides with the approach to ethics taken by most contemporary scholars and practitioners of applied and participatory theatre.

In the performance studies and applied theatre literature, there are frequent references to a number of established philosophers, ethicists and critical theorists who have provided thoroughgoing analyses of ethical issues, power relations, social inequality and political justice. Examples include Butler (1997), Lumsden (2000), Foucault (2006), Levinas (1969, 1991) and Beck (1992). These authors are cited in support of different facets of theatre, perhaps most notably for their arguments regarding the ethical and power issues inherent in work that is focused on vulnerability and yet which proposes to be empowering for beneficiaries or for the greater good. A range of theatre practitioners and scholars offer analyses of these ethical issues, particularly in reference to socially and politically engaged theatre processes (see, for example, Duggan, 2007, 2012; Caruth, 1996; Balfour, 2013; Stuart-Fisher, 2005, 2009, 2011a and b; and Edmondson, 2005).

Levinas, alterity and the face-to-face encounter with the Other

Perhaps most pointedly, Emmanuel Levinas provides essential philosophical theory which can help us to develop basic guidelines promoting ethical relationships between practitioners, participants, audiences, commissioners and indeed all stakeholders in collaborative processes. In Levinas' approach, the ethical face-to-face encounter is more than a relationship of mutuality and dialogue. The emphasis is on developing relationships based fundamentally on conscious good intention, respect for the other, generosity, and also maintaining a sense of deep and far-reaching — even 'infinite' — responsibility for the other person and a realistic, well-developed understanding of the effects of one's own actions on the other person. To use one of Levinas' better known principles, we must work with an understanding of the infinite 'alterity' — the *otherness* — of the other person, which expands the notion of respect. As Levinas writes, in his reflections on Marcels' *Metaphysical Journal* and Bubers's *I and Thou,*

> The claim to know and to reach the other is realised in the relationship with the Other that is cast in the relation of language, where the essential is the interpellation, the vocative. The other is

maintained and confirmed in his heterogeneity as soon as one calls upon him, be it only to say to him that one cannot speak to him, to classify him as sick, to announce to him his death sentence; at the same time as grasped, wounded, outraged, he is 'respected.' The invoked is not what I comprehend: *he is not under a category.* He is the one to whom I speak — he has only a reference to himself; he has no quiddity. But the formal structure of interpellation has to be worked out. [Italics and capitalisation as per the original.]

(Levinas, 1969: 69)

In Levinas' phenomenology of otherness, which he describes here in somewhat arcane language, each encounter between two people has the potential to be an encounter with radical otherness, what he calls alterity. Therefore, according to Levinas, our aim must not be to fully comprehend another person, because this is impossible and necessitates a fundamental reduction of the other person into the bounds of our own self-knowledge, 'effacing the other's radical exteriority' (Stuart-Fisher, 2009: 114). It reminds us that as facilitators of drama processes, there is, in effect, as Stuart-Fisher comments in her description of testimonial theatre, an 'ethical demand' for us to be present as witnesses and to become open not just to comprehending and respecting the other, but open also to the infinite 'unknowable and radical difference' of the other person (ibid.).

Authors such as Burvill (2013), Jeffers (2013), Balfour (2013) and Ridout (2009) also discuss the significance of Levinas' thinking and the notion of alterity in the context of theatre making. Such is the importance of Levinas in contemporary arts criticism that some authors have described a 'Levinasian turn' in the theorising of theatre, films and arts (Cooper, 2007: iii; Saxton, 2010: 96; Downing, 2004). Linking Levinas' writings specifically with the theatre of personal stories, one important insight to take from his work on ethical encounters is to understand that we can learn about the world through others and better understand ourselves through others. Indeed, we can channel our emotions through our reflections on their experience, and even further, we might be able to at least begin to understand the perspective of the other such that we might be able to offer them a response that meets their need, or even delights them, and avoids wounding them

(Downing, 2004). But none of this requires us to fully 'comprehend' (Levinas' word) the other — which is, in Levinas' view, an impossibility anyway.

Levinas' emphasis on the ultimate unknowability of 'the Other' and respect for the unavoidable mysteries inherent in the encounter between human beings, brings richness and complexity to the issue of ethics and working with vulnerability and risk in the theatre of personal stories. Likewise, his notions of alterity and responsibility for the other bring genuine complexity to the notion of personal responsibility. The tension is between individual accountability and systemic forces, and this must be seen as an ongoing, dynamic tension, never an 'either-or.' The philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2012) expands this point, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1980), when she addresses, within the context of her exposition on Nomadic theory, the complex dilemma that, when we think about issues, for example, of social justice and socio-political change, we are to some degree a part of the problem at the same time as trying to change the problem. To offer another example, in the case of someone diagnosed with a 'personality disorder' or 'mental illness,' there would be a similar tension when taking into account the social, cultural, political and family-systemic influences on a person's psychological struggles (and the power factors influencing how and by whom those struggles are framed by external parties), and balancing these against anything that the person themselves might be able to accomplish of their own volition and / or with support, to help themselves.

The complexity is important, at the very least because it helps us to avoid binary positions around issues such as personal problems being a personal responsibility vs being 'society's fault,' or social problems being the reverse. In addition to helping us to avoid simplistic binary positions, the complexity offered by this combination of ideas also helps us to appreciate the varied and complex ways in which each individual internalises socio-cultural and family influences and processes and incorporates them in their unique ways. Very importantly, such a perspective should also make us wary of labels that are often attached to individuals, as if this label is somehow a 'thing' that they possess or a 'fact' that

has meaning other than in a given cultural context. In my own practice as a psychotherapist, it is striking how common it is that people have been profoundly affected by inappropriate labels given to them by people with power and authority over them. Very often, the label exacerbates their problems and becomes an iatrogenic feature of their psychological disturbance.

Working with vulnerability and risk through drama: why the need for special attention?

The proliferation of theatre forms utilising personal narrative, discussed in chapter one, has been accompanied by detailed and searching critiques by many authors exploring the politics, power relations, ethics, aesthetics and epistemologies of practice with personal stories (Salverson, 1996; Thompson, 2009b; Wake, 2013; Leffler, 2012). As Salverson points out, a potential weakness of theatre that draws on the personal stories of vulnerable participants is that the drama practitioner may buy into the romanticised idea that staging vulnerability and pain is in itself a worthwhile or even noble goal (Salverson, 1996; Cizmic, 2012). Staging pain and suffering is not an answer in itself, and runs the serious risk of voyeurism, collusion with oppression and even re-abuse and re-traumatisation of victims. Unresolved trauma and abuse can result in distorted ways of perceiving the self, others and relationships, and therefore survivors of trauma and abuse need special care to help ensure that they do not unknowingly make themselves more vulnerable through the drama process.

If we are to remain ethical as theatre practitioners, personal stories of pain should never be presented as an unexamined spectacle and never with the assumption that the theatre artist is rebalancing the scales of justice simply by re-staging trauma without examining and taking heed of the wider sociocultural forces impacting on the participants, their stories, and the context in which their stories are now being told and will be shared in future. To do otherwise is to risk working within the context of forced, narcissistic solidarity, 'the violence of the "we"'

(Diamond, 1992; Salverson, 2001: 124). There is also the risk of 'inspiration porn,' where people extract 'inspiration' from watching the suffering and triumph over adversity of people telling their personal stories. Comedian and journalist Stella Young makes this point in her much-heralded TED talk entitled 'I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much' (Young, 2014), where she deconstructs the notion that people with disabilities should be conceived of as 'inspirational' simply because they are breathing and can remember their own name. Noting the hypocrisy and patronising attitude underneath portrayals of disability on the screen, disability rights advocates have criticised the fact that at the Oscars a significant portion of the best actor awards go to able bodied actors portraying disabled people. The pejorative term used for this by some disability rights advocates is 'cripping up' — a word describing the process whereby able-bodied actors portray a disabled person, begging the question, why not hire a disabled actor to portray the role?

I take a cue from Salverson when she suggests that theatre artists and educators using theatre for social change should:

> bring a more *deliberate attention* to the dynamics within the processes and performances we create and attempt to *build structures within which attention can be paid*, obligation traced but not required, and meanings touched but not pinned down. In this way performance and pedagogy might act as a doorway, an *instrument of encounter,* a place of public and private negotiations — where the goal is not just to empathise, but to attend, and perhaps eventually even to witness [emphasis mine].

(Salverson, 2001: 125)

With Salverson's prompting in mind, this chapter, and also the Drama Spiral which I explain in chapter three, are attempts at creating guidelines and building a structure through which to pay 'deliberate attention' to group processes and power relations. My hope and intention is that this guidance can promote ethical and aesthetic decision making during drama and theatre-making workshops that are, in

deep and profound ways, 'instruments of encounter' between people and between public and private domains.

Why is such 'deliberate attention' necessary? Theatre practice that draws on the personal narratives of participants is often undertaken with and focuses on the stories of marginalised, vulnerable populations who may have been ignored, injured, excluded or disadvantaged (Schaefer, 2009). Even when groups are not identified as vulnerable or at risk, the nature of the stories shared, the culture or context in which one is working, the processes used or the manner in which the story is presented to (and critiqued by) audiences may make participants vulnerable.

Surveying recent examples around the world, theatre practice drawing on personal stories might include, for example, people who are poor, unemployed or politically disenfranchised; people who are homeless; people recovering from addiction; refugees; asylum seekers; immigrants; people who have been displaced due to natural disaster, environmental degradation or government housing policy; people living in war zones; survivors of war, terrorism or political torture; survivors of abuse and trauma; current and former soldiers; sexual and gender minorities; members of religious, ethnic or racial minorities; people subject to political oppression; victims of crime and terrorism; victims of sexual trafficking, exploitation, forced marriage or genital mutilation; offenders and ex-offenders; gang members; youth at risk; people with mental health conditions; people facing disease or chronic medical conditions, including chronic pain; and people facing other forms of adversity and challenges to survival. In a wide range of contexts, the vulnerability might be understood on the personal level and also, at the same time, at the community, regional, national or international level. It is not unusual for large populations to be collectively traumatised, for example through war, occupation, terrorism, disease, famine, and natural disaster, not to mention social inequality and its concomitant effects such as poor health and shortened life expectancy.

When working with people who face such challenges, unresolved issues are often at or near the surface, still very raw. Indeed, in many cases the trauma, abuse or other struggle may be ongoing even as the theatre work proceeds. While on the one hand such individuals are often remarkable survivors, and in that sense 'tough' and 'resilient,' on the other hand, facilitators have a duty of care to work with an awareness not only of the outward, often highly proficient coping exterior of the participant, but also with the person as a whole, who might have underlying vulnerabilities that may to a certain extent lie outside the person's conscious awareness because their coping roles have predominated in order to keep them alive and safe. They may also feel unable to challenge a powerful and confident facilitator, particularly if they perceive that this would go against the group norm. In addition, the participants may have no prior experience of participation in drama and theatre activities, and therefore no way to anticipate what comes next, what the outcomes may be and what might be the ramifications of the process for them. Furthermore, there may be inherent power differentials or implicit cultural understandings that make asking questions or saying 'no' seemingly impossible for participants. This may happen, for example, in closed institutions such as prisons, forensic hospitals or youth detention centres where residents may feel themselves to be passive recipients of programmes that are offered to them. Such power differentials are of course not exclusive to closed institutions; they can exist in many other settings, such as where one culture is dominant, or where theatre practitioners from other countries offer services to countries and cultures who are defined as in some way 'deserving,' 'in need' or 'at risk' (Jeffers, 2008, 2013). Facilitators therefore need to build in constant checks and balances, where participants are encouraged to ask questions, offer suggestions and, most of all, say 'no' when they are unclear or when activities feel too risky for them, or not right in some way. This is ethics in action, and ethics as praxis — something enacted in a reflexive process.

'Deliberate attention' is also needed because wider forces are in play, beyond the rehearsal room. We all exist within systems at many levels, for example at the family, peer, institutional, community, regional, national and international levels. As

Thompson (2005, 2009a, 2009b), Saldaña (2011), Sepinuck (2013), Salverson (1996, 2001) and others have pointed out, the theatre practitioner is wise to be mindful of the broader cultural and socio-political context in which they are working and how this will influence the degree to which they encourage personal disclosure by participants. For example, in some cultural contexts, personal disclosure and the sharing of personal stories or even ideas may go against cultural norms, particularly in mixed-gender groups, groups where there are people of differing socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds, or in groups where there is or has been conflict. Furthermore, in situations of war, occupation, civil unrest, political or police oppression, dictatorship, forced migration, corruption and other contexts in which injustice and/or inequality may predominate, the theatre practitioner must hold in mind these influences and how the group of participants and/or audiences may be impacted by their participation in the theatre experience (Thompson et al, 2009; Thompson, 2002). Moreover, the theatre practitioner working in such contexts must be politically and psychologically savvy enough to understand how the theatre workshops, rehearsals or performance may be viewed by 'outsiders' — including neighbours, other people in the institution, the wider public and those in power with a stake in preserving the status quo. Indeed, the very fact of participation may be highly contested, with resentment or suspicion being felt towards the people involved in the theatre-making process.

Why is this important? It matters because drama workshops and theatre making processes are being used to address highly traumatic topics, with vulnerable groups and in risky socio-political contexts. Vulnerable people can easily be exploited, and there are serious risks of abuse, re-abuse and re-traumatisation. Unless theatre practitioners are informed, nuanced and able to work with the complexity of the ethical, aesthetic and therapeutic issues, there is a clear risk that practitioners over-step or blunder into damaging practice. So it is a safety issue and also a reputational issue; poor practice that puts participant-performers at risk or causes harm has the potential to damage the reputation of theatre practice far beyond the confines of a particular piece of harmful practice. It is not so much the intentional abuse of power that is of primary concern —

although that will always be a concern. What is of even more concern is the risk of uninformed and over-ambitious practitioners blundering into vulnerable and dangerous terrain without understanding or with a reckless or heedless arrogance.

Theatre is of course about breaking boundaries and taking creative risks. This is a vital impulse that keeps the theatre alive and innovative. I have no doubt that there will be times when the ethical guidelines will be breached; artists must have the ability to break new ground. But I would argue strongly that artists should be familiar with the discourses and ethics pertaining to their art — particularly when their art impacts vulnerable others — before going on to break suggested guidelines. So in no way do I wish to offer guidance that implies less creative risk-taking. Instead, what I wish to offer is an analysis of the process and an integration of theory which provides the practitioner with a theoretical understanding of the process and implications of working with people's personal stories, and perhaps even more importantly, some suggested guidelines for keeping the work ethically and psychologically sound.

The first principle must always be to *do no harm*. With this principle in mind, the theatre practitioner may need to radically adapt the aims and expectations of a given process, project or performance, not only in terms of how the work is undertaken but also in how and with whom the work is organised, negotiated, undertaken, explained, advertised, promoted, reported and documented. The risk of being culturally and politically naïve is that the applied theatre practitioner may inadvertently set up their participants for failure or place the participants' safety, livelihood or freedom at risk. Further, the worker may be subject to manipulation by those in power and further exacerbate an oppressive system.

Yet still, when the context is right and when the theatre practitioner has the informed consensus of a participant group with the capacity to make such decisions for themselves — with awareness of the potential risks involved — there is, within the role and remit of the theatre practitioner, the important possibility of helping groups of people to find hope and to strive towards self-determination and political and social change. In doing so, the applied theatre enterprise can move

back and forth between the tactical and strategic levels and enact creative resistances where it can (de Certeau, 1984; Thompson, 2009a: 121; Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 1994; Beck, 1992, 2006). In short, our idealistic hope to be agents for positive change in the world must be balanced by political awareness and shrewd artistic facilitation choices.

Understanding power dynamics in the drama process

Given the potentially significant vulnerabilities of participants, it follows that, if the theatre process is to use the personal stories of the participants, it is crucial to include in such processes a number of principles, guidelines and structures in order to protect people from re-oppression and from exacerbating their struggle. The theatre of personal stories certainly has the power to transform and heal, but it can also be a form of theatre that can do harm, by worsening the vulnerability of injured participants and also by passing on unresolved and uncontained (and typically unacknowledged) pain to audiences and performers.

To offer a visual representation of the potential roles that can inadvertently be played out during the process of eliciting and working with personal stories, it may be useful to refer to the work of Karpman (1968) and what has become widely accepted as a key interpersonal dynamic within contexts of conflict, violence and abuse. Karpman's model, which was drawn originally from his analysis of the underlying plot structure of fairy tales, consists of a triangle where the three corners represent the roles of *perpetrator*, *victim* and *rescuer.* I add to this a fourth element, the role of *abandoning authority,* which is drawn from the work of Hudgins with trauma survivors (Hudgins and Toscani, 2013) (see Figure 2.1). In situations of conflict and abuse, the abandoning authority is the person — or the people — who could have stopped the abuse but did not. The role of *abandoning authority* is roughly synonymous with the role of *bystander*, a role which came into particularly sharp focus during 2017 in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein sexual assault scandal, which led to a wave of Twitter-based #MeToo revelations across the media, politics, theatre, arts, sport, business, manufacturing and academia.

The role of the bystander has become a toxic mark of shame, with people being branded 'enablers,' and scorn being heaped on colleagues who turn a blind eye when perpetrators in positions of power are known to be abusing and silencing their victims with threats and gag orders (Hess, 2017).
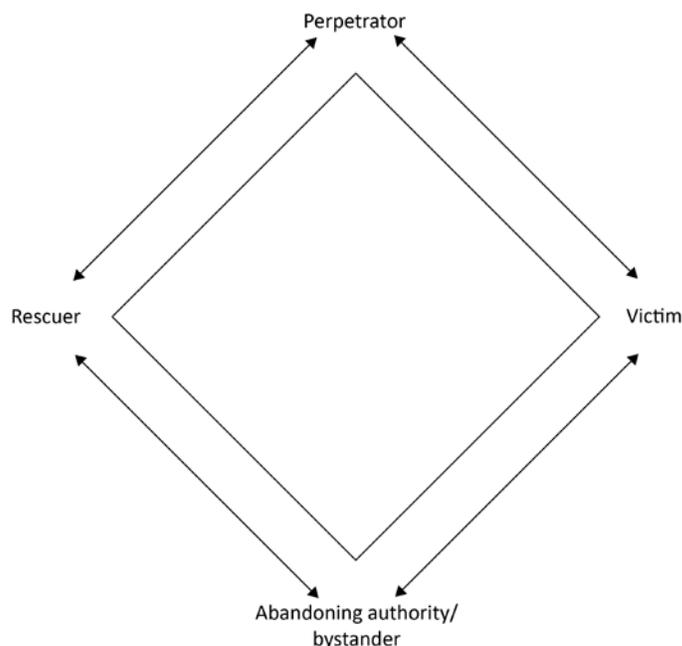
Fig 2.1: Typical roles played out in conflict situations and in situations of abuse. It is important that facilitators work with conscious awareness of these role dynamics and avoid being pulled into unconscious conflictual and abusive dynamics.

The four roles of *perpetrator*, *victim*, *rescuer* and *abandoning authority/bystander* can manifest in many ways during situations of conflict or abuse, and they are also likely to emerge in any context in which highly emotive material and potentially traumatic stories are revealed, such as in the context of drama processes working with personal stories of vulnerable people. One way to understand the function of the four roles is that, when people feel threatened, they often take mental and behavioural shortcuts as strategies for self-preservation, and these four roles represent the most common shortcuts. The four roles can be summarised in the following way:

Perpetrator: 'This is your fault.' 'You deserve this.' 'You don't matter.'

Victim: 'Poor me.' 'I am helpless.' 'You have to save me.' 'Look at what they did to me.'

Rescuer: 'I'll save you.' 'It's not your fault; you did nothing to deserve this.' 'You are safe with me and you are not responsible for your actions.' 'They are the bad ones.'

Abandoning authority / Bystander: 'This is none of my business.' 'Someone else should sort this out.' 'If I ignore it, it's not happening as far as I am concerned.' 'I am happy with the status quo.' 'I am not affected by this so I will not get involved.' 'This isn't happening (denial).' 'I want a quiet life, so I'll go along with the joke because it's the easy option.'

The four roles can emerge spontaneously and can be played out by participants, practitioners, organisers, production and support staff, and audiences. The risk is that such dynamics are typically beyond conscious awareness until it is too late and the damage has been done. For example, facilitators can become overly encouraging of disclosure and set up participants to be overexposed and unsafe during a public performance for which they are underprepared. In this instance, the facilitator has become a perpetrator (all the while telling him or herself that they are helping) and is potentially harming the participants, who are made victims of the facilitator's ambition and disregard for their vulnerability. This is a serious lapse of the duty of care, and I have seen it happen when facilitators have unreflexively taken on the 'enthusiasm of the helper' (Salverson, 2001: 121) in their eagerness to alleviate oppression and 'empower' their participants. Barnes (2009) offers a similar account of watching a performance by traumatised refugees, when one, in the midst of her autobiographical account of her torture, freezes on stage and is unable to continue. Barnes highlights the audience's discomfort with the appalling and abusive — not to say tasteless — practice and also highlights her difficulty as an audience member in speaking out and intervening. This is a very clear example of the perpetrator-victim-bystander dynamic — a distressing experience for all concerned.

In a second permutation of the four roles, participants in an ensemble-created performance who are still traumatised may slip into the perpetrator role and act out against the audience, leaving the audience feeling emotionally pummeled by the performers' raw outpouring of unprocessed feeling. In psychodynamic terms, this would be understood to be a process of projecting out onto the audience those feelings that are off limits / intolerable within the person. This can leave audiences almost powerless to defend themselves, or at the least feeling exploited. Some years ago I had the discomfiting experience when watching the autobiographical solo performance of an adult male survivor of child sexual abuse, stripped to his underwear, telling his story and writhing in a sexual way while clinging to a side of beef hung from above by a butcher's hook. It seemed to me that we in the audience stayed in the theatre mainly out of pity for the performer — while also feeling weirdly abused by the experience, and also like reluctant voyeurs.

In a third variation that I have seen happen during a rehearsal process with a company where I have occasionally offered input, the theatre practitioners, the participants and the host agency moved through several combinations of interpersonal dynamics where the roles of *perpetrator*, *victim*, *rescuer* and *abandoning authority/bystander* were played out as variations on a theme. The original agreement was for the participants to workshop their ideas and to share them with peers and key workers within the host agency. This agreement was broken late in the rehearsal period when the host agency put pressure on the facilitators to open the performance to the public. The facilitators felt pressured and ethically compromised, because the participants were very vulnerable and the subject matter was 'live' and highly personal. The end product, as originally agreed, was not meant for public audiences. The rehearsal process became fraught and unhappy, and tempers became frayed as the host agency became bullying and made ultimatums. The roles within this abusive dynamic changed several times, with people shifting between victim, rescuer, perpetrator and abandoning authority/bystander. Phrases such as 'How dare they?!,' 'Nobody told ME!,' 'You can't change the goal posts,' 'It's not my fault!,' 'What's the problem? It's not a big deal' and 'Well, we'll just have to do what they say' were heard during

these transactions. This round-robin exchange of roles is common within abuse dynamics. In the end, after time to reflect, the director and senior management team of the host agency met with the theatre facilitators, and a compromise was reached in collaboration with the participants. The stories were adjusted and fictionalised in a way that made the participants feel comfortable, and the public performances went ahead.

A fourth example is the recent case of the performance of a new play being shut down in Cannock, Staffordshire in November 2017. The play, written by local resident Peter Sidgwick, was about the mid-1960s murders of three children by the 'Cannock Chase Killer' Raymond Morris. When a local news feature advertised the production, the relatives of the murdered children protested to the newspaper and also threatened to protest outside the theatre. The story made headline news (Lockley, 2017) and, in the reporting, one can see the participants in the controversy — including the playwright, the victims' families, and the newspaper — rotating the roles of perpetrator, victim, rescuer and bystander. Despite Sidgwick's attempts to have dialogue with the families of the victims, their position was adamant. Jemma Tift, a niece of one of the victims, wrote in her petition to stop the production: 'Let us, their families, not have to be put through the pain again. This isn't a documentary — it is a play. How can you make something so heartbreaking into a play?' (ibid: 4-5). Reflecting on the news coverage and how the familiar pattern of abuse dynamics played out in this case, it is interesting to consider how the story might have unfolded had the playwright taken a different approach and included the victims' families and their points of view from the start. This might have taken the form of verbatim theatre or, as Tift noted in her petition, a documentary and investigative approach. With such an approach, the victims' families may well have become advocates for the production. It is an opportunity missed: the production was shut down before the first night.

A further example of how these abuse dynamics may play out is when the participants have already been labelled as 'victims' or as 'perpetrators.' For example, when working with prison inmates, especially inmates who have

committed some of society's most taboo crimes such as sexual offences or crimes against the elderly, or transgressions within the institution such as informing on others (i.e. snitching, or grassing, on fellow inmates), there may be unconscious processes at work that prime the dynamics of *perpetrator, victim, rescuer* and *abandoning authority / bystander*. Facilitators need to be aware of this pre-labelling effect and guard against unconsciously contributing to the script of one side being 'victims' and one side being 'perpetrators.' If facilitators do not make this conscious effort to counterbalance pre-existing labels, a common trap is that they will unconsciously slot into one of the complementary roles and inadvertently play out abuse dynamics in workshops and rehearsals.

The point here is that theatre practitioners who work with vulnerable people should be aware of the unconscious dynamics that can inadvertently be played out during the process of workshops, rehearsal, performance, and public discussion of the production. Participatory theatre is an open form where the processes are not fixed. This openness means it is more likely that roles shift spontaneously and unconscious dynamics arise during rehearsals and workshops. While there is great potential in this, there is also inherent risk. By staying alert to the abuse dynamics, and most particularly to the dynamics that may play out just beneath the surface of interpersonal interactions when the roles of *perpetrator*, *victim*, *rescuer* and *abandoning authority/bystander* are liminally present, theatre practitioners can minimise the potential for unconscious and harmful dynamics to infect the interpersonal process during drama workshops, and they can also intervene early when such dynamics begin to play out.

Guidelines for ethical practice when using personal narratives in the theatre

In this section, I review the existing scholarship regarding the ethical issues related to the use of personal stories and adaptations of personal stories in theatre rehearsals, workshops, presentations and performances. I offer a summary of the

key writings and divide them into sections, integrating and presenting them in such a way that I hope will be useful guidelines for practice. Many of the publications focusing on ethics are concerned with the pragmatic ramifications for theatre-makers, so it is in this sense fitting to provide a review of the existing literature in the format of guidelines for practice.

In order to undertake a review focused on the specific areas of ethics related to personal narrative in theatre-making, I carried out a search using key terms including *applied theatre, community theatre, applied drama, socially engaged theatre, social theatre, participatory theatre* and *theatre workshops*, combined with terms including *personal stories, personal narratives, life stories, real stories,* and further combined with terms including *ethics, ethical practice, ethical codes, ethical guidelines and ethical issues.* Search engines were utilised including university library electronic search services, Jurn, Google Scholar, refseek, JSTOR, Microsoft Academic and related services. Links were made between authors and their references to other authors, and this in turn led to further references and linked research and scholarship. Searching relevant sections of library bookshelves also elicited serendipitous findings in closely related themes. More than one hundred and fifty publications were identified through this process, including peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, online articles, monographs, unpublished dissertations and books. I added references to those explorations of ethics within psychodrama and psychotherapy that are part of the ethical principles I have adopted as part of my training and practice as a psychodrama psychotherapist. I then selected and analysed the results for relevance, significance and practical application. I have included academic as well as practice-based resources. The range of resources cited is not restricted to theatre and arts journals and books. For example, I have included one article which relates to entertainment law, because it addresses ethical and legal issues related to participatory performance. Several other articles cited come from fields such as social research, dramatherapy and psychodrama. Fittingly, the results also included several articles from *Performing Ethos,* a journal devoted to exploring ethical issues in the theatre.

Frances Rifkin (2010) offers a comprehensive account of the ethical issues in participatory theatre. After providing an overview of the history and context of the development of participatory theatre, and in particular emphasising the importance of the work of Heathcote, Jackson, Boal and the TIE movement, Rifkin offers the observation that much of the ethics embedded in these approaches has to date been implicit, vaguely stated and with a lack of consensus. She concludes that, 'the absence of a consensus on what the nature of an ethical approach might be has become problematic' (Rifkin, 2010: 5). Rifkin clarifies the need for an explicitly stated ethical code which benefits practitioners and also the wider group of stakeholders including the employer, other practitioners, commissioners, hosting agencies, and the wider public. In the context of my own experience as a former director of Geese Theatre Company UK, working in prisons, I know the importance of being able to offer hosting agencies — particularly those working with vulnerable people and people with a history of violence and sexually abusive behaviour — supporting evidence that helps them to feel confident that you know what you are doing, that there will be benefits for the people involved in the project, that you will not do harm or increase risk, and that you will not cause chaos or indiscipline in their institution.

Rifkin emphasises this point when she writes about how an explicitly stated ethical framework can help to build 'professional recognition, status and trust' (ibid: 6). While in some contexts it may be appropriate to challenge and foment change at the micro and macro levels of social-political systems, and to 'activate the process of political and social change' (Bharucha, 2011, cited in Barnes, 2009: 7), when the work is commissioned by an agency or service, there is always a delicate balance to be struck between being able to work with the participants and how 'radical' an approach one can take towards social justice and transformation — particularly if one hopes to be invited back. The shrewd facilitator, wherever appropriate, uses an approach that takes into account the complexity of oppressions, and attempts to win hearts and minds at all levels and among all stakeholders, in order to promote positive change throughout systems (Heritage, 2004).

The complexity of motivations and strategies is not unique to criminal justice theatre; Rifkin goes on to cite the important work of Stella Barnes at the Oval House in London. Barnes observes, 'coercion might be embedded in the attitude and policy of the funding bodies, particularly if they are public or state institutions, such as charities or local authorities. Therefore practitioners need a clear ethical position with which to resist coercion in the interests of the creative learning and development of the client group' (Barnes, 2009: 32-3). Barnes, whose work includes a focus on young refugees and participatory performance, has developed a set of five ethical principles underpinning the work at Oval House:

Choice	Making the young people 'partners in the process' (Barnes, ibid: 36).
Respect	Modelling respect for each other, with a particular emphasis on the need to respect differences (e.g. in mixed-gender and mixed cultural groups).
Equality	Recognising that many of the young people may have no previous experience of working within an equalities framework, the Oval House works with an understanding that 'changes of attitudes can be slow and that the issues are complex for the young people' (Barnes, ibid: 37).
Safety	This includes physical and psychological safety. This principle takes into account, for example, that the participatory theatre work may need to remain at the level of the symbolic or use the fictional distance of a folk tale. If working with directly personal material, the focus should be on the present and the future, not the traumatic past.
Tutor competence	This includes rigorous training and a keen awareness of the differences between theatre and therapy. Barnes does note that 'we do however acknowledge the positive therapeutic results of the work we do' (Barnes, ibid: 37).

Barnes develops this ethical framework one step further when she sets out the Oval House's 'Risk Table' (see figure 2.2). This is a table developed from using an X and Y axis, where the horizontal axis runs from low to high focus in terms of personal disclosure (this axis is called 'low personal risk' at one end and 'high personal risk' at the other). The vertical axis focuses on creative risk, i.e. at the bottom of the axis there is low creative risk and at the top of the axis there is high creative risk. This table allows Barnes, her colleagues and the young people involved in the participatory work to 'grade planned activity according to potential risk and to reflect on the activities already delivered' (ibid. 39). For example, Barnes is very clear that, when young people are focused in their play and in their creation of drama on experiences that they have not yet worked through (i.e. which are still unresolved and potentially de-stabilising for the young person), then 'in this instance it is important to ensure the work is focused on *fiction*: fictional characters and contexts; so that the sharing of personal material can occur safely if the young people wish to share or explore it' [original emphasis] (ibid,: 40). Barnes goes on to emphasise the importance of co-creation with the young people, and how important it is also to be led by the interests and concerns of the young people, in an approach where 'each person, whether they are a facilitator or participant, has equal value and equal stake in the work' (ibid.: 40).

Barnes' Risk Table is a significant precursor to the Drama Spiral which I have developed and which is described in chapter three. While I had not yet come across the Risk Table and Barnes' 2009 article before I designed the Drama Spiral, nevertheless I can see in retrospect that Barnes' Risk Table and the Drama Spiral can form a useful complementary set of models for planning and decision-making in participatory working. For the purposes of the current discussion, I will focus on the Risk Table as a very useful way of maintaining ethical rigor and safety during the theatre-making process, particularly with vulnerable groups. Anticipating chapter three and the explanation of the Drama Spiral, I think it is also useful to point out five important distinctions between the Risk Table and the Drama Spiral:

First, while the Risk Table and the Drama Spiral address similar concerns about the level of personal disclosure during drama processes, the Drama Spiral does not specifically address the issue of creative risk. Creative risk is a factor that is deeply embedded within theatre-making practices, and it is helpful that Barnes has included it in the Risk Table. It is a useful reminder that participatory work can have high aspirations in terms of its creative and aesthetic ambitions and the creative risks that can be taken (Gallagher et al, 2010).

Second, the Spiral elucidates several gradations of difference not quite captured by the Risk Table. For example, there is a gradation between the purely fictional and the personal level of story-making which includes the 'fictionalised' or distanced personal story. This is captured in the third ring of the Drama Spiral.

The Risk Table

HIGH CREATIVE RISK	Making and sharing art that is entirely fictional				Making and sharing art that directly references personal stories
5					
4					
3					
2					
LOW CREATIVE RISK	Group games / Not exposing / Fun / Laughing / Building confidence				Disclosing of personal stories / Talking about past trauma
1	1 LOW / PERSONAL RISK	2	3	4	5 HIGH / PERSONAL RISK

Fig. 2.2: Barnes' Risk Table (Barnes, 2009: 38)

Third, the Drama Spiral offers what I think are useful distinctions between the topics one can address while making personal disclosures. For example, as we will see in chapter three, there is the focus on 'positive personal stories,' then the focus on 'difficult and resolved stories,' and then, at the innermost ring, stories that are 'difficult and unresolved.' I make this point in order to add nuance to the notion, expressed by Barnes, that there is a firm boundary about not creating scenes based on the personal pasts of the participants (see her five ethical principles, listed above, where she mentions under the fourth item, 'safety,' that 'if working with directly personal material, the focus should be on the present and the future, not the traumatic past.' I think there is room for important distinctions here: There may be *positive personal scenes* and *positive personal stories* of achievement, cultural practices, celebration and *overcoming obstacles* that may be relevant, safe and beneficial to include in the drama process. While there are understandable reasons for having a rule about not going back to the past, there are also significant drawbacks. What if accessing part of their personal lives and their past experiences is actually going to help a participant to focus on what they are most proud of or what they are best at doing — i.e. to add to their strength? I would argue that to leave out a person's past experiences of triumph over adversity, and their strengths generally, from the purview of the theatre making process, is not only a lost opportunity but also possibly a kind of oppression in itself. Imposing such blanket bans on using past material, without addressing the nuances of what is contained in the narrative, is too broad and limiting, and may leave people feeling ignored and silenced about topics they are proudest of. Adept facilitators should be able to help groups make this distinction, for example by giving titles to workshop scenes that focus on positive stories, and also helping participants to identify the distinctions between scenes that may disempower / re-traumatise and scenes which can remind us of our strengths and give us hope.

Fourth, the Spiral incorporates a wide range of facilitation processes around the outer edge of the Spiral, including functions and sub-functions under the headings 'identify,' 'explore,' 'perform,' and 'evaluate.' This is thoroughly explained in chapter three.

Fifth, and finally, the shape of the Spiral itself is meant to capture the spontaneous, creative and unfolding nature of the theatre-making process. The way that each ring of the Spiral sits alongside, within and around the others is meant to capture some of the interactive, dialogic spirit of the drama process, where each element of the session is in dialogue with the other elements. Facilitators may move between the rings, skip rings, retrace steps, straddle several rings at the same time, etc., all as part of the improvisational dance of facilitation.

Barnes' Risk Table and the Drama Spiral can be seen as companion pieces offering complementary models of good practice when planning participatory work. This is particularly so when the work is potentially of the kind where participants may disclose their traumatic experiences either as part of the process or perhaps inadvertently, as can often happen with traumatised or vulnerable groups where the trauma 'leaks' out in uncontained ways, affecting the individuals concerned and the group as a whole in potentially damaging or exposing ways.

Returning to Rifkin, it will be useful for the purposes of this study to cite at some length that section of her research paper that focuses specifically on theatre-making processes where participants share personal material. For example, Rifkin notes that, where groups or individuals 'agree or even volunteer [autobiographical materials], the decision to use them whether in the workshop space or in public, needs special ethical attention, depending on context. The choice whether to use such material does not necessarily rest with individuals whose willingness to disclose might be problematic' (Rifkin, 2010: 25). Rifkin is here highlighting a particularly important yet often missed phenomenon, which is that participants who are traumatised may, as a result of the unresolved nature of the trauma, be forthcoming about material which is still unprocessed and which will expose them far more than may be safe. One of the hallmarks of integration and resolution around trauma is that the person is able to properly give voice to their experience and also *to contain the story* — in other words, to get the balance right between disclosure to others and maintaining one's own appropriate boundaries of privacy,

safety and personal dignity. The converse is also true: lack of resolution can mean that unintegrated material leaks out in unregulated ways. It is in such moments that skilled and informed facilitators need to step in to protect the participants, the group and the process as a whole.

Rifkin goes on to highlight the skills and competence needed in facilitators when personal material is being worked with. She writes,

> […] with personal and other kinds of difficult material, the need for competence in holding the theatre space is exemplified. Ensuring that groups work through the distancing – 'containing' – that theatre enables is creative, competent and safer. The Boalian process of making an image of reality and then working with the reality of the image, Metaxis, encapsulates this. […] Working with […] personal, traumatic and sensitive material involves consideration of aesthetic, funding, personal and social issues. A decision to work in the present and with the whole person as a life not solely characterised by trauma, for example, is an ethical decision with consequences beyond the immediate piece of work.
>
> (Rifkin, 2010: 25)

Here, Rifkin not only highlights the skills and competence required of the facilitator, she also briefly describes 'distancing' techniques such as working through the image of the reality — Boal's process of Metaxis. She also notes the ethical aspects of the decision to focus on the whole person and also their strengths (e.g. the ways in which they are defined as a victim but seen also for their positive strengths, abilities, competences and qualities as a whole human being). These ideas will be revisited in chapter three, with the description of the Drama Spiral, where the notions of *regulating distance* and *working through metaphor* are featured.

If we pull back from the specific focus on personal material in participatory theatre, we see from a search of the literature in applied theatre that many authors have addressed ethical issues in applied and participatory theatre making. Rifkin offers several summaries of ethical principles and guidelines suggested by her

research. In particular, she offers a 'Radical Ethical Frame' for working in participatory theatre projects, which includes the following core ethical and political objectives for participatory theatre (ibid.: 16):

- To empower.
- To question, to reflect, to be reflexive, to learn from experience, to create change in understanding, to reflect on the practice for its enhancement.
- To challenge accepted ideas, to question and challenge power relations, to transform, to transgress, to subvert.
- To become equal, to be democratic, to work with consent, to dialogue.
- To take power, to effect change.
- To explore metaphor through theatre, to make theatre, to be creative, to be artists, to transform through beauty, to have fun.
- To enrich teaching and learning.
- To create vital communication between people, of thoughts, feelings and ideas, to create group working while supporting individual autonomy.
- To find effective actions in the world.

In this list, the political and ethical objectives are intermixed, and this is reflective of Rifkin's research report as a whole, which includes a ten-page literature review separately credited to Dr. Elizabeth Hare. Rather than seeing this as a fixed or prescriptive list, Rifkin instead offers the list as a set of working ideas for applying a set of 'ethical lenses' that can assist in clarifying the ethical purpose and intentions of a project or work process. One particular advantage of Rifkin's list of objectives is that it is based on a combination of her field research, the literature review and her interviews with students and teachers of applied and participatory theatre. Rifkin's approach honours the objectives and ethical stances of current practitioners, students and teachers of applied theatre while also honoring the political, emancipatory and social justice traditions and agendas out of which applied and participatory theatre has emerged, including TIE, drama-in-education and Theatre of the Oppressed (Hare, in Rifkin, 2010: 34).

Rikke Gürgens Gjærum is another important author and researcher to consider as we examine the existing research on ethical approaches in applied theatre and performance. In her 2013 study entitled 'Applied Theatre Research: Discourses in the Field,' published in the *European Scientific Journal,* Gjærum offers an analysis of a range of competing and complementary discourses around applied theatre. She bases her work on reviews of published scholarship and also interviews with practitioners, students, researchers and teachers of applied theatre. She arrives at an integration of the discourses and divides them into six categories: The *legitimation discourse,* the *ethics discourse,* the *effect discourse,* the *outsider-visitor discourse,* the *global economy discourse,* and the *aesthetic discourse* (Gjærum, 2013: 347-8).[4]

Examining the moral implications of performances based on ethnographic research, Conquergood (1985) offers a useful grid containing what he calls 'four ethical pitfalls.' He describes the pitfalls as 'performative stances towards the other that are morally problematic' (Conquergood, 1985: 4). The four pitfalls are (see figure 2.3):

1. *The Custodian's Rip-Off*, where selfishness leads to acquisitiveness and disregard of what is sacred and unique in what one is recording and representing.
2. *The Skeptic's* [sic] *Cop-Out,* where cynicism prevails and the practitioner ignores the complexities and moral ambiguities involved in presenting culturally sensitive stories.
3. *The Enthusiast's Infatuation,* where the practitioner takes a superficially enthusiastic approach that leads to glib, shallow or sentimental performances that trivialise the lives of participants.
4. *The Curator's Exhibitionism,* where sensationalism prevails and the subject becomes exoticised or romanticised almost as if they are the featured exhibit in a natural science documentary.

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[4] It is worth noting that Gjærum also references Prendergast and Saxton's (2009) summary of four motifs they found after a consideration of a wide variety of applied theatre: The motifs of *participation, aesthetics, ethics* and *assessment.*

IDENTITY

DIFFERENCE
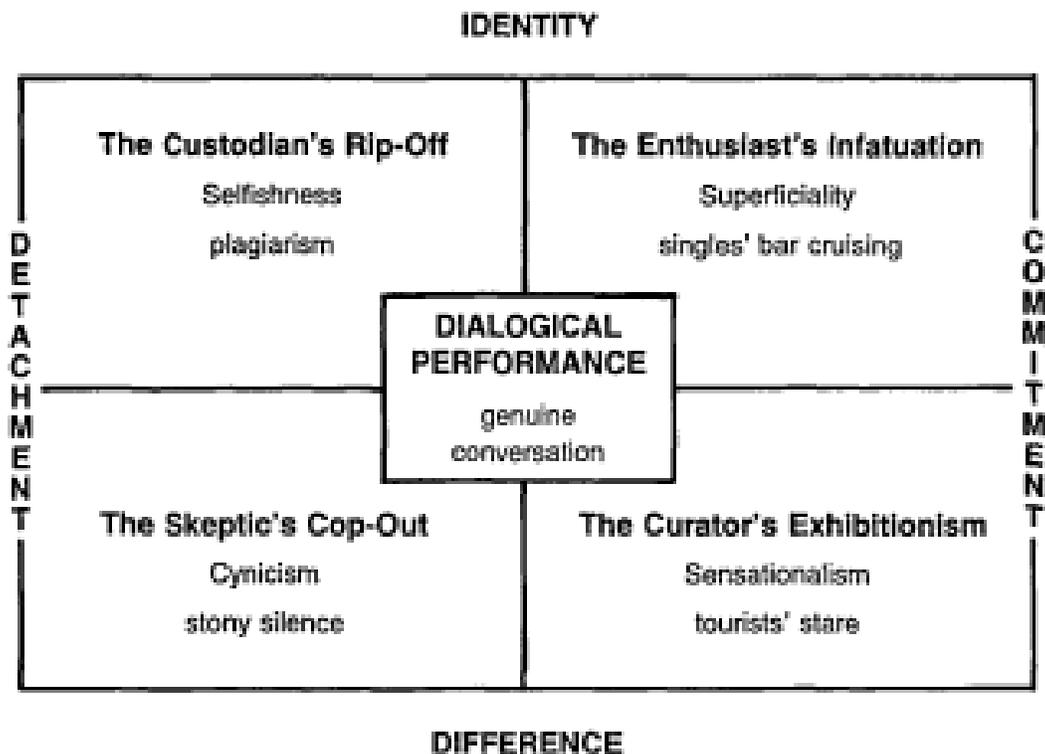
Fig. 2.3: Conquergood's grid showing 'Moral Mapping of
Performative Stances Towards the Other'

In the middle of Conquergood's grid, he places a fifth possibility, that of *Dialogical Performance.* This he describes as a:

> performative stance [that] struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate, and challenge one another. It is a kind of performance that resists conclusions. […] More than a definite position, the dialogic stance is situated in the space *between* competing ideologies. […] [The practitioner's] stance toward this heuristically rich paradox of fieldwork (and performance) is both/and, yes/but, instead of either/or. [original italics]
>
> (ibid.: 9)

The guidelines

While taking into account the scholarship and research findings of Rifkin, Barnes, Gjærum and Conquergood, and surveying several other authors who have written some of the more popular texts on applied theatre and who have offered perspectives on the ethics of applied theatre, it is possible to reflect on recurring themes and to consolidate these themes into groupings. I offer the following summary as an integration and consolidation of many authors, practitioners, students, teachers and researchers in applied and participatory theatre, as a way of drawing some practical guidance from key authors across a wide array of texts. I divide the guidance into four groupings:

- Duty of care, and respecting boundaries
- Negotiating the complex boundaries between theatre and therapy when personal stories are used
- Processes for negotiating what is 'true'
- Working with personal stories within the context of power and wider socio-cultural forces

These four groupings focus on ethical aspects of practice where personal stories are the primary focus. I offer this summary and consolidation not with any intent of this being comprehensive or definitive. As Gjærum observes, 'No one claims to have a solution for the moral and ethical questions in Applied Theatre' (2013: 355), and I do not wish to overstate the following as being a settled answer to the ethical dilemmas posed by the complexities of the work. Instead, what I offer here is an attempt at a reasonable summary of the current state of the ethical discussions taking place within the field of applied and participatory theatre and performance, with a particular focus on those authors addressing the use of personal stories in the theatre. My hope is that this summary might assist practitioners to develop their ethical practice and that it might promote further

discussion about the ethics of participation in theatre-making that involves personal stories.[5]

Before I explain the guidelines, it is worth noting that the field of media and communications has, since the early 2000s, been grappling with parallel concerns in the realm of reality television — a media genre that shares much in common with the theatre of personal stories. Authors such as Mast (2016), Crew (2007) and Hill (2005) have offered sobering critical analyses of the ethics of reality television. Crew, for example, highlights how deadly serious the ethical issues are when they describe the suicides of reality television subjects. In 1997, for example, the first contestant who was banished from the Swedish reality TV show *Expedition Robinson* (the precursor to the English language version called *Survivor)* committed suicide by jumping in front of a train. Holmes recounts the 2011 suicide of Russell Armstrong, whose disintegrating marriage was a featured storyline of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills.* These authors and others, including the psychologist and realty TV consultant Richard Levak (2003), have given scathing critiques and offered accounts of the severe working conditions, manipulation, gag orders, exploitation, humiliation, negative typecasting, dubious and misleading consent forms, secret recording, shaming, sleep deprivation, emotional trauma, selective editing and other appalling practices all in service of 'audience stimulation and successful ratings' (Crew, 2007). Mast and others have proposed ethical guidelines and standards that could be adopted. While there are many important differences between reality television and the theatre of personal stories, there are also important lessons to be learned from the conditions of reality television about what situations to avoid and, by contrast, how to work in ethical ways. I have borne these lessons in mind when undertaking the following survey and formulation of ethical guidelines for practitioners in the theatre of personal stories.

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[5] While I cite a wide range of specific authors, most of the ethical concerns, suggestions and guidelines that I describe in this section are discussed by several or more authors.

Duty of care, and respecting boundaries

A number of authors address the ethical implications of using participants' personal stories on the stage. A common theme among the published sources is that practitioners should work with awareness of ethical issues regarding how the process of sharing personal stories can impact participants in the short, medium and long term. This is even more crucial when the practitioner is working with young people, vulnerable or marginalised people, and people who have been traumatised and who may still be traumatised (Stuart-Fisher, 2009; Kandil, 2016; Baker, 2014). The ramifications of participation and re-visiting personal stories may be far-reaching in the person's life. For example, the practitioner should consider, in collaboration with participants and also taking into account other safety factors, if this is the right time and place for them to engage in what might be emancipatory and transformational work. In some contexts, this may endanger participants who are living in dangerous circumstances (Eldhose & Das, 2015). In addition, if participants are re-visiting experiences that have troubled or traumatised them in the past, the practitioner must consider a wide range of factors that may indicate that it is not appropriate to include such stories. There may be many reasons for this, some of them pertaining to the individual, the group context, the family and cultural context, or wider political contexts (Bundy, 2009; Caruth, 1996; Edmondson, 2005; Stuart-Fisher, 2009). Preston (2009) neatly summarises the duty of care of theatre practitioners in this way: 'As cultural workers, whether we are researchers writing about individuals, theatre makers constructing narratives and stories, or facilitators enabling people to write or perform their own stories, we have a responsibility towards ensuring that the representations that are made are produced through a climate of sensitivity, dialogue, respect and willingness for reciprocity' (Preston, 2009: 65).

Practitioners need to be aware of the duty of care they have towards all groups of people they work with, including audiences (LaFrance, 2013; Trzebinski, 2005; Bishop, 2014). Practitioners should be aware of the principles of safeguarding and what to do if they have concerns for the safety or risk regarding a person they are

working with. Practitioners should also take into account the process of ending the drama process and ensuring as far as possible that the work is sustained, that there is a positive legacy, and that — where desired — groups can continue the drama process after the practitioner has left (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009: 196).

Highlighting the crucial role of support and care for performers and participant-performers in the theatre of personal stories, what is particularly notable is the very recent development of a new specialism known as the *Artist Wellbeing Practitioner*. This is a new specialism that provides emotional and psychological support to 'theatre makers, actors, performers, live-artists, dancers, directors, writers, producers, musicians, fine artists and more' (Platt, 2018; see also Disney, 2017; and Mindfitness, 2017).

The ethical issues include how consideration is given to language issues, i.e. what language is used and how translation and interpretation is done. There are some instances where it is crucial to preserve the original language, for example when the story in question addresses colonial oppression. In such an instance, it may be an additional oppression to use the language of the coloniser. Other considerations include how decisions are made about who the material will be presented to and how the project will be documented and evaluated (Rea, 2008; McDonnell, 2005).

Another crucial aspect of boundaries within ethical practice is the issue of who controls the material. When considering how personal stories are shared, to whom and through what process, it is important for the practitioner to be aware of the ways in which material can be vulnerable to appropriation and redefinition in ways beyond the control of the facilitator and the participants (Preston, 2009: 65; Saldaña, 1998, Stuart-Fisher, 2011a) 'Sharing stories changes their ownership' (Nicholson, 2009b: 272). A related issue is documenting the process: Will the process be documented in photographs or on video? If so, who will control the images and recordings? Will the participant-performers have the right to request changes in and approve the final cut? Can the limits of distribution be guaranteed? Have consent forms been explained and signed? Have some people requested

that their images be pixilated, or their voices changed, to preserve anonymity? Working with personal stories also means respecting peoples' right to speak and also their right not to speak (Preston, 2009: 68). Similarly, there must be respect for individual privacy, with practitioners and participants working with the understanding that the theatre making process is not dependent on individuals making personal disclosures (Evans et al, 2009: 223; Mattingly, 1998).

The duty of care extends to the recruitment and selection of participants for different types of work. There is a significant distinction between the type of work that can be done in drop-in sessions as compared with longer term groups with consistent attendance by the same group of people. Practitioners need to work with an understanding that in some settings it is important to be able to meet with participants in advance in order to determine whether or not a particular group or process is appropriate for them. This may take the form of a more formal assessment or an informal chat. As a general rule, practitioners should reserve the right to control the number of participants and also the selection criteria. Where this is not appropriate or possible, this will by necessity affect the types of work undertaken and the degree of personal disclosure that is appropriate (Thornton, 2009, 2012; McAvinchey, 2009).

Related to this is when and where and to whom the personal stories are presented. When personal stories are transferred to the stage, this is a process that must be done sensitively and collaboratively. This is especially true when the story becomes scripted, for example through the use of a playwright (McDonnell, 2005; Saldaña, 1998). 'To tell one's story to another is […] a profoundly generous act and furthermore to be entrusted with this story places great responsibility on the theatre maker and subsequently the audience member' (Stuart-Fisher, 2009: 113). If such stories are shared, facilitators also need to be aware that the telling in one setting does not necessarily mean it is ethical or appropriate to share the story in another setting or context. It might be decided, for example, that a story shared with the drama group will not be shared with an invited or public audience because of the nature of the story, the audience or the particular characteristics of the

person telling the story, or the group, or the context of the work. What works with great success in one setting or medium may become fraught with problems, misappropriated and misinterpreted if transferred to other settings or media with insufficient adaptation or framing (Stuart-Fisher, 2011a). Changing from the original context runs the risk that new audiences make the work 'susceptible to other interpretations and connotations' (Balfour, 2013: 218). 'Out if its original context, the performance would likely produce the kinds of secure knowing that Burvill (2008)[6] notes as being less productive than other encounters with alterity' (ibid: 218-219).

Similarly, working with people's personal stories requires particular attention to the legal, moral and ethical guidelines relating to intellectual property. This is not just about individuals: it includes respecting the local culture and national traditions as regards the intellectual property rights pertaining to folk music, folk traditions, folk customs and other important cultural practices and traditions (Melville, 2017). It is important to consider, for example, who owns the rights to a person's personal story, a group's story, how credit and or royalties will be given, and at what point a story becomes the property of the artists, practitioners, host agency, playwright or producer. Practitioners should recognise that, while there will be grey areas, the ethical and moral position underpinning the principles of socially engaged theatre would suggest that practitioners err on the side of giving credit (as appropriate), for example through collective authorship and reserving the intellectual property of people who have shared their personal stories, where such stories have been included in any identifiable way (McDonnell, 2005; Kerr 2009; White & Belliveau, 2010).

A related aspect of ethical practice is to describe the work and its potential impacts in realistic terms and not to over sell the impact to participants, funders and hosting agencies (Taylor, 2003; Balfour, 2009; Mienczakowski, 1997; Neelands, 2009; O'Toole, 2009; Österlind, 2008). As Gjærum notes:

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[6] Cited in references in its reprinted version (2013).

Applied Theatre Research seems to develop as a field where the researchers are all bitten by the same legitimating focus. […] Applied Theatre researchers often feel a need to legitimate their work.

(Gjærum, 2013: 353)

While on the one hand, it is important to promote the positive benefits of theatre practice, it is also important to be realistic about the potential drawbacks. Like all powerful methods, there can be benefits but also unwanted, deleterious effects (Leffler, 2012; Salverson, 1996; Etherton & Prentki, 2006; Thompson, 2003; Saldaña, 1998; Sæbø, 2009). 'A powerful medium can be used for dubious as well as humanitarian ends' (Ackroyd, 2007: 1). Gjærum re-frames this when she sees the acknowledgment of potential negative effects as a sign of a maturing field when she writes:

We can […] discover a growing maturity in the field when we read some researchers who actually discuss the negative consequences for Applied Theatre, using negative terms such as bad, dangerous, damaging, oppressive, poison, disappointment and propaganda.

(Gjærum, 2013: 353)

Arising from these guidelines related to duty of care and boundaries, we might consider this sample of ethical questions to consider when facilitating drama processes that include personal stories:

· *Do I understand the story that they have told?*
· *Is this still a story that affects them?*
· *What are the ramifications of them having told this story in this group? How does it sit with the group? Are they able to contain the story and support / collaborate with the person who has shared their story?*
· *Are there dangers the teller may not be aware of when they tell the story, e.g. dangers in the group and outside of the group, or psychological dangers to themselves?*

- *How can this story be examined and deconstructed while also maintaining an ethical stance in relation to the teller?*
- *How will any stylization or reinterpretation of the story be negotiated with the teller, so that they feel respected, consulted and crucial to the creative process?*

To summarise, the care and support for people who are sharing their stories is a key feature of ethical practice in the theatre of personal stories. Authors such as Cohen-Cruz (2005) remind us that there are subtleties to the decision about whether or not to encourage people to share difficult and painful material. Facilitators need to be aware that in some instances the sharing of a painful or difficult story may be highly beneficial, and to stop a person telling such a story — which may have been troubling them for many years — may be a re-silencing of the person. Even so, when people share sensitive personal material on the stage or through other art forms, care and support should be available.

Negotiating the complex boundaries between theatre and therapy when personal stories are used

The theatre practitioner working with peoples' personal stories should understand the ways in which the process of recalling and sharing stories can be therapeutic for the people who offer up their stories. The process can transform individuals, groups and people's relationships with one another (Stuart-Fisher, 2011a; Balfour et al, 2014). For example, Khatwa notes that when a group of elders from many international communities shared their stories, 'a deeply-buried sense of value had returned to these elders' memories' (cited in Schweitzer, 2007: 41). Many other authors emphasise a similar view in support of the potential transformative and healing effects of theatre in general and, more particularly, the theatre of personal stories.

Drawing in a key concept from the field of psychotherapy to further emphasise this point, when a theatre practitioner works with people's personal stories, it is important for the practitioner to have some understanding of the principles of

narrative integration (this is the subject of chapter 4), and how narratives can become distorted or transformed, and why. Similarly, it is important to understand that the telling and sharing of personal stories can offer the opportunity for people to re-shape their stories and their understanding of the stories they tell. This can lead to profound changes in one's understanding of one's story and one's history and relationships. This can happen in any context where people are thinking about their personal stories, and can be highly therapeutic (and sometimes painful). Along with this comes the understanding of the multiple dimensions of personal story-telling and how the act of recalling, telling, re-shaping and opening up a story for sharing and scrutiny and dramatisation by others — and witnessing the story as audience members — may have positive, neutral or potentially negative effects (Leffler, 2012).

When working with people's personal stories, the practitioner also needs to work with an awareness of the boundaries between applied and socially engaged theatre, and explicitly therapeutic forms such as dramatherapy and psychodrama. This includes an ability to critique and look from multiple perspectives, especially when working in quasi-therapeutic ways such as *Rainbow of Desires* (Boal, 1995). It is not sufficient to simply claim that 'this is theatre, not therapy' when the experience of your participants is that the work is straying into therapeutic terrain and leaving them confused or bitter (Landy and Montgomery, 2012: xxiv, 180-1). Practitioners should have a basic understanding of overlapping specialisms such as dramatherapy, psychodrama, playback theatre, reminiscence theatre, autoethnographic theatre and related forms, in order to use theatre techniques in appropriate ways without straying into terrain where they are not sufficiently trained or experienced. At the least, the practitioner should be able to compare and contrast the different specialisms and to understand why there is a requirement for rigorous training if one is to work in overtly therapeutic ways with material that is not only personal but also unresolved for participants. Another difference is that there are different requirements in each area of specialism, for example the requirements for dramatherapists and psychodramatists to be trained, qualified, registered with a professional association, in ongoing supervision, and

meeting annual requirements for continuing professional development (Chang, 2016: 14-16; Leffler, 2012: 347; Pendzik et al, 2016).

As a concomitant feature of working with the complex boundary between theatre and therapy, it is important for the practitioner working with personal stories to understand how to regulate the distance of the material. This can be done by using models for structuring practice such as the Drama Spiral (chapter three) or Barnes' (2009) Risk Table to plan and structure work that may include personal stories. There are many drama techniques that can be employed to regulate distance, and a number of these are listed on pages 159-166 in chapter three. Making the case for the importance of regulating distance, Cohen-Cruz writes:

> […] if the enactment based on a personal story too literally repeats what happened, the teller may either be overcome with emotion or shut down. She may thus prefer the distance of witnessing someone else enacting her story.
>
> (Cohen-Cruz, 2006: 105)

As Cohen-Cruz points out, having someone else enact one's story is one way of creating necessary distance. Another way is to fictionalise aspects of the story. Yet another is to focus on some aspects of one's story while shifting focus away from other parts. Thompson (2003) describes this latter approach in relation to an entire group's need to regulate distance by including only some aspects of their stories and not others. In his facilitation of a three-day workshop in Sri Lanka, in a mixed group of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim participants, he observed that an implicit group 'rule' emerged about regulating distance:

> Here in Anuradhapura the group created for itself an unspoken ground rule. […] Trauma could be displayed, but your view of who caused it (armed men, not the army) was kept quiet. Common ground between the group could be built on an understanding of the personal impact of war and family violence. That common ground came closest to falling away when the political became public. For safety this theatre workshop replaced the concept of the 'personal is

political' with the dictate that the political should remain personal or private. This rule was not articulated, but only revealed in moments when it was transgressed.

(Thompson, 2003: 161)

While taking into account the cautions and issues of distancing highlighted by Thompson and Cohen-Cruz, at the same time the practitioner should be aware that as long as conditions are set and ethical standards apply, participants and audiences should not be underestimated in their ability to be challenged, to grapple with complexity (and perplexity) and to engage in debates. When the conditions are right, a very great degree of challenge, self-disclosure and working through may be possible (Breen, 2015).

Processes for negotiating what is 'true'

Negotiating what is 'true' is a problem addressed by a range of authors who work with peoples' personal stories. When working with peoples' personal stories, practitioners should understand that any exploration of personal stories and the 'actual' or 'true' version of events is notoriously contested terrain. This is a sensitive topic and calls for a great deal of subtlety and reflexive practice as one sensitively negotiates the issue of 'truth' in personal stories — as in the 'true version' of events (Stuart-Fisher, 2011b). Martin emphasises this point when she writes, 'Despite the postmodern assertion that truth is not entirely verifiable, most people live guided by convictions about what they believe to be true. It's this world — the world where truth is championed even as we experience our failure to ever know it with absolute finality — that theatre of the real attempts to stage' (Martin, 2012: 3-4) Five suggestions emerge from the literature, providing helpful guidance about negotiating what is 'true':

1. First, to respect the person's subjective perception of reality by treating personal stories as cherished, 'radically unique, noninterchangeable' testimonies, and recognising that the story belongs to that person alone (Felman and Laub, 1992: 3).

2. Second, to carefully frame the presentation to allow for other frames and other perspectives, without diminishing the respect given to any individual's perception. Another way to think of this is that the performance of people's lives should contain an implicit or explicit acknowledgment recognising that any account of a person's life will always be selective and partial, i.e. not the whole story, and not the whole of the person. As Gallagher points out, quoting Anais Nin, 'We do not see things as they are, we see things as we are' (Gallagher, 2006: 96). Bearing this in mind, the theatre-maker should work with an awareness of the 'positioned, invested, subjective observation in our storytelling' (ibid.: 96).

3. Third, to include within the dramatic creation an element that acknowledges the space between the 'real' and the 'not real' (Shaughnessy, 2005). An example of this would be using a scenic device to signal a scene based closely on factual and verified evidence versus a more subjective re-enactment based solely on one person's memory. This will of course not always be necessary, but on occasion it may be important for audiences to know how factual or how subjective, conjectural, speculative or fictional a specific scene is.

4. Fourth, to include within the drama some aspect of the process that led to the performance. For example, the production could include 'backstage' insights such as how the process of casting was undertaken, what took place in the development and rehearsal process, how certain choices were made, what the perspectives were of different consultants and stakeholders to the process, or the performers' reflections on the characters they play and how they relate to the themes of the play. Such additional perspectives may assist in negotiating the delicate terrain of what is 'true' when there are multiple versions of 'truth' in a given situation (Kaufman et al, 2014). This would also allow audiences to understand and put into context what they observe, and would also encourage those presenting the material to reflect on their stories in relation to others.

5. Fifth, to work with an understanding of how to sensitively handle 'truth effects' (any explicit or implicit indicator that an event really occurred) in the drama, and the implications of using truth effects when fictionalising personal material or when presenting any

material — fictional or otherwise — as 'truth' (Phelan, 1993). In what is increasingly remarked upon as a 'post-fact' and 'post-truth' mediatised world, with its proliferation of fake news and 'alternative facts,' it is all the more important to give careful consideration to how material is framed for participants and audiences, particularly when truth effects are used in performances. This includes being honest about the amount of directorial intervention and expertise brought to bear in constructing and bringing 'real' stories and 'real people' to the stage.

Item five prompts further reflection on a dilemma that underpins all theatre projects portraying real events — including the personal life stories of participant-performers. This dilemma is described by Peggy Phelan in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993)*,* as the challenge of how to manage and integrate the many competing perspectives and discourses all declaiming that they best represent the 'real.' Whether it is the voice of science, of the law, of the ivory tower, of embedded, street-level investigation, of autobiographical 'truth,' of documentary fly-on-the-wall realism, or of the expert analyst offering 'objective' or 'evidence-based' reflection on and interpretation of the proceedings, all of these competing discourses make their claim for priority in the truth stakes. 'Each real believes itself to be the Real-real' (Phelan, 1993: 3). Such claims are exclusionary and subject to being contested. How to acknowledge, balance, challenge and integrate these multivariate versions of the 'real' is of course part of the challenge and the delight of the theatre process. This is a challenge also explored by Stuart-Fisher (2011b) in her article *Trauma, Authenticity, and the Limits of Verbatim,* where she argues that the varied ways in which unresolved trauma can affect perception, recall and meaning-making limit the degree to which we can assume that a particular version of the 'real' somehow represents the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. While fully grasping the 'real-real' may only ever be a target, never reached, the process of creating theatre based on personal stories can offer an examination of the real that contemplates the deeper truths and the human implications of events, while acknowledging that there may always be other views and versions of the same events.

Phelan also highlights an even more challenging dilemma, which is often hidden behind layers of cultural assumptions so thick that it exists largely beyond our awareness. This is the dilemma of *similarity and difference* — of the *other* and the *same*. Phelan summarises this dilemma when she writes of the risk that 'Representation reproduces the Other as the Same' (ibid.: 3). Her observation reminds us of the dual edge of representational forms of art — including performance: while on the one hand, theatre offers audiences stories and characters we are meant to relate to and empathise with, on the other hand there is the risk that the story and character of 'the Other' is reduced to that which is represented and that which can be observed, understood and consumed by the spectator. This becomes a particularly significant dilemma when the performance being offered is meant to represent the 'truth' of an individual's life — or indeed the truth of a community. When we use truth-effects such as 'real people' (i.e. non-actors), photographs, video, eyewitness testimony, documentary forms, verbatim techniques or autobiographical storytelling approaches, it is important to remember the many ways in which the truth-effect can be manipulated, distorted and over-stated as an ultimate truth (Garde & Mumford, 2016). Equally, personal stories on the stage require — if one is to truly engage with the moral and ethical dimensions of what is entailed in such work — a thoroughgoing reflection on and inclusion of means within the rehearsal and performance for truthful encounter between audiences and performers. The aim is to encourage reciprocity and equality — an approach of radical encounter with the Other in which the Other is not reduced to the Same. It is an approach to encountering other human beings as themselves, as 'like me' but equally 'not like me.'

This speaks to fundamental ideas of *alterity* and a philosophy focused on the Other contained in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, whose importance and relevance we considered at the start of this chapter. Drawing on Levinas can help us to understand that it is important for practitioners to recognise every person's radical alterity — their 'otherness' — which is ultimately unknowable (Levinas, 1969). We can never comprehend another person in their entirety because to do so would be to reduce the other person to the scope of our own knowledge and

limitations. This is a Levinasian concept, discussed in Levinas (1969), Critchley & Bernasconi (2002), Stuart-Fisher (2009) and Balfour (2013), among others. At the same time, it is important to take responsibility for the effects of our actions and for our 'infinite responsibility' to the other person (Levinas, 1969: 244). This is complex, and to some extent paradoxical: recognising the alterity of the other person and also taking responsibility for the effects of our behaviour on them — which is, in the end, unknowable — is a difficult balance to strike. Nevertheless, the theatre practitioner should work within this paradox and strive towards knowing what is ultimately unknowable. Perhaps what is best of all within this paradox is that, whatever the degree of knowing or not knowing, the one thing that can doubtless be agreed is that the theatre process is inevitably one of radical encounter with the Other (Burvill, 2013). This can be savored without the need the know everything about the Other. Indeed, the encounter may be appreciated all the more because it is always a work-in-progress, always striving towards knowing without the burden of achieving a final (impossible) full understanding of The Other. In other words, theatre can act as an ethical encounter, i.e. 'a provocation to an experience of ethical encounter with alterity' where 'the face of the other is not simply represented or imaged but where a relationship or connection with the other or perhaps with otherness as such is transitively created' (Burvill, 2013: 204).

Working with personal stories within the context of power and wider socio-cultural forces

Guidelines for ethical practice also need to take into account implicit and explicit power dynamics and wider systemic and social forces that may impact the participants and the theatre-making process. The theatre of personal stories, and participatory theatre more generally, often takes place in contexts and with participant groups where the work can become an 'ethical minefield' (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 348). Working contexts can be filled with complexity, where one's assumptions about what is safe or dangerous practice may need to be updated as the project unfolds; the process of 'becoming ethical' is ongoing and never-ending

(Thompson, 2003: 147-71; Hughes and Ruding, 2009; LaFrance, 2013). When one is working in a given context, for example a war zone, an institution, a community or a local group, one becomes for that period of time a part of that system. Even when the remit is to conduct 'objective' processes such as research or fact-finding, the practitioner is inevitably a part of the system, engaging in reciprocal effects. Practitioners must therefore work with an understanding of how these reciprocal effects may play out for the participants, for other stakeholders and for themselves. Thompson emphasises this point when he writes, 'Theatre projects in war situations are part of that situation — part of the war — not separate from it' (Thompson, 2003: 168). Thompson stresses how important it is to consider the setting and the socio-political context in which stories are shared. Despite all of our best intentions to bring people together and to promote solidarity, in some communities, people can be made more isolated, vulnerable or endangered when they share their own personal stories or simply participate in a process that may be considered radical, challenging or unacceptable to the community. This is a factor described with great humility by Fox (2009). By contrast, it is also the case that the theatre-making process in itself may provide a welcome and healing opportunity for 'affective solidarity and mutual regard' that can act as 'counterweights to the exclusions and disregard in a *careless* society' [original emphasis] (Thompson, 2015: 430).

The nature and remit of many theatre projects means that practitioners frequently work in situations where complex moral and ethical challenges and dilemmas arise. It is therefore important to make explicit the values, ethics and principles of one's work, so that the work is less likely to be targeted incorrectly, misrepresented or misappropriated. By clearly stating the values underpinning their work, the facilitator is less likely to lose their moral compass when faced with complex and ambiguous situations. 'If we do not say why we are doing our work, what our beliefs are and why we work with particular communities, someone else will do it for us' (Thompson, 2003: 169). This has sometimes been summarised as the tension between the 'integrity of the practitioner' and 'demands from the economic funders' (Gjærum, 2013: 355). Or, as Thompson writes:

> While all values will be negotiated within the contexts that are encountered, we must not be afraid of starting to state what those values are. We need to confront the Kantian ghost so that values are openly presented and transformed in practice rather than simply being a spectre haunting our work. […] We should not use relativism as an excuse for avoiding creating positions from the specifics of practice. Ethics are […] a vital generator of the theatre we do in and with communities.
>
> (Thompson, 2003: 168)

This is a crucial point: Practitioners need to work with savvy, humility and skeptical awareness about our own motives and also the wider ramifications for participants involved in projects — including the ways in which participants may come to harm as a result of their involvement in the project (Thompson, 2009a). A related hazard in theatre making that uses personal stories is that the work can run the risk of usurping people's stories for the greater good of the process, or worse, the greater good of the reputation of the practitioner. Gallagher (2006: 96) poses the provocative and very useful question, citing the work of bell hooks, 'How do we look at difference without […] eating the other, reconstituting the other, saving the other, or exoticising the other?' This suggests the need for a practice which includes the process in the product, for example by including the process that takes place between the practitioners and the participants, so that the entire process, including the end product, becomes a mutual endeavour and not a reality captured by or engulfed by one person or one sub-group. It is also important that practitioners are aware of the ways in which cultural history may play out when working in developing countries or with marginalised, disenfranchised or social excluded groups (Thompson, 2014). This includes understanding how groups may inadvertently become 'fodder for the imperialist international gaze' (Edmondson 2005: 473, cited in Fox, 2009: 244).

While making one's values and ethics explicit is important, it is also important to reflect on one's position as a provider of services when working in the context of government initiatives, agendas and policies which may have party-political

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objectives (Scharinger, 2013). Such initiatives and agendas may have significant support in the wider public, yet may, on reflection, short-cut or run counter to important ethical principles. Bartlett (2011) describes, for example, the ethical challenges of working as a theatre practitioner within the UK government's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' agenda. Likewise, Jeffers (2008) describes the complexity of working with Asylum seekers, where the work partly focused on moving beyond restrictive narratives of victimhood and avoiding 'bureaucratic narratives' where the participants are reduced to being seen as victims, as asylum seekers, and are thus significantly stripped of their uniqueness, identity and various roles. Conquergood (1985) makes the point that practitioners must work with an awareness of the ethical tensions inherent in working across cultures, with under-represented groups and with personal or sensitive material. Ahmed (2002) advocates for a way of working that encourages indigenous theatre practitioners (in this instance, in Bangladesh) to access skills, knowledge and training and to bring these skills back to their communities to encourage debate, reflexive practice and critical analysis. In Ahmed's article, this proposal is set against what is seen as ethically compromised practice by NGOs where the interests of global capitalism, government funding and donor agendas influence commissioning and the processes and outcomes of applied theatre. Joseph (2005) offers reflection along similar lines in his analysis of theatre for community development in Kenya. Amanda Stuart-Fisher offers the observation that Applied Theatre workers should demonstrate ethical practice in the sense of it being practice that is 'responsive and responsible to each of the different contexts' that the practitioner visits (Stuart-Fisher, 2005: 247).

As such, being a drama practitioner requires one to decide how to view ethical development, and this is where the 'neo-Aristotelian' and 'Bakhtinian' (after Mikhail Bakhtin, 1981, 1993) views of ethics need to be brought into dynamic conversation. In other words, practitioners need to consider what their view is of the development of the ethical self, i.e. to what extent are ethics based on the conceptualisation of each individual as a self in isolation, and to what extent are ethics and the sense of self socially created and capable of shifting over time?

How we answer this question and how we view the formation of ethics will have a powerful effect on our approach to facilitation and to our ethical practice. According to Edmiston, drama offers the opportunity for ethical encounters including discussion of narratives and character motivations, the rightness or wrongness of actions, perspective taking from multiple points of view, and, through the layering and sequencing of different stories with contrasting ethical narratives, discussion and questioning and re-examination of ethical assumptions. Ridout (2009) offers further support of the idea of theatre as a medium of ethical encounter. This is where the theatre can offer what Freire advocates when he espouses the principles that education should be about raising the consciousness, expanding perspectives, encouraging encounter through dialogue, and finding collective ways to overcome obstacles and pursue the promises of liberation (Freire, 1972, 1974).

It may also be possible, when working with people's personal stories, to move to the level of strategic dialogue, systemic understanding and, where possible, changing structures that dehumanise people at all levels — those being oppressed and those doing the oppressing. Here the concept of *interpellation* (mentioned earlier in the quotation from Levinas) may be useful. This is a term coined by the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser and expanded by others including Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. It is defined as the process by which individual members of a society are affected, or impressed upon, by the ideologies embedded within the society. As a concept, it might be thought akin to concepts such as cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 2000) and how individuals can consciously or unconsciously become indoctrinated by hegemonic discourses, sometimes also termed the *colonised mind* (Fanon, 1967).

As an example of interpellation in action, if we are driving our car and a police car pulls behind us with lights flashing, we will pull over and stop at the side of the road. If we resist, we will soon enough realise that we do not have a choice in the matter and that we must acknowledge the embedded ideology of *law and order* of the society in which we live. This is how ideology functions, according to Althusser:

we are all enmeshed in multiple social structures that in large and small degrees shape our identity. In order to live within a given society, we must acknowledge (implicitly or explicitly) the validity of the embedded ideologies and subject ourselves to these ideologies. The alternative is to become an activist in order to change those structures or embedded ideologies that are oppressive or unacceptable to us. Most of these ideologies are so deeply embedded within the fabric of our consciousness and social interactions that we are unaware of them unless we give the ideologies deliberate thought.[7] This idea runs directly counter to the notion of the autonomous, self-actualising human being and instead emphasises the ineluctably interdependent nature of living in all societies, even those espousing the ideological construction of rugged individualism and the 'self-made' individual (Brooker, 2003). Other philosophers such as Rawls (1971), writing about equality and morality, have similarly critiqued the illusory construction of the 'self-made' individual, pointing out the ways in which any individual's success is dependent on numerous systems and sub-systems operating at all levels of society in order to provide the context for any individual's rise to success.

If we take into account the notion of interpellation and the notion that human beings are embedded in many layers of visible and hidden systems, this will affect the way in which we conceptualise the individuals we are working with and how change may come about. With an awareness of embedded systems, including systems of control that are often hidden in plain sight, the practitioner may become more sensitive to the ways in which structural violence, inequality and injustice is legitimised by those in power, and also the ways in which the contemporary neoliberal regime normalises violence (Fanon, 1967; Evans & Giroux, 2016). The concept of interpellation can also offer insight into which people, in a given socio-political system, are customarily considered 'criminals,' 'mentally ill,' 'personality disordered,' the 'at risk,' the 'vulnerable,' or otherwise labelled with outlier status, and which people are considered to be 'insiders,' 'normal' and 'good guys.' Or, put another way: What behaviour is encouraged in a just society (Rawls, 1971)? And

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[7] Some authors have noticed how this idea is reflected in the film 'The Matrix.'

what behaviour becomes taboo or outlawed in an unjust society? Note, for example, the many instances in which forms of violence that are accepted as justified in one generation or in one culture — violence against women, for example, or corporal punishment, slavery, or cultural or religious persecution — are often looked upon with horror by more recent generations or by other cultures (Benjamin, 1978).

A potential risk of working with such sensitivity and awareness is that we can fall into a form of passive nihilism that holds that change is a pointless, Sisyphean task. Yet it is crucial, especially if one is working with people's precious stories of hope, to move beyond nihilism or its disguised forms of postmodern irony and skepticism. To indulge in nihilism when working with people's personal stories runs the significant risk of debasing their perception of reality and exacerbating oppression. Instead, it is important to hold to the view that change is still possible, that some things are knowable, and that progress is not an illusion (Martin, 2012; Arendt, 1968). Taking this approach means that it becomes possible to see that theatre can use its many techniques with varied intentions, aimed at change at the personal level and / or aimed at helping people to join together in taking deliberative action at the level of local systems or societal level systems. In this way, the theatre of personal stories can become a means for people to act together in the pursuit of freedom.

To extend this point, theatre practitioners need to be aware of the socio-economic constraints that influence participants' life choices and available options, holding these realities in mind without encouraging a sense of hopelessness or promoting the idea that an individual's choices are out of their control. For example, when working with offenders in the community or in prison, the theatre practitioner must bear in mind the context of each person's offending and remain cognisant of the wide range of factors and pressures influencing offending behaviour. This means treating all participants individually, within their family, societal and historical context, and consistently balancing individual responsibility with external influences. This is a complex and nuanced approach, and does not

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lend itself to easy categorisation identified with left or right politics. It is an approach that emphasises treating people as individuals with autonomy and will, living within the realities of family, community, regional, national and historical contexts, and within socio-political and economic conditions. This principle applies whether a person is labelled as a 'victim' or as an 'offender,' or indeed by any label, because labels have the propensity to restrict a person's sense of self, and hence a sense of options available. To be labelled as (or to label oneself as) a 'refugee,' 'survivor of abuse,' 'offender,' 'immigrant,' 'victim,' 'disadvantaged' or 'mentally ill' may serve certain functions and may form an important part of one's identity, yet at the same time, theatre practitioners have a valuable role to play in helping people to expand and experiment with different identities, roles and strategies for living that explore beyond the boundaries of generalised labels.

What are the implications of this approach for the theatre practitioner? One implication is that, in any given project, the practitioner would be reflecting on and investigating with the participants and all of the stakeholders what the potential is for the project and its successor projects to influence change at all levels. Thompson (2009a) calls for 'new alliances that might interweave the strategic and the tactical (ibid.: 122). In the context of examining his theatre project in Sri Lanka and its aftermath, Thompson encourages applied theatre artists to form alliances with theatre practitioners who specialise in forms of theatre that attract wide attention, with a view towards creating 'a form of enmeshed public / private / tactical / strategic performance practice … whatever it may be called' (Thompson, 2009a: 123).

Theatre practitioners working in the realm of the theatre of the real — which includes the theatre of personal stories — also need to be aware of the explicit and implicit ways in which personal stories and stories of 'real-life' events can become subject to the forces of commoditisation. To extend this point, we can consider that one way of understanding the trend towards personal stories in the theatre is in the context of audiences' desire to experience *the actual;* we tend to give real-life accounts more credence when we hear directly from the person who was there.

While the desire to share our stories is deeply embedded in our instincts as a species (John, 2017), so too is our innate desire to encounter 'the actual' and the authentic — that is, to see directly, to touch, to stand within, and to otherwise experience with our own senses the world around us. Daniel Schulze, in his recent volume *Authenticity in Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2017), argues that audiences are hungry for unmediated experiences that supersede what is perceived as postmodern, fake or lacking depth, and that we seek instead a more direct experience of the actual place, the actual object, or to meet the actual person. This brings us closer to the experience in a way that has much more meaning, more subjective, visceral connection and more content. This can be linked to the rise of what has been called the 'experience economy' (Toffler, 1973; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Along with the desire to experience the actual is the desire to experience that which is *authentic* — less pre-packaged, less tailored for someone else to make a profit or with the imprimatur of the marketing executive. Here, virtue is ascribed to what is felt to be *real*, authentic and meaningful on the human scale — as opposed to the corporate scale.

Somewhat ironically, but perhaps not at all surprising, is the way in which the marketing professions attempt to co-opt this trend towards authenticity and brands the non-brand. Each individual's striving for authenticity and to be 'my own person,' expressing their individual voice and perhaps rebelling against the status quo in order to foment change or just to go their own way, has been taken on as another marketing segment to target. The desire for authentic and 'non-commercialised' consumption thus becomes commodified — a characteristic flanking maneuver of late capitalism (Klein, 2000). The artist and cultural critic Nato Thompson offers an analysis of the ways in which the hunger for the authentic experience and the desire to be individual, and even more, to resist oppression, to challenge authorities, to rebel, and to stand up for democratic freedoms — is time and again co-opted for commercial ends:

> The steady packaging and reselling of each successive cultural signifier of resistance (everything from punk rock to the Black Panthers to hippies to anarchists — pick your poison) means

something, as does the fact that every promise of revolution seems to become fodder for app developers and advertisers who have content to promote on social networks.

<div align="right">(Nato Thompson, 2015: 12-13)</div>

Nato Thompson argues that co-option has seen mass culture and counter-culture co-existing since the 1950s and increasingly coalescing. Hoodies have become a fashion statement for elites. We have the trend away from mass consumption and branding, at the same time purchasing the 'alternative' brand and feeling that this is the more authentic choice. It seems, however, under the regime of late capitalism, that this will be an endless war of attrition, with feinting moves and deceptive entreaties, where trend-spotting marketers are ever ready to co-opt the rebellion and tell us how to rebel.

How can we help participant-performers to grapple with this ethical complexity? In the rehearsal and theatre making process, it may be useful to spend time explicitly exploring issues to do with ethics, values, philosophy, the forces of commoditisation, and the motivations and possible ramifications of sharing their personal stories in front of audiences. This is in keeping with Edmiston's (2000) observation that drama is a form of ethical education. One way to do this using theatre processes might be, for example, to create mock trials of real or fictional characters in order to focus a debate on key topics. Similarly, the facilitator could direct an improvisational process including the multiple perspectives of many stakeholders to the theatre project in order to examine the wider systemic implications of sharing personal stories on the stage. This application of sociodrama techniques could be seen as a dramatically charged Socratic debate. The aim would be to encourage participants to expand their understanding of how philosophy and ethics can inform the theatre-making process they are involved in. Taking this concept further, participant groups can be encouraged to construct their own code of ethics and behaviour pertaining to the particular context of the theatre project.

Chapter Three: Praxis

The Drama Spiral

As an actor, I find there's a kind of risky charge to a performance knowing it's based on an actual person. And there's a thrill for an audience, too, when a story is based on real events. But let's not forget the power of new worlds and fictional realities. And even when art *is* inspired by real life, once it's been through the filter, the alchemy of metaphor, artistry and the imagination, once it's out there to be examined, prodded and poked, laughed at, cried at, dismissed or applauded — interpreted by anyone however they want — it becomes a kind of fiction.

Noma Dumezweni, 'The Gamble,'
BBC Radio 4, 1st November 2017

Introduction

This chapter focuses on praxis — turning theory and research into action. In this chapter, I integrate the historically grounded understandings and the ethical guidelines covered in chapters one and two and describe the Drama Spiral, a practical model for decision making during theatre workshops where participants' personal stories might be used. I argue that best practice in the theatre of personal stories means structuring participatory theatre processes in explicit reference to the level of personal disclosure being used. The chapter addresses the key question: How can we articulate a graduated and reflexive model of practice that provides clear guidance to theatre practitioners who are working with participants' personal stories? The Drama Spiral is this graduated and reflexive model.

After describing the process of practice-based research which led to the creation of the Drama Spiral ('the Spiral'), I explain how the Spiral provides a practical model that is intended to help the theatre practitioner to work safely and ethically in a purposefully eclectic manner along the continuum from low focus, discussion-based or creativity / activity- based groups to high focus work in groups where individuals enact their personal life stories. The aim is to provide an

integrative model of drama facilitation encompassing the whole spectrum of distance from the source material (i.e. from highly distant for the individual participant to closely autobiographical) and to elucidate the key distinctions in theatre practice with personal stories, based on insights and practices from the fields of psychodrama, dramatherapy and related forms. The Spiral includes the entire range of theatrical and drama-based forms and includes within the scope of the theatre practitioner those forms that are ordinarily presumed to be the exclusive domain of qualified therapists, most particularly psychodramatists and dramatherapists. I offer guidance within the chapter and thoughts regarding why and how even the most vulnerable topics (and people) should remain — *with necessary safeguards, including appropriate training for and supervision of the practitioner* — within the purview of applied theatre and performance.

The impetus for creating the Drama Spiral:
Striving for safety when staging vulnerability

The Drama Spiral ('the Spiral') emerged in the context of this study. It has also developed as an outgrowth of my earlier work presenting issue-based, interactive performances and facilitating workshops with Geese Theatre Company (Baim et al., 2002). My training in traditional theatre as well as explicitly therapeutic uses of techniques derived from theatre has also made me acutely aware of the ethical and safety issues surrounding the use of personal disclosure and personal story, and equally aware of the many contexts in which it is inappropriate, unsafe or unethical to elicit personal disclosure and personal narratives.

The early idea of creating the Spiral arose from my having received numerous enquiries over the years from universities and drama schools, requesting that I teach students the distinctions and commonalities between theatre (including applied theatre) and psychodrama. These workshops have consistently shown that theatre students are acutely interested in the inter-relationship between these fields of practice and are equally interested in the boundaries between what might

be considered the primary terrain of theatre and what might be considered the primary terrain of psychodrama, dramatherapy and psychotherapy. Much of the focus of these workshops has been on how the varying methods use personal narrative and how each has techniques for maintaining safety and optimal distance. As I reflect on the process of developing the Spiral, I can also refer back to the process of writing the Geese Theatre Handbook (Baim et al, 2002). That process required a thorough examination of what were, up until then, largely intuitive processes. Faced with the challenge of writing that handbook, we began an arduous, multiply layered, five year process of breaking down our approach to theatre games, drama workshops, structuring sessions, and creating and performing original, issue-based productions, into a series of discrete steps. Having gone through this process, I realised in coming to the task at the center of this study that a visual model that is readily accessible, with a series of different phases but without a prescribed order, would likely be of most use.

In order to better explain these concepts and to provide students, practitioners, participants and educators with a useful model, I developed the Spiral as a decision-making tool for theatre practitioners negotiating the complex, contested and inherently risky terrain of personal stories. The Spiral represents an integration of theory and practical insights from the fields of action research, applied theatre, dramatherapy, psychotherapy, arts therapy, systems theory and cybernetics (Lewin, 1951), group work, experiential therapy (Ringer & Gillis, 1995) and attachment narrative therapy (Dallos & Vetere, 2009). It also integrates the many well-established principles and practices of working collaboratively in the creation of devised work with groups (Heddon & Milling, 2005; Govan et al., 2007).

The process of research leading to
the creation of the Drama Spiral

Using the processes of reflective inquiry, action research and the related research methods discussed in the introductory chapter of this study, I field tested evolving iterations of the Drama Spiral in workshops between 2011 and 2017 at the University of Exeter, the University of Birmingham, Newcastle College, the University of Sunderland, and at Queen Mary University of London. Participants in these workshops included students of applied theatre and also, in several academic institutions, the workshops included medical students who were interested in narrative medicine, students of forensic psychology, students on psychotherapy courses, and criminology students. Outside of academic settings, I have also workshopped the ideas within the Spiral with Geese Theatre Company, with psychodrama trainees, and at conferences with experienced colleagues in the fields of applied theatre and psychodrama. Typically, a workshop looking at the Spiral, or elements of the Spiral, included drama games, an introduction to the Spiral (at whatever state of development it existed in at the time), and scene creation at various points along the Spiral. After scenes were presented within the group, we would then analyse and process the scenes, making distinctions between the themes and discussing how such scene work might be applied in different contexts and with different groups. We also considered the range of factors one needs to consider in order to justify 'spiraling in' towards the centre of the spiral, and what the contra-indicators are for such a move. One example of such a workshop was the one I facilitated at Queen Mary University of London as part of their Quorum series on 28th January 2015. The workshop was entitled 'Applied Theatre and Personal Narrative – Ethical and aesthetic considerations when people's personal stories are used in performance.' More than forty people attended and interacted with the Spiral, relating their experiences of theatre to elements of the Spiral and offering feedback for refinement of the definitions of the rings of the Spiral (Baim, 2015b).

In all, during this study, more than 350 people have participated in workshops and offered their reactions, suggestions for refinement, clarifying questions and constructive critical feedback. As the model evolved towards its most recent formulation (see Figure 3.2), I was able to see that groups readily grasp the essential features of the Spiral, and for most groups with some understanding of participatory theatre, the Spiral is understood almost immediately and seen as a useful tool to help shape thinking, structure activities and regulate distance. In Spiral workshops during 2014-2017, for example, workshop groups have 'put the Spiral to work,' demonstrating with a high degree of accuracy scenes adjusted appropriately for each ring of the Spiral. This has given me confidence that the Spiral may need only relatively small refinements from this point forward. However, it will inevitably remain a work in progress.

During the workshopping phase, the process of action research produced feedback and new ideas, leading to knowledge generation regarding the following eight key features of the Spiral, its design, its content and its intention as a model. Ideas that were tested out or which emerged include:

- The rhizomatic design of the Spiral (as compared with a sequentially ordered design, or a continuum, or a grid).
- The notion of the Spiral model being a decision-making tool.
- The four quadrants around the outer edge of the ring, representing phases of work and key processes within each phase.
- The six rings and their names, definitions, processes and graduated differentiation.
- The colours of the rings.
- The icons for each ring of the Spiral.
- The decision-making factors informing which part of the Spiral is used.
- The range of drama strategies that can be used to regulate distance.

These eight features are each discussed and explained in the rest of this chapter.

The rhizomatic design of the Drama Spiral

The Spiral is intended to offer a clear and effective means for safely regulating the degree of distance and focus as required in any drama-based process, from single sessions to long-term groups. *Distance regulation* is a term used in psychology to describe how members of a family or social group regulate their emotional closeness and distance from each other (Eriksson, 2011; Byng-Hall and Campbell, 1981). In the context of the Spiral model, I have borrowed the term and define distance regulation as the process by which a facilitator guides a session so that the material and issues explored are pitched at the right level of aesthetic and emotional distance in order to maintain safety, ethical responsibility and respect for personal boundaries (Rifkin, 2010; Casson, 2004; Jennings, 2011; Bannister, 1991).

If we consider first a very simple continuum which runs from low to high focus, at one end of the continuum are purely fictional characters and scenarios (i.e. at a great distance from the personal life stories of the people involved in the process), while at the other end of the continuum are highly personal characters and scenes (i.e. the scenes and characters represented in the drama are based directly on one or more people present in the workshop, and indeed may be portrayed by the people themselves). This spectrum of dramatic distance can be illustrated by the simple linear continuum seen in Figure 3.1:

Distant / one step   Personal
removed scenes   scenes

Fig. 3.1: The continuum of distant to personal scenes

In developing the Spiral, I have expanded the concept of the continuum to include a more recursive and multi-factorial approach which better reflects the

complexity and heuristic nature of applied theatre processes, namely the Drama Spiral ('The Spiral'). This takes the same idea as the continuum and curves it into a spiral which both 'spirals in' and 'spirals out.' The Spiral is a type of map on which one can plot the processes involved in participatory theatre practice. There are six rings of the Spiral, with each ring representing a different phase of working (see Figure 3.2, on pages 136-137). As one works closer to the centre of the Spiral, the topics and scenes become more personal and sensitive for the participants. The positioning of the six rings on the Spiral is indicative only, suggesting that some elements will normally be used earlier in drama processes, and some will usually come later. Facilitators can move in and out of the Spiral as needed and as appropriate at any point in a session or activity.

The outer ring of the Spiral — the first ring — will typically include theatre games, exercises, dramatic scene creation and other creative activities that are distant from the personal life stories of the participants. In the second ring of the Spiral are scenes, characters and plot-lines that are fictional or one step removed from the lives of the participants. They may reflect universal themes and archetypes, or real events not related directly to the participants, and there is no sense that the scenes are based upon or draw directly from the life stories of anyone present. In the third ring, the stories portrayed are fictional, distant versions of the participants' stories. Where scenes have been drawn from personal work, in their final form they will bear only a faint, fictional echo of the original material. By contrast, scenes at the inner three rings of the Spiral — rings 4, 5 and 6 — will be highly personal to the participants, directly portraying aspects of their life experiences with little or no fictional distance. These gradations among and between the rings of the Spiral are fully explained later in this chapter.

There are advantages to using a spiral as opposed to a linear continuum or other forms, such as a grid. The image of the spiral captures the spontaneous movement between techniques that typically occurs during applied workshops. Facilitators and participants may move from one ring of the Spiral to an adjacent ring or even one further away with little or no notice, and this often works like an

improvised dance or a musical jam, with themes being revisited with variations based on the needs, interests, sensitivities, resilience and progress of the group members. When this dance is going well, everyone enjoys the process. However, even the most experienced facilitators can sometimes be tripped up by spontaneous processes that emerge during a workshop or rehearsal, and suddenly may find themselves working with very raw and vulnerable material without warning. Facilitators need simple, quick reference points that can be shared with participants, to help everyone understand the levels at which they are working. Skilled facilitators can then move nimbly from one technique or process to the next, with deft negotiation of a wide number of variables as they perceive the group process and the varying needs and levels of involvement of participants. Stating this with reference to the Spiral, facilitators 'spiral in' and 'spiral out' as needed and as appropriate at any point in a session or activity, in the best interests of the participants and with the overall aims of the project in mind. This process is sometimes called *rhizomatic* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980), a term borrowed from botany and used to describe multiple, layered, evolving, branching and recursive processes of human interaction and learning, as compared with more hierarchical, prescriptive, fixed, binary or strictly sequential processes.

The Spiral as a decision-making model

The Drama Spiral (Figure 3.2.) is a 'decision-making model.' That is to say, it has the following elements and intentions, adapted from Krogerus and Tschäppeler (2008):

Simplification. The Spiral is meant to simplify by including the elements of drama processes that are most relevant to the regulation of distance. For example, the model does not focus on how one creates an interesting plot in a dramatic performance. Instead, it focuses only on how one can facilitate drama-based sessions that integrate personal material in a safe manner with the optimal degree of distance.

Pragmatic. The Spiral is meant to be a pragmatic, useful tool for guiding facilitators in making choices before, during and after drama-based sessions. It is also easily shared with most participant groups, who often like to know why the facilitator makes the choices they do.

Summing up. The Spiral is meant to sum up complex concepts and inter-related dynamics that occur in drama-based activities.

Visual. The Spiral is intentionally visual, as the spiral image quickly captures a process that otherwise can be difficult to capture in words. One way of thinking about the Spiral is that it is a visualised model of theatre processes that incorporate personal stories, which also incorporates the structure of action research. As described in the introduction to this study, the sequence of steps used in action research (*identify, investigate, explore, take action, evaluate, amend plan, take second step, repeat process as necessary …*) is often presented as an ever-extending spiral of recursive steps. Thompson (2003: 124 and 140), for example, refers to the spiral form of action research.

Organising and plotting. The Spiral is meant to help facilitators organise and order their decision-making. For example, facilitators who make decisions based on the Spiral are quickly able to 'place' or 'plot' their decisions on the Spiral, as a sort of visual filing system.

Method. The Spiral is meant to offer a method of making decisions, but it does not provide the answers for the facilitator. Facilitators will find that answers emerge once they have applied the model and worked with it in the context of the work they are planning or facilitating.

Processes occurring at each ring of the Spiral: The four quadrants

As Figure 3.2 illustrates, each ring of the Spiral includes four important processes that are essential to working safely, transparently and effectively with groups of people involved in ensemble-created theatre. Each of the four processes is

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located in a quadrant of the Spiral. These four processes — and a range of sub-processes within each of them — occur at each ring of the Spiral. Some of the sub-processes are more associated with early stages of a group, some with later stages, and some are equally relevant throughout the stages of a group. The important point is that all of these processes are essential to participatory theatre and should be borne in mind when making decisions about the appropriate level of an activity, session or project. The four processes are:

1) *Identify*
2) *Explore*
3) *Present*
4) *Evaluate*

These are explained as follows:

Identify

In the upper right quadrant, which is the starting place for each ring of the Spiral, is the process of *identifying*. This includes:

Contracting with stakeholders. This includes establishing the mandate for the work and contracting with stakeholders about what the remit of the work will be. For example, if the facilitator is working for an agency, organisation or institution, there will typically be a verbal or written contract or agreement about the purpose, scope and scale of the work to be undertaken. It is important to give thought to who the various stakeholders are, i.e. who is likely to be affected in some way by the work, who has influence over the project, and who is funding the work. As part of the process of preparation and considering stakeholders, it is important for facilitators to consider the 'big picture' and to understand the potential systemic and socio-political impact of the work. This is also a crucial point in the process to consider the ethical position of the proposed project and to consider the safety and welfare of the participants before, during and after the project (Sajnani, 2010). For example, if working with one group in an institution, how might the work be seen

by other groups, by the institution as a whole or by the community outside the gate (Thompson, 2005, 2009a)? How might conflicts or misunderstandings be forestalled? How could these groups be included, e.g. as allies, as consultants, as a resource for the rehearsal process, as invited audiences or as potential future participants?

Forming the group. This might include, where appropriate, drawing up admission and exclusion criteria, taster sessions, intake interviews, assessment, prioritisation and 'road shows' to recruit participants,.

Identifying needs and aims. This might include a range of activities aimed at helping participants to clarify their needs and interests, and agreeing aims with them.

Establishing boundaries. This typically includes establishing policies and principles of safe practice such as cooperation, group norms, asking questions, saying 'no,' confidentiality within limits, respect, boundaries regarding touch, time-keeping, etc. The implications for the theatre practitioner are profound, particularly when facilitating processes that lead to people recalling, sharing and perhaps presenting their personal stories. Participants may have many implicit or explicit questions and concerns about the drama process: How is a story to be recalled? By what means? Which stories are important? How should the story be told? Whose perspective will be given priority? Will the story be challenged or interrogated? If so, by whom and how will this be negotiated? Who will have control over the story? Will I be able to tell my story in my own language, or in ways that make sense to me? Will my story be respected, even if it is not fully understood? Will it leave my power and be altered by others? If so, will I have any say over this? Will I be able to decide what the 'meaning' of my story is, if it has any meaning at all? Can I be sure? Or will I be psychologised and pathologised, labelled or judged harshly because of my story (a point considered by Rifkin, 2010: 22)? How will the process help me? How might it hurt me? Will it leave me

The Drama Spiral

Clark Baim 2015

EVALUATE
De-briefing
Deciding next steps
Reflecting on outcomes
Measuring effects
Documenting the work

IDENTIFY
Contracting with stakeholders
Forming the group
Identifying needs and aims
Establishing boundaries
Agreeing a plan

Universal

E V A L U A T E

I D E N T I F Y

1. Games and creative activities
2. Fictional / distant stories
3. Fictionalized personal stories
4. Positive personal stories
5. Stories of resolved difficulties
6. Stories of unresolved difficulties

Highly personal

P R E S E N T

E X P L O R E

PRESENT
Presenting work to:
The rest of the group
Invited guests
Specific audiences, or
The general public

EXPLORE
Creative activities
Exercises exploring themes
Sharing stories
Creating scenes and characters
Rehearsal / practicing skills

The Drama Spiral is a decision-making tool intended to help theatre and arts practitioners to work safely and ethically along the continuum from the fictional to the highly personal. In the outer rings, participants are involved in creative activities and work at the metaphorical and fictional level. As one 'spirals in' towards the centre, the rings represent stories that are increasingly personal and sensitive for the participants. Each ring of the Spiral includes four important processes: *Identify, Explore, Present and Evaluate*.

Fig. 3.2: The Drama Spiral: Regulating distance in participatory theatre and performance

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FICTIONAL DISTANCE

Games and creative activities

- Group-building; warm-ups; theatre games; communication and performance skills.
- Creative activities including dance, music, song, art, writing, rhythmic movement and percussion, social and communal customs and pastimes where everyone participates.

Fictional / distant stories

- Enacting stories and plays that are already written. Can include myths, fables, fairy tales and other well-known stories. Can also include watching a play / interacting with characters.
- Ensemble-created plays or improvised dramas that are wholly fictional or based on historical / news events.

Fictionalized personal stories

- Ensemble-created drama with fictionalized scenes and characters; can include stories and themes that have arisen from more personal work.
- Metaphor is frequently used to create distance from personal stories and to contain powerful themes.

Positive personal stories

- Participants enact directly personal stories focusing on neutral, positive, safe or non-troubling topics.
- Participants may also enact situations they desire or may face in the future, i.e. 'rehearsals for life.'

Stories of resolved difficulties

- Participants enact directly personal stories about troubling issues that are resolved – for example, stories of healing, growth, or triumph over adversity. The rehearsal process itself may be a part of the healing and growth.
- Important processes include informed consent, group support, sharing experiences, validation and witnessing.

Stories of unresolved difficulties

- Participants enact directly personal, unresolved stories for the purpose of therapy or growth. Important processes include informed consent, confidentiality, witnessing, group sharing and follow-up support.
- The focus on unresolved personal stories can make participants highly vulnerable and requires experienced facilitators and the guidance or supervision of a qualified therapist with relevant training, e.g. psychodrama, drama therapy.

embarrassed or ashamed? Or feeling good, or relieved, or moved in some meaningful way that makes it worth the pain or sadness? These are just some of the questions that emerge and add complexity when we begin to integrate ideas from Levinas (discussed in chapter two), with additional integration of ideas, particularly from Butler, on the ways in which power influences the fabrication of the individual psyche (Butler, 1997).

Agreeing a plan. Sometimes, agreeing a plan may simply mean agreeing to participate in the next activity. At other times, agreement might include a verbal or written agreement to participate in a multi-week project. In any case, it is important to gain the agreement and consent of participants at the outset of participatory workshops.

Explore

The lower right quadrant includes:

Creative exercises. This is a wide-ranging category and includes theatre games, group-building activities, sound and movement, collective singing, dance, movement and percussion, group experiential exercises and warm-ups, and related activities.

Exercises exploring themes. This could include any of the creative exercises, but has the added focus that the activity is used to focus on or highlight a given theme that is relevant to the participants. Typical themes might include trust, boundaries, cooperation, freedom to choose, looking to the future, empathy, consequences, becoming aware of inner thoughts and feelings, or assertiveness.

Sharing stories. As part of the process of exploring themes and creating dramatic scenes, participants may share stories they know or experiences of their own in order to provide the inspiration for dramatic action. How personal and sensitive the stories are will depend on many factors and will be subject to regular monitoring and possible revision by the facilitator in cooperation with the group.

Creating scenes and characters. As the participants explore dramatic situations, they may be encouraged to create scenes and characters and to improvise dialogue. Where appropriate to the situation and the focus of the work, the participants can be encouraged to more fully explore and develop particular scenes and characters.

Rehearsal and practicing skills. As part of the workshop process, participants are helped to develop the skills and craft of performance, characterisation, improvisation, movement, collaboration, speaking in front of audiences, and any related performance-related skills. Related to this, the participants are helped to rehearse short or long sequences — or indeed entire plays — for presentation to others.

Present

The lower left quadrant represents the part of the theatre-making process where people present their work to others. Where the performance includes personal stories, it is important to give special consideration to which type of audience is appropriate:

The rest of the group. In some situations, members of a group will present their work to the rest of the group. For example, one half of the group may present a scene to the other half, and vice versa.

Invited guests. In other situations, the participants may develop a performance or presentation for invited guests. For example, in a closed institution, this might include other residents and staff of the institution.

Specific audiences. In another situation, this might include a presentation to specific audiences, for example a school audience, or people attending a conference on a special topic.

General public. Where appropriate, presentations or performances may also be offered to the general public.

Evaluate

The upper left quadrant includes a number of crucial processes related to evaluation:

De-briefing. This includes, for example, hearing feedback at the end of an activity, exercise, sessions or series of sessions. How have the participants experienced the session? What did they enjoy? What would they like more of? Less of? What do they want to remember from this session? How is the group process going? How are people working together and looking after each other? De-briefing also includes sensitive listening, sharing common experiences, talking about feelings, and encouraging mutual support among the participants.

Deciding next steps. When deciding next steps, the facilitator considers the feedback from the participants, assesses a range of factors about the remit and scope and timing of the project, individual and group needs, and coordinates group processes so they proceed to a greater or lesser degree with the guidance of the facilitator. Some groups will need strong guidance and leadership, while others may be largely self-directed, with the facilitator holding the space and helping to give shape to the process. This is also the part of the process at each ring of the Spiral where the facilitator and the group might decide to 'spiral in' or 'spiral out' — or indeed to stay at the same level of personal disclosure.

Reflecting on outcomes. Towards the end of an activity, a session or a series of sessions, the facilitator and the participants may take time to reflect on the outcome of the work. Did it go as planned? What benefits arose from the work? Were these as intended? Were there any unintended outcomes? If so, how can we repair any ruptures, and what lessons can be learned?

Measuring effects. The range of effects may be very wide, and depending on the group, the context, the duration of the work and other factors, the focus on specific and measurable effects may or may not be appropriate. In some contexts, the most appropriate 'effect' may be to assess to what extent the participants enjoyed their time together. In other contexts, it may be appropriate to assess other effects

such as — depending on the context — improved psychological or social functioning, emotional well-being, occupational performance or learning, or concrete and practical changes that may emerge from the theatre process.

Documenting the work. This includes processes such as photographing and video recording sessions (where appropriate), systematically preserving the stages of development of the work, storing important written materials, negotiating how the work will be preserved, safely archiving the work, and sharing the process and outcomes with key stakeholders and — where appropriate — with the public. Sant (2017) offers a range of up-to-date ideas regarding the practical, aesthetic, ethical and legal issues related to documenting and preserving performances and theatre-led processes. Marsh (2014) is also a useful guide to the processes, aesthetics and ethics of documenting performance art and related practices.

Example of how the four quadrants can be used

To offer an example of how the four quadrants apply, we might consider how the upper right quadrant, 'identify,' is in part focused on 'contracting with stakeholders' and also 'agreeing a plan.' In a context where a community theatre practitioner is, for example, engaging with a group of refugees who are service users of a charitable community centre, there are a range of stakeholders. The stakeholders may include, for example, the participants, their families, the staff and volunteers working at the centre, the potential audiences for a performance that might be produced, the funders of the charity, other service users of the charity, and so on. Whatever ideas the facilitator has regarding topics of focus, themes, artistic concepts, or how the work should be facilitated and shared with audiences, the first step needs to be gaining the informed consent of the stakeholders and agreeing a plan regarding where the focus will be. The agreement can, of course, evolve as the project unfolds, as long as there is consent from all parties.

Description of the six rings of the Spiral

First ring: Games and creative activities

The outermost ring of the Spiral includes elements such as group introductions, establishing group norms, group-building exercises, trust exercises and related activities aimed at deepening the communication and spontaneity of the group and participants. This may include a wide range of theatre games, music, movement, song, art or other artistic means to encourage expression.
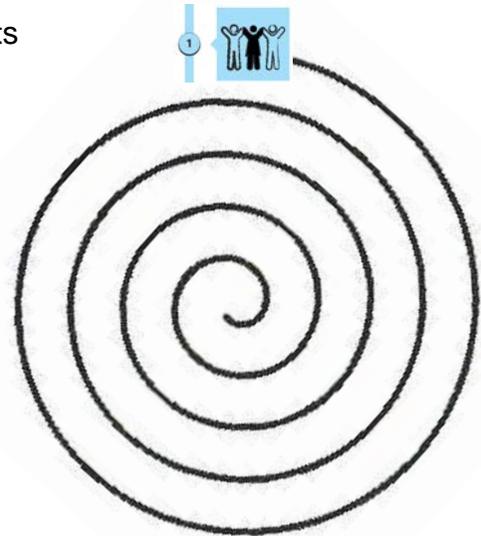
In most situations, facilitators will begin new groups using exercises and activities at this first stage of the Spiral, before considering moving inwards on the Spiral if that is appropriate. There are many contexts in which it will be appropriate to work only at rings one and two — the outermost rings — of the Spiral.

Personal disclosure: At this ring of the Spiral, in general little or no explicitly stated personal disclosure is sought, although it is acknowledged that the work may have profound personal meaning and connections that remain private. In some of the examples below, personal and collective material may be sought, but this is meant to be done with a light touch, and any personal material is meant to be in focus only briefly. Where personal material is sought in this light touch way, it can serve as a sort of overture, a brief glimpse of what working at rings three, four, five and six might entail. In other words, this will give participants a little taste (brief, and with a light touch) of what it feels like to disclose some personal material. They can then make a more informed choice about whether they feel safe and ready to work further into the Spiral.

Theatre and drama processes at this stage may include:

- Group-building exercises, theatre games and warm-ups

- Trust exercises and related activities

- Communication exercises

- Developing theatre and performance skills

- Dance, singing, music, art, writing to encourage expression, creation and connection; Sound and movement exercises

- Social and communal customs and pastimes where everyone participates

- Reading a play or script, or watching a play

- Playing out of brief elements of personal and collective life. These should be 'light touch' and focus on communal activities or personal / family activities that do not involve disclosure of personal history or circumstances, for example: *A gesture or behaviour that I do every day or which is typical of me; a gesture common in my family / community; A cultural ritual or practice, e.g. tea making, cooking, greeting a stranger or greeting a friend or family member, cleaning the home, going for water, gathering wood, working, shopping, farming, eating meals, family practices at children's bed time, sport and recreation, hobbies; Cultural practices or behaviours that signify people at different ages, e.g. children, teens, young adults, parents, older adults, or practices that signal different occupations, working tasks, social rank, lifestyles, walks of life, times of year, times of day (e.g. starting the day, commuting, walking to school, eating lunch, etc.), holidays, significant life events such as courtship, marriage, child rearing, name days or birthdays, or funerals and memorials; Important events in our culture, including for example our history, our industry, our heritage, our schools, our natural environment, our society, sport, arts, work, religion, politics; gestures, behaviours and roles that are passed down from generation to generation; something that connects us all in small and large ways* (see Thompson, 2003: 129, 133 for related ideas).

- General level discussion of these activities – for example: after doing a communication exercise, discussing the elements of good communication.

Second ring: Fictional / distant stories

The second ring of the Spiral includes involvement by participants in *one step removed* (i.e. fictional or distant) sculpts, scenes, role plays and other drama-based activities. The scenes and characters are fictional, i.e. distinct and different from the particular autobiographical details of the people present. Alternatively, the stories staged may be of real events which are distant from the lives of the people present (e.g. a news event from afar; or a story based on hearing eyewitness testimony). This stage also includes rehearsal and performance of fictional plays and enacting stories and plays that are already written, that is, from the literary canon. Activities at this ring of the Spiral may also include the staging of myths, fables, fairy tales, films, superhero stories and other well-known stories (Prendergast and Saxton, 2015).
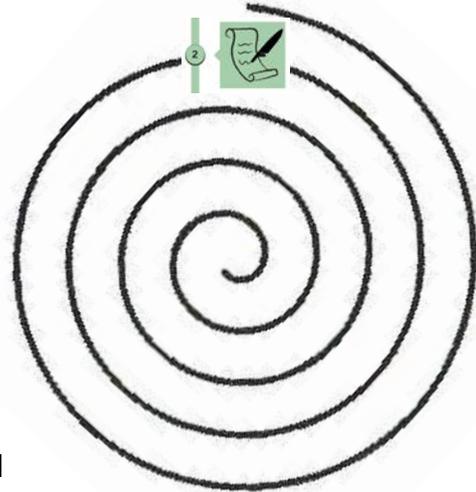
Personal disclosure: In the second ring of the Spiral, little or no explicitly named personal disclosure is sought from participants, although — as with work in the first ring — it is acknowledged that the work may have profound personal meaning and connections that remain private.

Theatre and drama processes at this stage may include:

- Enacting stories and plays that are already written. Can include myths, fables, fairy tales and other well-known stories, including superhero stories and epics that are foundational to the culture — for example the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* in India.
- Ensemble-created sculpts, scenes, plays or improvised dramas that are wholly fictional or based on historical / news events. This can include themes that have

arisen from working at inner rings of the Spiral prior to 'spiraling out' to this ring of the Spiral. This approach typically involves use of metaphor, changing the settings and characters and using other devices to create significant distance between the performance and the source material.

- Can also include watching a play and / or interacting with characters in a play using forum, aside, 'hot seating', interactive improvisational theatre or related techniques where the audience speaks with characters or discusses the characters and their choices.

- Developing life skills and positive roles using skills practice role play and related skills development.

- Approaches that typically operate at this level include drama-in-education, sociodrama, 'living newspaper,' and drama workshops aimed at personal growth, development and empowerment. This is a partial list only.

- Sample titles or stimulus topics at this stage might include, for example: *'The journey'; 'Friends who help'; 'The negotiation'; 'The sudden discovery'; 'Peer pressure'; 'The role model'; 'The argument'; 'The secret'; 'The intervention'; 'The lie'; 'The outsider'; 'Anger'; 'Aggression'; 'Violence'; 'Hitting rock bottom'; 'Craving'; 'Fear'; 'Breakdown in communication'; 'The victim who refused to be a victim'; 'The fight'; 'Consequences'; 'It wasn't my fault'; 'Life on the street'; 'The safe / unsafe family'; 'The trigger'; 'The risky situation.'* Or a task such as 'Create a new myth, or fable, or superhero origin story.' Adages and aphorisms can also be used as titles. Examples: *'When we sing together, our hearts beat together.' 'The axe forgets; the tree remembers.' 'When elephants fight, the grass suffers most.' 'There are no villains, only those who deal with pain by passing it quickly on.' 'When you seek revenge, dig two graves.'*

This is only a partial and beginning list; the possibilities at this level are as limitless as drama itself.

Third ring: Fictionalised personal stories

The third ring includes 'fictionalised' scenes and plays which are enacted at a *medium distance* from personal stories of the participants. For example, a scene may be performed which is based on a personal story of one of the participants, but where the setting and characters have been fictionalised in order to offer anonymity and create a safe distance where the individual may feel too exposed or vulnerable to work at the directly personal level. Reminiscence theatre (Schweitzer 2007) is one form of theatre that sometimes uses this approach.
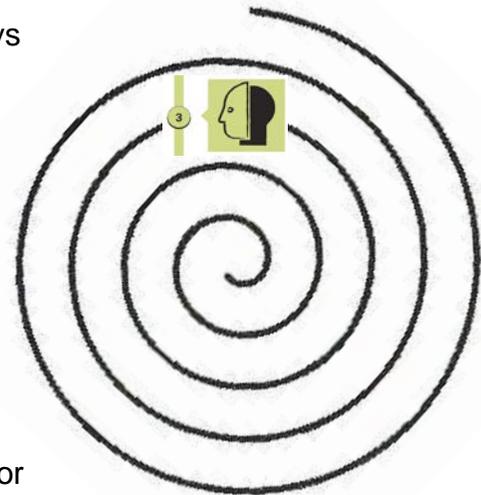
Personal disclosure: In this ring of the Spiral, personal material is typically sought during the rehearsal process, later to be fictionalised. We are therefore moving into more personal terrain, with important implications for working with sensitivity and care. This is even more important when working with vulnerable populations because traumatised individuals may not be aware of their vulnerability, and it is up to the drama practitioner to watch for this and work safely with this understanding. The third ring of the Spiral may also include personal level discussion, where personal connections are explicitly sought and worked into the process. While some personal disclosure is needed to work at this level, it is acknowledged that the work may have personal meaning and connections that remain private.

Theatre and drama processes at this stage may include:

- Any of the activities from rings one and two of the Spiral, but with personal connections explicitly sought and discussed.
- Sharing personal stories as part of the process of creating theatre.

- Ensemble-created drama, community drama, reminiscence theatre, verbatim theatre, documentary theatre and related approaches with 'fictionalised' / one step removed scenes and characters. Performers do not play the role of themselves or people they know, although they may do this in a fictionalised form.
- Can include stories and themes that have arisen from more personal work.

When the optimal place to work is at the third ring of the Spiral, metaphor is typically used to create distance from personal stories and to contain powerful themes. An example of working in metaphor would be creating the story of an alien landing on Earth as a metaphor for the experience of refugees settling in a new country, or a former inmate resettling in the community, or a student moving to a new school. Holmwood (2014), Perrow (2012), Jennings (2009 and 2011), Casson (2004), Chesner (1995), Linds (1996) and Dayton (1990) provide many examples and thorough guidance about the concept of working through metaphor, the concept of the 'containing metaphor' and notions around regulating aesthetic distance. Bannister (1991) and Boal (1995) offer further useful guidance. Students and practitioners of applied theatre will be familiar with Boal's concept of 'metaxis,' describing the participant's encounter with the space between the world of their reality and the image of their reality, created by themselves (Boal, 1995: 43). The third ring represents that part of the drama process where the 'space between' is cultivated, and this can be done using all of the tools in the dramatist's and director's toolkit.

Fourth ring: Positive personal stories

At the fourth ring of the Spiral, the participants enact directly personal scenes. However, at this stage these scenes should relate to strengths and positive episodes from the past, or they should focus on safe, neutral or non-troubling topics.

Examples may include scenes of accomplishment, of affirmation, of confidence and empowerment, challenges currently being faced and dealt with, positive memories, positive relationships, significant moments or developmental transitions (example: 'The birth of a new role'), celebrations or challenges overcome. Participants may also rehearse and enact scenes they desire or may face in the future, that is, 'rehearsals for life.' Or participants may enact situations from their current life in order to develop positive social skills and strategies to handle personal situations (Kipper, 1986; Yablonsky, 1976; Baim et al., 2002).
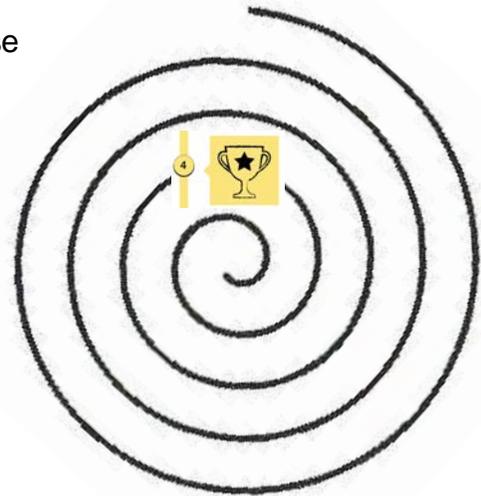
Personal disclosure and support: When personal material is explicitly used as the basis of the drama or otherwise enacted or spoken about, participants should be encouraged to share their connections with each other's stories and to demonstrate sensitive listening and support. Facilitators will need to allow adequate time for this sharing, discussion, mutual support and containment.

Theatre and drama processes at this stage may include:
- Ensemble-created drama, community drama, reminiscence theatre, verbatim theatre, documentary theatre, testimonial theatre, ethno-theatre and related approaches, focusing on positive, safe or non-troubling topics and personal stories. Performers may play the role of themselves or people they know.
- Participants enact their personal life circumstances to develop positive social skills and strategies to handle personal situations from their current lives.

- Participants rehearse and enact scenes they desire or may face in the future, i.e. 'rehearsals for life.' As part of this process, participants can present for each other suggestions and examples of how challenging life situations might be handled.

- Frozen picture / sculpting techniques.

- A variation that may be useful in applied theatre contexts is *rehearsed psychodrama*, where participants direct the rehearsal and presentation of scenes from their life.

- Also included at this ring of the Spiral are collective stories around positive experiences that people share. Examples might include the theme of holidays; traditions; national celebrations; religious festivals; secular festivals; games and sports; positive historical events, etc.

Sample scenes or stimulus topics at this stage might include, for example:

- A positive memory;

- A time when I have felt connected to other people / to the whole of the world;

- My first friend, or: a favourite memory of being with a friend;

- An achievement I am / we are proud of;

- Something I am proud of about my culture / my family / my community / my region / my country;

- Something I am good at / something I know how to do;

- Someone I want to thank;

- Someone who gives me strength / an example of a time they gave me strength;

- A relationship that is important to me;

- A memory of listening to music, playing music or singing;

- A role model for me, and what they offered as an example of how to be in the world; A role model of moral strength and dignity;

- Something I want to celebrate;

- A truth teller I admire;

- A moment in my life when my life took a new direction;

- A moment when I made a key decision;
- The birth of a new role (i.e. a moment when I took on a new role that I had never had before, such as sibling, partner, god-parent, employee, immigrant, aunt / uncle, etc.);
- A time when I stood my ground / defended myself / defended or protected someone else;
- A challenge I am facing now and dealing with successfully;
- A 'perfect moment' or 'golden moment' I have experienced in my life (often, this is a moment without words);
- A time when I faced and overcame my fear;
- A time I learned an important lesson;
- A time I helped someone else, or alleviated someone's unnecessary suffering;
- Something I do much better now than in the past;
- Something I have tried to put right;
- A time in my life when hope or persistence made all the difference;
- How I want it to be in (X) years/ How I will get there;
- A time when I made a difference for someone else / when they made a difference for me;
- Some great advice or support I once received;
- A big choice I have made;
- A moment of awe or mystery that I have experienced;
- When I have fallen in love, or felt loved;
- When I have experienced or witnessed something beautiful;
- A special time with my family
- A time of sharing laughter with family or friends;
- A time of celebration I have shared with others;
- Something or someone I love;
- A memory I have of making something / working with my hands;
- A tradition in my family or community or workplace or culture;
- A time when I have enjoyed being out in the natural world;

- A time when I have experienced a rush of excitement / adrenaline;
- A time when I experienced simple pleasures with family or friends;
- A time when I have had an adventure outdoors;
- A way that I am different now as compared with my younger self;
- A belief, idea, person, practice or custom that gives me strength;
- Me in my element, doing what I love to do;
- A place where I find strength;
- A favourite pet, or animal I have known — and a good memory I have of being with them;
- An internal strength that I draw on when I face difficulties / something inside that keeps me strong;
- A song I love to sing (sing it solo or with others);
- An aspect of my family, community, culture or society that gives me strength;
- The people who have made a difference to me;
- The work I do / we do;
- A precious moment with a family member, relative, colleague or friend;
- Something or someone I would like to celebrate;
- A time I admired someone's character or achievement.

Comment: Facilitators should be aware that, depending on the topic and the sensitivities of the person in focus, this type of work may be at stage five or six of the Spiral (see below). This will vary, person to person. At the same time, it is important to note that, philosophically, this ring of the Spiral tries to emphasise strengths and resilience rather than trauma, loss, vulnerability, dysfunction and insufficiency. This approach is inspired by research within the field of positive psychology, which demonstrates the many ways in which people can be helped by focusing not on their difficulties but instead on their strengths, talents and positive goals, and the people, activities and things that bring them joy (Seligman, 2011).

Fifth ring: Difficult and resolved stories

Working in the fifth ring of the Spiral, participants enact directly personal stories about troubling issues that are resolved — for example, stories of healing, growth, or triumph over adversity. The scenes enacted may once have proved difficult for the participant to face and may also have been traumatic and unresolved in the past, but they are now resolved. This is what might be termed 'non-clinical' psychodrama, because the issues addressed do not require clinical working through, e.g. in a therapeutic setting. Put another way, at this ring of the Spiral we are staging vulnerability by focusing on *post-traumatic growth*. Working at this ring of the Spiral taps into the insight and wisdom that participants may have gained from their life experiences and challenges they have faced, worked through and resolved.
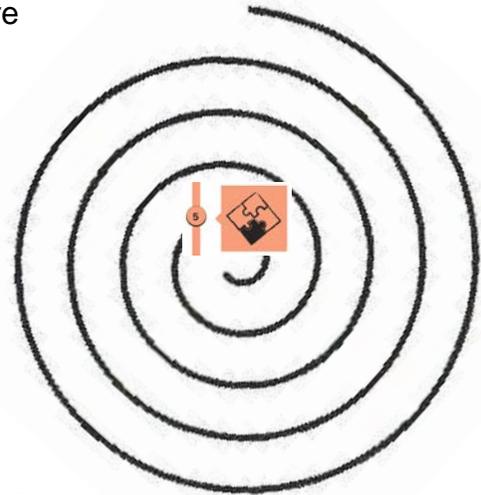
This level of working requires shrewd judgment by the facilitator to ensure that the work stays within safe bounds. The facilitator must be skilled and experienced enough to understand how to assess whether and to what degree events that were difficult, painful or traumatising for the participant in the past are resolved in the present. Typical examples of this form of theatre include self-revelatory performance (Emunah 2015), auto-ethnographic performance (Pendzik et al, 2016), autobiographical theatre (Stephenson 2013; Heddon 2008), theatre of witness (Sepinuck, 2013) and testimonial theatre (Forsyth 2013; Stuart-Fisher, 2009; Farber, 2008).

Personal disclosure and support: At this stage of the Spiral, participants are encouraged to share personal stories and connections for mutual support. Important processes include informed consent, group support, sharing

experiences, validation and witnessing. The rehearsal process itself may be a part of the healing and growth.

Theatre and drama processes at this stage may include:

- Creating and / or performing ensemble-created drama, community drama, reminiscence theatre, documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, testimonial theatre or related forms, focusing to a greater or lesser extent on troubling / stressful issues that are resolved for the participants / performers.
- Frozen picture / sculpting techniques.
- A variation that may be useful in applied theatre contexts is *rehearsed psychodrama*, where participants direct the rehearsal and presentation scenes from their life.
- Also included at this ring of the Spiral are collective stories around traumatic events from the past which the participants have recovered from, i.e. issues that have in the past led to collective trauma or events that have affected all or many people in the group. Examples might include recovery from natural disasters, national crises or political events.

Sample scenes or stimulus topics at this stage might include:

- An experience I had that I want others to know about and learn from;
- An aspect of my life that I want to share with you, and to be witnessed;
- A turning point in my life;
- Finding the strength to get through difficult or painful times;
- A challenge I (or we) have faced and overcome;
- When my family / our community / our city / our region / our nation came together to help each other to face a crisis;
- Something I (or we) have recovered from / My journey through recovery;
- A time in my life when I needed other people and they were there for me;
- A time when I was angry / sad / afraid / needed comfort, and someone was there for me;

- How I see things now compared with how I saw things then;

- How I was then, and how I am different now;

- A time when I learned I can change and move on;

- A time I made a mistake and what I learned;

- A time when my beliefs, ideas or assumptions were tested;

- A time in my life that changed me or my view of myself or someone else;

- A time when I have said what I believed, rather than what was comfortable;

- A difficult or uncomfortable conversation I have had;

- When I have had to learn and adapt quickly to a new situation;

- When I made a big decision that made all the difference;

- When I was at a low point, and how I got up again;

- Finding my voice;

- More abstract: 'Strong at the broken places.' 'We all share in common the deepest secrets.'

Comment: While there are potential risks and safe practice must be followed, there are also great potential benefits in working with material based on overcoming and resolving difficult life experiences. Working at this ring of the Spiral taps into the insight and wisdom that participants may have gained from their life experiences and challenges they have faced, worked through and resolved.

The explorations at ring five of the Spiral can be linked to the positive and developmental focus of Rosi Braidotti and her nomadic philosophy. Nomadic theory explores the ways in which the process of creation, development and integration is in constant and ongoing dialogue with multiple layers of competing discourses, out of which can emerge new, dynamic, resilient and generative politics of affirmation (Braidotti, 2012). Braidotti's concept of focusing of what is affirmative, positive, generative and developmental is explored more fully in chapter four, which addresses the intentions of the theatre of personal stories.

Sixth ring: Difficult and unresolved stories

The sixth, innermost ring of the Spiral is the most personal and sensitive. Here, participants are helped to stage scenes that are still difficult and unresolved for them, for the purposes of personal and communal healing, gaining insight, resolving pain, taming fears, being witnessed, and, in some situations, advocating for social change and social justice, so that others do not have to suffer in the same way.
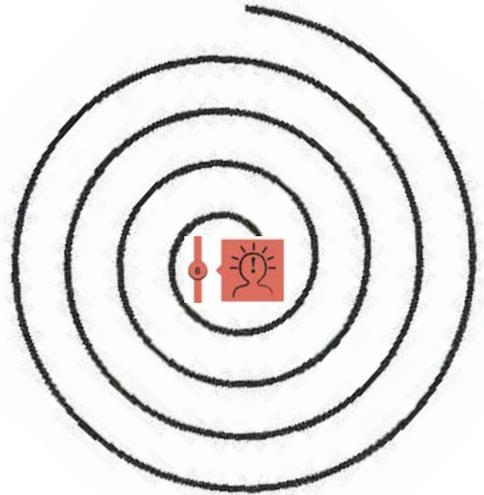
The focus on unresolved personal stories can make participants highly vulnerable. Where the facilitator is not a trained therapist, in order to maintain safe practice and appropriate boundaries, they should have the guidance or supervision of a qualified therapist with relevant training, for example in psychodrama, dramatherapy, experiential or related therapy methods. In any case, before entering into this terrain, the theatre facilitator should receive specific training in working ethically with people who have this degree of vulnerability.

Personal disclosure and support: Working at this level, participants will typically share personal stories about situations where they may have been highly vulnerable during or after the episode. To maintain safety and ethical boundaries, important processes at this level of working include informed consent, confidentiality, witnessing, validation, group sharing and follow-up support. It is crucial to develop and maintain an atmosphere of support, trust, good will and safety, in order to promote a positive, generative, developmental and healing atmosphere where people can find their way towards resolution and strength.

Theatre and drama based approaches at this stage may include:

- Creating and / or performing scenes focusing to a greater or lesser extent on difficult issues that are unresolved for the participants. A wide variety of strategies for regulating the pace and intensity of the scenes may be used. These are described below, on pages 159-166.
- Frozen picture / sculpting techniques.
- To preserve clear boundaries, it may be helpful to use structured forms of personal exploration such as Boal's (1995) *Rainbow of Desires* and *Cop-in-the-Head* techniques, or other structured exercises described in, for example, Baim et al (2002), Blatner (1997), Chesner (1995), Dayton (1990) and many other resources.
- Psychodrama and dramatherapy addressing personal, unresolved issues.
- Also included at this ring of the Spiral are collective stories around traumatic and unresolved issues, e.g. issues that have led to collective trauma or events that have affected all or many people in the group. Examples might include natural disasters, national crises, war, civil unrest or other political events.

Sample scenes or stimulus topics at this stage might include:

- A challenge I am facing now, where I am struggling to cope (Or, a challenge we all face, where we struggle to cope);
- Unfinished business that is holding me back;
- Hidden injuries;
- Trying to get unstuck from the past;
- When I need to know I have a connection to other people / when I really need help from others;
- Something that is unhelpful or destructive about my culture, region or country / something I want to be a part of changing about my culture, region or country;

- My internal struggles; My internal conflicts; My different selves and how they compete (e.g. my past self and my current self, and the self I want to be)
- A time when I have been a reluctant or unexpected witness to suffering;
- Speaking my truth;
- Something I must say, because it is eating me inside;
- My conflicts with another person / other people: trying to get past these, and move on;
- I want the world to know this about me …;
- Me in a dangerous or high risk situation in the past / present / future;
- A change I am struggling to make, where I need support and help;
- The last time I was angry / sad / afraid;
- Coping with my feelings;
- A problem my family faces while I am in prison / hospital / treatment: My place in that story;
- Throwing off a burden that does not belong to me;
- A hidden legacy from my family or ancestors that I want to hand back;
- Making amends;
- Unburdening myself of something that is not mine;
- Hitting rock bottom and finding hope;
- Something I regret doing – and what I learned from that experience;
- Missing home;
- My most likely/ least likely/ most hopeful futures;
- Where I am now/ Where I want to be/ What's standing in between the two;
- The story of my life / A story that remains with me;
- Figuring out something from my past (putting the pieces of the puzzle together);
- Resolving something that remains unfinished from my past;
- Healing what divides us, and finding what unites us.

The colours of the rings of the Spiral

Where the Spiral is pictured in colour, each of the six rings has a different colour. The idea of having different colours for each ring was introduced at a relatively late stage in the development of the Spiral, and emerged during exploratory workshops. The final choices were not made until a professional infographic designer was commissioned to produce a clear visual illustration of the Spiral. The idea behind the use of colour is to help the practitioner and participants to make clear distinctions between the different rings of the Spiral.
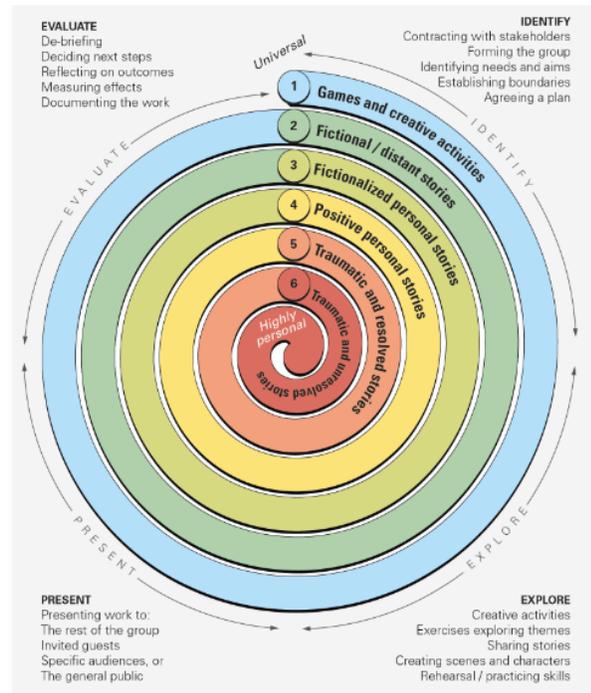
The colour changes in gradations from blue at the outer edge to red at the innermost ring. Broadly speaking, the colour blue is meant to represent a part of the process where the material is not emotionally exposing or reliant on personal disclosure of sensitive stories. It is emotionally 'cool' territory, especially in regards to personal revelation. (This does mean that the material will not be powerful or emotional; the distinction is primarily to do with the degree of self-revelation around sensitive material.) As one 'spirals in' towards the centre, the colours of the rings become warmer and warmer, until we are at the red centre. The colour red is meant to capture the 'emotional heat' of work which is highly personal and revealing, while at the same time focusing on past or current events which are still emotionally hot and troubling to the person telling the story.

The icons for each ring of the Spiral

Another design feature of the Spiral is the use of icons to represent each ring of the Spiral. These icons were developed during an iterative process involving the infographic designer and colleague professionals. A range of icons were suggested for each ring, and the ideas were workshopped among colleagues from fields such as applied theatre, psychology, psychotherapy, visual arts and graphic design. In the end, the icons were chosen for their simplicity and the ways in which they are both specific and also open, leaving room for a range of possibilities within each ring of the Spiral. The icons also follow the colour coding appropriate to the ring they describe.

Games and creative activities: This icon – three people with their arms raised and connected - is meant to capture the notion of positive activities in diverse groups.

HIGH

Games and creative activities
- Group-building; warm-ups; theatre games; communication and performance skills.
- Creative activities including dance, music, song, art, writing, rhythmic movement and percussion, social and communal customs and pastimes where everyone participates.

Fictional / distant stories
- Enacting stories and plays that are already written. Can include myths, fables, fairy tales and other well-known stories. Can also include watching a play / interacting with characters.
- Ensemble-created plays or improvised dramas that are wholly fictional or based on historical / news events.

Fictionalized personal stories
- Ensemble-created drama with fictionalized scenes and characters; can include stories and themes that have arisen from more personal work.
- Metaphor is frequently used to create distance from personal stories and to contain powerful themes.

Positive personal stories
- Participants enact directly personal stories focusing on neutral, positive, safe or non-troubling topics.
- Participants may also enact situations they desire or may face in the future, i.e. 'rehearsals for life.'

Traumatic and resolved stories
- Participants enact directly personal stories about troubling issues that are resolved – for example, stories of healing, growth, or triumph over adversity. The rehearsal process itself may be a part of the healing and growth.
- Important processes include informed consent, group support, sharing experiences, validation and witnessing.

Traumatic and unresolved stories
- Participants enact directly personal, unresolved stories for the purpose of therapy or growth. Important processes include informed consent, confidentiality, witnessing, group sharing and follow-up support.
- The focus on unresolved personal stories can make participants highly vulnerable and requires experienced facilitators and the guidance or supervision of a qualified therapist with relevant training, e.g. psychodrama, drama therapy.

LOW

Fictional / distant stories: This icon — a scroll and quill — is meant to convey the idea of fictional and creative scripts and stories.

Fictionalised personal stories: This icon — a person behind a mask — is meant to indicate that the personal version of a story has been obscured by 'masking' key elements through the process of fictionalisation.

Positive personal stories: This icon — a trophy cup — is meant to convey the idea of positive and rewarding personal experiences.
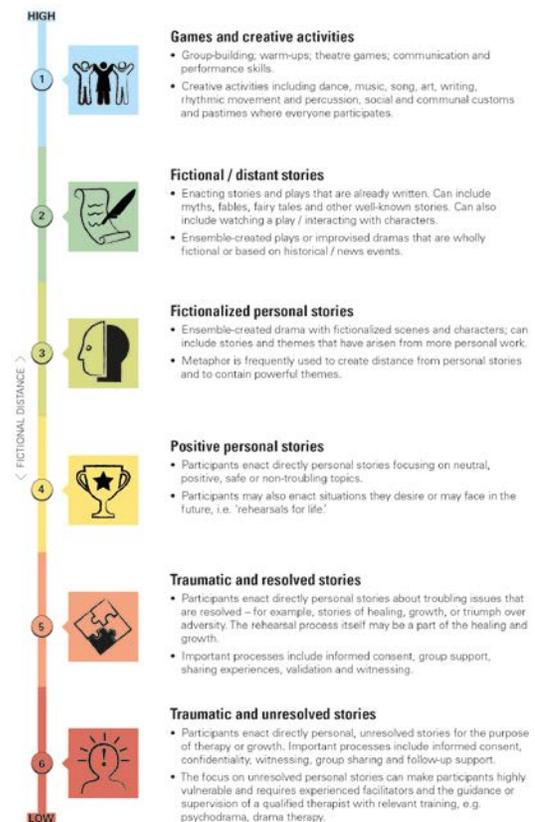
Difficult and resolved stories: This icon — a puzzle with the last piece fitted — conveys the idea that an event is resolved, i.e. the last piece of the puzzle has been put together, and the result is an image that is complete and intact.

Difficult and unresolved stories: This icon — a person in an alarmed state with an exclamation mark — is meant to convey the idea of material that is still potentially alarming, unresolved and highly charged.

Factors influencing which part of the Spiral is used

During theatre workshops, there are a range of factors that influence the degree of personal disclosure by participants. Some of the main factors are:

Contract with the group. In some professional, institutional or other contexts, it is inappropriate to ask participants to reveal personal material. In such instances, the facilitator must lead the workshop in such a way that scenes and discussion keep to the outer rings of the Spiral.

Comfort with personal disclosure. In general, theatre workshops start with general exercises at the outer edge of the Spiral, and work inward as appropriate. Some individuals in the group may be comfortable working at the centre of the Spiral (e.g. with a great deal of self-disclosure around sensitive topics), while others would prefer to be on the outer Spiral edge (i.e. disclosing very little of their personal life). This may shift during the course of a single session, and indeed it may shift during the course of an exercise. This is a dynamic factor and subject to continual shift which is highly multi-factorial.

Personal focus. Similarly, the level of focus on any individual is an important factor. In high focus activities, the whole of the group's attention is on one or two individuals for a significant amount of time. The focus is higher still when the nature of the material portrayed is highly personal and / or autobiographical. In

general, groups need to begin with low focus activities, and only later, if appropriate, move to medium and high focus activities.

Vulnerability and risk. It may be that the participants have had experiences that make them vulnerable in certain ways that require work at a distance, i.e. at the outer rings of the Spiral. Issues such as unresolved trauma or loss, current addiction, recent victimisation, social isolation, illness, or other forms of current or ongoing danger, may mean — in certain contexts — that work needs to stay at the outer rings of the Spiral.

Readiness level of the group. Some groups will need a great deal of work using games, exercises, group building and ice breaking activities at the outer edge of the Spiral in order to build enough trust and cohesiveness to move inward on the Spiral and reveal anything of themselves and their personal stories.

Practitioner / director skill and training. Practitioners and directors must work with an awareness of how far their training has prepared them to safely work with participants' personal material, particularly troubling, unresolved or traumatic material. Where they have not had such training and preparation, practitioners are well advised to work in the outer parts of the Spiral.

Indicators that it may be appropriate to work closer to the centre of the Spiral. When the group members have agreed that they wish to work with more personal material and around sensitive topics, and where it is appropriate to do so, the practitioner may choose to 'spiral in' with the group and work at levels 5 and 6. To do so, the practitioner will need to have sensitivity and awareness around key indicators that signal whether or not a given participant is ready to work on such a personal and sensitive level of disclosure. As a general principle, the practitioner should aim to work within the participant's *zone of proximal development*, that is, to present sufficient challenge to offer opportunities for the participant to genuinely develop, without stretching them so far that they panic or shut down. This is a key pedagogical principle set forth by Vygotsky (1978) and is a cornerstone concept

within educational and therapeutic contexts (Vygotsky, 1978). Key indicators that you are working within the zone of proximal development include:

1. Is the participant working spontaneously and creatively at their current stage of disclosure, such that they can make an informed and reflective decision about whether to move to a higher level of disclosure?

2. How integrated is the participant with the rest of the group? If they reveal personal and sensitive information about themselves, are they likely to find support from the group? How integrated is the group generally?

3. Is the participant able to take a graduated approach to the telling of their story? For example, if may be best to tell the story using a titrated approach: First, tell the story verbally. Then, if ready and able and if it is appropriate, set the scene and tell the story as a narrated scene with actor / participants moving in silence (or, alternatively, play the story as a radio play, again with no action). After this, if the participant is able to go to the next level of enactment, stage the scene in increments, using any or all techniques as needed to regulate distance. At this point, the participant telling the story should normally be out of the scene and someone else plays their own role. At some point, the participant may be able to go into the scene in their own role. This is not a strict requirement and there are many instances where it is more appropriate if they do not go into their own role, particularly if it is a moment where they were traumatised. This sort of reenactment typically demands a great deal of training and sensitivity on the part of the practitioner, in order to avoid re-traumatising the participant.

Drama-based strategies for regulating distance

In order to make best use of the Spiral, practitioners should be aware of the array of techniques that can create distance between a participant's personal story and the scenes created from their story. Even if there is no fictional distance, many of these techniques can still be used to regulate the pace and intensity of the

material for the individual. Such techniques, which can be used at any ring of the Spiral, include:

Character variations

- Using fictional names.
- Having other people play the role of the person whose story is represented.
- Changing the ages or other particulars of the characters such as their gender, occupation, national origin, social roles or other cultural specifics.
- Creating characters whose personality is similar to but not exactly like the person whose story is in focus.
- Similarly, creating characters that amalgamate, or merge, several people.
- Using selected elements or characters from the original, but translating them into other contexts.
- Adding or subtracting characters.

Scenes / Plot / Theme variation

- Amalgamating several stories or story elements into one.
- Altering the plot and introducing new plot twists for the purposes of dramatisation.
- Focusing on the *theme* of the original source material, and changing some or all of the particulars. This can include working entirely in metaphor.
- Similarly, working in abstraction, at the level of aesthetic and emotional truth (the 'heart's truth'), without 'pinning down' meanings. With some scenes or passages of the drama, not making literal sense may be the best way to convey the effect you intend. This would be the stage equivalent of Lewis Carroll's poem *The Jabberwocky,* where it is

precisely because we cannot accurately determine the meaning of every word (many of them are invented), that the imagination is sparked and our creative contribution to the meaning is required. Many of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poems work in similar ways, using neologisms that convey thematic resonance but which are not defined words.

- Combining the person's story with a well-known story, i.e. using their story as the basis of a new version of *Red Riding Hood*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lord of the Rings*, etc.

- Bringing in new or unusual perspectives. For example, imagined characters or representing real people but from other times and places (or other types of anachronism). Or, imagining the story from the point of view of an inanimate object, or from the point of view of another observer, or from an animal such as the family pet. Or, telling the story from one's own point of view at different points in time, including the future, or from a different internal point of view or aspect of self (my panicked self versus my reflective self).

Time / Setting variation

- Changing the time period of the play. For example, setting it in another time, altering the amount of time elapsed during the story, or moving back and forth through time.
- Using different settings which are real places.
- Using fictional settings, either lightly or strongly fictionalised (i.e. near or far in metaphorical 'distance' from the personal stories of those present).

Techniques / Conventions

- Using theatrical stylising techniques and conventions, e.g. freeze frame, fast forward, flashback, reverse / rewind, voiceover, silent acting, aside, direct address to the audience, soliloquy, segue.

- Using a 'stop / start' control mechanism, e.g. giving the person whose story is being shared a 'remote control' which can start or stop (or rewind, pause, fast forward, mute, etc.) the action. Such a theatrical device can offer the person a sense of being able to control the intensity of the impact of telling / sharing their story.

- Using the distancing effect of having a play within a play.

- Breaking the action with intrusions such as anachronisms, or consciously adjusting the 'frame' around the story, for example by alternating between the 'as if' world of the story and the 'here and now' world of the storyteller / performer. Or, between the 'as if' world of the story and another 'as if' – including moments that happened during the process of researching or creating the performance / script. There are many ways of making explicit the act of story-making and story-telling, and playing with the six-way transactions between storyteller, actors, director, characters, story and audience.

- Similarly, making explicit the processes behind the performance. For example, noting that some of the story is 'real' and some is not — but not necessarily making explicit what is and is not 'real.' Or, making explicit reference to the rehearsal process and the decision-making process used in rehearsal.

- Using story telling devices such as a third party who tells the story having witnessed it or heard about it. Similarly, a portion of the story could be revealed via the arrival of a letter, a text, an email, or some other form of 'words from afar.' This could also include words read from a diary.

- There are many ways to convey the 'absent presence' (Mahfouz, 2012) of a character, such as sound effects, recorded or offstage voices, an overheard conversation where the people are not seen, projected film or still images of the person, a drawing of the person or a drawing made by the person, the person's signature on a document, a gesture or movement used by the person, or a mark of some kind left behind by the

person - for example, a special symbol associated with them (Heathcote, 1984: 166-7).

- Absent presence can also be conveyed by the impersonation of the absent person, bringing them to life in front of the audience. It can also be conveyed by the presence of an unopened gift addressed to them, or another of the person's possessions or an object that represents them or symbolically brings them 'into the room' (war medals are an example of this).

- Musical themes or sound or lighting themes are another way to convey 'absent presence' — an example might include a character's signature tune, or signature instrument, noise or voice, being heard, in combination with some other signal of their presence (e.g. one of their possessions). A related example would be music or sounds that the person loves or loved. Further examples include footprints, an empty throne or seat, a photograph, an empty picture frame, a shadow, a riderless horse, a historical document or historical record or reference to the person, or an item of clothing draped over the back of a chair or hung on a washing line. Any of these ideas can be augmented with elements of interaction and 'completion' by the audience. For example, a character may give the audience an opportunity to hold an object that came from the actual place or scene being described. Or, as another example, the audience may be given scripted dialogue to read, which is the verbatim speech by a person being represented or discussed.

Aesthetic devices

- Finding a genre, theatrical style or trope that will transform the story in some way, e.g. comedy, drama, adventure-thriller, film noir, opera / musical, Elizabethan drama, documentary, faux documentary ('mockumentary'), soap opera, reality TV or 'augmented reality' TV show, courtroom drama, police procedural, rom-com, sci-fi, buddy movie, the war film, 'quest' drama, vaudeville, children's TV, game show, nature

programme, awards ceremony, talent show, music video, radio play, food or travel programme, news programme, satire, parody, circus sideshow, Greek tragedy, fairy tale, shaggy dog story, the tale of the underdog triumphing against the odds, parable, fable, myth, superhero story, man vs. nature, deus ex machina, etc.

- Using a talk show format, where the person is interviewed on stage. A variation that can be useful: While they talk, scenes are played out to illustrate the stories they tell.

- Using a voiceover or otherwise using a narrator role.

- Multi-media, for example film or slide projections or audio voices, music or environmental sounds. Such a technique could be used, for example, to interweave a personal story with the social / cultural context of the time. An example would someone narrating or enacting a scene from their life, while on the backdrop a scene from their location at the time they are describing is projected, and we hear the sounds associated with what they are describing. While this is not, strictly speaking, a distancing technique, it does embed the individual's story within a broader social and cultural context, which is a form of regulating distance in that it emphasises connection to place and context, rather than isolation and solipsism.

- Finding a game or other activity that metaphorically captures some of the key elements of the person's story. For example, if their story involves losing something valuable to them, the group can play the game of hide and seek and weave this into the drama.

- Similarly, using symbolic or metaphorical actions, objects or environmental factors that chime with or underscore the truth or essence of a story, character or plot element. Example: a cleansing rain at a moment of transition during the process of grieving, a light coming on when truth is illuminated, or a needle skipping at the end of a record as a relationship comes to an end.

- A related technique would be to make tangible what the character relates as their subjective reality, or their metaphorical or imaginary or desired reality. As an example, a character may be hearing voices in their head, and we hear the voices. Or a character may be imagining a world where reassuring characters come to comfort them at night, and we meet these characters. As a further example, a character may imagine a hoped-for scenario where they have a super-power, or where the world is transformed somehow, or where they (if blinded) regain their sight — and we see them with this superpower, or in this altered world, or with sight restored.

- Using visual or sound-based motifs. For example, sounds and music of a particular time or place, or design motifs, objects, props, food, colours, actions or activities associated with particular times, places, events, populations or occupations.

- Other aesthetic techniques of distancing might include various adaptations of verbatim techniques. For example, the original words of the people who lived the actual events could be audio recorded and replayed during performance, with the actors lip-syncing their words and acting in time to the audio soundtrack.

- Proximity and related variables: Playing with qualities such as big versus small, close versus far, voiced versus silent, loud and quiet, moving and still, observer and observed.

- Involve the audience as characters in the verbatim drama, e.g. representing people in the real life story. Example: Hand dialogue cards to audience members, which they read as part of the scene. The dialogue is the real life dialogue from the real life person, i.e. their exact words.

Process variations

During the process of theatre-making with personal stories, the practitioner can work with the group to set in place various conventions that can help to regulate

distance in practical ways. For example, you can establish a convention whereby the teller of the story stands apart from the actors and the scene, in effect creating space between themselves and their story. In such an instance, someone else would be playing the role of the teller in the story, as the teller stands apart from the scene.

Similarly, during the process of creating scenes based on real life experiences, the teller of the story can also be the director of the scene (with the drama practitioner offering guidance as needed). This can reaffirm for the teller that they will retain control over the story and how it is told. In addition, by taking the role of the director, and facilitating a repeated rehearsal of the material, this process can help to take the emotional heat out of a memory, and help the teller of the story to achieve mastery and confidence in relation to a story and memory that may previously have been destabilising and / or unresolved.

Applying the Spiral: Some conclusions

This chapter has explained the Drama Spiral and the process of research and field testing that led to the initial development and subsequent refinement of the Spiral. At the outset of the study, I was curious to discover whether it would be possible to delineate clear markers between theatre and therapy. In my own practice as a theatre maker who also trained as a psychodrama psychotherapist, at the outset of this study I felt able to make clear distinctions between work that I would consider to be within the domain of theatre and drama workshops, and work focused on individual and group psychotherapy. However, during the process of this investigation, this distinction has been challenged time and again by productions I have seen that were both successful theatre performances and also therapeutic for the performer / creators and the audiences. What has become clear to me during the course of this study is that it is no longer possible to place clear markers down regarding what material is reserved for the theatre and what material is reserved for the therapy room. My field research has provided ample

evidence of good theatre practice addressing even the most extreme forms of dangerous human experience, enacted by the very people who experienced the danger. Consequently I conclude that, when determining what is appropriate material for the theatre practitioner to include in the theatre-making process, it is not how personal the material is, or even how traumatising the material is — including direct experience of war and battle, devastating injury, injury, illness, accident, sexual abuse, murder, rape, torture and political oppression. All of these types of experience can be and indeed have been dramatised, not just as first person narratives, but in some cases by the person themselves, i.e. the person who experienced the traumatic event in the first place. One could argue that this is the place where the distinction between theatre and therapy reaches a vanishing point.

Reflecting on the research and process of refining the gradations of personal disclosure contained in the Drama Spiral, I would propose that the more useful distinction is not in the 'resolved' or 'unresolved' nature of the content. Instead, I would propose these four factors as being more relevant when making decisions about which part of the Spiral to focus on:

1) *The skills, ethics and values of the practitioner.* This includes appropriate supervision and oversight of the practitioner.

2) *The readiness of the group.* This includes the group's ability to support the person who is telling their story, to ensure as far as possible that the process of telling and creating theatre from their story is a positive and / or healing experience for them.

3) *The personal readiness and resilience of the participant telling their story.* There are many factors that influence how ready a person feels to share their story and / or to work with others to recreate their story. Practitioners will consider factors such as how integrated the person is in the group,

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how stable they are in terms of their interactions in the group, and how they cope at each stage of telling their story. Given sufficient internal strength and interpersonal functioning, participants might be able to make use of theatre process at any part of the Spiral.

4) *The correct context for and framing of the process.* This includes timing, recruitment, preparation, choosing appropriate modes of presenting the work, mediation and integration with other systems and agencies to support the participants / performers, and follow-up. This also includes gaining informed consent and making people fully aware of the possible consequences of involvement.

While reflecting on the writings of Schön (1983: 42), where he addresses the roles and functions of the reflective practitioner, the authors Hughes, Kidd and McNamara (2011) each offer a case study serving as an exemplar of research in practice. They make use of Schön's evocative metaphor distinguishing between the 'high, hard ground' of evidence-based theory and technique, and the 'swampy lowland' of messy human ambiguity, multiple concerns and conflicting needs. I am tempted to extend Schön's metaphor and suggest that one way of describing the intent of the Drama Spiral is that it is meant to serve as a bridge connecting the swampy lowland of 'confusing "messes"' that resist easy solutions or simplification, and the hard, higher ground of empirically supported theory and technique. To the extent that it can serve as a bridge between the low and high ground, the Drama Spiral can be a useful reference point for the drama practitioner. As mentioned towards the start of this chapter, it can also serve as a useful lens through which to critically analyse participatory theatre generally and the theatre of personal stories more specifically.

To elaborate further, the Drama Spiral is intended as a practical tool for the theatre director, workshop leader, or applied arts practitioner who seeks to

incorporate the personal stories of participants. The Spiral offers a template for decision making and structuring sessions, with the aim of improving safe practice while also giving practitioners and participants a way to share understanding about the theatre process. The Spiral is not a cookbook, offering a recipe for designing successful workshops. It is instead a kind of road map, featuring landmarks, possible destinations, suggested routes, sights of interest, and hazards to avoid. It is then down to the skill of the facilitator to find, in collaboration with colleagues and participants, the destination and the means and route to get there.

My intention in offering this structure is that it helps participatory theatre work to stay ethical and informed, and also sensitive to the needs, vulnerabilities, and potentials of everyone concerned. I also hope that the Spiral offers theatre practitioners a useful practical resource to help their decision making and negotiation of risk, and prompts the exploration of new modes of working that generate new ideas and move beyond familiar tropes.

When we elicit participants' stories and work with them in a drama process, what is crucial is not really whether or not we focus on injury and risk or on only positive stories; what is crucial is the skill of the practitioner in staying focused on ethical processes, working collaboratively in transparently negotiated processes with groups. For some groups, staying metaphorical will be where they feel able to work. Other groups may wish to portray their story in direct terms. With appropriate precautions and processes in place and with a reflexive, nuanced approach, skilled theatre practitioners ought to be able to operate across the full spectrum of theatrical forms, from fourth-wall, fictional stories to the up-close-and-personal forms that include autobiographical performances around even the most vulnerable and risky topics.

To do this, the theatre practitioner must have a solid grasp of the terrain she is working within, and the demarcations within the terrain that keep the work within appropriate borders. Where drama processes directly access or explicitly refer to the personal and collective stories of participants, the theatre practitioner is obligated to work within a coherent ethical framework of practice which includes a

structured, transparent approach at each stage of the process. Recognising this, the theatre practitioner working with people's personal stories needs to be conscious of how far 'into the Spiral' one goes with the group. Moreover, the practitioner needs to work with the insight, broad view, ethics, and integrity to ask searching questions about the motives, aims, parameters, and potential short, medium, and long-term impact of the work on the participants, audiences, and wider society. This is the reason for developing the Spiral.

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Chapter Four: Intentions

The integrative imperative in the theatre of personal stories

What I actually needed to write was the truth about where I was at. One of the things I wanted to explore most in the show was a sense of vulnerability and emotional nudity, and so the devising process was hard for me but truly beneficial for the show that we created through it. I want people who have been through what I went through to be inspired by this show to reclaim their lives and rise from it.

<div align="right">

Urielle Klein-Mekongo, on the intentions of
her solo performance piece, *Yvette* (Vile, 2017)

</div>

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the intentions of the theatre of personal stories. I argue that the more personal and sensitive the material, the more crucial it becomes to have clear intentions and a clear focus on the integrative potential of the process and output for a given theatre project. This becomes particularly crucial when working with personal stories focusing on difficult and unresolved issues, including psychological trauma and unresolved loss.

Two key questions underpin this chapter. First, how can the psychotherapy modalities of psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy — both of which use personal narrative as a healing element — provide a well-theorised model of bio-psycho-social integration for theatre practitioners who are working with personal narrative? And second, how can the process of accessing, recollecting, sharing, enacting and presenting a personal story help people, or potentially harm them? In addressing these questions, I will argue that one of the primary intentions of the theatre of personal stories should be bio-psycho-social integration, that is, at some level, promoting the integration of a person's biological, psychological and / or

social functioning such that the person is better able to live well (i.e. biologically and psychologically) as a member of their community (i.e. socially). The bio-psycho-social approach to human wellbeing was introduced in the 1970s by psychiatrist George Engel, who proposed the model to counter what was then the dominant biomedical model, in favour of a more systemic and holistic approach to human illness and wellbeing (Engel, 1977).

I draw upon theory and practice in the fields of psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy to describe what is meant by the term 'integration' and also in order to provide support for my argument that highly personal work focused on unresolved difficulties requires some degree of integrative focus or intent. I argue more specifically that, when working with stories of unresolved difficulties, the theatre practitioner is doing work that overlaps with therapy, and rather than denying this or shying away from this, the practitioner can greatly increase the aesthetic power of their work and its integrative potential by tapping into the vast array of action methods utilised in active and experiential therapeutic forms such as psychodrama and the integrative approach of attachment narrative therapy. To neglect the integrative potential of such sensitive and personal work risks not only misses out on the potential inspiration that can derive from understanding psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy, but also risks perpetuating dysfunction and prolonging or exacerbating suffering and the unresolved nature of the person's story. I will also argue that the process of accessing, recollecting, sharing, enacting and presenting a personal story can be integrative in itself.

To briefly re-cap a point made in the introductory chapter in my coverage of Flyvbjerg's adaptation of Aristotle's concept of phronesis, applied phronesis can help the theatre practitioner to focus on four key questions before and during the theatre-making process:

1) What are the intentions and potential outputs of this theatre-making process?
2) Whose interests are being served and what are the power relations embedded in this process?
3) Is the process helpful or integrative in some way?

4) What do we need to keep in mind, and what changes do we need to make, to keep things on course and to ensure the process is responsive to all perspectives?

(Based on Flyvbjerg, 2004: 302)

In developing my argument regarding the integrative imperative in the theatre of personal stories, I am focused primarily on questions one and three from this list, which focus on intentions and integration. These factors are crucial when undertaking theatre based work with people's personal stories because of the potential sensitivities of the work and the degree of personal exposure involved for participant-performers. A lot is at stake for them, and also, potentially, for audiences.

Intentions of using people's personal stories in the theatre

Why use people's personal stories on the stage? After all, there is no shortage of material from the existing canon of dramatic fiction, and no shortage of playwrights creating new work. Further stated, in participatory theatre workshops, working at the fictional level is very common, and groups often become very energised when creating their own fictional plays and performing them. So what is it about using peoples' personal stories that has a particular attraction or advantage, and what are the intentions behind doing this, particularly when the stories focus on unresolved difficulties for participant-performers?

If we first consider the aims and intentions of the theatre of personal stories that are also common to most popular and public theatre, we can include commonly understood intentions such as the intentions to entertain, inform, challenge, provoke thought, enlighten, to move people emotionally, and to provide a communal experience of sharing, of beauty, of healing, of celebration, of commemoration and encountering what it is to be human. Such intentions are as old as theatre and storytelling. The intentions of the theatre of personal stories also shares much in common with all participatory arts forms, including intentions such as building confidence, enhancing communication skills, expanding the role

repertoire, building a sense of moral agency, and enhancing and building connection through collaborative interdependence (Berkeley, 2005).

The theatre of personal stories also shares some intentions in common with radical, political, activist and social justice oriented forms of theatre. This was a topic in chapter one. These aims include providing a platform for neglected voices to be heard, raising awareness of important or neglected issues, cultural and political resistance, political and legislative change, provoking action, including practical help for the participants, and, when needed, to provide a counter-narrative about a person or a group of people when a prevailing narrative is harmful, incomplete, prejudicial or otherwise is in need of updating. Further aims include re-examining the basic questions of how to run a just society, and exposing the harms and injustices of dominant discourses.

These intentions, as widely varied and important as they are, can be fully addressed at rings one and two of the Drama Spiral — in other words, through fictional means and through distant non-fictional stories (i.e. true stories that are not drawn directly from the life narratives of the participant-performers). At ring three of the Spiral, we also have the chance to play with reality and fiction, and explore the realm of the fictionalised true story. This is a place on the Spiral where we can play with ideas of reality and fiction, what is 'me' and 'not me,' and to expand our self-definition of what we think of when we think of 'me.' The benefits and intentions here may include personal development, role expansion, boosting creativity and confidence, and possibly developing roles and aspects of one's identity that run directly counter to those roles and aspects of identity that feel broken, debilitated or shut down in some way — for example, a version of myself that is the hero of a story, or a lover, or a creator, or a leader.

Moving inward on the Spiral, towards rings 4, 5 and 6, moves us to the directly personal level and aims and intentions that are more exclusive to the realm of the directly personal. Intentions that are more associated with the theatre of personal stories at rings four and five include: providing a space where personal stories of strength, of success, of positive life experience, or of triumph over adversity can

be shared in the presence of affirming witnesses — many of whom may have had similar experiences or who may be in the process of recovery from similar adverse experiences. Importantly, many people feel the need to help others when they have suffered and been through a process of recovery and healing. The message here would be that 'I want some good to come of this, so that others do not suffer as I have.' The quotation from Urielle Klein-Mekongo, at the start of this chapter, speaks to this intention. Often, this motivation is linked to an impulse to break the cycle of suffering or violence, and to promote human well-being and social progress by sharing one's own story of recovery.

At rings 4 and 5, and especially at ring 5, there is also a type of existential encounter not available to the theatre of fictional stories or fictionalised personal stories. There is a profound encounter that happens when people share such directly personal stories on the stage — a sense conveyed of 'I am here and here is my story. Who are you, and what is your story?' This is very different from encounters in the traditional theatre. This is a more direct encounter, and it also has an insistent force in the form of the presence of the person themselves.

In this age of increasing candour, where the private is ever more public, and where reality is debased with the steady stream of 'fake news' claims, the theatre of personal stories might be understood as a participant in a kind of ever-ascending arms race to try to achieve some level of real understanding by hearing directly from the source. In the age of social media — where rumour and hearsay have explosive amplitude, and where an ill-judged tweet can cause a media storm leading towards ever-thickening obfuscation of facts — we are hungry for truth, and to hear it from the source. Hannah Arendt identified the crucial role of providing public spaces so that the affairs of humankind are brought into the light, as an alternative to the degradation of the truth that she investigated in her historical analysis of totalitarianism. She makes this point in 1968 when she writes:

> If it is the function of the public realm to throw light on the affairs of men [sic] by providing a space of appearances in which they can show in deed and word, for better and worse, who they are and what

they can do, then darkness has come when this light is extinguished by 'credibility gaps' and 'invisible government,' by speech that does not disclose what is but sweeps it under the carpet, by exhortations, moral and otherwise, that under the pretext of upholding old truths, degrade all truth to meaningless triviality.

<div align="right">Hannah Arendt (1968: viii)</div>

Arendt's observation has extra resonance today, where credibility gaps in public discourse are in the news daily and where information overload can drown out what is significant. Looked at through the lens of Arendt's observation, we can see that the theatre of personal stories is one of the ways that we have of trying to access accurate stories that 'throw light' on human affairs and cut through layers of misinformation.

Intentions at the sixth ring of the Spiral: Integrating psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy in the theatre of personal stories

The theatre of personal stories at ring six has a range of intentions that differ from those covered in rings one through five. This is because ring six of the Spiral represents that part of the theatre process which directly incorporates the personal stories of the participant-performers around themes and topics that are both difficult and unresolved. Theatre practice at this part of the Spiral provides a space where unresolved stories of suffering, of woundedness, of shame or ostracism, of prejudice, of weakness, of regret, illness, powerlessness or pain can be shared and witnessed in the presence of containing, empathic, accepting audiences, many of whom may share similar experiences, and so wish to not only offer support so that the tellers do not feel alone, but also to share and work through their own suffering.

To clarify the terminology, an 'unresolved' issue is one that has been incompletely or insufficiently processed by the mind and expressed in the body. This means that the body may still be holding on to the unexpressed emotion and

the mind may still be preoccupied by the experience, or the mind may dismiss the importance and impact of the experience, or the mind may distort information by taking on disproportionate responsibility for one's role in the situation, or the mind over- or under-anticipates the risk of such an event happening again (Crittenden, 2015; van der Kolk, 2014).

Where theatre practice is focused on difficult and unresolved stories from the lives of participant-performers, I would firmly argue that this brings with it an ethical imperative that theatre practitioners should have a clear focus and intention, as well as a basic knowledge of therapeutic principles and how action-based methods have historically been used to promote healing and integration. At the sixth ring of the Spiral, typical intentions of working may include work facilitated to promote healing and integrative functioning in the participants, for example by helping them to express blocked actions and blocked emotion in a safe, witnessing space, supported by others. Other intentions may include helping participant-performers to transform pain into something more life affirming, or telling their stories to help give meaning to their suffering and to raise the awareness of others to hopefully prevent further suffering.

Where participant-performers are portraying stories of specific types of illness or conditions, additional intentions may include recruiting more awareness of and funding for treatments and prevention of the illness, a prompt for more public sensitivity, less prejudice, more compassion, more awareness, and also, so that people will take action, seek treatment, not be afraid to speak out, and not be afraid to offer help or support if they think someone needs help.

When such stories are shared on the stage, there is also the possibility for aesthetic transformation into a story of survival and resilience, in a communal setting of sharing, celebration and collectively raised consciousness. Knowing that a story is someone's personal story makes an enormous difference, and having the actual person present and telling their story multiplies the effect even further. The effect is in the experience but also knowing the context of the experience. One is 'play' — i.e. safe practice — and one is real. The two forms are distinct:

one has real world consequences, and the other leaves room for separation from reality.

It is also worth noting another important distinction between process-focused workshops and performance-focused projects. In the theatre of personal stories, some workshops will focus primarily on *process*. This type of work tends to focus on healing and personal growth, without any expectation of performance as an outcome. Examples include psychodrama, dramatherapy and certain hybrid forms where theatre approaches are used for specific healing and developmental purposes as described, for example, in Balfour et al (2014), Boal (1995), Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman (1994), Jennings (2009, 2011) and Baim et al (2002). Other approaches lead towards an *end product* such as a sharing of the work to colleagues or fellow residents in an institution, or performances for stakeholder audiences, invited audiences or the general public. These performance-oriented approaches can include highly autobiographical material, as described in Pendzik et al (2016), Saldaña (2005; 2011) and Sepinuck (2013). This type of work also includes a variety of approaches where participant-performers are helped to create plays based on their real-life experiences. Two examples of this approach are described in detail in chapter five. Whether the theatre workshops are primarily focused on process or on the end product, i.e. a performance, either way, all rings of the Drama Spiral may be used — including ring six.

In order to theorise and better understand how it is that the theatre of personal stories, and particularly theatre practice at ring six of the Spiral, can promote well-being and help to resolve difficult stories, I will focus on two related fields of theory and practice, namely, psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy. This will lead to a more general integration of these two models of theory and practice with the theatre of personal stories, to provide a theoretical basis for working at ring six of the Drama Spiral.

Working therapeutically with personal narrative: Psychodrama

As briefly described in chapter one, psychodrama is a therapeutic form of theatre in which people are helped to explore their psychosocial and emotional difficulties using sensitively guided enactment (Blatner, 1997; J. D. Moreno, 2014). Psychodrama uses a wide range of action-based techniques to help people examine troubling episodes from their life, their current or past relationships, unresolved situations, desired roles or inner thoughts, feelings and conflicts. The aims are to help the person to understand and transform the impact of these experiences and relationships, to test out new responses, and to promote insight, emotional release, resolution of trauma and loss, and, most of all, integration (Moreno and Moreno, 1975; Blatner, ibid.). Integration will be defined and explored later in this chapter.

Psychodrama was first devised in the 1920s and 30s by the psychiatrist Dr. Jacob Levy Moreno, and further elaborated over several decades in collaboration with his wife Zerka Toeman Moreno. Among Moreno's extensive writing, his essential texts include *Who Shall Survive* (1954) and *Psychodrama* (1946-1975, Volumes 1-3) (the latter two volumes co-authored with Zerka Moreno).

Psychodrama uses a very wide array of active techniques, and many of these have been incorporated into other therapies and indeed many of the techniques have also filtered through to drama and theatre practice. Moreno was a prolific innovator and published more than 300 books, chapters and articles. The far-reaching influence of his work led Eric Berne, the creator of Transactional Analysis, to observe, in writing about the work of Dr. Fritz Perls:

> In his selection of specific techniques, Dr. Perls shares with other 'active' psychotherapists the 'Moreno problem': the fact that nearly all known 'active' techniques were first tried out by Dr. Moreno in psychodrama, so that it is difficult to come up with an original idea in this regard.

> (Berne, 1970: 164)

Not only did Moreno's prolific invention influence the world of psychotherapy, as Berne observes here, his work also had a profound influence on the radical theatre experiments of the 1950s and 60s, while also influencing the emerging encounter movement (J. D. Moreno, 2014). As mentioned in chapter one, Moreno simultaneously ran a public psychodrama theatre in Manhattan from the 1940s to the 1960s while also running a hospital in Beacon, New York, where the psychodrama stage was the centerpiece of the therapy. As described in chapter one, theatre and therapy have overlapped considerably since the creation of western theatre thousands of years ago in Greece. Moreno's creation of psychodrama is a further development in keeping with a very ancient synergy between theatre and therapy. As Moreno observes,

> Theatre and therapy are closely interwoven. But also here there are many steps. There will be a theatre which is purely therapeutic, there will be a theatre which is free from therapeutic objects and then there will also be many intermediary forms.
>
> (Moreno, 1924: 16)

Put at its most succinct, rings 4, 5, and 6 of the Drama Spiral represent the 'intermediary forms' that Moreno writes of. And ring 6 is most closely related to what has become identified as clinical psychodrama, that is, the (in Moreno's terms) 'purely therapeutic' use of the theatre-based techniques and processes to assist people with unresolved difficulties from the past that negatively impact their current functioning. I would also emphasise that Moreno firmly identified from the start, as far back as 1924, that future psychodramatists would emerge from the theatre schools as well as the psychodrama training schools. Moreno signals this very clearly when he writes, referring to the need for talented psychodrama practitioners,

> Out of the thousands of theatre institutes and the growing number of psychodrama centres […] slowly new talents and methods will come into being. These will create the theatre of the future.
>
> (ibid: 16)

I think it is particularly noteworthy, as this quotation demonstrates, that Moreno, the creator of psychodrama, wanted his method to stay firmly affiliated with the theatre. Sadly, this originating impulse of Moreno's has largely been lost, and the two fields of practice — psychodrama and theatre — are almost totally estranged except at the margins. Theatre practitioners facilitating high focus personal stories may not have any knowledge at all of psychodrama, even when what is produced in the theatre workshop or on the stage is essentially a psychodrama. And psychodramatists may have little or no knowledge of how personal stories are used in the theatre or the wide literature, theory, research and practice within socially engaged, applied and participatory theatre. To underscore the important links between psychodrama and theatre, Sue Jennings reports that, during a conversation between eminent social theatre practitioners at a conference in Milan in 2002, Richard Schechner 'proposed that [social theatre] should become a term that encompassed all uses of theatre that were not commercial theatre, and that it should include dramatherapy and psychodrama' (Jennings, 2009: xv). Schechner's observation, reported by Jennings, is very much in keeping with Moreno's original vision for psychodrama.

Part of the impetus for undertaking this study has been my frustration at this estrangement, and my hope to join the small but growing contingent of practitioners who are interested in the links and synergistic possibilities of rejoining psychodrama with its theatre roots. When I work with theatre students and see their excitement about working with the ideas and structures within the Drama Spiral, which connects them to the therapeutic and transformational possibilities of theatre, I see them as the future navigators of this very fruitful terrain in the intermediate space between the purely aesthetic and the purely therapeutic theatre. This is why it is so important to include psychodrama and integrate its principles and techniques into the theatre of personal stories. As Schechner and many other theorists and researchers in theatre and performance theory have observed, theatre has always combined and interwoven, like a 'braid or helix' (Schechner, 2013: 80) the intentions of efficacy (focused on effecting change,

including personal change as well as political and social change) and entertainment (focused on aesthetics as a primary intention).

As I described in chapter one, while psychodrama is now a widely practised method across the world, in most countries where it is practised it has to a large extent lost sight of its theatrical roots and is mainly confined to the mental health professions. This separation has historical roots, in that J. L. Moreno was a psychiatrist and therefore the method was associated from the start with both the theatre and with the medical and psychological professions. This has led to some countries seeing psychodrama as the exclusive territory of medicine and psychology. As long as the mutual estrangement continues, theatre practitioners are cut off from almost one hundred years of research, writing and theatrical experimentation that is, at last count, represented in more than 7,300 publications exploring psychodrama and its effects, processes and influences (see, for example, the online bibliography of psychodrama at www.pdbib.org). For psychodramatists, I would equally make the point that the research and writing within the field of theatre and performance studies, and in particular the field of applied and participatory theatre, is a fruitful area to explore. There are informative accounts of this breach between psychodrama and the theatre in J. D. Moreno (2014), Scheiffele (1995) and Nolte (2014). Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman (1994) also write about the connections between psychodrama and the work of Augusto Boal, and Jennings (2009) is a useful resource exploring the links between theatre, therapy and activism.

Elements of psychodrama

There are five elements present in a psychodrama session:

The protagonist. The person whose story or issue is the primary focus of the session.

The auxiliary egos. Group members or trained members of staff who assume the roles of significant others in the drama. This may include significant people, objects or even aspects of the self or a person's internal world.

The audience / group. Group members who witness the drama and who may become involved as auxiliary roles. The emphasis is on creating a safe and supportive environment where each person is a potential therapeutic agent for the others.

The stage. The physical space in which the drama is conducted. It may be an actual stage or simply a designated space.

The director. The trained therapist who guides participants through each phase of the session.

These five elements of psychodrama are brought together into an integrated system. Psychodrama is intended to be 'an all-embracing medium, leading systematically to the heart of the [protagonist's] suffering, enabling the director, the protagonist, the auxiliary egos, and the group members, to become a cohesive force, welded together to maximise emotional learning' (Z. Moreno, 2006: 110).

Spontaneity and creativity

The underlying premise of psychodrama is that all human beings are born with an innate will to survive, which includes the drives of spontaneity and creativity. Spontaneity is the capacity to find adequate responses to new situations or new responses to old situations in order to best meet the challenges and opportunities that life presents. Moreno often wrote about the many forces within families and society that constrain spontaneity and creativity from infancy onwards, resulting in robot-like thinking, feeling and behaviour. One way to encapsulate the purpose of psychodrama is that it is a process of rediscovering and unblocking our innate spontaneity in order to 'heal ourselves' and free ourselves from the tendency towards becoming automatons. To further develop this point, we see that in the

terminology of psychodrama, the client is called the 'protagonist,' a term borrowed from the ancient Greek theatre meaning 'the first actor.' Psychodrama is intended to help each person find the courage to act with authenticity and to take centre stage as the primary actor in their own life story.

Encounter

An important aspect of psychodrama is that the client — i.e. the protagonist — is part of the action. As part of the action, they are encouraged to encounter the other people in the group. (Psychodrama is normally a group process, although it also used effectively in one-to-one sessions.) The challenge and energy of encounter is one of the prime healing forces in psychodrama; it is through authentic, 'here and now' encounter with other people that we are best able to gain an understanding of how our behaviour affects other people, to get feedback from others about how they perceive us, and hence to know if we are 'getting better.' The spontaneously offered hug from a fellow group member, or being held and accepted by another group member even when experiencing a 'messy' emotion, can generate profound emotional healing. At the same time, to hear another group member tell you that they perceive you in a different way than you intend — while often challenging and frustrating — can be a valuable source of insight about how you relate to other people.

The five types of catharsis

Catharsis is a term first used by Aristotle to describe how drama can lead to emotional purging among audience members. In psychodrama, we add some degree of refinement to the notion of catharsis and consider five different types of catharsis as important to healing and integration. Notably, catharsis is not restricted to audiences, as in Aristotle. Instead, catharsis in its various forms is for everyone present.

First, there is the *catharsis of insight*. This is like the 'light bulb moment' — a moment of insight into an aspect of one's life. For example, during role reversal as their mother or father, the protagonist may have an 'aha' experience of understanding what it was like for their parent when they experienced an earlier setback, how the experience affected them, and how the after-effects of the experience impacted their ability to parent the protagonist. Such forms of insight can be very helpful to protagonists in making sense of their life experience.

However, insight is in some ways just the start, because to know something is not the same as being able to act of this knowledge and understanding.[8] Next is the *catharsis of emotion,* particularly a release of deeply held emotions such as sadness, fear or anger. This is what is most commonly understood as catharsis when the term is used: the release of withheld emotion. In psychodrama, when the protagonist expresses a catharsis of emotion, this is often an emotion which has been suppressed for years or even decades, held in the body because it was not allowed expression at the time of the original event or suffering. J. L. Moreno writes about 'somatic catharsis,' that is, a 'purging or cleansing of any locus of the body' (Moreno, 1946: 16). In the catharsis of emotion, there may be physical, bodily purging which coincides with emotional purging. When this is the case, the expression of held-in emotion often brings with it a feeling of relief; holding in such emotion takes a lot of energy, which can now be re-focused onto healing and well-being.

There is another important form of catharsis, which is the *catharsis of integration.* Emotional release may have limited value if it is not then integrated into the person's psychosocial functioning. The catharsis of integration usually takes place towards the end of a psychodrama, when the protagonist is helped to put into practise their new learning and apply it to daily living. Role play and role training are important techniques used at this stage, where the protagonist is helped to enact new roles and new strategies. It should also be noted that, for

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[8] Augusto Boal was highly critical of emotional catharsis that did not lead to action (Boal, 2006: 54).

some people, particularly those who are typically overwhelmed by emotion, psychodrama can be used just as effectively to help them contain rather than express emotion, or to help them express the 'forbidden' emotion that they are not able to express (such as the anger behind sadness, or the fear beneath a defiant exterior). The catharsis of integration could be considered the primary therapeutic value of the method of psychodrama, a point emphasised by Feldhendler when he writes, 'The protagonist discovers, often with great relief, that what had previously been understood as an undeveloped, repressed or fixed part of one's character can, in fact, function as a valuable element in one's role repertoire' (Feldhendler, 1994: 93). We will return to the theme of integration for further investigation later in this chapter, and expand our consideration of this crucial process.

The fourth form of catharsis is the *catharsis of aesthetic transformation,* which has the potential to raise a theatre piece to a higher level of integration and a 'collective resonance' between performers and audiences (Pendzik, 2016: 63). In the catharsis of aesthetic transformation, the protagonist is helped to transform their suffering into something else, where the focus is on empowerment, healing, creativity and spontaneity. For example, the psychic wound of early abandonment may be transformed into a chorus of support from one's friends. Or the trauma of a physical attack might be transformed into a communal dance where everyone joins in a healing, rhythmic motion in support of the protagonist. Or, as Susana Pendzik describes, in recounting an autobiographical piece by a young woman, the trauma of sexual assault may be transformed with a powerful new image of shared strength: 'The lights go out, and after a few moments they go on again, showing [the protagonist] running on the spot, facing the audience, while a song by a famous female singer is played that speaks about freedom, hope and empowerment for women. One by one, group members join her, running with her as they look at each other supportively, creating a reassuring connection, until the stage is filled with a powerful group of running women' (Pendzik, 2016: 63). As these examples demonstrate, the aim of the catharsis of aesthetic transformation is to help the protagonist to find a way within their own creativity and with the support of others to transform their suffering into something that is more bearable

and possibly even something that can be re-framed as belonging to the past, which can stay in the past because it has been transformed into something that is now in the control of the creative capacities of the protagonist. There is also the possibility that the protagonist can be helped to see the ways in which they are stronger as a result of what they have survived, and that new possibilities may be there that were not there before. Here, I am thinking of those survivors of disasters, crime, trauma and illness who have gone on to contribute to society and to foster progress in many domains of human activity. (This has been conceptualised as *post-traumatic growth*, or *post-traumatic strength*, a positive re-framing of the possibilities for recovery in the aftermath of trauma.) Providing additional support for the idea of aesthetic transformation, Pendzik et al have observed that 'aesthetics and therapeusis are not mutually exclusive; more often than not, they powerfully coincide' (Pendzik et al, 2016: 7)

Finally there is the fifth type of catharsis — the *audience catharsis*. In this type of catharsis, we recognise that audiences can be very deeply affected by the psychodrama that they are witnesses to and participating in. In the same way that Aristotle recognised that spectators at Greek tragedies may experience powerful catharses of pity and fear, so too in the theatre of personal stories (including psychodrama) may audiences, group members, and indeed everyone present, experience healing catharsis.

Change

Psychodrama offers a medium for 'rewriting the script' of our lives and rehearsing new behaviours and roles. Where the issue is unresolved trauma and loss, it is necessary that the person have his or her suffering acknowledged and validated. Resolution is often achieved by revisiting the scene of the hurt in a structured way and providing an opportunity for emotional release and also a comforting and empowering new experience.

In its so-called 'classical' form, a psychodrama often begins with a current problem or difficulty and traces it back to earlier life situations. Here, the

protagonist may have the chance to experience what was missing but needed at that time. The enactment then returns to the present, where new learning can be integrated and put into practice. At the end of the drama, the group members share how they relate to the participant's issues and problems. The sharing portion of the session is very important, as it offers the group members an opportunity to speak about their own emotional burdens. It also lets the protagonist know that they are not alone in their suffering (Goldman and Morrison, 1984).

Clinical and non-clinical psychodrama

I make the distinction between clinical and non-clinical psychodrama. Non-clinical psychodrama is concerned with issues which do not de-stabilise the protagonist, which are focused on strengths and positive themes, and which typically address issues related to social integration, social functioning, current challenges and communication skills. Broadly speaking, non-clinical psychodrama is best associated with rings four and five of the Spiral. Clinical psychodrama addresses unresolved difficulties that are blocking the person in some way, and is more associated with ring six of the Spiral.

Psychodrama techniques

Psychodrama is notably different from talk-based therapy, because in psychodrama all aspects of life are not only discussed but are re-created, worked through in action and integrated in the 'here and now' of the session. This active involvement can deepen learning, recovery and growth (Kellermann, 1992). Key psychodrama techniques include:

Role reversal. In this technique, one person reverses roles (changes places) with another person and speaks from their point of view. It is a fundamental technique for encouraging empathy and insight into the mind of other people, and also for understanding the effects of one's behaviour on others. Role reversal is so crucial that it is often called the 'engine' that propels a psychodrama forward.

Doubling. Doubling can be helpful when people struggle to voice their authentic thoughts and feelings. In this technique, we stand or sit alongside the other person and try to become their 'double' by speaking what we imagine to be their inner thoughts, feelings and beliefs. The protagonist is then asked if the doubling statements resonates with them or not, and they are encouraged to speak if they find the words. Doubling is a very sensitive and subtle technique to get right, because it can easily become coercive, particularly with highly self-doubting protagonists or where the person doubling is experienced as more insightful or powerful. However, when done correctly and with sensitivity, it can make all the difference to a protagonist.

Parts of self / internal roles. In this technique, the participant is encouraged to speak from and embody the various 'parts' of himself, such as 'the part of me that hates myself and doesn't care about having a decent life' and 'the part of me that likes myself and wants to live a better life.' To borrow a phrase from Walt Whitman, we all contain multitudes within us, and this technique encourages us to get in touch with and embody our multiple internal roles and potentials — and to own them.

Role training / role play. This is perhaps the most widely adopted of the techniques derived from psychodrama. As the name implies, in role training the participant is encouraged to learn and practise virtually any human role, including the skills and strategies associated with those roles.

Empty chair. The protagonist speaks directly to a person, a group, or an aspect of the self as represented by an empty chair. This technique can be used to address unfinished business from the past or to have a 'conversation with myself,' to offer just two of the myriad applications of this technique. Using a chair in this way is often useful when it is too difficult to speak directly to a person.

Concretisation. In psychodrama, it is common to find ways of putting the 'inner world outside' by making the intangible real, or 'concrete.' So, objects, symbols,

drawings, chairs or other group members may be used to represent internal processes.

Mirror technique. The protagonist stands at the edge of the stage area while a scene from their life is played by the auxiliaries. It is as if they are looking into a mirror, or through a window, at an aspect of their life. This can bring insight, objective perspective and, in some cases, powerful catharsis of emotion as one sees from a distance what one cannot experience when immersed in the action.

Surplus reality. In the technique of surplus reality, the protagonist is allowed to say or do that which his or her life does not or cannot allow. For example, the protagonist may have the chance to have a crucial conversation with a loved one who is deceased, or to re-visit the past, or to imagine and enact a desired future scene or relationship, or encounter an imagined other person or a real person they have never met. Surplus reality can also be used to develop roles and skills for the future. As J.L. Moreno writes, 'there is in psychodrama a mode of experience, which goes beyond reality, which provides the subject with a new and more extensive experience of reality, a surplus reality [which is] an enrichment of reality by the investments and extensive use of imagination' (J. L. Moreno, 1965: 212). Surplus reality is often the most powerful part of a psychodrama. As Zerka Moreno observes:

> From psychodrama we know that the greatest depth of catharsis is not achieved through mirroring the past, however traumatic or instructive it might have been, but through representation of those dimensions, roles, scenes and interactions which life cannot allow.
>
> (Z. T. Moreno, 1982: 68)[9]

All of the psychodrama techniques — there are more than 150 of them, with countless variations — are intended to promote integrative functioning, personal development, sharing one's internal world with others, and promoting healing in the context of being among a supportive group of people. Many of these

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[9] With acknowledgments to Feldhendler (1994: 99) for identifying this quotation.

techniques are described in Z. T. Moreno (1959, 1965), Schutzenberger (2003), Wysong (2017), and Blatner (1997).

Psychodrama and the theatre of personal stories: A 'second world'

Over and above any use of techniques, it is important to understand the primary imaginative leap that Moreno made when he created psychodrama and its precursor, the theatre of spontaneity. Using his customary confidence and global vision for healing society, Moreno framed psychodrama as being an improvement on no less than the handiwork work of God, as described in Genesis 1:

> When God created the world in six days, he had stopped a day too early. He has given Man [sic] a place to live but in order to make it safe for him he also chained him to that place. On the seventh day, he should have created for Man a second world, another one, free of the first world and in which he could purge himself from it, but a world which would not chain anyone because it was not real. It is here where the theatre of spontaneity[10] continues God's creation of the world by opening for Man a new dimension of existence.

(Moreno, 1924: 22)

While Moreno's vision has an exhilarating scale of ambition, my main reason for including this quotation is that it demonstrates again how closely aligned Moreno's original vision for psychodrama was with the creative potential and processes of the theatre. It is with this quotation that we also have an almost complete alignment of the aims of psychodrama with the aims of the theatre of personal stories. For what is it to put our personal story on the stage if it is not in some ways to free us from the normal boundaries of time, to revisit experience, to examine meanings and imagine different possibilities and different futures? In this way, we are freed from the normal chains of existence, and able to transform stories of suffering into stories of healing and progress. We are able to make 'mistakes' in rehearsal and workshops without having to fear failure, getting it wrong, or being the subject of shaming ridicule for not being in some way up to

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[10] Moreno uses the term *theatre of spontaneity* in this quotation, but he could just as well have used the term psychodrama; the theatre of spontaneity was the precursor to psychodrama (Kent & Carter, 1974: 74).

scratch. The theatre of personal stories is, just like psychodrama, a type of 'second world' as Moreno describes, where we can go to explore possibilities and find comfort and consolation not available in the first, and to better prepare for the challenges we will face when we return to the first.

Exemplars from psychodrama practice

I have been a qualified practitioner of psychodrama since 1999, having trained in the method for five years. Since that time, I have progressed to become a senior trainer in the method, and co-director of a training school for psychodramatists. In my clinical work, I have primarily worked in probation settings, in prisons, in forensic hospitals and in private practice. With this array of experience I have become highly aware of the boundaries and overlaps between my work as a theatre practitioner and my work as a psychodrama psychotherapist, and these dual roles have provided an underpinning for this study. In the following examples, I offer a brief sampling of psychodramas that I have directed in public groups and in institutions. In each case, I hope it will be clear that these clinical psychodramas use techniques and processes that are recognisably related to theatre processes, although adapted for use in clinical, psychotherapeutic work (names and details have been changed to preserve confidentiality):

> Gerry has suffered a string of relationship breakdowns. During his psychodrama, he traces his difficulties back to his early relationship with his mother, who beat him with a stick on many occasions when he was a child, and who was also very verbally abusive to him. She often screamed at him that she wished he was dead. Speaking to a group member who is in the role of his mother, Gerry angrily expresses his unmet need for love and care from her, and his anger at her violence and abuse. Within the drama, Gerry then experiences an emotionally attuned mother. He allows himself to be held, and he weeps. He speaks about all the times he has run away from intimacy, or treated women badly because he could not bear to be vulnerable and then rejected by them. His more attuned, psychodramatic mother encourages him to form intimate relationships and to allow himself to love and be loved, without fear. Following this, Gerry is given time to

practise a new way of being in intimate relationships, drawing from this experience of attuned mothering in the psychodrama.

Meredith chooses a group member to represent the child she never had. In the drama, she holds the child (played by a group member) she always wanted, but could not have for physical reasons. She expresses her grief and longing, while gently stroking the child's hair and face. After a long and sensitive encounter with this much-wanted child, with a great deal of support from the group, she is helped to explore ways in which she can still carry out her desired role of 'loving mother' with her nieces and nephews and in her community. She finds hope for her future, beyond her despair, as she interacts with an immigrant family of two children and their struggling mother (played by group members) who live in her street. She reflects that there are creative and valuable ways to carry out her mothering role that don't involve being a biological mother.

As a child, Tom was sexually assaulted by a neighbour who had 'befriended' him. Twenty years later, he is still terrified by the memory of this event. In the psychodrama, Tom expresses his fear and grief, and summons up his rage about the abuse. Tom takes back his ability to say 'No!' as he accuses his abuser and sees him brought to justice in a psychodramatic 'courtroom.' Tom receives supportive hugs from the group members and tells them it is a relief to be believed and understood. He feels relieved of the pressure to keep secrets and the burden of guilt and shame that he has held onto for so long.

Terence is a prisoner who participated in a gang rape at age 17. In his fourth year of a fifteen year prison sentence, he looks back on his actions that day with solemn regret. He had joined a local gang as a last resort, as a way to survive in his neighbourhood. On the night of the rape, he feared for his own life if he did not join in; this was the code of retribution in his gang for anyone who defied the leader. The victim was an adult woman, targeted because she was walking alone. In his psychodrama, Terence goes back in time and stands up to the rest of the gang and stops himself from being involved. He stops the others and rescues the woman (played by another young prisoner, a member of the group), and apologises to her, weeping and wracked with grief over the damage done to her. He also expresses his grief and regret over the waste of his own life.

Mandy is still terrified of her abusive husband, who she escaped from five years before but who still haunts her dreams. In the drama, she places him on 'trial' in a psychodramatic courtroom, and receives justice when all present witness her story of suffering. The 'judge' convicts her husband.

Carl is still trying, twenty years after the event, to regain some control over the terror he felt as a child when his father came home drunk one Christmas Eve, destroying all of the presents under the tree and severely beating Carl's mother when she tried to stop him. In the psychodrama, he comes out of his bedroom and forcefully stops his father from being violent. He finally stands up to the man who terrorised the family for years.

Elizabeth was raped by her stepfather many times over several years, an experience that has left her traumatised and ridden with fears and shame. In her psychodrama, she is finally able to weep for her lost childhood, to rage at her stepfather for what he stole form her and put her through, and to accept protection and comfort from her mother (played by another group member), who never knew.

These are the psychodramas that I have come to think about as dramas where the protagonist reclaims his or her right and ability to say 'no.' I have seen this common theme in countless psychodramas over the years — unresolved episodes in people's own lives, when their own rights and feelings had been overridden, their own dignity smashed (Baim, 2004, 2013). (Meredith's psychodrama was an exception to this common theme, as it did not focus on her saying 'no' to an oppressor but rather 'yes' to new possibilities for expressing her maternal act hunger.) The psychodramas allowed these protagonists to take back the right to say 'no' to the people who had hurt them. After being allowed the opportunity to reclaim the ability to say 'no,' with their pain being heard and understood for the first time and in a safe and contained environment, the protagonists could begin to practise new strategies for meeting their needs with new hope for a future much less influenced by terrors from the past. As Moreno observes, 'every *true* second time is the liberation from the first [original emphasis]' (Moreno, 1924: 103). Provided with this liberation from an oppressive first experience, in the form of a

liberating second experience, the protagonist is freed to create their own life in greater spontaneity, free from old chains and terrors.

I offer these short examples from my own practice to show a glimpse into the processes of psychodrama when it is used as a method of psychotherapy and to describe the sort of work that is done when we address unresolved issues with a specific focus on healing and psychotherapeutic integration. Each psychodrama contained, as I hope these descriptions make clear, several forms of catharsis and also an element of integration. Crucially, I am not saying that the issues addressed in these psychodramas are the exclusive terrain of psychodrama or indeed psychotherapy. These issues can and indeed already are addressed in the theatre of personal stories and such productions are likely to continue to proliferate for the reasons outlined in chapter one. In other words, it would be a mistake to say that certain topics or certain individuals' life stories are off limits to the theatre. What is absolutely essential, however, is to recognise that theatre and psychodrama (and indeed dramatherapy) have different modes of approach, different contracts of engagement, and, to some degree, different intentions. But the line is not clear cut. To say that psychotherapy is where healing — personal and communal — occurs is to vastly underplay the beneficial effects and the integrative potential that is possible in the theatre of personal stories.

In the following section, I describe the central importance of narrative and how it is conceptualised as a healing and integrative factor within the framework of attachment narrative therapy. This will then lead towards a broader integration of psychodrama, attachment narrative therapy and the theatre of personal stories.

Working therapeutically with personal narrative: Attachment narrative therapy

Attachment Narrative Therapy (ANT) utilises the healing and integrative power of helping people to develop a more coherent or adequate understanding of their life history, their patterns of attachment (i.e. cognitive, affective and behavioural

coping strategies when under stress), and their processes for regulating their emotions and interpersonal relations (Dallos, 2005; Dallos & Vetere, 2009; Crittenden, 2015). As the name implies, ANT draws distinctly on attachment theory, but it also puts equal emphasis on the systems perspective, that is, a perspective that takes into account the ways in which people are embedded within family, socio-cultural, economic and political systems at many levels and with complex repercussions. To take one example, the systems perspective provides a useful way of conceptualising the difficulties of making individual or small-group changes when larger systems, striving for homoeostasis, work against such changes and strive to return to the familiar patterns of the status quo. This concept can be applied at small and large scales, from couples, to families, to communities and to whole societies.

The instinctive and healing impulse behind storytelling

To understand the basis for Attachment Narrative Therapy, we can use as a starting point some of the foundational ideas of narratology, which is the study of human narratives and their effects on perception and subjective experiences of reality in individuals, groups, communities and societies. Narratology is closely related to the more recent formulations regarding memory and information-processing (Siegel, 2007, 2008, 2015; Schacter & Madore, 2016; Crittenden, 1994; Bowlby, 1980: 44-74). The main idea is that every human being has a personal life history, unique to each of us, with all of our experiences, relationships, thoughts, feelings, actions and patterns of response bound into an ongoing chain of moments from birth to the present day. Our history also extends back in time to before our birth, and into the future, as part of the continuous story of our lives in relation to our culture, our ancestors and our descendants. Human beings are creatures of narrative, and stories are the way we attach meaning to our lives. At the root of all theatre, and indeed all storytelling, is the human need to make meaning of the world and to communicate these meanings to other people in the form of stories.

Stories are elemental to being human, and storytelling has been with us since the dawn of civilisation. Our ancient ancestors used stories to make sense of the wonders all around them: Gods ruled the sea, the air, the underworld and human passions. Helios' chariot pulled the sun across the sky. We arrive biologically prepared for stories and creating narratives to make sense of our experience and to stay alive. Socio-linguistic research demonstrates that the instinct to share one's story is very likely to be bound up in the prehistoric origins of human communication and the emergence of consciousness and language (Jaynes, 1976). Such meaning making and storytelling is at the core of what makes us human and is intimately related to the development of our minds, our core sense of self and our understanding of our place in the world (Schechner, 1988, 2013; Wasilewska, 2000; White, 2007; McConachie, 2013). We are *homo narrans* — the storytelling primate (Warner, 2012). Taking this evolutionary view, we can see our use of language and our ability to share stories as giving us a significant survival advantage as a species.

The integration of psychodrama and personal narrative

Working with personal narrative is at the heart of many forms of psychotherapy. Of the more than four hundred recognised forms of psychotherapy, the vast majority involve helping people arrive at a more adequate interpretation of their inner world and to give meaning to their lives, symptoms and hopes for the future (Wilber, 2000). This applies to the highly popular cognitive-behavioral therapy and its many derivative forms, to psychoanalytic and psychodynamic forms, and to humanistic, transpersonal and systemic forms. The notion of narrative, and revisiting and reframing the narrative, is everywhere. Add to this the burgeoning area of narrative medicine, where medical doctors are trained to listen to the patient's story about themselves and their illness and to incorporate this into the diagnosis and treatment planning, and we begin to see a large overlap between personal story (self-narrative), medicine, psychotherapy, and theatre.

A coherent self-narrative is an essential feature of psychological health. From

an early age, starting as early as the pre-school years, children can start to become authors of their stories; they can begin to take different perspectives and consider different versions of their experiences (Rose & Philpot, 2005). The stories we select as valid help us to interpret the world, and guide us to pay attention to certain things whilst ignoring others. They help us to understand how we came to be the person we are, and to understand why we think, feel and behave the way we do. Our ability to shape the experiences of life into an adequate self-narrative is a fundamental adaptive capacity, as essential to the well-functioning mind as food and water is for the body. Thus a key indicator of psychological health is the coherence and integration of our own personal life story, for this is the basis for our sense of self and our subjective experience of reality (Holzman, 1999).

Importantly, the stories we tell ourselves about our lives are subject to continual revision. The very act of remembering provides an opportunity for reassessing our memories, connecting and comparing them, and creating new understanding about ourselves. This is a fundamental idea within Attachment Narrative Therapy (Dallos and Vetere, 2009). Furthermore, the act of recalling our life stories often takes place with other people, and so our story will be influenced by our relationship to them and their responses and questions. Revising our personal stories impacts directly on personal change, because the stories we create about our lives have a powerful effect on our sense of identity and how we live. As the renowned neurologist Oliver Sacks observes, 'We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative — whose continuity, whose sense, *is* our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a "narrative," and that this narrative *is* us, our identities' (Sacks, 1998: 110).

Phenomenology, neuroscience and cognitive psychology have arrived at some common understandings about the fundamental properties of the ways in which our minds construct what we understand to be reality (Eagleman, 2016; Siegel, 2008, 2015). Stories abstract reality — they are never a direct recreation of reality. This is because the brain does not hold memories in store, as in a library card catalogue or a computer hard disk. Instead, the brain has neural networks that are

primed by experience to be predisposed to fire in association with other neural networks. There are millions of these neural networks of association in the brain. Because of this neural basis of recollection, stories are *always* edited: we can't recall every moment of our life, and we leave out lots of information in all of our stories. So our stories are always in this sense inaccurate and subject to unconscious biases and tendencies to filter out that which we prefer not to acknowledge. And 'true' stories can never be the full story, because we only have a fraction of the necessary information. This happens at meta levels and also at the level of perception. Neurologists and neuropsychologists focusing on perception have observed, for example, that what we perceive through our eyes is only the tiniest fraction of the electromagnetic spectrum. And yet this tiniest fragment is what we use to define what our sighted reality 'is.'

While our reality may be confined by physiological limits, it is also powerfully influenced by social factors and also factors to do with our upbringing. For example, a young child is heavily reliant on their parent or carers to define the meaning of an event. When the meaning offered by the parent accords with the child's experience, all is well. But very often, the parent will offer a distorted meaning that the child cannot challenge: 'I hit you because you deserve it.' 'You make my life a misery.' 'You're spoiled rotten.' 'You're stupid and you'll never amount to anything.' 'You made me do it.' 'You're being awkward just to wind me up.' This is why people often grow up with highly distorted or limited or negative views about themselves: it is the story they were given, or somehow learned, and when they learned it, it was so powerful that it has become an implicit self-understanding.

As imperfect as they are, our individual and collective stories make our world and shape us. We live within the law, we agree and dispute arbitrary borders, we live within or in defiance of societal norms, and we go to war to protect vital stories such as nationality, race, property, political beliefs and religious faith. Some stories can heal, and others can lead to killing. In tribal, national and international conflicts, stories from hundreds of years in the past can be resurrected to inspire

fresh waves of vengeful attacks against the descendants of one's supposed oppressors. We experience these fictions as utterly real and foundational to our experience, but they are no more 'real' than Santa Claus. What makes these stories 'real' is that other people believe them too — and so we are able to have a fairly well functioning society based on agreed fictions — a consensual reality. Veer too far outside the mainstream of what is consensually agreed to be normative reality within your society, and you risk being arrested, ostracised, placed in psychiatric care, or targeted. Consensual reality is a very powerful version of events, with heavily vested interests.

Related to this point is the idea of 'natural pedagogy,' a form of social cognition that is based on social cues and social learning. Csibra and Gergely have developed this theory, which helps to explain how human beings learn from each other and transmit cultural knowledge in relationships and social contexts. Their theory suggests that we are more likely to be open to learning from a person whose social cues encourage us to feel that they are well-informed and credible, and that they have good intentions. The authors emphasise in their theory how the credibility and benignity of the storyteller or role model are crucial aspects of the effectiveness of storytelling as a form of human communication and as a medium for passing on cultural knowledge and values (Csibra & Gergely, 2001, 2011). If we connect this idea to the theatre of personal stories, we have some added evidence as to why there is an extra level of importance and gravitas given when a personal is telling their own story because they would generally be considered to be credible and, by definition, well-informed about their own story.

As already mentioned, a key indicator of psychological health is when we can construct a psychologically coherent account of our life story, including how we came to be the person that we are and why we think, feel and behave the way we do. If we can give an account of our lives that contains no significant omissions, errors, distortions or deceptions, particularly around dangerous events, we are more likely to be able to function in a well-balanced way, free to experience relationships without being stuck in obsolete patterns that are harmful to ourselves

or other people. This may sound straightforward, yet for many people, this is a task fraught with obstacles and potential threats. For many people, clearly seeing their life story and their patterns of behaviour may be a frightening prospect, so terrifying that they expend a huge amount of effort to *not see* things clearly, and so to avoid feeling difficult and painful feelings (Hudgins and Toscani, 2013; Maté, 2013). Drug and alcohol use, becoming a workaholic, risky and self-destructive behaviour and antisocial behaviour are just some of the ways people find to avoid facing reality, suffering and pain. In extreme cases, dissociation, delusion and psychosis may be the last-ditch escape route from an intolerable past or present, and may also be a way of signaling the need for and drawing in external supports (mental health services, police, the community) when one is left with no other options. If this distorted way of perceiving the world keeps the person locked in old, destructive patterns, they will continue to use this strategy until they develop a new understanding of their life story and how they are living it.

To summarise, a central concern of attachment narrative therapy is concerned with revealing and healing the injured personal life stories of participants, so that a new story can emerge.

Attachment theory

Attachment narrative therapy, as the name implies, draws heavily from attachment theory, so it will be useful to describe essential features of attachment theory as we build the case for integrating attachment narrative therapy and psychodrama with the theatre of personal stories.

Attachment theory provides a model for understanding how we adapt to actual or perceived danger across the whole of our lives in order to stay alive, form relationships and ensure the survival of our children (Crittenden, 1994, 2015; Bowlby, 1980). Early empirical research in the field of attachment focused primarily on how early experiences of care — including problematic or harmful care — influence the development of our strategies for gaining protection and comfort (Crittenden et al, 2014). More recent research has shown that attachment

strategies are important and relevant across the whole of the lifespan and in all human societies (Crittenden, 2016; Howe, 2011; Siegel, 2007, 2015). Attachment theory is therefore just as important for understanding adult attachment as it is for understanding children's.

Attachment theory observes that, from birth, human infants (and most other mammals) display a range of instinctive behaviours to signal when they are afraid, hungry, tired, cold, hot, in pain or otherwise unsettled. When distressed, the infant will instinctively cry, cling and reach out towards the (hopefully) protective person, that is, an attachment figure. These actions attempt to meet four basic survival needs:

1. Faced with perceived *danger*, we seek *safety*.
2. Faced with perceived *distress*, we seek *comfort*.
3. Faced with perceived *isolation*, we seek *proximity* to our attachment figure(s).
4. Faced with perceived *chaos* – including internal chaos – we seek *predictability*, that is, what is familiar to us.

Thus, the term *attachment* refers to a number of related processes: staying *safe*, seeking *comfort*, regulating *proximity* in relation to attachment figures, and seeking *predictability*. The strategies that an infant learns to use with their particular attachment figures arise from their instinct to adapt, which is just as important as their instinct to attach. Seen in this way, we can see that patterns of attachment develop within the context of thousands of everyday interactions between the infant and their attachment figure(s). The attachment behaviour of the infant is their best solution for obtaining the protection and comfort they need, from the particular attachment figure(s) they depend on.

The process is personal, interpersonal and adaptive; the ways in which the attachment figure does or does not respond to the infant's signals of distress will create the early template for how the infant learns to recognise and regulate their emotions and interact with their attachment figures (Howe, 2005; Gerhardt, 2004; Fonagy, 2001). These early experiences and patterns of response typically become deeply embedded within the neural pathways of the brain and the

central nervous system (Siegel, 2008, 2015; Van der Kolk, 2014; Panksepp, 2005). This is why our early attachment patterns impact so profoundly on our later abilities to regulate our emotions within the context of relationships, particularly intimate and sexual relationships. In adulthood, we may use the same self-protective strategies that we used as children. This can help us to understand why, for example, an adult being abused in a relationship may not realise they are being harmed; they may not see the abuse as harmful, and indeed they may even find some safety in the predictability of the violence or abuse. If the situation is predictable, at least they can organise a strategy to survive within it — a strategy that has kept them alive so far.

Patricia Crittenden (2016) has developed the Dynamic-Maturational Model (DMM) of attachment and adaptation, a name that reflects the dynamic and developing potential of adaptive strategies within each person, across their lifespan (Crittenden & Landini, 2011). The DMM offers a well-researched model of attachment that focuses on essential factors described by John Bowlby: danger, protection from danger, and the effects of unprotected danger on brain development and social and psychological function. As such, the DMM is highly relevant to the treatment of psychological and social problems (Crittenden et al, 2014). The DMM deliberately avoids using clinical categories or labels. Instead, the DMM considers attachment strategies as serving a crucial survival function in their original time and context, and considers these strategies on a continuum of attachment security. In this way, the DMM can be seen as a strengths-based, non-labelling and non-pathologising model. It does not focus on symptom-based diagnoses but instead concentrates on *understanding* the function and meaning of human behaviour.

Typically, people who face serious and chronic dangers in childhood and who are unprotected and uncomforted must adapt their mental processing and behavioural responses in order to cope with such dangers (Crittenden & Landini, 2011; de Zulueta, 1993). The DMM stresses that the strategies, when first developed in childhood, were adaptive in that they promoted the child's survival at that time. As children mature, their attachment strategies can increase in

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complexity, since a child's neurobiological development enables processing of sensory information at increasingly sophisticated levels. These strategies are seen as adaptive when first developed by a child. However, later in life these strategies may be described as maladaptive. Adjustment difficulties can arise when individuals block out or misinterpret crucial information that, if perceived accurately, would lead to more successful psychological and social functioning. For example, a child who compulsively complies with the demands of an abusive parent is simply doing their best to survive; the compulsively compliant strategy is keeping them alive. However, if they still use a compulsively compliant strategy in adult relationships, they can easily fall into relationships where they are exploited, victimised or otherwise abused, and they may have no strategies for escape or even the awareness that things could be different for them.

It is only later that the use of these same strategies may become maladaptive, that is, used out of their original context. This is crucial to our understanding of social and emotional problems: *the very same strategy that is adaptive in infancy, childhood or adolescence may be maladaptive later in life.* This is a key insight from attachment theory, and it reminds us that we must recognise the value of that strategy in keeping the person alive when they faced significant dangers, and then we can help them to avoid over-applying that strategy while at the same time helping them to *add to their repertoire of strategies* (Baim and Morrison, 2011; Cozolino, 2002; van der Kolk, 2014). It is worth stressing that this approach runs in direct opposition to those forms of diagnosis which interpret maladaptive strategies as dysfunctions, disorders, personality disorders or types of mental illness or disease. Attachment theory, and the DMM most specifically, argues strongly that all of the strategies have their appropriate function in certain circumstances. Again, this is a strengths-based model as opposed to a deficits model.

This is crucial to our understanding of psychological disturbance. To reiterate, the very same strategy that is adaptive in childhood or adolescence may be maladaptive later in life. Further, severe psychological disturbance and impaired development are likely to result where children are faced with extreme and

deceptive forms of danger, neglect, abuse or psychological harm (Gerhardt, 2004; Perry, 2008).

Knowing the terrain of narrative integration

As discussed above, we are shaped by the stories we tell and the stories we believe. Many strands of research and fields of study, including educational theory, psychology, philosophy, religious studies, cognitive neuroscience, computer science and artificial intelligence converge on the idea that the way in which human beings interpret the world and our place in it, and the way we explain the world to each other, is through deeply embedded stories that guide our lives and our sense of self (Campbell, 1949; Schank, 1990; Crittenden, 1994; Mattingly, 1998). In the theatre, when we tell *fictional stories* to each other, we share contemplation of the human condition and we join together in shared cultural understandings. When we tell *personal stories* to each other, we are doing the same thing, but with the added possibility that the recollection and formulation of our personal story, the sharing of that story, and the feedback and support we receive after telling the story, will all combine to affect the way in which we interpret the story and the effect that it has on our lives. This reminds us that the concept of what is 'real' or 'actual' (i.e., 'true') in a story must inevitably be contested. For our purposes in this discussion, we will use as a working definition that the 'real' is what we are working with when participants share with us their perceptions of their own experiences, from their own perspective. This perception can, of course, change over time, and may even change during the course of a rehearsal process. This is because our feelings about an event, and our memory of an event, are deeply affected by the conditions we are in when we recall the event. So fragile is our system of memory recall that we might recall and event differently on Thursday as compared with Tuesday, depending on who we are telling the story to, our mood at the time of recollecting the memory, the context in which we are speaking, and other factors. Our recollection of events, and our feelings about them, are also deeply affected by everything that has happened to us since the time of the event. This includes all of the times we may have

consciously reappraised this event — alone or with the help of others — and reflected on it. Our understanding of our former self is always a work in progress (Gazzaniga, 2018).

We also have the chance to *revise* the story, as we examine it in more detail and perhaps identify some of the plot inconsistencies, the previously disguised power relations, and the distorted understandings we may previously have had about the story. In doing so, we have the chance to generate a more adequate story that feels more authentic, liberating or useful to us. In other words, sharing our stories can heal our broken stories, our broken hearts and our broken minds. Through stories we construct and reconstruct our sense of who we are. Giddens (1991) addresses this point when he writes about the reflexive construction of self.

Translating these concepts to the theatre, we can observe that when a theatre practitioner works with people's personal stories, it is important for the practitioner to have some understanding of the principles of narrative integration, and how narratives can become distorted or transformed, and why. Similarly, it is important to understand that the telling and sharing of personal stories can offer the opportunity for people to re-shape their stories and their understanding of the stories they tell. This can lead to profound changes in one's understanding of one's story and one's history and relationships. This can happen in any context where people are thinking about their personal stories, and can be highly therapeutic (and sometimes painful) — even when the framing of the experience is that it is theatre, not therapy (Holmwood, 2014). Along with this comes the understanding of the multiple dimensions of personal story-telling and how the act of recalling, telling, re-shaping and opening up a story for sharing and scrutiny and dramatisation by others — and witnessing the story as audience members — may have positive, neutral or potentially negative effects (Leffler, 2012).

Promoting integration and healing in the theatre of personal stories

Having described psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy in this chapter, and explored the theatre of personal stories in this and previous chapters, we can now consider how these three areas of theory and practice can be linked together to help us formulate some clear ideas about what the intent is of working with difficult unresolved personal stories, i.e. at the sixth ring of the Spiral. This combined approach takes us to the fundamental question we must ask when working with personal stories of unresolved difficulties: *'Where is the integration?'* This is a question that one could ask at any part of the Drama Spiral, but it becomes critical to the process of working at ring six of the Spiral because of the added vulnerabilities of working with unresolved painful and difficult stories. Integration becomes of crucial importance in order to avoid simply retelling stories of pain and, as psychoanalyst Charles Rycroft has observed (cited in Pendzik et al, 2016), merely 'advertising the continued existence of a longstanding ego' (Rycroft, 1983: 193). Instead, as Rycroft advocates, there must be an element of 'reflexive practice that aims at self-discovery' (Pendzik et al, 2016: 2), i.e., integration. Speaking about the implicit processes within each of her plays, the celebrated verbatim investigator / performer Anna Deveare Smith analyses her integrative intent this way: 'My plays usually start with outrage, and then they go to a sort of mourning, and then they usually end up with love or forgiveness' (Smith, 2018). With this statement, Smith neatly captures the process of healing and integration that takes place in many therapeutic processes.

Integration in this context means the bringing together of differentiated parts into a functioning whole (Siegel, 2008, 2015). To offer some examples, a functioning aircraft is an integrated machine with hundreds of thousands of different parts and modules all working together in a functioning whole. An integrated organisation may have tens of thousands of employees working together to form a functioning whole. A human being has many billions of cells and a panoply of organs, bones, tissues, systems and functions, all working

together in an integrated whole to keep the person alive. And this is not even to mention the complexity of the person's mind, memories, values, beliefs, character, personality, relationships, ambitions and patterns of behaviour. A further level of complexity can be grasped when we note that many of the elements of integrated systems run in opposition to each other in order to maintain a delicate balance of good function. In animals, this is seen for example in body temperature regulation, hormone release, sleep-wake cycles and approach-avoidance behaviours. When we stop to contemplate the complexity of what it is to be human and to stay alive and functioning reasonably well, successful integration is a stunning achievement. The term *integrative* is of course related to the word *integrity,* a word that we commonly use to describe people who are trustworthy and who function well, with sound ethics, good intentions, good character and good judgment. These qualities rarely develop without a good deal of conscious effort.

From the attachment narrative therapy perspective, integration occurs when we make use of all the thinking and feeling that is relevant to our situation, and discount the information that is irrelevant. An integrated mind can access useful information from both past and present, and can self-organise and plan for the future. However, when we are under severe strain or facing great danger, our mind takes short cuts because we don't have time to think; we are in survival mode and must act fast. Typical short cuts taken by the human mind include when information is omitted, fragmented, misattributed, exaggerated, minimised, denied, distorted or falsified. This is known as *transformed information.*

To explain what is meant by transformed information, here is an example from social work child protection. While the example is extreme, it accurately reflects all too common cases of child abuse: If you're eight years old and you have learned from bitter experience that if you don't do exactly as you're told by your parents, that you will be severely beaten and locked in the cellar overnight without food, you don't stop to question or challenge the right or wrong of your parents' actions. You do what you are told and don't *dare* to think that your situation should be other than it is; that's a life-threatening thought because it

might lead you to challenge your parents, with known and dangerous consequences. In these circumstances, it's a basic and instinctive survival strategy to agree with your parents that you are the problem, that you are nothing but trouble, that you are wilful and insolent, that you never should have been born, and that you deserve the beatings because the devil needs to be beaten out of you. Given these circumstances, we can all understand why the eight year old child takes on the belief that they are bad, that they deserve the beatings, and that their parents are good people who mean well and are trying to protect them by beating the devil out of them. That is what is meant by transformed information — when information is omitted, fragmented, misattributed, exaggerated, minimised, denied, distorted or falsified in order to promote survival in dangerous circumstances.

While these short cuts that transform information work in the short term, in the long term, we need to regain the accurate information in order to make more generally applicable reflections. Very often, however, the mind retains only the transformed information, which applied only to the original situation. So the response and strategy that was effective for self-preservation in the original situation may become over-applied, which typically leads to a lack of coherence, and potentially a range of emotional and interpersonal problems (Crittenden, 2015; Dallos and Vetere, 2009). Again, it is not that the strategy is wrong; it is the fact that it is an old strategy used inappropriately in a new context that is the problem.

To summarise, the development of a coherent and integrated mind is a central goal in creating emotional well-being and resilience, and such integration is strongly related to attuned relationships, which help to shape the neurological connections and patterns in the brain (Siegel, 2015). Summarising the importance of integration, Ogawa *et al* (1997) go so far as to state that,

> *Integration is not a function of the self; integration is what the self is.*

> Ogawa *et al* (1997: 871)

Five levels of integration

To provide a practical way of using the concept of integration in the theatre of personal stories, and most specifically theatre practice at the sixth ring of the Spiral, where people are disclosing personal material that is difficult and unresolved for them, I offer a developmental hierarchy that distinguishes five levels of integration. The idea of the five levels of integration emerges from my synthesis of ideas from attachment narrative therapy, Dynamic-maturational attachment theory, systems theory, psychodrama, applied theatre, trauma theory and Bruce Perry's Neuro-sequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) (Perry, 2008). By bringing together some of the common themes and ideas from these authors, theorists and researchers, we can generate a hierarchical way of conceptualising integration. For the theatre practitioner working with people's personal stories of unresolved difficulties, it is possible to use this hierarchy of integration in order to focus on particular kinds of intentions when facilitating theatre-making processes involving personal stories (Baim and Morrison, 2011). The later forms of integration are developmentally more complex, and it is typically the case that the earlier forms of integration need to be addressed and developed first, before people will be able to integrate at the more complex levels.

I should stress that in advocating for a considered approach to bio-psycho-social integration, I am not suggesting that theatre practitioners need to become psychologists or psychotherapists. I am trying instead to address the fact that theatre and therapy have no clear delineation and that because of this, theatre practitioners need to have an informed understanding and a clear idea about the purpose of the process they are facilitating. In other words, the theatre practitioner must continually ask themselves why they are working in a particular way and making the decisions they are making, focusing on integrative processes and intentions wherever possible (Taylor, 2003). More to the point, if the theatre practitioner is working with difficult and unresolved stories, they have a duty of care and a duty to be aware of the risks and potential benefits of working with such material, and they must also have some guidelines regarding when to and when

not to explicitly address personal stories of unresolved difficulties. Here it may be useful to draw in some of the ideas of *social therapeutics*, a method for personal and societal healing that draws heavily on performatory practices (Holzman, 1999, 2017). Lois Holzman, the Director of New York's East Side Institute and co-founder in 2001 of the annual *Performing the World* international conference, developed *social therapeutics* in collaboration with Fred Newman. This approach, which integrates principles of performance, education, psychology, psychotherapy and related fields, is probably the closest to what I am proposing when discussing how theatre and therapy overlap at rings 4, 5 and 6 of the Drama Spiral, and how theatre and therapy can be integrated.

When we think of the qualities of what makes a good, compelling, satisfying story, there will usually be some aspect of the story which is integrative at some level: the hero succeeds in her quest, the anti-hero is redeemed, the victim is avenged, the town is saved, the wrong is righted, the criminal is captured, the lovers finally get together. Almost all good stories have a kind of in-built moral compass, tending towards integration and justice (Campbell, 1949). In offering the five levels of integration, I am tapping into this deeply embedded principle of storytelling and attempting to make the notion of integration accessible on a practical level, so that theatre practitioners can focus their thinking on certain kinds of integrative intentions over others.

It is worth pointing out that I have chosen to emphasise *integration* as the crucial concept, rather than seeing the person's problems as a deficit, where old strategies and ideas need to be replaced. By focusing on integration, I am attempting to provide ideas for how theatre practitioners can help participant-performers to *add* to the range of strategies, roles, and responses they can use, while also acknowledging that their old strategies may have been useful in the past and indeed may still be useful in some situations. When we work at the sixth, innermost ring of the Drama Spiral, people are likely to be exploring the meaning of their lives and the ways in which they have coped with their difficulties, and where they are establishing or rediscovering their hope for the future.

Level one: Integration of mind and body

At the first level of integration, we are helping participants to integrate the functions of the mind and the body. We are helping participants to tune into and pay attention to the activity of the mind and the sensations of the body, with the understanding that the way we use our mind can have a profound influence on the neuronal connections in our brain (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Another way of stating this is that we are integrating 'higher brain' functions with 'mid-brain' and 'lower brain' functions. Siegel (2007, 2008) calls this 'vertical integration.' From the point of view of the participant-performer, this level of integration includes *paying attention to what my body is telling me, and giving that information its proper due. Learning to live 'in my body' and fully inhabiting my physical being. Integrating all of my sensory perceptions, such as hearing, sight, touch, taste, smell, interoception (conscious awareness of internal sensations within the body), and orientation in space and time. Integrating my thoughts and my feelings. Integrating the various emotional 'states' that I can be in, for example when I am excited, joyful, playful, contemplative, interested or bored. Gaining a sense of awareness of how my emotions emerge from my body and are expressed in and through the body. Becoming more adept at self-regulation of my emotions, and how I can transform one emotion into another* (Feldenkrais, 1991). *Understanding that these are all states of being, and they each have their purpose.*

There are many ways that theatre processes can help with the integration of mind and body. To name a few, drama games, voice and movement exercises, sensory activities, communal singing, physical and emotional exercises of many kinds can be used to develop integration at this level. It can also very useful to use any of the myriad practices within theatre that focus on somatic experiencing and somatic integration, including dance–movement improvisation, experimentation with somatic orientation, voice and body exercises, exploring the use of the body in relation to nature (for example, walking, climbing, swimming, running, playing, explored through character and movement experimentation), and other practices

where the use of the body is integrated with reflections on mind-body-emotional connections (Feldenkrais, 1991; Ayers, 2005).

With all of these activities, the practitioner would facilitate the exercises and lead the discussion afterwards with a focus on vertical integration, as described on the previous page. This starts with basic but essential noticing of what is happening within the mind and within the body, recognising that information that emerges in the mind ('thoughts') and information that comes from the body ('feelings,' 'emotions' and sensations of many kinds) is of equal importance and it is therefore crucial to recognise and integrate both sources of information. Discussing the embodied aspects of trauma, Bessel van der Kolk, one of the world's leading experts on trauma and recovery, observes:

> Trauma is much more than a story about the past that explains why people are frightened, angry or out of control. Trauma is re-experienced in the present, not as a story, but as profoundly disturbing physical sensations and emotions that may not be consciously associated with memories of past trauma. Terror, rage and helplessness are manifested as bodily reactions, like a pounding heart, nausea, gut-wrenching sensations and characteristic body movements that signify collapse, rigidity or rage. […] The challenge in recovering from trauma is to learn to tolerate feeling what you feel and knowing what you know without becoming overwhelmed. There are many ways to achieve this, but all involve establishing a sense of safety and the regulation of physiological arousal.

> Interview with Bessel van der Kolk
> http://www.psychotherapy.net/interview/
> bessel-van-der-kolk-trauma#.VEjnDOh4ssY

Level two: Integration of the parts of oneself

At the second level of integration, we are exploring our inner landscape and focusing on integrating the various 'parts' of the self into a functioning whole. For example, we are concerned with integrating the part of one's perception that can step back and observe what is occurring in the mind, brain and relationships with

the part of one's perception that is immersed in experience. Sometimes this is referred to as the 'meta' function (i.e. the part of me that can stand apart from, or above, my experience, and look upon me objectively). An example of the meta-function is when we consciously pay attention to and adjust our behaviour in order to connect better with another person. Sometimes this is also called 'having a conversation with myself.' For many people, this 'meta' part is also the part of them that is conceived of as a spiritual essence — a part of themselves that, in the process of introspection, experiences deep inner truths, experience and oneness with existence (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). In other words, when we use our minds to do this type of integration, we are most in tune with our sense of our 'self' and who we are. In order to fully integrate the various parts, a useful internal role is the role of 'conductor' of all the internal roles, a role that can bring together all of these competing internal roles into a functioning whole (Blatner, 2007). Sometimes this role is called the *executive self* or the *internal manager*. From the point of view of the participant-performer, this can also include *integrating my creative, intuitive self with my rational, logical self; Integrating my impulsive/'automatic' responses, thoughts, feelings and physiological symptoms when under stress with a more mature and thoughtful approach (e.g. managing my fear response when under threat); Integrating these various parts of myself and orienting myself towards growth, development and positive change; Attuning to all aspects of my inner world and perceptions, with openness and curiosity* (Wallin, 2007).

There are many drama processes that can promote integration at this level. At rings four, five and six of the Drama Spiral, various staging techniques might be used to represent aspects of one's internal 'parts' or different aspects of self. Where work is focused on ring six of the Spiral, the intention would be to help the person to develop those parts of self which are oriented towards internal noticing, metacognitive functioning, strength, recovery, and resilience.

Level three: Integration of memory and self-narrative

The third level of integration is focused on memories and orienting them in time and place with a continuous narrative that includes and balances the role of oneself and others in the memories. From the point of view of the participant-performer, this would include *integrating what is familiar and safe in my mind with parts of my mind and memory that may have in the past been 'no go' areas, so that there is no part of my mind or memory that is 'excluded' or 'forbidden'; Integrating my perspective from the present day with my perspective at the time of the event I am recalling. This includes my thoughts, feelings and responses then and now (i.e. the meaning I gave events then, as opposed to the meaning I give them now); Integrating the information that was unique to an event in the past (and therefore can be left in the past) with information about an event that can be useful to protect myself in the future; Integrating my understanding of what is realistically in my control with what is out of my control, and maintaining optimism that I have some control over myself and my life decisions.* This is an important type of integration because the parts that are 'forbidden' or 'blocked from view' have a habit of emerging in covert ways if they remain split off or defended against. This level of integration also includes *integrating the past, present and future: knowing where and when events happened in time, and integrating my different types of memory — for example, my memories of events and my recollection of how I thought and felt about them at the time versus how I think and feel about them now — so that the stories I tell myself about the past make full use of all of my integrative capacities.* This includes holding on to certainty and also acknowledging that some memories may not be certain. Also: *Integrating my perspective now with my perceptions in the past, and being able to trace my evolving understanding to make distinctions about how my perception has changed over time.* For example, we may in the past have had a number of beliefs about ourselves and important people in our lives, and these beliefs may have changed over time. This type of integration includes being able to understand that at different ages we have different capacities. This becomes crucial when people are left, for example, with a feeling of shame, helplessness or 'blaming' their

younger self. This type of integration includes the ability to 'forgive' and show compassion to one's younger self, and to make use of the lessons learned. Also: *Bringing in witnesses: integrating my version of events with the version that may be offered by other people, particularly people who may have been witnesses to or involved in my story; Integrating what I know about my history with what is ambiguous, uncertain or incomplete;* Finally, *integrating and resolving those parts of my story that have been painful and difficult for me to face. Integrating these experiences into my story, and valuing the lessons I have learned from setbacks and troubling events. This may lead me to see more clearly the truth about my history and its effects on me.*

In the theatre of personal stories, where the focus is on personal stories of unresolved difficulties, there are many approaches that may assist in these integrative processes. One example would be staging a personal story from the perspective of today versus the perspective at the time the original story happened. This could invite a range of story options, including, for example, drawing on multiple resources available now that were not available at the time, in order to achieve a dramatic form of justice, righting what was wrong in the past.

Crucially, focusing on this area of integration would also be an opportunity to introduce 'rich' stories about the person's life that may not have heretofore been part of the dominant narrative about the person. This may be the ideal place to explore the person's previously subordinated stories, for example their intentions, aspirations, values, hopes and desired ways of living (White, 2004, 2009; White & Epston, 1990). Exploring and staging such stories may help participants to claim a wider identity rather than one defined by dominant problem-saturated discourses of illness or vulnerability, including labels such as 'mental illness,' 'addiction,' 'survivor' or 'asylum seeker.' This type of emphasis on the person's wider identity has strong links with the widely cited work of the 'Just Therapy' movement, which developed in New Zealand from the narrative therapy tradition. Just Therapy is an activist movement, committed to equality and justice, and gives explicit focus to

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historical and ongoing inequity and injustice suffered by the Maori and Samoan communities (Johnstone et al, 2018; Waldegrave et al, 2003; Waldegrave, 2009).

Level four: Integration with other people / relationships

At the fourth level of integration, the focus is on relationships with other people, i.e. developing social intelligence when one is interacting with other people (Goleman, 1996). From the point of view of the participant-performer, this level of integration would include *integrating my perspective, needs, interests, feelings and goals with those of other people, and adjusting my behaviour accordingly, so that I can work co-operatively in relationships with other people, accomplish mutually satisfying goals and form and sustain loving relationships.* It also includes: *Integrating what other people have told me and role modelled for me with what I have thought of and decided for myself* (Fonagy & Luyten, 2009). This is an absolutely vital form of integration when people have received toxic messages or poor role modelling as children. It represents the ability to reject these toxic influences and to say 'no' to emotional and verbal threats and abuse. At the level of interpersonal relationships, this level of integration also includes: *integrating my understanding that my needs, interests and abilities are different now as compared with when I was a child. The same is true for other people.* Related to this is: *integrating an understanding of what is my responsibility and what is the responsibility of other people. This includes recognising that responsibility for many problems and their solutions is shared together with other people.*

In theatre practice focusing on personal stories, including stories of unresolved difficulties, this type of integration might include scenes within the story where the participant-performer enacts important and / or difficult conversations with important people in their life. They may also enact other aspects of important relationships from their life, and use dramatic methods to explore and enact different ways of being in relation to significant people in their life. In psychodrama terms, this is similar to techniques such as role play, role training, surplus reality and future projection. All of these techniques lend themselves to dramatisation.

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Role reversal is another technique that can be very useful in promoting integration at this level, because it encourages people to understand other people and to better recognise the inter-dependence they share with other people, and the effect that their behaviour has on other people.

Theatre practitioners may also use the notion of integration with other people to focus on techniques that involve audiences members, such as direct address, dialogue with audiences, involving audience members in some of the scenes in structured or unstructured ways, asking audience members to demonstrate how they would approach a dilemma (a technique well known in Forum Theatre), improvising dialogue with audience members, working on the 'as if' assumption that a member of the audience is a certain character or person (i.e. treating them as a character in the play), and asking audiences members to share what they have in common with or what affected them about the story of the person on stage whose story is told (known as 'sharing' in psychodrama terminology).

Level five: Integration of the self with the wider world / higher consciousness

The fifth level of integration is concerned with the big picture. This is where we consider the wider world and where we fit in. It is about exploring and integrating a higher consciousness of the connection between all things. From the point of view of the participant-performer, this level is about *integrating my behavioural roles with my surroundings, such that I can adequately carry out roles suited to my situation, relationships and goals.* It also includes *orienting my life towards making a contribution by encouraging growth and well-being in other people, including the next generation.* Also: *integrating my story with the wider story that includes the social and cultural forces that have influenced me in the past and that may still influence me. This includes integrating myself with existence as a whole, and understanding my place in the long chain of human history, the cycle of life and death, the evolution of life on Earth, and the ever expanding cosmos.* Finally, this level of integration includes *integrating my ideas about the way the world 'ought to be' with acceptance of the way the world 'is' (i.e. doing a 'reality check').* This does

not mean passively adjusting to the status quo, but fully recognising and accepting the situation as it is in order to best orient oneself to reality, which may include working to change the status quo. This is a concept highlighted in the Nomadic Theory of Rosi Braidotti, which will be addressed in the next section (Braidotti, 2012).

Where the theatre practitioner is working with participant-performers on highly personal stories, including stories of unresolved difficulties, there are a very wide range of techniques and processes that can be used to promote integration at the level of the wider world and higher consciousness. For example, the person can be helped to link their individual story with the stories of other people from the past or present, or from other cultures. They could be involved in scene creation looking into the future, and looking at alternative possibilities for themselves and for society. Also worth considering is the importance of the audience: part of the integrative aim may be in offering performances for specific groups who may benefit from seeing the performance and being involved in sharing and discussions afterwards. For participant-performers, this may be a key aspect of becoming more integrated at the level of the 'wider world' and raising one's awareness of life at a higher level of consciousness, i.e. by making a contribution to the community.

Braidotti's Nomadic Theory

In the previous sub-section, I made passing reference to Rosi Braidotti and her Nomadic Theory. It may be worth briefly noting the significance of Nomadic Theory and its relation to the intentions of integration and the theatre of personal stories. This is because Braidotti's work and her Nomadic Theory match so perfectly the argument of this study, which supports the integrative imperative of the theatre of personal stories.

Braidotti presents Nomadic Theory as an ethics of affirmation, i.e. affirming the deeply-rooted human instinct towards freedom, towards empowerment, towards

life, creativity, enjoyment and achieving what is within one's potential (Braidotti, 2012). Braidotti is keen to stress that her philosophy — which draws heavily on the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1980), and, further back, the 17th century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza — stands in contrast to what she refers to as the more melancholic philosophies of Butler or Levinas. Braidotti deliberately reverses what she sees as the all too common emphasis within modern critical theory on trauma, vulnerability, risk and dysfunction. She instead places the emphasis on the person as a relational subject who, crucially, has agency, with the ability to be both immersed in life and relationships while also providing a grounded critique based on first-hand experience of many aspects of life. She advocates that life should be an ongoing process of 'intensive becoming,' of affirmation and joy, and she encourages people to demonstrate creative courage and to generate new knowledge through the process of creative critique. Braidotti's activism is, as she describes it, an ethics of positive possibility based on a thorough analysis of the reality of the current situation and then oriented towards generating not just critique of the status quo but also a grounded activism that recognises that we are both within and a part of the problem while also being a part of the potential solution (Braidotti, ibid.). This involves both being in the world whilst also being in the mode of opposition.

Braidotti includes in her affirmatory approach a crucial emphasis on memory and critical consciousness — concepts that are in close proximity to our discussion in this section about the importance of utilising memory and working towards integrative functioning. As such, Nomadic Theory is a useful and relevant theory to support the work of participatory theatre, particularly theatre that is focused on people and their personal stories, because it is focused on creativity and transformation. Braidotti's Nomadic Theory argues for a politics of positive possibility, of overturning the negative with the enactment of new creative possibilities.

Translating some of the affirmatory theory of Braidotti's Nomadic Theory into ramifications for the theatre of personal stories, we have the possibility that in

plays based on personal material, people may have the possibility of transcending the common labels and received discourses around victim status, refugee status, people in recovery, the homeless, prisoners, and the like, and to focus instead on what makes them unique and complexly human — for example, how they strive to love and be loved, to make a contribution to the world, to grow, and to be a part of something bigger than themselves, while pursuing their own particular joy. As what could be considered an ultimate form of integration, Nomadic Theory helps us to re-vision the participant-performer as someone who transcends labels and who exists as an individual striving towards self-actualisation. This is very much in keeping with the fifth level of integration, described above.

A caveat regarding working with people with unresolved trauma

Working with participant-performers on their stories of unresolved difficulties may also mean that in some situations the difficult story is severe enough to be considered an unresolved trauma. The reason it is this severe may be because of the degree of threat or danger or injury experienced during the event, or it may be that the actual degree of danger was not so severe but nevertheless the person has retained a feeling or response that is so severe that it is disrupting their mind and body and keeping them to some extent stuck in a fight, flight or freeze response that has not yet been discharged.

There is still a great deal of debate within the field of trauma research and treatment about to what extent it is useful to help people to explicitly tell the story of their traumatic experience — in other words, to give it a coherent narrative. This is important for theatre practitioners to know, particularly when there is a chance that they will facilitate processes where stories of trauma may emerge. Some theorists, researchers and therapists point away from remembering and recalling stories of the traumatic event as being a key to recovery, and instead suggest focusing on the body, and helping people to feel secure within their body (Haines,

2016). Examples of therapies that may take this approach are somatic sensitisation and movement-based therapies. Such therapies may place an emphasis on grounding exercises, breathing, interoception (recognising signals from within the body), and exercises aimed at noticing and freeing the body, and becoming more in tune with and feeling well within the body. Key processes in this approach also include building safety, developing affective self-regulation, identifying and building strengths and internal and external resources, practising empowering roles and behaviours, and orienting oneself in time and space. These exercises are mostly akin to level one integration ('mind and body') described above. These approaches aim to draw out sensory information that is blocked and frozen by trauma, to help participants befriend (rather than suppress) the energies released by the inner experience, and to complete the self-preserving physical actions that were thwarted when they were trapped, restrained or immobilised by terror. This approach deliberately avoids explicitly recalling or telling the story of the traumatic event.

Other approaches to trauma resolution place more emphasis on giving a coherent and adequate narrative to the experience as part of healing. Ultimately, this is something that will vary a great deal from person to person, and there are numerous factors including the individual qualities of the person, the nature of the trauma, how long ago it was, was it one time only or chronic and repeated, how old the person was at the time, whether they have spoken about it before, how clearly they remember, the context of your working together, the amount of time you will be working together, what the person says about wanting to tell their story, i.e. why they want to tell it, how able the person is to use metaphorical, abstract or otherwise indirect forms of meaning making, the training of the theatre practitioner, and the sequence in which things are done – e.g. body work first and possibly verbalising the story later.

To summarise, there are many ways to do work on trauma and unresolved difficult stories that have nothing to do with retelling the story. The key thing to remember is that people should not be encouraged to tell more than they feel

comfortable to tell, and that people can gain a great deal of integrative benefit by working at more abstract and metaphorical levels if that is what suits them better. Thinking about stories that heal, a type of story that may be best for one person may have little meaning for another. So there will always be a case for some people needing the opportunity to tell or present their own story, or, thinking of rings two and three of the Spiral, of having the opportunity to develop themselves through enacting a fictional story or a fictionalised story. However, many individuals may also benefit from, at some point in the process of healing, telling the story of what happened to them. But not if they are overwhelmed or disempowered or left ashamed or flooded or disassociated (Fonagy and Luyten, 2009).

Ultimately, it will be a question of finding the shoe that fits the individual, and giving careful consideration to issues of timing, audience, and how best to represent the story in dramatised form given a certain combination of factors affecting the context of performance. Some people will benefit from and want to use words, some may want to work symbolically, some will feel the desire to work at ring six of the Spiral, and others may prefer to stay with games and exercises or be a part of another's piece of work and part of the group process.

Summarising the importance of integration for her, three-time Moth story slam winner and Moth Grand Slam champion Tracey Miller Segarra offers this view:

> If I'm not quite over the experience, or I'm not sure how it changed or affected me, I'm not ready to tell the story—or it's not a story worth telling. Which is why most of the stories I tell happened many years ago. I've had time to integrate their meaning and message into my life, so that makes it easier to craft it into a story.
>
> (Treder-Wolff, 2017)

For Segarra, the parameters are clear: she wants to know that she has integrated an experience from the past before she shares it with audiences. For performance artist Bryony Kimmings, difficult, painful or traumatic experiences might be more

raw, or unfinished, or even ongoing, when she decides to share the experience with audiences. Reflecting on the trial run of her autobiographical performance about her infant son's chronic illness and how she tried to cope and get help for him, Kimmings observes:

> I was spilling my trauma all over the stage. Because actually this is *so* personal. I felt *very* vulnerable and not in a good way, and I think actually in this case, I just needed to risk saying everything. What I came away thinking was like, 'OK, you saw me in my depths, and now I want to show you what it's like when you tear yourself through that trauma and out the other side.'

<div align="right">

BBC Radio 4, 1st November 2017
'The Gamble'

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Segarra's view and Kimmings' view about how much integration is required before sharing material with audiences might be thought of as representing two ends of a continuum of integration. Importantly, both performers are working with autobiographical material, so very different guidelines will apply to them as compared with theatre practitioners who work with participant-performers. Issues of consent, confidentiality, safeguarding and duty of care, for example, are very different when one is presenting one's own private life on the stage, as compared with processes where participant-performers are going to share personal material emerging from workshops led by a theatre practitioner. Even so, the issue of integration is still crucial in both cases.

Whether the material is performed by a professional or by volunteer participant-performers, if the focus is on difficult and unresolved stories, where the degree of lack of resolution is such that the person is still traumatised, there are many theatre techniques that can be used to help the person to safely stage their experience in the service of integration. For the theatre practitioner, the techniques suggested in the discussion of the five levels of integration, as described earlier in this chapter, will be relevant for informing the purposefully adaptive approach with participants and their stories of unresolved difficulties and trauma. As a broad

guideline, when working with people's difficult and unresolved stories, the focus should always be on their process of healing, of expressing and understanding one's authentic feelings, of finding strength and hope, and developing what is increasingly being described in the trauma field as 'post-traumatic growth.' This will orient the theatre processes towards affirmation, adaptation, strength and hope, which contrasts distinctly with the heretofore predominating discourses in the medical and psychological professions which have tended until recently to focus primarily on post-traumatic conditions as being typified by stress, disease, dysfunction and disorder (Johnstone et al, 2018). This orientation towards growth and the development of positive, integrative roles is the essence of the strengths-based, non-labelling and non-pathologising approach to health and wellbeing that I have advocated in this chapter and in this study as a whole.

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Chapter Five: Exemplars

Two case studies examined through the lens of the Drama Spiral

Introduction

This chapter focuses on two examples of theatre practice and examines them through the lens of the Drama Spiral in order to analyse the ethics, aesthetics, theory, process and practice issues raised by these productions. The two productions serve as exemplars of conscious and reflexive practice where the personal stories of participant-performers are used. One of the exemplars is from my own applied theatre practice, done in collaboration with colleagues during the course of this study, and the other exemplar was a public production that played to paying audiences in Cardiff, Wales in 2014. The case studies are presented as a way of linking theory with practice in a format that Stiles (2017) has termed *theory-building case studies.* As Stiles points out, using case studies to build theory is a different approach to studies that seek to test hypotheses. Instead, theory-building case studies help the researcher to compare theoretical ideas and models with real-world examples, and modify theory based on the empirical comparisons.

The two case studies are representative of a larger set of observations I have undertaken as part of this investigation. In chapter three, I explained the research process that I carried out in order to arrive at the present iteration of the Drama Spiral. Concurrent with this process was additional field research which involved watching theatre productions. In order to gain a sense of the variety of the theatre of personal stories and to calibrate and clarify the criteria I could use to demarcate and describe the six rings of the Spiral, and to find examples of best practice, during the course of this study, between 2012 and 2017, I saw a sampling of twenty-five productions where people's personal stories were used. These productions were chosen because they included some aspect of people's personal

stories, and they were accessible to me (I could get a ticket and attend). They included verbatim, documentary, testimonial, autobiographical and related forms.

I have chosen to focus on the two case studies in this chapter because they allow for the clearest coverage of two important issues: The first case study, drawn from my own work as a theatre practitioner, offers an example of how the Drama Spiral can be shared with participants in theatre-making processes and used in practical ways to regulate distance and structure creative exploration. In this theatre project, work was focused on rings one to five of the Drama Spiral, i.e. we did not surface stories of unresolved difficulties during this theatre project.

The second exemplar, Re-Live Theatre's performance of *Memoria,* provides a clear example of work at the sixth, innermost ring of the Drama Spiral. It stands as an excellent example of ethical, flexible, safe and reflexive practice where participant-performers present their personal stories around difficult and unresolved issues. During my observations of a wide range of theatre productions during this study, *Memoria* is the best example I saw of theatre practice at the sixth ring of the Spiral. I have chosen it because it demonstrates how theatre practitioners can work with integrity with difficult and unresolved personal stories where people are highly vulnerable, and do this work in ways that are unique to theatre and highly integrative — without apology and without trying to imitate the processes of psychotherapy.

Case study of a participatory theatre project using personal stories and rings one to five of the Drama Spiral

The first case study is focused on an ensemble-developed performance emerging from personal narratives of young people leaving care. This case study is based on a theatre project I co-facilitated in 2012 with young people leaving the care system in Devon. This was a collaboration between myself; Fiona Macbeth; ExStream Theatre Company, who provided several peer facilitators who are specialists in leading participatory theatre workshops; the University of Exeter

department of drama; several additional advisors from the faculty of other departments in the University; a professional researcher in community and policy issues; twelve young people in care; and staff of a local county council. The project had among its primary aims to explore how theatre projects have the potential to facilitate and support young people leaving care as they transition into young adulthood and life in the wider community (Goldingay et al, 2012). The project included a range of coordinated activities over eight months leading to a symposium (Goldingay, 2011). This account of the project will focus on just one aspect of the project, where young people who were soon to be leaving foster care created an original play, based on personal stories they shared in the theatre workshop.

The theatre project

The theatre project with the young people took place in April 2012. We decided, after considering many variables and listening to the interests of the young people, to offer a three-day theatre workshop which would have a finished product at the end of it, to show to an invited audience.

On day one of the project, after a range of warm-ups, group-building activities and creative games at ring one of the Spiral, we ask the young people involved to create personal level scenes based on the title, 'A challenge I have faced and overcome.' From this prompt emerge two personal scenes that were later adapted and fictionalised as part of the final performance. After we see these first two scenes, I then explain the Drama Spiral to the group and we discuss the two scenes through the lens of the Spiral. Both scenes were personal and represented work at the fifth ring of the Drama Spiral. Both also used some distance by having someone else play the role of self.

After I explain the Drama Spiral, Sophie (names are changed to protect confidentiality), a group member who is one of the young care leavers, offers her own idea about a drama structure that allows personal scenes to 'spiral out' and become more fictional and abstract. In her suggested structure, people will share

stories in small groups, and then give the other team a maximum of four words or phrases that describe the story, and the other team will allow those words to settle in their own imagination and produce a scene to go with those words. Using this approach, we will move 'out' on the Drama Spiral. This is a golden moment for me as a practitioner-researcher, because Sophie's idea is right on target and shows that she understands the notion of spiraling in and spiraling out. Sophie's idea is a useful further confirmation that the Spiral model is readily understandable; it is a practical, pragmatic tool that can be shared with participant groups with little fuss.

During the course of the next two days, we use Sophie's idea to explore how personal scenes can be abstracted, and we also explore further scenes that directly recreate scenes from life. These are later fictionalised and fed into the mix for the final production. We also continue to lead warm-up games and theme-based exercises that help to explore themes that resonate with the group. On day three, we focus on bringing the scenes together to form a short play that is presented to a small invited audience of people who we know will be supportive of the participant-performers. The play is called 'The Girl Who Lost and Found,' and has a running time of about thirty minutes. Here is a summary of the play, with commentary:

> **Opening image:** The play begins with a joyful circle of people rushing around and laughing, holding each other by the hands and spinning in a large circle.

> **Overture:** Half of the ensemble are spread around the stage and have their eyes closed. Their partners in the sequence are spread around different parts of the stage. The people with their eyes closed find their way to their partner guided only by gentle sounds the partner makes, like a beacon guiding them home. This movement piece is inspired by a trust game we played during the rehearsal period called *Baby Penguins, Find Your Mother.* The overture is paused half way through, when the 'baby penguins' are only half way home. We will return to this sequence at the end of the play.

> **Scene one:** Mia, the central character, is a small child. She panics when she realises she has lost her toy kitten. Her mother helps her to

search for the toy, and eventually they realise the kitten is lost forever. In the scene, we see that despite the hurt of what will be an ongoing loss, an attuned parent can give meaningful comfort. This scene was a fictionalised version of a story told by one of the group participants about a time when she lost something precious to her.

Interlude one: This is a recreation of the trust circle exercise, with people moving to the centre of a tightly formed group, and falling backwards and forwards, knowing other people will catch them if they fall. The dialogue includes people offering reassurance to the person in the middle: 'We won't let you fall.' 'We will be here for you.'

Scene Two: This is a scene when Mia is school age, trying to perform a tricky maneuver on the football pitch. Her coach is persistent, supportive and highly motivational. The scene captures the importance of having people who believe in you, inspire you and remind you of what you can do. This arose from the drama structure exercise suggested by Sophie, where personal scenes were abstracted using four key words or phrases.

Mid-way interlude: This is a song, sung by the ensemble. It is a song from the musical *Glee,* entitled 'We can't back down.' Sophie was very focused on having this song included, as she finds it highly inspirational. The rest of the cast rehearsed hard with Sophie, to get the song and the accompanying dance movements just right.

Scene three: This is a fictionalised version of a personal level scene offered by one of the participant-performers, where she faces a loss of confidence. She receives attuned comfort and encouragement from her carer. The scene captures the idea that a comforting and supportive carer can help you to have confidence to face unhappy and difficult situations.

Interlude two: This is a metaphorically resonant sequence, derived from an imagination exercise where people take each other on guided tours of imagined places. In this interlude, Mia is taken by a tour guide to an imagined place, her 'happy place.' The sequence is meant to capture the idea that the imagination can be a source of comfort and creative inspiration, and that we can attempt to access inner resources whenever we need them.

Scene four: This scene was a fictionalised and combined version of two scenes that emerged during rehearsal. Mia is with her friend on a

bus. Her friend is drunk and provokes a drunken fight with another passenger. Mia ushers her friend off the bus before the fight turns more violent. After the bus pulls away, Mia's friend screams, 'I lost my purse!' After desperate searching through coats and bags, Mia finds it for her. She tells her friend, 'You didn't lose it. It was here all the time.' She reflects that she can help her friend with some things, but not with others.

Epilogue and closing image: In the closing sequence, we re-visit the opening overture, and this time, the people manage to reach their partner, having been guided home by their gentle calling. The group all join together in the shape of a bird. They flap their wings and fly.

Analysis and reflection regarding the rehearsal process and the performance

While there are many lenses through which we could analyse this theatre project, I will focus here on the elements of the project most relevant to this study — namely those elements that help to explore how the Drama Spiral was used in the project to regulate distance and also to ensure that the project was carried out in ethical, safe and boundaried ways that also encouraged artistic expression and creative confidence among the ensemble and the practitioners.

In reference to the Drama Spiral, there are important ways in which the Spiral helped us to make decisions about regulating the degree of distance during rehearsal and in the final performance. For example, we began to form our new theatre company using group building exercises and theatre games. These would normally be located on the outer edge (the first ring) of the Spiral and are typical processes used to form new groups. They are the sorts of activities that bring groups together and build trust, cohesion and a sense of shared enterprise.

After one or two hours of this process, the group spontaneously began to share personal reflections that arose from the games and exercises. This was a significant step inward on the Spiral (i.e. to the fourth and fifth rings). This led to the creation and enactment of two personal level scenes about resolved difficulties, i.e. at the fifth ring of the Spiral.

One notable process throughout this project was how the participants naturally found ways of creating an optimal distance with the material. For example, on several occasions they swapped roles so that the teller of the story was not in their own role during the enactment. This created some degree of distance, as the teller was not in their own role re-enacting an episode from their own life. The final performance of 'The Girl Who Lost and Found' could be placed on the third ring of the Spiral, as it represented a fictionalised version of the stories presented. While the cast members would easily be able to identify which elements of the performed version of the play were related to their own life story, the audience would not have been able to tell this.

It is also worth noting that there was a great deal of mutual interest and respect, from older to younger and from younger to older, for each other's life experiences. There was a spirit of mutual endeavour and care taken with each other's personal stories. Albert Bandura's widely cited social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) has established how human beings learn from each other in social contexts, and in particular focuses on how young people often look to people just a few years older as role models. Looked at through the lens of Bandura's work, we can see this project, with care leavers and peer facilitators who were a few years older, as being a prime example of social learning theory in action.

It is important to note that the scenes enacted were not in the domain of unresolved or traumatic issues. It would not have been appropriate to ask the participants in this project to explicitly speak about or enact unresolved traumas, losses, events or relationships. This was not the contract, and would have represented unsafe practice. In another context, such as a medium to long term psychodrama group or a therapeutically informed theatre process, exploring such issues may be appropriate. For this project, we mainly worked at the first, third and fifth rings of the Spiral (see Fig. 3.2.), and we consciously, explicitly and purposefully did not allow the material to drift further towards the center of the Spiral — the sixth and innermost ring — towards more troubling, difficult, highly

personal and unresolved material. The participants in the project agreed with this principle and understood the rationale for the boundary.

Thinking about attachment narrative therapy, in this drama project the therapeutic elements of the process were handled largely through metaphor, i.e. at abstract distance. The participants did share aspects of their personal life stories, for example in group discussions after exercises, and in one or two of the scenes of the play. However, the project purposefully avoided a direct exploration of the attachment histories and attachment narratives of the participants, as this would not have been appropriate in short term work, where there was no guarantee of adequate follow up. Therefore, the aspect of attachment narrative therapy within this drama project could be said to be 'light touch' in the sense of working largely through metaphor. In other, longer term and more supported work, it would be appropriate to work with personal attachment narratives in more direct ways, for example by staging key scenes from one's life when attachment figures were needed.

Having said this, the production did address attachment issues in the sense that it provided an experience that supported the move towards adulthood, and the shift from the identity of young person in care to the identity of young adult who will be forming new relationships and new attachments as part of their development towards independence. By working largely through metaphor and fictional distance, the play allowed exploration of this attachment-related theme and also a range of other themes. All of these themes can be seen as integrative, and, on reflection, I think that there was integration at all five levels of integration described in chapter four. For example, the play included the theme of coming to terms with losses and traumas, especially those that can never be 'made right.' It also contained themes such as: Finding safety and learning to trust others; dealing with failure; needing and finding the loving support of an attuned attachment figure; being protected by someone else who is important to you and holds you in mind; feeling alienated, stupid and incompetent, but wanting to be so much more; allowing other people to help you when you need it; being understood; having

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someone who cares about you who really listens and tries to understand the problems you have faced or are facing; finding confidence; becoming resilient and more able to overcome obstacles and 'stand your ground'; becoming self-aware; growing and maturing; finding a sense of fulfilment by helping others and being a part of something bigger than oneself; getting it wrong sometimes, but carrying on and trying to learn from mistakes; wanting to help others while also becoming aware that there are some things that people must want to change themselves (e.g. the intoxicated friend on the bus); forming friendships and trying to help one's friends; being bold and taking risks that stretch you as a person; facing and overcoming fears; and, feeling like you are a good person and worth knowing.

Each scene of the play developed one or more of these integrative themes through the character of Mia, as she grows from childhood into young adulthood. It is notable that all of these themes emerged naturally as a part of the process of eliciting personal stories from the participants, which were later adapted and fictionalised for the final performance. This shows good evidence of the principle of 'trusting the group,' i.e. trusting that participants, if provided with a safe and non-judgmental setting and the right kind of facilitation, will find their own healing metaphors and integrative scenes.

The project also provides a useful reference point for integrating the theatre of personal stories with psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy. For example, by applying the Drama Spiral model to the drama project, we can see that certain psychodrama ideas were utilised when the participants were encouraged to rehearse and enact scenes from their own lives. These were later adapted and re-shaped in order to serve as elements of the dramatic performance 'The Girl Who Lost and Found.' In psychodrama, one of the most prominent features is that individuals are encouraged to enact and explore scenes and relationships from their own lives, in order to encourage reflection, healing, growth, creativity, spontaneity and integration. However, it is most common in psychodrama for the scenes not to be rehearsed, but instead to be created spontaneously, in front of the group, with the guidance of the director. So the

approach used in the rehearsal process in this drama project was an adaptation of typical psychodrama processes — what might be called *rehearsed, self-directed psychodrama* (i.e. the autobiographical scenes were largely self-directed by the person whose story it was). I like this technique because it places the material so directly in the hands of the teller. I have not seen the technique demonstrated anywhere else, and I have not read about it — although of course it may have been invented many times before. I thought of the technique in about 2013 when I was testing out an early version of the Drama Spiral with theatre students, when I needed a technique that would allow participants to have a sampling of what it feels like to create a highly personal scene, perhaps even a scene at ring five or six of the Spiral, while also wanting them to experience the process as being very much within the realm of theatre and the scene creation work that they would already be familiar with. As such, this technique of *rehearsed, self-directed psychodrama* represents a tested example of how the theatre of personal stories, psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy can be integrated into a hybrid form of theatre creation. I have used the technique in more than twenty workshops explaining the Spiral thus far, and it works every time. It is a very useful hybrid, as it encompasses so well the theatre of personal stories, psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy.

I mention the technique *rehearsed, self-directed psychodrama* at some length because I am aware, as a qualified director of psychodrama, that the director has very great power and influence regarding the direction, focus and pace of psychodramas. I think it is very useful to offer participants other modes of working where they are fully in the directing role as to the content, process, focus and pace of the way that their story is rehearsed and presented. I am not saying that the role of the psychodrama director is flawed; what I am saying is that there are additional ways of encouraging protagonists to share their stories with others, and the technique of self-directed psychodrama is a useful tool for the toolkit.

Case study two: Re-Live's *Memoria*

An example of a theatre production that could be said to have operated at the sixth, innermost ring of the Drama Spiral is Re-Live Theatre's November 2014 production entitled *Memoria*, performed for public audiences at Cardiff's Chapter Theatre. The play was performed for three nights to sold out audiences and live-streamed to more than 4,000 people in 12 countries. I focus on *Memoria* because it is a clear example of best practice at the sixth, innermost ring of the Drama Spiral. I learned of the production through being on the company's contact list, and also through professional connections: Alison O'Connor, one of the two directors of Re-Live, was once a member of Geese Theatre Company, and I first met her when she worked there — although we were not contemporaries.

   Memoria featured the autobiographical performances of people living with dementia and also their family members and the social care professionals involved in their care. In this sensitively staged production, the performers shared their life stories and the challenges they face in living with dementia or caring for people with dementia. Theorising the production through the lens of the Drama Spiral, *Memoria* explored the terrain at ring six of the Spiral, i.e. difficult and unresolved stories that are painful, fearful and ongoing. With seriousness and humour, the performers presenting their personal stories did not shy away from the stark realities of the illness, its effects on them and their families, and the struggles many patients and their families have in finding appropriate and sensitive care, support and medical attention. The production was a powerful sharing of human experience, and was also informative: on the night I saw the production, many policy makers and social care and medical professionals were in the audience and reflected on their learning during the question and answer session after the performance.

The work of Re-Live

The founders and Co-Directors of Re-Live, Alison O'Connor and Karin Diamond, describe Re-Live as a specialist Arts in Health organisation focused on designing

and delivering performance-led interventions and experiential training programmes for professionals. *Memoria* was a programme designed for both public audiences as well as professionals. The theatre production was part of a larger project, which includes a training programme. The company has received commissions to deliver life story work and dementia care training for Swansea County Council, Vale of Glamorgan County Council, Powys County Council, Cardiff County Council, and the Lancashire Workforce and Development Partnership. Part of this work is done in partnership with Cardiff University, with the ambitious aim of transforming dementia care training in Wales. At the time of writing, Re-Live continues its work focused on dementia care, among its other programmes of work including work with war veterans, survivors of conflict, and older adults.

O'Connor and Diamond describe their approach as *life story theatre* — a form of theatre where people are helped to share stories about key aspects of their lives with audiences (O'Connor and Diamond, 2014). It is a form of theatre which is perhaps most closely related to documentary, verbatim and testimonial theatre. Within Re-live's approach to life story theatre, there is also an explicit aim of promoting positive social change in their work.

Looking at *Memoria* through the lens of the Drama Spiral

While there are many lenses through which we might analyse *Memoria,* in order to focus on the key issues in this study, I shall restrict my analysis, as I did with the first case study, to considering how the play relates to the Drama Spiral and to the themes of ethical practice and integration in the theatre of personal stories.

Memoria serves as an exemplar of how theatre can operate safely and ethically at the innermost ring of the Drama Spiral when carefully framed and thoughtfully facilitated by skilled practitioners. As elaborated in chapter three, the sixth, innermost ring of the Spiral is the most personal and sensitive. Here, participants are helped to stage scenes that are still difficult and unresolved for them. Given the particular sensitivities of the topic and the participant-performers, a notable feature of *Memoria* was the detailed groundwork and careful contracting done

before and during the project, and the thoughtful support offered to participants long after the production concluded (O'Connor and Diamond 2014). When I met with O'Connor and Diamond in 2017, two and a half years after the production had concluded, they were still in contact with the cast members, and some of the cast were still involved in support groups and in other projects facilitated by Re-live. O'Connor and Diamond take a long view in relation to participant involvement, and they recognise that to some degree projects like *Memoria* fill a gap and serve the function of social support and social therapy that might be missing in statutory and voluntary sector services.

Working at the innermost ring of the Spiral requires explicit consideration of ethics from multiple points of reference, and ethical issues abound in a production such as *Memoria.* Thinking back to the wide range of ethical issues that are explored in chapter two, we can see that in *Memoria*, questions arise regarding informed consent, patient confidentiality, and the confidentiality of family members and professionals involved with the people on stage. Further ethical issues include the effects on audiences, and the effects of involvement on participants. In exploring these issues during discussion with O'Connor and Diamond, they described to me the ways in which they take into account these and other ethical issues and address them with ongoing adaptations throughout the theatre-making process. It would be fair to say that ethical concerns are just as important to O'Connor and Diamond as artistic issues and the social mission of the organisation. The focus on ethics is required not just because of the vulnerabilities of their participant groups, but also because of the highly personal nature of their *Life Story Theatre* approach, which purposefully elicits autobiographical material around difficult and possibly painful themes in peoples' lives.

There are a number of directorial choices within the production of *Memoria* that signal the careful consideration of ethical processes. This included using the technique of onstage interview to allow the performers' personal stories to be told without requiring them to remember monologues. For example, in an early scene, Karen, a woman who appears to be in her 30s, who has been diagnosed with

younger onset dementia, is interviewed on a park bench by the co-director, Alison O'Connor. She speaks about the devastating effects of being given the diagnosis, and how difficult it was telling her children and her husband. She also speaks about how her friends have abandoned her, not knowing what to do or say. This technique of collaborative dialogue, and a number of other, related techniques used in the production, seemed to capture perfectly the idea advocated by Anne Davis Basting in her writing and practical work on dementia care and care for older adults, where she promotes the idea of working collaboratively with the person and encouraging them to be an active participant in promoting their own wellbeing (Basting, 1998, 2009; Basting et al, 2016).

Similarly, there was frequent use of pre-recorded voiceovers, played back while the person whose voice is heard is seen onstage. This was an effective way of including monologues without requiring people to remember their lines. In the fifth scene, for example, Jeanette, Patrick and Karen are onstage (they are not 'in character' — they are simply themselves). Their voices are heard on a recorded voiceover. We hear them recall life's pleasures, activities they like doing such as singing and playing music. They also speak of loss, such as the loss of the joy of reading, 'because it's difficult to remember what you have read,' and the loss of the pleasures and routines of their old life, including work. Grief hangs heavily in this scene.

Other notable adaptations included the slow and steady pace of the scenes and the scene changes, the very simple staging (including minimal movement once onstage), and the fact that none of the participant-performers with dementia were left alone onstage. There was always someone nearby, within just a few feet, in case they needed assistance, or a prompt. Looking at the piece as a whole, this sort of scaffolding was present in every scene, providing an infrastructure supporting the memory and action of each cast member. And while this infrastructure had, on the one hand, a purely pragmatic aspect, in that it supported the participation of the cast members, it also represented a kind of meta-choreography of embodied memory and history. For example, in one of Jill's

scenes, we see her onstage while we hear her recorded voiceover, recounting her profound grief when she realised her husband Chris would not be coming home again. Onstage, Jill is very still, writing occasionally in her journal. On the backdrop, we see a montage of scenes of their life together, raising their sons. The counterpoint of voiceover, onstage actions, and photographs from the family album work as a harmonious juxtaposition and a powerfully affective resonance. It feels like a powerfully meditative witnessing, very precious and sensitive. It comes with a feeling of being privileged to have someone share something so precious and heartfelt with us. In other scenes in the play, there are variations on this theme, where memory, history, action, sound effects, live music and visual images play in harmony and counterpoint in such a way as to keep the audience engaged with fresh combinations and techniques — while also being adapted to the particular capacity and needs of the individual cast member. This integrated use of scaffolding and juxtaposed elements of staging is perhaps the strongest and most notable aspects of the aesthetic as well as ethical production values of *Memoria.*

If we reflect on the notion of ethics and the many facets of ethical practice that were explored in chapter two, we can see that O'Connor and Diamond worked in ethical and sensitive ways in the staging. The techniques used were sensitively adapted to the capacities of the participant-performers within their zone of proximal development, and this approach allowed them to be maximally active in the performance, depending on what they could do.

The ethical sensitivity and strength of *Memoria* also extended to the themes embedded within the play. For example, throughout the play there was a balance of shadow and light: when a scene focused on the fearful, exhausting and debilitating aspects of dementia, this was soon juxtaposed with the strengths of the participant-performers, their pleasures, their humour, their treasured memories and relationships, and their dignity as individuals. Each person was able to tell aspects of their life story in simple scenes that were played at the slow and steady pace of contemplative reflection. The autobiographical stories were often augmented by the projection of images from their family albums, offering an

invitation to the audience to see the onstage performers as individuals with a rich personal and family history.

Continuing on the thematic elements of the play, and how they reflected a high degree of ethical thinking and values, I noted how the play balanced and integrated multiple perspectives in relation to the central theme of dementia. This was most plain to see in the fact that the cast included people living with dementia (Jeanette, Karen, Patrick) and also a husband (David, who is Jeanette's husband), Jill (whose husband had died of dementia several years earlier), Carri (whose mother currently has dementia), and Dawn (who manages a home for people with dementia). This casting allowed a variety of perspectives, which added to the overall impact of the play. It was informative and also revelatory.

By the same token, there was a balance of views in relation to critical assessment of the medical and care professions: while some of the cast spoke about the shortcomings and insensitivities of the care they received, or how inadequate their care was compared with patients with other diseases such as cancer, there were other cast members who recalled professionals who offered care and treatment with great sensitivity and effectiveness. For example, in one scene, Alison O'Connor interviews Jeanette and David — a couple married for fifty years — at the piano. Jeanette recalls seeing a range of specialists, and having to lobby exhaustingly hard, with the support of her daughters, to get a confirmed diagnosis. Her husband David then speaks about the shock of receiving a letter from the doctor after the diagnosis, addressed to 'Mrs. Carter and Carer.' He was outraged: 'I am her *husband,* not her *carer.'*

By contrast, Jill has a later monologue offering a very different view of the care her husband received. During her monologue, played as voiceover as she sits on a park bench, Jill recalls the protracted and difficult process she went through before she could agree to her husband Chris going into full time care. She then talks about the care home that Chris went into and how grateful she is towards the nurses, who showed him care and sensitivity up until his death. She asks

rhetorically, 'Angels in heaven? In churches? No, they are here on Earth, and they wear blue tunics. And I thank God for them from the bottom of my heart!'

The contrast between Jeanette and David's experience of the health system, as compared with Jill's and her husband Chris', felt like an important balance because it represented complex reality rather than partisan sloganeering. In some ways, *Memoria* was a campaigning piece, championing greater awareness of the issues around dementia and advocating for better services for dementia care. Given this, it may have been tempting to offer a biased view that stressed the inadequacy of the services in a plea for more investment in dementia care. It is notable that O'Connor and Diamond took a more nuanced approach and included points of view across the spectrum, with some cast members offering harsh criticism and others praising the compassion and care their loved one received. This is a complex and mature approach, because it recognises that many of the people in the audience would be people working in dementia care, and would probably be turned off by a play that slated their profession without also focusing on the good services offered. While there is a time and a place for partisan protest, there is equally a time when the best strategy is to bring people along with you, from both sides of the argument.

The production had high aesthetic values and used photo-montage effects with a mix of projected images that included facts and figures, family album photos, images of specific settings like a hospital corridor, and also images of outdoor settings such as parks, woods and streams. On two occasions, there were interludes with music and images where relevant statistics were projected onto different parts of the scenery. One of the statistics informed us that 'there are 44.4 million people across the world living with dementia, and that by 2050 this will rise to 135.5 million.' Another statistic informed us that 'In the UK, there are over 670,000 unpaid carers for people with dementia. Unpaid carers save the economy £11 billion per year.' These images and statistics brought valuable context to the scenes. Looked at through the lens of ethics, the images from family albums can

be seen as adding respectful context to the life stories of the participant-performers.

Perhaps the most powerful ethical aspect of *Memoria* was captured in an observation made by Karen Diamond in the Q&A session after the performance I attended. Karen mentioned her observations of dementia care in Japan, and how people with dementia were encouraged to continue to do what gave them joy. She spoke about how she and Alison O'Connor had tried, with *Memoria*, to encourage the participant-performers to continue to do what they enjoy doing, and to use their voices to help other people.

Finally, there is also the important aspect of the ethical relation to the audience. Some of the notable features of Re-live's approach to the audience is how the performers and the onstage director (Alison) brought a sense of informality, naturalness and, sometimes, humour, to the action onstage, such that the audience had a sense of joining in with a process focused on sharing, understanding and kindness toward others. The atmosphere established in the auditorium was one of sensitivity, empathy and shared experience. These were stories and people that any of us could relate to, and they were sharing their stories with us in such a way that we could encounter and contemplate the themes and the stories with a feeling that, if we needed support, support was on hand. This was an intangible but nevertheless important aspect of the tone of the production.

Memoria is also an example of how the theatre of personal stories is increasingly breaking through barriers and making a direct address that provides a means for participant-performers to offer their unfettered viewpoints. Such is the urgency to communicate about the issues that they face that the people involved in this production have boldly presented their lives and their personal stories to the world, free from the filter of — and potential silencing by — professional discourses and systems while also attempting to break through societal ignorance, stereotyping and stigmatising of people experiencing dementia (and their loved ones). In the case of this production, this highly provocative approach, which can

be seen as an example of the widespread process of *disintermediation* (i.e. the removal of intermediating agents) which is happening in so many aspects of culture, led to some truly astonishing and memorable moments of encounter in the theatre. The paradox presented by such a production is that its power to a very great degree lies in the vulnerability of the people whose lives are being presented and who are the most powerful proponents of telling their stories.

To sum up, *Memoria* demonstrated how theatre can address highly personal themes with participants — even profoundly vulnerable themes — and maintain high levels of safety, ethical rigor and aesthetic form.

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Conclusion

This investigation has focused on the central question: How can theatre practitioners help participants and performers — including themselves, if they are performing autobiographical work — to access, share and enact their personal stories in safe, ethical, flexible and intentional ways, particularly when their stories might focus on difficult and unresolved issues? Along with this central question, the study has addressed two related questions, both aimed at turning theory into praxis: Firstly, how can we articulate a graduated and reflexive model of practice that provides clear guidance to theatre practitioners who are working with participants' personal stories? This was the focus of chapter three. And, secondly, how can the psychotherapy modalities of psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy — both of which use personal narrative as a healing element — provide a well-theorised model of bio-psycho-social integration for theatre practitioners who are working with personal narrative? This was the focus of chapter four. Chapters one and two examined the history and ethics pertaining to the theatre of personal stories, and chapter five described two exemplars of practice. Underpinning these questions and the study as a whole has been the intention to promote excellence in theatre practice where personal stories are used.

In order to answer the central question, in this study I have integrated theory and practice from the fields of theatre and performance studies, applied theatre, psychodrama and attachment narrative therapy in order to develop and describe a four-part framework for best practice in the theatre of personal stories. I have argued that this integrated framework — consisting of the four elements *history, ethics, praxis* and *intentions* — is necessary because the theatre of personal stories has crossed so clearly into therapeutic terrain around difficult, painful and traumatic stories. Therapy has in this sense gone public. When people perform their stories of trauma and loss in workshops or in front of audiences, theatre practitioners need clear guidelines, decision-making tools and ethical principles to help them navigate what can quickly become very tricky terrain. To this end, I have

tried to show how psychodrama, attachment narrative therapy and the theatre of personal stories can be integrated into a coherent model which allows the practitioner to work in a purposefully eclectic manner along the continuum from low focus, creative drama groups to high focus work in groups where individuals enact their life stories around even the most difficult topics.

With the integrated framework consisting of *history, ethics, praxis* and *intentions*, and more specifically with the Drama Spiral, I have attempted to offer relevant guidelines, principles and a model of practice in order to promote safe, ethical, flexible and intentional practice in the theatre of personal stories. My intention is that the study, the framework and the Drama Spiral will move the discourse in the theatre of personal stories forward a significant step towards safer practice. The aim, in the end, is to have flexible practice and responsive, informed and well-trained practitioners, able to facilitate and direct theatre processes across the continuum from the purely fictional to the highly personal, and from the purely creative to the highly functional and pragmatic, allowing for the possibility that all points along these continuums may be contained in any one work of art.

Theatre artists who present their own life on the stage, and practitioners who facilitate groups of people who want to present their personal stories to audiences, may have a wide range of motives. For some, it is a way of being witnessed and validated, and for others it may be a way of contributing to their own healing by contributing to society, for example by helping to raise awareness of a problem, or encouraging action in a particular cause. Looked at from a purely pragmatic and financial point of view, it is also the case that for some performers, putting their life on the stage — or putting other people's stories on the stage — is a way of earning a living. Whatever the motive, firm ethical principles and models need to be held in mind in order to prevent, as far as possible, people being exploited or the theatre of personal stories becoming the venue for cheap exhibitionism, cynical cashing in, or worse, re-traumatisation through public re-enactment of trauma and abuse.

Around the world, university drama departments and theatre schools graduate thousands of students each year from both applied and mainstream theatre programmes. Many of these graduates have ambitions to use the power of theatre to make a positive impact in the world, and as part of this positive impulse they may be drawn towards using personal stories — their own, or those of their participants — as a way of reaching audiences more directly with the special impact that comes with people portraying personal stories on the stage. Given this likelihood, my hope is that this study contributes in some way towards safe and ethical practice, while also enhancing ethical risk-taking and aesthetic ambition in the theatre of personal stories.

The pragmatic focus of this study has been driven by my concern that the outcome be relevant to the everyday work of theatre practitioners. From the outset of the study, I have sought to offer something practicable and accessible to theatre makers. The resulting four-part framework, which includes the Drama Spiral, draws upon theory, history, practical research, ethical reflection and integration with several domains of therapeutic knowledge and practice. I hope that the framework and the Spiral offer theatre practitioners a useful practical resource to help their decision making and negotiation of risk, and prompts the exploration of new modes of working that generate new ideas and move beyond familiar tropes.

We need the right tools and the right skills in order to stage vulnerability without hurting people. The Drama Spiral is an attempt to minimise risk, and the framework as a whole is an attempt to provide a containing structure for people to encounter vulnerability in relative safety. As such, the Drama Spiral and the four-part framework are proposed as useful tools in the practitioner's toolkit, so that theatre makers can work in an ethically robust and artistically skilled way, helping people to share their stories in ways that promote understanding, integration, ethical encounter and liberation.

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