Vital Spaces/Vital Signs:
Young People, Performance, Identity and Dialogue

Submitted by Erin Colleen Walcon to the University of Exeter
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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.

Signature: *Erin Colleen Walcon* ………………………………………..

Abstract

This thesis advocates that young people's participatory theatre in Britain is an important site for dialogue - both internally between young people and externally with those in positions of power and authority who have decision-making responsibilities in young people's lives. Contextualising the work within the field of critical pedagogy, the thesis asks questions about how devised theatre with young participants can be an effective method to start conversations about young people's identity and role in society.

The research was conducted within a Participatory Action Research methodology, and involved about 600 young people from across Devon in a variety of pilot projects which became increasingly dialogic in form over the three years of study. Looking first at the complex issue of 'youth' identity within sociology, cultural studies, ethnography and geography, the thesis posits that the fields of theatre and performance studies have important contributions to make to an understanding of how identity is a performed and constructed concept. Building upon this premise, the second chapter overviews the existing field of young people's participatory theatre in the UK, stipulating that a pedagogical framework built on an historicized understanding of educational theatre is essential to mapping the existing state of practice. This pedagogical framing allows for navigation through the increasingly impact-driven criteria which can profoundly shape the aesthetics and authorship of such work when conducted in the field. These (often silent) shaping forces are analysed through a set of case study examples.

Chapter III defines and defends the framing of this work as a form of critical pedagogy, specifically exploring the definitions of dialogue and literac(ies) through case study examples of dialogic practice with young participants. Chapters IV and V examine the PAR research conducted over three years under the heading Vital Spaces/Vital Signs, which moved from small-scale pilot projects in youth centres to larger-scale 'devised dialogues' within more traditional theatre spaces. The praxis and findings encountered within the action research are detailed, and recommendations for future extended dialogic work are made.

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Key Abbreviations

ACE – Arts Council England

CCCS – Birmingham-based research group called the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, founded in 1964.

DIE – Drama-in-Education

FYT – Flint Youth Theatre (USA)

NAYT – National Association of Youth Theatres (UK)

PAR – Participatory Action Research

TIE – Theatre-in-Education

A note about pseudonyms

All participants involved in the Vital Spaces research who are under 18 are referred to with pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. In order to maintain a sense of flow in the writing, the use of aliases has been chosen over initials.

Place names (towns/cities) are real, but specific locations have been changed, such as youth centre names or schools.

All participants who were over 18 at the time of the research are referred to by their real names, with their express permission.

Adults involved in the Vital Spaces Project in their professional capacities are referred to by their real name, except in cases where anonymity was deemed necessary. For example, the case study example described in Chapter IV, a pseudonym is used for the key worker at the Central Youth Centre.

These decisions have been made with much deliberation, to strike a balance between honouring and naming the contributors to the research, but also preserving necessary privacies for those involved.

Acknowledgements

This work was made possible by the profound investment of a team of university facilitators who brought enthusiasm, expertise, good humour, and an unwavering generosity to the work. Without the involvement of the Vital Spaces Company, in its fluid and changing form, this thesis would not be possible. I wish to especially thank Josh, Rosalie, Matt, Rachael, and Izzy for their long-term investment, as well as Emma, Becky, George & Mandy for their facilitation with Devon Youth Theatre.

This generosity was met by the 600 young people who participated in the Vital Spaces project, and who brought *genuine* participation - through their honesty, questions, play, and sometimes even more through moments of resistance which taught us all a great deal. It has been a privilege and pleasure to get to spend so much time with these groups of young people and to explore these questions with them. This work is a direct product of those voices, and I also hope that its findings will return to those communities and bring potentials for further theatre work in the future.

Despite a belief that the institutional frameworks of schooling are deeply troubled, I know that the educational systems are filled, brimming, with passionate advocates for young people, teachers who fight a daily battle to enact change, to honour the whole person, to provide spaces for revolution even within the body of the beast. It is to them and their daily endurance and courage, and to the young people who survive (some joyfully) such systems, to whom this work is dedicated.

Lastly, I wish to express gratitude to my brilliant colleagues at the University of Exeter Drama Department who have seen this through with laughter and listening, and especially to Fiona Macbeth and Kerrie Schaefer, whose support have been invaluable in shaping the work's practice and theory – a beautiful balance. A final thank you also goes to my family – to Wendy, Carey, Alden, and to David, Maya and Sophia. Smae, the 'HP' is done!

Introduction

The Vital Spaces project was, at least in part, a product of my own intentions, agendas, and biases, and it seems important to begin this introduction with an honest statement about these subjective realities which I bring to the table. Ultimately, I am making a set of selective choices about which elements of the work to carry through to the final thesis evaluation, and left scattered behind are thousands of equally important moments which I have rejected. In this selection process, my own lived experience as a teacher, researcher, mother, writer, and theatre director influence what I see as important. My roots in the teaching culture of USA secondary schools have equal importance to my involvement as Artistic Director for Devon Youth Theatre here in the UK. I will not deny that the critical pedagogy which I bring to the centre of this thesis is a distinct choice I make, articulated by my belief that schools are a site where many young people experience dissonance between their lived experience and the expectations of standardisation, testing cultures, distinct discipline divides, and a punitive reactionary system. Drama classrooms often represent an exception to these kinds of school cultures, and yet the teachers in those sites rarely have the opportunity to step back and reflect upon their practice in a meaningful and deep way.

After working as an Applied Theatre practitioner and educator for over 15 years, I began the Vital Spaces research with a set of research questions about how young people might be performing identity in daily, grounded, tiny, and spectacular ways. I hoped to work with a diverse cross-section of young people outside of school settings to create theatre which engaged with these questions: how are young people in this particular place performing a sense of self? How does that performance change or adapt? How can theatre sites serve as safe spaces to experiment with alternative performances? How can theatre sites engage with critical questions about the social forces which influence and shape those performances?

These questions motivated the early pilot projects, and were informed by a rich set of theoretical discourses from geography, ethnography, performativity studies, and developmental psychology. However, as the research continued, and was reflected upon (within a Participatory Action Research methodology), it became increasingly clear that these were risky questions to ask in unsafe

contexts. The research began to query the unspoken and silent agendas which can accompany theatre in the public sector, and to critically analyse the policy imperatives and impact requirements which can saturate any theatre work with young people, regardless of site. The positioning of the practice in youth centres brought a number of ethical issues about funding mandates, necessary outcomes and impacts upon the young people's perceived and measured 'well-being'. In particular, the research found a dissonance with the deficit models of young people's identity which often frame interventionist work in the public sector, and this dissonance prompted a shift in the research questions and focus. I began to ask more about the social forces, societal perceptions, and adult definitions, and to wonder how young people were speaking back to these imposed classifications.

> '...the resistance of theatre-makers and teachers to 'delivering' the government's social and educational agendas through theatre is entirely understandable; theatre-makers frequently regard themselves as independent-minded cultural provocateurs rather than uncritical followers of government agendas. But if the condition of theatre says something about the state of democracy, *then the education of a society's young citizens speaks even louder about its values* (Nicholson 2009, Section 2, Paragraph 7).

The Vital Spaces/Vital Signs project significantly changed over its three year duration, as the pilot projects also encountered a number of issues around ownership, authorship, agency, and dialogue. The work began as an exploration of the ways in which young people could create theatre which combined performed narratives of self with imaginative possibility for change. However, increasingly the work became permeated with the intention of creating a site for dialogue, often involving people in positions of power and authority in those young people's lives.[1] Throughout the action research process, I found that every time the Vital Spaces project explored ideas about youth within the theatre practice, it tended to prompt a conversation – even, importantly, a dialogue about society, about identity, about belonging, about performing selves. An important question which emerged, then, was how that dialogue was honoured within the theatre process (or not). At the end of the three years, the

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1 By 'positions of power and authority' I simply mean those who are responsible for decision-making which may have a direct impact upon young people's lived experience in a particular locality. For example, in the later Vital Spaces work, this often meant youth workers, headteachers, local authority councillors, and those in the public sector who are responsible for children and young people's services.

research questions are now: how can participatory theatre work create spaces for important conversations about young people in our society? How can such work reach out to larger audiences and engage them in dialogue about these concerns? How can young people author, instigate, create, and facilitate theatre practice themselves? What dialogues are possible within theatre spaces that could not happen otherwise?

Identifying the model and purpose of the Vital Spaces work

Despite this evolution in practice and research questions, the Vital Spaces project always operated with the same core technique: participatory performance which was created by and with young people from across Devon. The work began with a set of questions about 'youth identity' which interrogated how young people's identifications were formed and shaped by their localities, interests, personal narratives, and self-reflections. However, as the work continued, my intentionality became honed by reflexive experience and was influenced by the collaborative nature of the research. The insular work with young people in youth centres, drama studios, city streets, and professional theatres started to feel, well, insular. I began to wonder if the more powerful question in this work is… who is listening?

What began as an attempt to encounter questions with young people about their experience became a purposeful attempt to turn those questions outward to the society which holds those young people – to create spaces where young people can ask the questions of all of us. What makes our young people into who they are? How are they creating a sense of self in a world which has powerful pressures and shaping factors, which can restrict as much as it can coerce? What tools are they using to make meaning of this journey into adulthood? How are we as adults listening to them?

The hybridity of the Vital Spaces model was aligned within various contested categories – Applied Theatre, Youth Theatre, Drama and Theatre in Education, public sector consultation, and participatory practice. Each of these labels could merit an in-depth analysis, and each has been debated as both a title and way of working. Unfortunately, none of them exactly suits the process and product encountered during the action research, and I found myself returning again and again to this important question of intention. As I sought out best practice models from within the UK, Australia, and the USA, it became

increasingly clear that the work is part of an emergent field of practice which uses devising techniques, often multi-media and digital forms, creative writing and collaborative theatre-making with young people to probe questions of both identity and social justice. This dual purpose – exploring both identity and how that identity is linked to questions of social justice, is central to the lens through which I will interrogate the existing field of practice.

The Vital Spaces work aimed to use theatrical languages and techniques to explore, magnify, sift through, examine and experiment with Anthony Gidden's 'retelling narratives of self' as part of a reflexive process of identity construction (Giddens 1991; Henderson et al. 2007). But while elements of 'narratives of self' were certainly present within the Vital Spaces work, and the best practice models it drew upon, the performances were not exclusively interested in biographical performance, verbatim, testimony, or other forms of autobiography on stage. Also, the work was not dramatherapy, interested in processing or healing emotional scar tissue which might emerge during these sessions of 'retelling'.

The devising process did indeed use personal narrative, but was primarily concerned with exploring complex themes around the stereotypes of 'youth' and 'identity' and the role of both in a larger British society. Perhaps most importantly, the work owed a large debt of gratitude to the pedagogical frameworks developed in Drama-in-Education (DIE) over the last forty years in the UK, but it deviated from the cognitive developmental aims of DIE, and moved toward an external expression to an audience as a key component of the work. DIE's lasting legacy lingers within the Vital Spaces research in three primary ways: the integral belief in young people as active creators and producers of meaning, the use of drama as an imaginative emancipatory act which is constantly linked to a critical pedagogy, and a devotion to the cyclical necessity of moving between process and product in theatrical forms in order to achieve praxis. Gavin Bolton articulated this cycle as a movement between seeing oneself as a part of the creative act, in an 'as if' world, and then witnessing it within performance as well – being both participant and percipient (Bolton 1986, 20–21).

Critical pedagogy

In examining 'narratives of self' within a social context, the young participants in the project often had to engage in a process of inquiry and self-reflection, which was constantly being re-invented through theatrical languages in order to express it outwardly to an audience. Because of this, the work regularly encountered elements from critical pedagogy (Dewey 1956; Freire 1970; Bruner 1986; Bruner 1990; Giroux 2011; Vygotsky 1986). This theoretical landscape demands that the work not stop with simply inward reflection, but that it returns to a critical awareness of the world and its manifestations of power, privilege and inequality. Some elements of critical pedagogy were explored via DIE and TIE within British schools during the 1960s and onward, but the present field of practice is often necessarily sited outside schools and other educational establishments, and this demands that the pedagogical grounding be made explicit.[2]

The action research and case study examples explored in this thesis all take place outside of the secondary drama classroom - and yet a critical pedagogical lens of analysis has clearly proven to be the most insightful means of measuring success, evaluating impact, and articulating intent. This lens has allowed me to measure the work's aesthetic and social impact with criteria other than simplistic behavioural markers which can so often accompany young people's arts involvement. To imply that it is possible to just layer a lens of critical pedagogical analysis over the diverse array of young people's participatory theatre practices in Britain is false, however. The existing field of young people's participatory theatre is currently driven from a diffuse and varied range of funding agencies, public sector partners, educational institutions, and contains a myriad of (at times conflicting) agendas and measures for efficacy.

This field of practice is a shifting landscape, directly influenced by material changes to the National Curriculum and to funding agencies such as the Arts Council England (ACE). Often the work is developed and run with a complex set of opaque agendas related to young people, and many of these agendas may contradict a critical pedagogy which aims to challenge material and social inequalities. Perhaps most importantly, young people's theatre

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2 Theorists such as David Beare, Sharon Grady, John Carroll, Mia Perry and Philip Taylor have queried how young people's involvement in drama can both question and re-vision issues of power both inside and outside of institutional spaces.

practice is most often framed within questions about how it is *serving the young people*. As the Vital Spaces project began its participatory practice operating within the premise that the young people needed to benefit in some measurable way, we realised that this was a problematic question. At risk of being flippant, an entire lifetime of complex inequalities cannot be addressed in a single afternoon's drama session about coping mechanisms. This tension about tokenism, encountered within the Vital Spaces research through practice, has also resonated with Applied Theatre theorists who suggest that perhaps the framework and evaluative measures need to be altered. One of these arguments, articulated by John McGrath, proved to have a direct impact upon the nature of the Vital Spaces practice.

Turning the questions outward

In an interview with James Thompson, theatre director John McGrath queries the 'how does it serve the youth' aim as a universal certainty, suggesting that it is in fact a larger audience that needs to be served by the practice.

> With young people's work in particular, I think one of the big mistakes is how such work has been viewed and valued in the last 10 years, partly as a result of government framing. There has been a lot of good investment in work with young people that shouldn't be junked, but the framing has sometimes been: 'we do art with young people and it has certain social effects'. I think it is much more interesting to turn that around and say **'we do art with young people because society needs this art'. Not because young people need to be improved but because society needs to be different, particularly in the way it interacts with young people and this art can be part of that transformation.** I feel I can say to young people: 'we're making a piece of work that is about whatever we want it to be about: to present that to the world in the hope that it will shake people up and make them think differently and disturb them.' (Thompson and Low 2010, 410, italics and bold text my own).

McGrath's reversal of the usual evaluation criteria brings to light the essential question: who is the work actually serving? Often a tokenistic attempt to tick a box, participatory theatre which attempts to build confidence, teach communication skills, and help make young people 'better citizens' is rarely founded on the needs and desires of the young participants, but rather on the externally-imposed criteria for success that is felt by the host organisation(s).

As McGrath has demonstrated in his ongoing legacy with Contact Theatre in Manchester, alternative and radical methods are possible which can cultivate young people's theatre which is genuinely prompted by their own concerns, passions, and ideas, and which is of a high enough quality to provoke larger societal interest in the work.

These concerns from within theatre studies about the societal reception of youth theatre are echoed generally by critical pedagogue Henry Giroux, who states, 'I want to suggest that struggles over how we view, represent, and treat young people should be part of a larger public dialogue about how to imagine a democratic future. [...] it demands a renewed sense of imagination, vision, and hope' (Giroux 2011, Section 3, Chapter 5, Para 36). Indeed, I think much of the field of youth participation work requires the same momentum.

Unfortunately, however, the majority of youth participation outreach work which exists is limited by restrictive funding requirements, asked to tally their 'successes' with young people by narrow criteria which leaves little room for experimentation, alternative approaches, or a shift in framing. Such work depends upon issue-specific funding pools, and perhaps more troublingly, often on the altruistic goodwill of a facilitator who sees themselves as necessary to 'provide voice' to the young people. Much of this thesis demonstrates an uneasy negotiation with regards to the role of the facilitator/artist and the agendas which can prompt such work. Despite these reservations, models of strong participatory practice do exist and will be discussed later in the thesis with particular attention to the ways in which a facilitator's 'gentle touch' within the theatre process can provide guidance without manipulation, leadership without authoritarianism, and a necessary outsider perspective.

Devised theatre: temporary sites of authorship

As a former teacher, I have witnessed young people, both in and out of school, become silenced, unheard, or devoid of agency. I have to admit that a part of my own bias as a researcher and a teacher is the belief, unshakable, that 'Drama can be used to help students speak around these silences. [...] Through drama, students can be given authorship' (Doyle 1993, 131). I wish to argue that this can be more than just authorship of a dramatic script or an embodied theatre dance piece – that it can be authorship of a life. However, this unshakable belief is grounded in a very pragmatic understanding that young

people are bound up in complex socio-economic networks and an increasingly media-saturated visual culture which writes their self-worth as part of a consumer identity. Equally, there are limits to the role that drama can play in enacting behavioural or social change within such contexts. Still, I will advocate that even a temporary site of authorship, and an opportunity to explore varying selves, voices, languages, styles, and embodiments can provide an important space for young people to engage with concepts of their own identity and vision for the world.

In Maxine Greene's words,

> Human beings, of course, devise their life projects, in time, against their own life histories, and the wider human history into which those histories feed....To be aware of authorship is to be aware of situationality and of the relation between the ways in which one interprets one's situation and the possibilities of action and of choice. This means that one's "reality", rather than being fixed and predefined, is a *perpetual emergent,* becoming increasingly multiplex, as more perspectives are taken, more texts opened, more friendships are made (Greene 1990, 23, quoted in Doyle 1993, 93).

Greene's emphasis on awareness of authorship echoes a critical social consciousness identified by Paulo Freire as *conscientization*, and begins to open up possibilities around social action, agency, and voice. In my final analysis, the Vital Spaces project served as a temporary site of authorship, and as a container for young people to share their own stories about how they interpreted their situations, actions, and choices –a reflection upon, in Greene's words, their own 'perpetual emergent'.

Co-researchers and Participatory Action Research methodology

This thesis binds many stories about this 'perpetual emerging' together from three years of action research. In this text, a plurality of voices begins to materialise– a chorus – which was attempting to make collaborative meaning of these questions about how young people's identity is shaped in this particular place and time. This plurality needs to be seen and heard explicitly here, not just as faceless presences that were the objects of study, but as co-authors; as authorities on the subjects raised. I wish to be clear that this is a collaboratively researched thesis. Whilst the role of principle researcher has left the final act of binding and meaning making in my hands, my hope is that the work had been informed at every turn by the involvement of the 20 university facilitators and the

600 young people who took part as participants. They are overtly named as co-researchers throughout this thesis in order to be as explicit and transparent as possible about their significant contributions to my final conclusions. Without their stories, enthusiasm, dedication, honesty, and compassion, none of this research would have been possible. We co-own these findings together.

Much of the Vital Spaces work attempted to reconcile the idealism and hope of critical pedagogy with a wary alertness to research which sees attempts to 'voice the silenced' as 'a dangerous and myopic vision of power' (Gallagher 2007, Prologue, paragraph 14). Gallagher's concerns about the role of the researcher as a sited and powerful figure are echoed too in the literature around Participatory Action Research (PAR), and it was this methodology through which the Vital Spaces work was conducted. Such methodologies require that the researcher be self-reflective and continually aware her/his own situation, biases, and manifestations of authority or power in the research process (Park, Brydon-Miller, and Jackson 1993; Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007). Whilst no research can ever be wholly neutral or entirely remove such imbalances of power, a regular, honest set of reflections about the situated nature of the researcher and her/his role in the work can help to make it at least explicit.

PAR methodology is founded upon a central tenet – that social change is integral to the action-reflection cycle which moves between theory and practice. As such, the work is unapologetically tinged with transformative intent. This fluctuation from theory to practice is generally conducted via a reflexive cycle which moves from planning to action and observation and finally to reflection which leads again to planning, whilst attempting to incorporate any realisations or praxis points in the next cycle. This cycle is not always a neat process, as Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart explain: 'The criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully but rather whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice' (2000, 277). In an attempt to honour this 'strong and authentic sense of development', this thesis will be honest and detailed about any shifts in focus and perspective.

Additionally, such PAR methodologies are often collaborative. This is a strength, in that such work mirrors how social change occurs as a collaborative venture, but it also represents a significant paradigm shift which identifies

participants as key contributors to research findings, and who need to benefit from such research findings directly. In Kemmis and McTaggart's description:

> Participatory action research is itself a social—and educational—process. The "subjects" of participatory action research undertake their research as a social practice. Moreover, the "object" of participatory action research is social; participatory action research is directed toward studying, reframing, and reconstructing social practices (2000, 277).

As part of these PAR methods, the young people who were involved in Vital Spaces work were regularly identified as co-researchers throughout the project. Particularly those who took part over sustained periods of time engaged with the work in a collaborative, critical, and responsive capacity which has immeasurably enriched the outcomes, and made the process incredibly rewarding. To that end, the primary facilitators, aged 18-22 at the time of research, are named here, as co-researchers of this process. Josh Burnell, Rosalie Pordes, Matt Pocock, Isabel Rabey, Rachael Burton, Rebecca Rich, Emma Rose Payne, George O'Neil, Stephanie Lyse, Kate Welsh, Piers Jeffries, and Emma Ollis all participated in a voluntary capacity and contributed enormously to the findings and conclusions of this research. Additionally, another eight university students took part as facilitators -in a portion of their second-year Applied Drama module at the University of Exeter. These 20 university students engaged over three years with almost 600 secondary students, aged 12-18, in projects of varying duration, site, focus, success, and freedom.

This involvement is integral to my own methodology, and is part of an emergent field of practice within PAR and ethnographic research. In order to define the co-researcher role in the Vital Spaces work, I again turn to Kathleen Gallagher, and her articulation of ethical participatory drama research *with* young people:

> The adolescent participants are both 'informants' about (and therefore witnesses of) and 'representatives' of (and therefore actors within) the 'topic' of the research. Their multiple selves become central, as do the particular constellations of identity of the researchers. Knowledge is both 'out there' and 'in here' for participants and researchers alike (Gallagher 2007, Section 2, paragraph 6).[3]

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3 Gallagher does not classify her work as PAR, but as 'critical ethnography', which she describes as 'teetering on the brink' of participatory action research methods. Her description of such methodologies as

Whilst the secondary student involvement in the work certainly demonstrated this interplay between witness and representative, the university students brought an additional depth to the work in their abilities to reflect upon a recent (and for some, ongoing) adolescent experience as it filtered into a university and arguably more adult identity. Their reflections and interactions with the secondary students about an experience of 'youth' were even more nuanced because of this, and none of the work would have been possible without their immediacy to the subject matter and honesty in exploring it. This immediacy was felt powerfully during the last two projects the Vital Spaces team created – a devised performance of *Borderline* and a touring and interactive performance entitled *On Our Terms*.

With the exception of the very first project, which was a film-based workshop, the rest of the Vital Spaces work was conducted through the medium of devised theatre – a collaborative process which Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling refer to as 'collaborative creation' of theatre without a source script (Heddon and Milling 2006, 3). This form was not a premeditated choice; it simply proved to be an available and known theatrical form in which to engage in dialogue and create theatre about the concepts of identity and self. In retrospect, however, this collaborative medium may well have provided the optimum vehicle for ensemble meaning-making, and proved to be the right instrument for a collective set of wonderings about the 'perpetual emergent' possible in authorship.

Thesis structure

The arrangement of this thesis mirrors the evolution of the PAR research which it contains. I begin with an empirical exploration of 'youth' as a concept and as a research subject, and in particular the methodologies which have been employed to analyse young people's experience from within the academy. Specifically, the role of performance studies and grounded theatre research will be advocated as a necessary contribution to the existing discourse. From here, the thesis overviews the existing state of young people's participatory theatre practice in the UK, identifying key tensions and ethical issues. Accordingly, the chosen lens of critical pedagogy is explained and defended, with particular

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'porous' is an articulate synopsis of the ways such methods have to react and respond to the grounded circumstances in which they are conducted.

attention to the elements of dialogue and literacy which are theorised within this discourse. Lastly, the thesis investigates in detail the PAR findings, describing key moments of praxis which occurred in the grounded research, and articulating how these praxis points prompted shifts in the research questions and final conclusions.

In order to adequately address the issues implicit within the concept of 'youth identity', the first chapter of this thesis will explore the problems with defining 'youth', articulating the challenges of using such a general label with a diverse population of varied experience, class, gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, disability, body image, educational access, and family life. In addition to problematising and probing the ways in which 'youth' have been researched and defined externally, the first chapter will explore the ways in which the academy has shifted its analysis and methodologies from empirical and distanciated study to more ethnographic interview models, and onward to the contemporary use of participatory and action research approaches.

Following on, the first chapter will analyse a variety of theoretical lenses to young people's identity, including those from performativity, human geography, ethnography and developmental psychology. This thesis began looking at work through these lenses, but ultimately set them aside in favour of a critical pedagogy approach, which establishes the Vital Spaces work within an educational, rather than a cultural studies frame. These discarded lenses are pertinent, however, in that they capture the empiricism which can often accompany research into 'youth' and the first chapter will make recommendations about how the methodologies and expertise of performance/theatre studies have important contributions to make to these more distanciated approaches.

As Dwight Conquergood has argued, the placing of performance studies as a 'border discipline' can 'cultivate […] the capacity to move between structures, to forge connections, to see together, to speak with instead of simply speaking about or for others' (Conquergood 1995, 137–138). Chapter I will advocate for increased contributions from performance studies and theatre researchers to conversations about 'youth' identity, and will base that recommendation on existing literature from a diverse cross-section of fields. PAR projects like the Vital Spaces work can provide essential spaces where 'speaking with' becomes powerfully realised within research.

Upon establishing the necessity of such models, the thesis will then turn its attention to an examination of how theatre practices may already be involved with these kinds of performances, and will explore how practitioners are already working with young people to explore these issues through theatre.

The field of youth participatory theatre is characterised by both a surge in emergent practice and a deep historical rooting in the British movements of Theatre-in-Education and Drama-In-Education. Chapter II will explore the ways in which new forms of participatory theatre methods are being used with young people, and also point out the resonance between these mediums and the continued evolution of TIE/DIE. As with the complex history of these educational forms, continued participatory work with young people is saturated with issues of agendas, intentions, funding challenges, ethical pitfalls, and concerns about tokenism. The second chapter will map out several models of participatory theatre practice in the UK, and use them to explore some of these challenges and the potential possibilities of such work. Additionally, Chapter II will establish the importance of a clear evaluative lens, citing examples of youth participatory work which is evaluated for its social efficacy in behavioural correction, or in terms of 'bolstering self-esteem' which represent potentially troubling models of practice as well as more desirable models which allow for a more nuanced set of evaluative measures.

The third chapter will continue this discussion of a critical lens, defining and exploring critical pedagogy as the context for the Vital Spaces work. As part of this discussion, two key elements of critical pedagogy will emerge as essential concepts – multiple literacies and dialogic outcomes. Drawing on the work of Paulo Freire and subsequent theorists, the monopoly of Theatre of the Oppressed forms as the primary means to explore dialogic outcomes will be queried. Alternative models of dialogic practice with young people are explored through three international examples: Suzanne Lacy's work with young people in Los Angeles, Mary Ann Hunter's analysis of the Australian *Skate Girl Space* project, and in the Flint Youth Theatre's evaluation of *My Soul to Take,* their contribution to the Animating Democracy initiative in the USA.

The Vital Spaces Participatory Action Research will be discussed in-depth during Chapter IV, including an honest reflection upon the mistakes, successes, and turning points of the various projects. In particular, key decisions about aesthetic choices within the devising process will be analysed,

and reflections made about the power and impact of such choices as examples of a 'grounded aesthetic' or a coerced outcome. Importantly, this chapter will also explore the evolution of the Vital Spaces focus, as it shifted from site-specific practice in 'deprived' neighbourhoods to a more theatre-based setting for devised work which collaborated with a broader cross-section of young people, brought together by a mutual interest in theatre rather than an issues or deficit-driven agenda. This chapter will end with an in-depth analysis of the ways in which devised performances were juxtaposed as a set of performed dialogues between university students and the younger participants, and the ways in which those adjacent performances spoke to each other about a collective understanding of youth identity. These 'devised dialogues' were further explored in the Devon Youth Theatre 2011 curriculum, which also experimented with issues of authorship and ownership in devised settings. Finally, the full-length devised performance *Borderline* which was created by the members of Devon Youth Theatre in April 2011 will be analysed, both as a product of a devising process which explored personal narrative and as a catalyst for more dialogic work in the final year of the action research.

In Chapter V, the concluding Vital Spaces project will be evaluated. This last piece, entitled *On Our Terms,* represented an attempt at creating a dialogic medium in participatory theatre practice with young people. In the wake of the project's failures to achieve its aims, there lingers a set of residual questions which will be explored, particularly in terms of the participatory model, the dialogic outcomes, and the use of multiple literacies within the work. *On Our Terms* was a short-term, experimental attempt by 15 young people and myself to start conversations which moved beyond the insular qualities of 'youth theatre' and which involved other people. In attempting to reach out to local councillors, teachers, media, police, youth workers, and public sector employees, the project revealed a number of praxis points which have relevance to future dialogic work with young people, and prompt speculation about the potentials of such work if conducted in a long-term sustainable model.

In the conclusion to the thesis, such potentials will be further advocated, and recommendations made about the possibilities for exploring concepts of dialogue, literacy agency and authorship within participatory theatre practices in the future. I will return to a reflection upon my own position within the research, and vision toward the future of young people's dialogic theatre. The core

research questions, which ponder how participatory theatre can create spaces for important conversations about young people in society, how such work could possibly reach out to larger audiences, and how young people might author, instigate, create, and facilitate theatre practice themselves - these questions will be returned to and explored, ballasted by the specific findings encountered through practice throughout the Vital Spaces research. In the final conclusion to the thesis, I will advocate that such practices are not only promising experiments, but essential pedagogical methods which deserve increased research and theatre practice.

Chapter One
Youth: Methodologies & Perceptions

Introduction

This first chapter will explore definitions of 'youth', and analyse how an understanding of the category has been impacted by the methodologies and discourses of youth cultural studies. This will take the form of a literature review of socio-cultural definitions of 'youth', with a particular emphasis on how this may speak to participatory theatre practice which aims to explore such concepts. What is 'youth'? How is 'it' researched? What methodologies are used to ask questions about young people's identifications, performed identity, and perceptions? How might performance studies and in particular participatory theatre provide a helpful and necessary space to supplement the discourse already existing in youth cultural studies? What are the implications if these theatre practices then aim to intervene or change young people's perceptions of these issues? These questions will begin in the first chapter, and carry on into Chapter II, which overviews young people's participatory theatre work in the UK.

Defining youth

There is a paradox embedded within any research which examines the classification of 'youth'. As a category of identification, it presumes identifications, bridges, and commonalities which cannot possibly exist across culture, class, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, education, and locality. Roche et. al. captured this paradox, stating: 'Youth is historically varied and significant; it is also a social process and not a fixed life stage. […] the lives led by young people are as varied and divided as those of adults, and at the same time *what unites youth is the reactions of adult society*' (2004, 263 italics my own). The diverse and varied experiences which young people encounter render the social construct of 'youth' to be as mythic as any other articulated identity in the postmodern world. Succinctly, what defines young people, what bands them together in any kind of common experience is that they are defined as 'other' from adulthood and from childhood, and to examine the cultural construction of this identification requires an examination of *how* adults have defined and researched youth.

The gaze of adults upon the young of their society has a performative element- there is an audience for this transition stage- and a set of

expectations, norms, and standards to which young people are held. These are often written in a 'storm and stress' model, which expects a certain degree of turbulence to the passage of child to adulthood. This adherence to a 'storm and stress' transition is attributed to psychologist G. Stanley Hall, whose 1904 synthesis of contemporary psychological and sociological research was formerly credited as defining a contemporary understanding of 'adolescence' as an explicit stage of development.

In reality, as Christine Griffin points out, Hall's late 19th century 'discovery' 'synthesised a range of contemporary arguments about young people and their relationships with education, family life, sexuality, and employment' (Griffin 2004, 11). As will be discussed later, this notion of adolescent identity as disparate from other life stages was part of a larger historical movement towards social reform and is inextricably bound up in notions of intervention. The assumption that adolescents must endure a turbulent time of turmoil has persisted into the twenty first century, and is perhaps even enjoying a new surge of popularity as certain consumptive behaviours in Western society are being demonstrated at younger ages and are more widely discussed via virtual media. Certainly, intellectual study of young people has emphasised psychological turbulence, economic deficit, and sociological concerns around deviance and anti-social behaviour.

Long-established as a field of cultural studies by the seminal work of the Chicago School and the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, the field of youth studies has recently shifted its theoretical grounding away from an attempted sociological categorization of lived youth culture(s). The discourse has recently turned toward a more post-modern perspective, allowing for the fluidity and permeability of an increasingly media-saturated world. Vacillating between the fields of cultural studies, ethnography, sociology, psychology, human geography and at times, performativity studies, the work exhibits both a complex hybridity and a degree of uncertainty about its present methodologies. A full history of youth cultural studies is certainly not possible within the scope of this thesis, and indeed is not necessary as the action research conducted as part of the Vital Spaces work was primarily focused on how young people define *themselves* in a particular locality– and exploring the ways in which they perceive theirs as a performed identity, in league and in conversation with them. However, this thesis is placed within a

field which has attempted to categorise, define, and delineate a certain understanding of 'youth', and has deep roots in the sociological history of youth cultural studies. Essential within this is a critical appraisal of why there has been such a pervasive perception that young people require intervention, the ways in which interventions have been structured, and the current climate and theory in support of best practice in contemporary study and youth work. This research does not call for a history of youth, but rather an understanding of where the categorisation comes from, and a querying of how methodology has influenced empirical understandings of young people's experience.

Therefore, it seems important to articulate the ways in which researchers have looked at and talked about young people – both in terms of justifying them as an 'area of research' from various disciplinary backgrounds, but also in terms of problematizing the category itself and raising questions about its continued validity. Lastly, this chapter will point out the possibilities present at this cross-section of fields and begin to articulate how theatre can build a bridge across such research models, bringing the possibilities of genuine engagement, participatory approaches, and dialogue.

Youth or young people?

'Youth' does not consistently refer to a specific age group, despite attempts within public policy to draw lines of differentiation – 13 to 19, 11 to 19, 16-25, and so on ("Learning Partnership West - Targeted Support" 2012; "The Prince's Trust: Inspiring Young Lives" 2012).[4] As Roche previously articulated, it is a process through which each person is socialized into adulthood, not a fixed identity. It is also a label, a sticker on the metaphorical forehead of a group defined in simplistic and general terms as 'youth' - a demarcation which geographer Ben Malbon objects to, commenting '…the term 'youth' resonates with a slightly unsettling, de-humanising, patronising and ascribed quality' (1999, 200). From its inception, the research category of 'youth' was affiliated with a deficit model, aligning social problems with the attitudes, behaviours, and interests of groups of young people. As Mica Nava and Angela McRobbie pointed out in 1984:

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4 These statistics are selectively drawn from a wealth of nationally-funded initiatives which aim to help young people. These include the Prince's Trust and Connexions, two organisations aimed at interventions with regard to young people's employment and training across the UK.

> Not only, for example, is there no agreement about which age group constitutes 'youth' (manifested in the fluctuating age of entitlement to half-fares, educational grants, marriage and the vote), over recent years young people have contradictorily been defined as the mainstay of industries such as music and fashion (both as consumers and producers) and simultaneously as in need of supervision, control and training. Dominant preoccupations and perceptions about young people are neither constant nor coherent (McRobbie and Nava 1984, 1).

These same concerns about inconsistency and fluctuating social perceptions are true today, and perhaps even increasingly prevalent. This research will prefer to use the phrase 'young people', honouring Malbon's legitimate concerns about the array of societal baggage that can accompany labels like 'youth'. This also honours the reality that every person, has, indeed, at one point, been young and therefore it is unquestionably a part of our humanity and not a separate category.

As such, it is important to state that this research is interested with the lived experience and meaning-making of young people as they attempt to navigate this phase of life, and in particular how they make sense of the ways in which their society views them. During the three years of Vital Spaces work, theatre and performance proved to be a powerful tool for exploring such concepts from young people's own perspectives. As such, the research is less influenced by the fields of developmental psychology and child development, but focuses instead on these processes of identification, self-reflection, and awareness about the social construction of such a category, not on the biological and developmental changes which might occur during adolescence.

Situated cultural perspective

Much of the existing literature about youth identity is grounded in the worlds of sociology and cultural studies and explores how such identities can be purchased, experimented with, maintained and subverted within consumer culture. These lenses of analysis pay close attention to the material and economic conditions which have cultivated an extended adolescence in the Western World and as such have observed, analysed and excavated youth culture(s). Because of the material emphasis, it is particularly important to articulate the cultural grounding of this research within its UK context.

This is a very British overview of youth cultural theory, drawing on other resources from the Western World, including scholarship from the USA and Australia. These definitions and the chronology of the field represent a particular view and set of cultural expectations, and it is imperative to note that words like 'subculture' and 'consumption' must be grounded in a very real set of economic circumstances. Much of the existing literature about 'lifestyle' and 'subculture' depends upon a certain degree of economic freedom to make consumer choices. As Alan Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris aptly point out in their description of punk subculture, 'there can [...] be no social base for a movement subverting consumerist lifestyles in a society where a safety pin or a dustbin bag is an article of deficit, not abundance' (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004, 9). In other words, to explore how young people's identities may be performed on a daily basis, indeed, to look at how 'youth' is a performative concept, requires that first it is clear that this performance will vary widely depending on the material conditions of the larger culture.

There are also differences within Western industrialised culture about the ways in which youth are viewed, defined, and researched. American scholars tend to place a greater value on issues of race, class, gender and sexuality as being essentialist to an idea of 'taste cultures' (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004, 10). However, as Christine Griffin points out, the 'UK/US Nexus' and perspectives of Western industrialised societies have become a global reality, informed and influenced by the discourses of media, technologies, and entertainment.[5] The pervasive extension of Western cultural media into the globalised world view has meant that these concepts permeate beyond their nations of origin. This research will discuss and overview the immediate cultural grounding within the UK, which later serves as a context for the Participatory Action Research of the Vital Spaces work. This does not negate the urgent need for more detailed and diverse understandings of intercultural perceptions of youth, but rather a resigned clarity that for the scope of this research, a focused gaze at the Western industrial creation of the category of 'youth' is an imperative. It is necessary to learn the language fully, to understand its context and to engage with the concepts at their root level.

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5 Scholarship is emerging around discourses which challenge these hegemonic concepts. In particular, works which looks at ethnic identity in negotiation with youth identity raises compelling questions. For a quality read, see Sunaina Maira's work on young adult identity, or Les Beck's writings about masculinity and 'other'. An interesting international example can be seen in Jesse Weaver Shipley's article on Ghanan hip-hop.

The very definition of 'youth' bridges economic, sociological, psychological and biological fields. Scholars agree that the category has grown out of a series of economic and social conditions which have prolonged the experience of childhood and established a state which is now commonly referred to as 'adolescence' (Côtè and Allahar 1994). The industrialization of the Western world limited the labour contributions of young people through work day hour caps and requirements about 'compulsory education', followed by further mechanisation which removed young people from the labour market virtually altogether. This removal from the system of capital earning relegates young people to an extended dependency on family support, and reduces their cultural capital until they become adults and wage earners (Bourdieu 1984). Recent scholarship has returned to notions of cultural and social capital as key to young people's identity formation, both in terms of extended leisure and in terms of a corresponding societal disregard, albeit differentiated by variations in class strata (Thornton 1995). Class is assuredly an important factor here, as young people from more affluent backgrounds will have greater access to activities and resources which may increase their cultural capital in certain settings/ways.[6]

This extended period of adolescence has also become increasingly subjected to economic pressure from a consumer standpoint, as young people are targeted for their ability to spend money (likely not their own) in what Côté and Allahar term the 'leisure industry' and 'identity industry' of media, music, fashion and education (Côtè and Allahar 1994, xvi). This field of study which examines young people as a powerful consumptive force, targeted by advertisers and corporate influence, is vast and ranges well outside the realm of this research project. The notion of adolescence is contextual, and varies according to its societal surroundings. As psychologist David Proefrock states, 'the developmental period of adolescence does not exist outside of the social factors which caused its emergence' (Proefrock 1981). What binds all these perspectives together within the Vital Spaces work is the way in which these social processes and pressures are indeed felt, perceived, and responded to by young people in sometimes very subversive and active ways. This research aimed to take the 'social process' described by Roche and actively question it

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6 Sarah Thornton's work also looks at the ways in which cultural capital operates in a subverted manner within youth culture(s), basing it instead on differing criteria such as music taste, club attendance, and social media popularity.

within theatre spaces, collaboratively and in partnership with young people. This kind of PAR-based active and voiced response is a methodological approach which has at times historically been missing from youth cultural studies.

Deviance & deficit

The created category of adolescence has been subjected to various kinds of scrutiny over the last 100 years, beginning with the sociological approach of the Chicago School in the 1920s, and emerging most recently as scholarship with an ethnographical methodology which looks at a fluidity of identity and affiliation within youth culture(s) and subcultures. The sociological/ethnographic field, often termed youth cultural studies, is sometimes seen as being at odds with the more biologically deterministic approach of fields like psychology or childhood development (Piaget and Inhelder 1969; Vygotsky 1997; Griffin 2004; Rogers 2004). The more sociological approach has gained a strong foothold in terms of scholarship partially because of two major research centres which emerged in the twentieth century and the resulting methodologies still influence the majority of research which is conducted today.

An American Department of Sociology which was founded in 1892, the Chicago School was the first of its kind, and despite the apparent cohesion of its title, actually consisted of an array of more fragmented and disparate movements of scholarship. Their method of working: empirical, interview-based, and concerned with the social problems driving 'deviant' behavior, tended to persist in youth cultural studies until the inception of the next major school of research with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Since that time, the field has fragmented, leaving contemporary poststructuralist notions of 'youth culture' somewhat adrift.

The Chicago brand of sociology was not solely concerned with 'youth' as a subject of research, but rather with larger concepts of deviance within society. The groundbreaking element to the Chicago research was the perception of deviance as a normal response to mainstream society, rather than evidence of criminality. Deviance was redefined as political acts of resistance, and those groups of young people identifying as separate from the hegemonic mainstream were seen as actively constructing a reactionary identity, rather than as

delinquents (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004, 195). The sociological approach looked to understand how space shapes identity and behavior, and used traditional methods of ethnographic empirical research. This methodology has been replaced by more participatory approaches, where young people are increasingly seen as 'co-researchers' or 'participants' in a process where their voice is encouraged to be active. These methodologies represent a substantive ideological shift in both the academic world and the practical world of youth work.

Heroism & cynicism

After WWII in the UK, the booming Western world affluence brokered in a period of consumption which may have apparently 'eroded visible class distinctions', but this was an illusion which had little material reality (Bocock 1974; Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004, 21; Rogers 2004). According to Featherstone, this post-WWII period in the UK was a time for a *perceived* increased freedom and fluidity with regard to young people's identities (Featherstone 2007). However, these perceived freedoms were not combined with a shift in material circumstances. Their life circumstances were unchanged; the veneer was simply glossier. This shift towards consumption as a possible means of buying identity also brought about a new emphasis on creative constructions of self, and consequently an increased interest on the ways in which these selves grouped and clustered. This emphasis on the creative elements of identification has forever changed the ways in which we think about youth identity as a constructed process, rather than a fixed certainty.

The terminology around 'subculture' has dominated the field of youth cultural studies, commencing as early as the 1940's. Milton M. Gordon used it in 1947, referencing: 'we prefer [subculture] since it seems to emphasize more directly the dynamic character of the framework within which the child is socialized. It is a world within a world, so to speak, but *is* a world' (Gordon in Gelder and Thornton 1997, 41). Scholars had begun to debate exactly how young people were grouping, identifying and responding to the consumer demands of their world. The concept of a subculture suggested that active choices were being made by young people to affiliate or distance themselves from dominant cultural expectations. The prevalence of subculture as a topic is largely attributable to the CCCS fields of study, founded at Birmingham

University in 1964. Contrary to the Chicago approach, this centre chose to focus particularly on youth (Gelder and Thornton 1997, 83). The scholarship on subcultures examined the how the categorisations emerged from within class systems but also how young people were politically responsive and often presented active means of resistance to the hegemonic norms of the mainstream culture. The seminal 1976 work *Resistance Through Rituals,* edited by Hall and Robertson, represented an eruption of new writing by the emergent field of youth cultural studies in Britain (Jefferson and Hall 1976).

Throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, this wave of scholarship explored mass culture, gender, style, fashion, dance, music, punks, hippies, 'Teddy Boys' and many other spectacular forms of subculture which were predominant amongst young people at the time (Cohen 1972; Willis 1978; Hebdige 1979; McRobbie and Nava 1984; Willis et al. 1990). In contrast to the Chicago School's sociological studies, the CCCS approach was noticeably more ethnographic in structure. Researchers would engage in focus groups, do home interviews, and generally attempt to integrate the research process as a part of a more authentic relationship with the young people (Willis et. al. 1990).

The CCCS was still interested in deviancy, but their enthusiasm for the concept looked at the Gramscian political possibilities of such behavior – analyzing it as one means by which a working class culture might choose to *not* live its subordination, particularly through the elective identifications of young people. Paul Willis's emphases on grounded aesthetics and stylistic choices have particular resonance with notions of performed identity with young people. Willis advocated that style and aesthetic choices were active declarations of resistance, arguing that, 'it may be that certain kinds of symbolic creativity in the expressive and communicative activity of "disadvantaged" groups exercise their uses and economies in precisely eluding and evading formal recognition, publicity and the possible control by others of their own visceral meanings' (Willis et al. 1990, 3). This respect for the 'eluding and evading' of young people's meaning-making is essential, honouring that such practices may function intentionally outside of formal recognition or analysis.

Willis has been subjected to more recent criticism, but his notions of a grounded aesthetic which is based in a respect for the symbolic creativity of youth still has resonance with contemporary youth work and academic research. As he argued, 'There is now a necessity in leisure, the necessary

symbolic work of modern cultural survival, of developing identity and connecting its powers actively to the cultural world' (Willis et al. 1990, 16). His perceptions of the cultural creativity with which young people engaged in their consumptive practices called for a non-elitist look at popular culture, which has a direct impact upon the contemporary cultural studies preoccupation with young people's aesthetic choices as a part of a performed identity.

Of particular importance to this thesis is Willis's notion of 'grounded aesthetics' as the 'yeast of common culture' - the process through which people make further meaning, identification, selection, highlighting, resonating, appropriating and particularizing of symbols/practices within common culture and make meaningful their own terms and in their own words (Willis et al. 1990, 21). This process is inherently performative, and Willis's writings reflect that with use of terms like 'costume'. Willis is of particular interest to those scholars writing from the field of theatre or performance studies because of this emphasis on aesthetic and symbolic practices. However, it is important to contextualize his work within the critique which has followed its publication.

The critiques of the CCCS have centred on several key areas of weakness: an overemphasis on the 'heroic' nature of subculture as conscious resistance, an under-emphasis on the role of media, and a disparity in gender balance. The desire of the CCCS theorists to see active (even conscious) resistance within subcultural groupings has been heavily critiqued by more modern Bourdieuan theorists such as Sarah Thornton and Angela McRobbie, who rightly suggest that the affiliations had far more to do with media and consumption than was first articulated in the 'heroic' model of youth resistance to a hegemonic parent culture (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 6). Even within the CCCS theorists there were already criticisms: the neglect of women (Hebdige 1979; Hebdige 1988; McRobbie and Nava 1984; McRobbie 1991); under-explored issues of race (Cohen 1972; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 13); and in the emerging scholarship of the 1980s, theorists began to ask why it was the most spectacular, public and vocal subcultures were receiving the most research attention (Thornton 1995; Maffesoli 1996; Muggleton 1997; Malbon 1999; Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Carrington and Wilson 2004).

In the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, postmodernism and post-structuralism have shattered the formerly heroic and universal notions of subcultures. They are no longer reified as fixed categories.

Subcultural identities which were formerly seen as static and stable are now termed as fluid and shifting options which can be taken up or disregarded without penalisation. Scholarship increasingly fragments the former CCCS notions of youth subcultures as inherently resistant, but also casts doubt on the idea that young people identify with a single particular group. Drawing heavily on the theoretical work of Michel Maffesoli, modern scholars tend to refer to young people's groupings within two primary strands – that of 'neo-tribes' or 'club-cultures', both of which argue for a more fluid representation of youth identity and political affiliation (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 14). In addition to the shift in theoretical framing, the methods used to conduct research with young people have undergone significant revision.

Rather than the empirical, distanced approach so common since the early Chicago School period, there has emerged a new kind of researcher – one that participates within the world under investigation. This kind of action research, which draws on the research 'subject' as a fellow participant or researcher, can be classified as 'Participatory Action Research' (PAR), which will be further explored in specific detail in Chapter IV. PAR is a methodology which raises concerns about traditional academic methodological approaches (Park, Brydon-Miller, and Jackson 1993; Kesby 2007; Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007), but which also opens the door to performance studies as a co-contributor to such discourses. Opportunities for interdisciplinary PAR approaches to youth identity and how we study it are emergent, and this thesis represents one such possible method. So not only the content of the field has changed, but also its way of working. This shift in methodology has an over-arching relevance for this thesis, and it impacts the ways in which young people are implicated in research about their own identities.

Contemporary theories: an intersection of disciplines and methods

Several contextual factors have driven this shift in methodology within academia. Primarily, the role of media and technology has, in the last twenty years, transformed young people's existence and social realities through the use of mobile phones, internet, social networking, and gaming. Additionally globalisation and consumption have changed shape with increased corporatisation of localised markets and a growth in leisure industries targeted

at younger populations (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006; Warde; Besley 2003; Bauman 2011; Miles, Cliff, and Burr 1998; Miller 1995).

Lastly, the academic influence of post-structuralism has been felt across many fields, and youth cultural studies is no exception. What was once stable and secure now seems fragmentary, as notions of 'community', 'identity', and 'place' are all cast under the scrutiny of a post-structuralist lens. Judith Butler's theories of performativity, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, and Foucault's reflections upon power all bump up against the formerly Gramscian ideologies which drove the CCCS, and reveal a much more complex picture of young people attempting to negotiate identity in the twenty-first century.

There is an ongoing debate between those rooted in the original critical impetus of the CCCS who study identifications as Gramscian subversions of hegemony and post-structuralist critics of the CCCS who problematize such politicisation of young people's lived experience.

> But if the CCCS over-politicized youth formations, then post-modernist and other post-subcultural positions have been equally guilty of under-politicizing them. The assumption that youth cultures are mainly hedonistic, individualistic, and politically disengaged [...] has been significantly undermined by the political activism and media visibility of new post-subcultural protest formations (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 14).

Here is demonstrated the somewhat loose footing of current scholarship – trying to find a stable middle ground between the idealism of the CCCS and the more cynical framing of postmodern theory. The field lives currently under the somewhat cumbersome title of 'post-subculture', attempting to find a label which suits the illusory and ever-moving nature of the subject (Muggleton 1997; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). While there has certainly been a substantial addition to scholarship which addresses notions of social and cultural capital (Hey 2006, 448), perhaps the most significant theoretical shift to impact youth cultural studies is the inclusion of theories around performativity.

Performativity

Increasingly, the role of the performative in the everyday has been investigated, drawing on Judith Butler and the subsequent theorists who attempt to make material and grounded sense of her theories of performativity which have deepened the research understanding about how identity is created, sustained

and re-created through daily lived rituals (During 1993; Rose 1994; Bell 1999; Fortier 1999; M. Fraser 1999; Nelson 1999; Skeggs 1999; Crouch 2003; Jacobs and Nash 2003; Lukose 2005; Hey 2006; Skeggs 2005; Lloyd 2007). Through this academic lens, earlier critiques of the CCCS work as devoted primarily to visible and public displays of male identity have been developed more fully, providing an important space to look at the private and domestic lives of young people, and particularly the much-neglected field of female youth identity.

These debates are neatly summarised by sociologists who specialise in performativity theory, such as sociologist Vikki Bell, whose writings on mimesis and belonging can help to make Butler's incorporeal theories decipherable. Bell succinctly summarises Butler's seminal point as: '[...] gender, to cut a long story short, is an effect performatively produced.' (Bell 1999, 3). Her notion that gender is a sustained performance enacted through rehearsed behaviours has impacted many contemporary fields of sociology and cultural studies, and within youth studies a number of theorists have explored how identity is fictive, performative and hetero-normative (Bell 1999).

Of particular note are the ways in which youth cultural theorists have increasingly discussed issues of visibility, recognition, and legitimacy, drawing not only on Butler but also on Foucault and Ranciére's notions of legitimated power. In direct contrast to the CCCS work which focused on the spectacle of visible youth subculture, this work emphasises the less visible and raises compelling questions about its opacity. As Beverly Skeggs states, in her discussion of white working class young women:

> To be recognized as something always invokes systems of knowledge, classification and disciplinary power. It is also always spatialized and dialogic. As Zukin (1996) notes, the production of space depends on decisions made about what should be visible and what should not. [...] within scopic regimes visual practices fix the subject into an authorized map of power and meaning. Only some forms of visual presence have legitimated value; others are considered illegitimate (Skeggs 1999, 220).

Skeggs examined the ways in which young people might seek invisibility as an assertion of power. She draws on Peggy Phelan's work to ground her own research, noting, 'there is a real power in remaining unmarked.' (ibid: 220). This work impacts deeply the Vital Spaces research, and indeed other forms of arts and public sector interventions which attempt to draw young people into

spaces where they might not already be participatory. It raises complex questions about what is the ethical imperative for youth workers, researchers, and artists working in these spaces.

Similar questions have been raised here in the UK regarding public consultancy work which aims to bring young people into conversations about local government (Fitzpatrick, Hastings, and Kintrea 2000). If, as Skeggs supposes, the act of non-participation is a means of evading formal recognition, then is any work aimed at resistant youth inherently coercive? What is the good of asking young people to engage in processes of reflection on their own performance rituals if they do not want to engage in such questions? Within the Vital Spaces research, it emerged that performance and theatre may bring an important element to this complex and sensitive ethical conundrum.

Looking ahead to the later chapters of this thesis, the possibility is raised that there may be something about working in an ensemble which allows young people to explore a collective understanding of 'youth'. However, with this comes a new set of inquiries. What questions and concepts can be accessed within a theatrical space with regard to how they might be participating in a performance of 'youth' within their daily lives? What then are the ethical responsibilities within that theatre space? Finding performance spaces which can create *safe* sites to experiment, explore, and ask such questions seem to be a vital concern of this research.

Additionally complicating these questions is the challenge of translating the abstract theoretical concepts of performativity to a more grounded and practical application within work with young people. Valerie Hey, whilst admitting that Butler can be at times impenetrable as a theorist, describes the importance of understanding mimesis as a neutral, non-judgemental process, not necessarily a site of intervention (Hey 2006). While Butler's theories include the importance of embodiment and the body itself, the work does not include an imperative to action. As Mariam Fraser points out, drawing on Maffesoli: '[...] the body is being constructed as a value...even in its most private aspects, the body is being constructed only in order to be seen; it is theatralized to the highest degree. Within advertising, fashion, dance, the body is adorned only to be made into a spectacle' (Maffesoli 1991: 18-19, quoted by M. Fraser 1999, 115). However theatrical this process may seem, theorists following Butler's writings often agree that the work may diagnose the problem(s), but not in a

specific enough way to enable a dismantling of hegemony, admitting that these processes occur within systems of distribution which contain complex injustices (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; M. Fraser 1999; N. Fraser and Bourdieu 2007). These concerns bear relevance for any practical attempts at intervention, and problematise work which interrogates lived practices of mimesis as possibly grounded upon a fundamental misunderstanding of performativity theory.

Despite this disconnect between the abstract concepts and the grounded reality, interdisciplinary theorists continue to attempt to bridge concepts of performativity with daily life. Lise Nelson points out the prevalence of this practice within the field of geography, noting '[...] most geographers have read and deployed performativity uncritically, in ways that both foreclose an interrogation of the more problematic aspects and constrain their own analyses. In other words, many geographers enthusiastically use the language of performativity without regard to its limitations' (Nelson 1999, 331–332). Nelson's critique is particularly important because much of the most compelling contemporary work in young people's identity and performance is occurring from within the fields of human and cultural geography at this point in time. Here, again, links to theatre and performance studies are clear.

Geographer Nigel Thrift explicitly explores this link from performativity to geography, pointing out the natural correlation to performance studies (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000). Thrift's influential body of work has moved increasingly toward performance studies as an important lens of analysis, and much of it invites a response from those within theatre fields. He establishes a distinction between the 'Performative' and the 'Performance', drawing on Phelan's concepts. According to Thrift, the performative is 'the iteration of the act preceding the one actualised in the present moment' and the performance can be defined as 'a thing done'. Thrift distils his definition: 'Performativity is then this in-betweenness: "a space we might call the tension of the present tense" (Phelan 1999: 224, cited in Thrift and Dewsbury 2000, 422–423).

Thrift describes the ways in which everyday life is 'performed' - citing specific actions, from those as benign as busking, street entertainment, karaoke, to social practices such as raving, violent acts like street fights, all the way to the 'performance' of war. However, despite the clear connection of Thrift's theory to similar work within performance studies (Houston and Pulido 2002), there are still challenges in making a disembodied theory practical, which

can be seen in research from theatre practitioners/theorists who attempt to bridge the two worlds. So can a bridge be built between such theories of performativity and theatre studies?

Houston and Pulido are two theatre practitioners who see a link between theories of performativity and theatre practice, as they explored within Theatre of the Oppressed forms in California. They are part of a larger movement of theorist/practitioners who wish to forge a stronger connection between the theory and the lived experience of people.

> [...] there is an urgent need to reconnect performativity to historical materialism and collective social action. Indeed, we argue that, despite providing many useful and imaginative insights, poststructural and postmodern theories of performativity, although often claiming to be about the everyday practices of ordinary people, have become increasingly abstract (Houston and Pulido 2002, 402).

Houston and Pulido recognize the academic desire to keep performativity concepts distinct from more practical usage, but as they note: 'In this regard, performativity is not about what one is (especially in a radical humanist or empirical sense), but is rather about what one does, or more specifically it is about what is rendered visible in the act of doing.' (Houston and Pulido 2002, 404). This notion of visibility and action links directly, in their view, to Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, and invites potential forms of theatrical intervention. They see the performative gesture as a site for play/movement which can trouble hegemonic relations 'which appear to us as `natural', by threatening to expose the performance of power as a performance' (2002, 404). Whilst the majority of performativity theorists and human geographers are uncomfortable with the abstract concepts being used as intervention mechanisms, there are some natural questions to be asked about the ways in which theatre sites create powerful places to both witness lived performativity as a performance, and also to disrupt and subvert which performances are considered acceptable. In Houston and Pulido's words,

> For human geographers [...] the performative provides an important connection between identity, power, and the construction of normative geographies, what Catherine Nash (2000, page 656) calls `microgeographies of habitual practices", in which the body becomes a performative site upon which multiple social identities are continually encoded and potentially resisted (2002, 404).

Performance Studies

These kinds of contemporary cultural theories naturally link to theatre. Elements of costume, script and role are regularly discussed within geography and performativity studies of young people. Some of the current debates in the field of youth cultural studies include theorists who revisit cultural theorist Polhemus' phrase 'Supermarket of Style', exploring notions that identity can be virtually and literally bought off the shelf, and replaced easily if the previous model didn't suit. Paul Sweetman neatly sidesteps the stigmatised subculture debate by classifying two categories for young people's identifications: travelers (those who take on a particular style) and tourists (those who just play around with style but ultimately return to an established safe identity) (Sweetman 2004, 80).

These performative notions of self are part of a conceptual framework of youth cultural studies which glances upon performance studies, but the cross-over has not occurred fully. Whilst anthropologists, sociologists and geographers have been happy to talk about 'performed' identity, this subject has not been adequately explored from within the field of performance studies, and in particular through a lens of drama-as-intervention. In what seems to be an exception to this, Nicole Fleetwood's work on urban black young people's public performance on buses in the San Francisco metro area specifically looks at public identity as a performance. Her work represents emergent scholarship from those who can span both fields – and begins to fill the void that is created when sociologists discuss 'performance' or performance theorists discuss 'identity' through an ethnographic lens. This is a difficult ask, however, and Fleetwood's analysis will be further interrogated within this thesis with regard to how its more empirical methodological approach could be powerfully responded to from a PAR-based methodology.

There seems to be greater consensus amongst scholars that the idea of 'identity' in our twenty-first century can be purchased. Whilst some discourses debate the ways in which young people are constructing (or shopping for) and playing with identity, others are concerned with the realities a globalised market place upon anyone's identity, not just that of young people (Lukose 2005; Croghan et al. 2006). David Chaney revisits the importance of global economics, stating, '[...] although we might assume that our multicultural world

is more diverse, one reason for discarding subculture could be because our assumptions of diversity are illusory; that there has in reality been an increase in cultural orthodoxy (a view that could be supported by Ritzer's (1993; 1998) account of "McDonalization"' (Chaney 2004, 36–37).

Chaney's reminder that 'national cultures became more homogenous than they ever had been before,' is well taken, as are his reflections upon a 'democratization of creativity' which is supported by the growth in different forms of 'reality' through emergent technologies (Chaney 2004, 45). Perhaps this expansion of understanding is an explanation for the interdisciplinary nature of youth cultural studies at this point in time. The many kinds of 'virtual' identities made possibly by online networking sites like Facebook, Bebo or MySpace all dramatize the reality of adolescent existence – and make many possible selves out of an online ethereal Otherworld, in which photos can be chosen carefully, biographical descriptions crafted (and changed) according to the impression one wants to make, and friends added or dropped depending on the shifting social sands (Turkle 1995; Palfrey and Gasser 2008; Salvato 2009; Sefton-Green and O'Hear 2004; Webster 2002). A fluid identity is not only an option; it is a manifest reality for many young people in the Western world.

It is in this space, virtual or tactile, that the worlds of performance studies and theatre seem particularly resonant methods for potential exploration of identity, where tactics vary from empirical research methods to those of more participatory approaches. Cultural theorist Fleetwood's work represents the complex intersection of disciplines that such research on/with young people can find itself as it dances between ethnographic observation, Participatory Action Research, and performance studies. It is a particularly compelling example of how youth cultural studies creates friction when it rubs up against Butler's theories of performativity, and Fleetwood's research methodology raises important questions about ethics and voice when researching young people's lives. Because of this resonance, Fleetwood's work will be used as a theoretical case study example in this thesis, accompanied by a contrasting example, geographer Ben Malbon's demonstration of a different kind of research method, and an alternative lens through which to view young people's performance in club cultures.

Empirical methodologies: Nicole Fleetwood and TURF

Fleetwood, a researcher with a background as 'a youth advocate for years [who] spent a significant amount of time studying black youth's cultural practices', also worked as a vocational counsellor for 'at risk' students (Fleetwood 2004, 36). As a scholar within the world of cultural theory, she grounds her work within the context of 'performance', an interdisciplinary cross-over which represents the interbreeding of the state of current research into young people's identity and performative activity. Within the context of participatory approaches, and against the world of ethnographic models, Fleetwood's examination of young people's performative identity on public transit is both problematic and challenging to those who work within the disciplines of theatre intervention and PAR-based research.

In particular, Fleetwood's work speaks to the Vital Spaces research because of the emphasis which it places on the policing nature of public sector contact with young people. Under the title of TURF (Together United Recommitted Forever), the city of San Francisco created a body of voluntary young people who 'surveiled' public transit as part of a 'violence protection unit' from 1996 until 2000 (Fleetwood 2004, 33). Fleetwood positions herself as an observer-researcher, riding the public transit of San Francisco and watching (as well as note-taking) the performative nature of young people's existence on the buses.

It is important to note that Fleetwood would not fall within the category of participant-researcher. PAR research involves an immersive, interactive, and often interview-based model – requiring the researcher to participate in young people's grounded experience, and to engage over sustained periods of time with the populations they research. Fleetwood's work is more transient, exploring through empirical observation, albeit a group of young people who she may well have had other contact with through her work as a vocational counsellor in the urban area. As a young black woman, it could well be argued that Fleetwood was an 'insider' to the group of young people she studied – and that through her immersive role in a helping profession with many of the 'at-risk' young people, she was well-informed about the issues they faced.

Fleetwood's thesis rests upon this premise: 'I consider much of the activity of the young on mass transportation, which is interpreted as expressions of delinquency*, as a performative engagement* with adults' anxieties and with

the cultural trope of urban, racialized youth as deviant' (Fleetwood 2004, 39). Grounding her work both in youth cultural studies and within philosophy which honours the 'everyday', she proceeds to travel public transit, exploring the question, 'How are adults' perceptions and black youths' actions and responses shaped by a social construction of racialized youth as deviant?' (2004, 39). Fleetwood draws upon research in the cross-over fields of urban geography and performativity, as she references key theorists who link the two fields (Goffman 1959; B. Anderson 1983; de Certeau 1984). Of particular interest is Fleetwood's characterisation of black youth criminality as a 'spectacle' wherein 'the public arena becomes a material space for youth to *reify and contest through social performance* the construction of youthful and racialized identities as deviant and threatening (Fleetwood 2004, 35).[7]

Fleetwood's honesty about her own status as a researcher is refreshing and has a synergy with the PAR approach – as she acknowledges that she 'passes' as a young black person in the public arena. However, this is as far as her self-reflexive examination of the research extends, and it is here that I wish to engage my first criticism regarding the limitations of this kind of work. The role of the researcher here demonstrates very little change from the external gaze exemplified by the Chicago School – that of a researcher seated in the corner, observing and note-taking the behaviour of a subject group. Fleetwood's example is compelling because it attempts to analyse youth performance through observational analysis conducted by an academic researcher.

This kind of anonymous observation can, in essence, silence and dis-empower the research subjects. Because of the lack of permissions granted by the young people involved in such studies, similar strategies have been challenged as both ineffective and unethical in recent years (Hart 1992; Grady 1996; Saldana and Wright 1996; O'Brien 2001; Conquergood 2002a; Goodley and Clough 2004; Kesby 2007; Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007; Denscombe 2010). Fleetwood, despite an agile and at times brilliant examination, falls victim to methodological models of research which inextricably bind young people as an 'object' of study. Even more marked here, is the fact that Fleetwood firstly self-identifies as a young black woman, and yet still casts her own identity group as separate from her identity as a researcher. This separation may be indicative

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7   It is necessary to point out that scholarship which examines the 'spectacle' of young male conduct in the public sphere vastly outweighs scholarship which examines quieter forms of performative identity.

of the pressures of academic writing, of the role of the qualified researcher, and it reads as if in order to discuss young people's identity, researchers must somehow distance themselves from identifying with them.

Much of this ethnographic and cultural studies work would be supported and bolstered by supplemental writing from within performance studies. Fleetwood's analysis provides a helpful window into how such research would benefit from performance and theatre expertise. Her work branches out from cultural studies, in an examination of the site-specific advantages of public transit as a performance space, identifying its strengths as a 'physically confined space' in which 'the constant motion through the city streets gives transit a fluidity and openness' and the internal 'routine and monotony […] ideal […] to observe how institutional systems are contested on a daily basis' (Fleetwood 2004, 37). The bulk of Fleetwood's analysis examines, however, the dress, language, and actions of young people's engagement on buses, and the attempt at a further analysis from a performance studies lens falls short, constrained by the empirical methodology employed.

In describing how young people enter the bus in groups, 'often listening to music', and how they choose to sit far away from the driver, she enters again into the role of the ethnographer hiding, disguised from view: 'Tagging, littering, and seed bombardment were all acts—more or less playful—of undermining the institutional structure of the bus, its primary use for commuting (as opposed to play), and its sombre code of guarded anonymity' (Fleetwood 2004, 39). Not included in this format of research are any interviews with the young people, asking them about the tactical nature of such acts of 'playful undermining', and this seems a place where a PAR approach from within performance studies could be beneficial.

Fleetwood's exploratory research into the motivations and subversions occurring by the young people creates a site of unfinished performance analysis. As a youth cultural theorist, Fleetwood signposts the performative elements, but is unable to fully examine the performative potentialities of public transit as a theatre site, and despite enticing hints at the potentials of such practice, it is left unfinished within the work. As shown here, in her articulate description of the bus as a 'stage or playing field', and using terminology such as 'actor' and 'audience', she draws out in-depth analysis:

Adult spectators riding in the front of the bus, their seats facing away from the action, must sneak peeks, turn their necks, and eavesdrop. Adults may listen or look in, but rarely can they directly gaze on the actions of the young in the back of the bus. Even when adults dare look back, there is an effort not to make eye contact with young people. Eye contact might be construed as hostile or confrontational. *Avoiding the gaze is a way of controlling the action by keeping the spectacle in the rear contained there. Youth are aware of adults' ambivalence, both desiring to see and repulsed and fearful concerning what is happening.* Young passengers thus successfully destabilize the locus of power by transferring "center stage" to the back of the bus, a space to which adults have only limited access (Fleetwood 2004, 39, italics my own).

Fleetwood goes on to place this work within Paul Willis' work in 'symbolic creativity of the everyday cultures of youth', but without acknowledging Willis's contention that ethical youth sociological work should and must include the voices of the young people as integral data (Willis 1978). Similarly, she empirically explores the language of urban street jargon, fashion as chosen costume, and performed deviant gender identities through observation from a distance. There is no denying that the research is fascinating stuff – but the absence of young people's voices and perspectives leaves a methodological hole which performance studies and PAR approaches could well fill. Despite her perceptive analysis of the irony of the policing state using young black identity to 'control' public disruptive behaviour, Fleetwood fails to acknowledge the inherent contradictions in examining youth performance without consulting youth.

It is here that my final critique comes to rest. The vast majority of youth cultural studies still tends to examine youth performance from a distanced site of observation. Even young, 'passing' researchers are held apart by the trappings of institutional codes, requiring particular methodologies which better resemble watching fish through an aquarium glass than they do engaging in actual conversation/interaction with the dynamic population being discussed. Rather than seeing this as a failing, it would be wise to grasp this as an opportunity for performance studies to explore the potentialities of action in the face of academic empiricism. As Dwight Conquergood advocates:

This promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing carries the most radical promise of performance studies research. Performance studies struggles to open the space

between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice (Conquergood 2002, 145).

Fleetwood's work represents the lens through which youth cultural studies might view young adult performance in daily urban settings, and provides a counter-balance for more interventionist, integrated, and consultative participatory models which can and are emerging from current practice in the field of performance studies and interestingly, within human geography (Conquergood 1997; Conquergood 1993; Conquergood 2002b; Phelan 1993; Park, Brydon-Miller, and Jackson 1993; S. Jackson 2011; S. Jackson 1998).

Studies like Fleetwood's demonstrate progress in their detailed accounts of the intricacies, complexities, and nuances of young people's identifications and meaning-making on a daily basis which are founded on actual observational data, rather than resorting to generalisations by researchers. However, Fleetwood's distanciated status renders her work relatively absent of young people's voice, and the resulting research bears little relevance and direct action to the lives of the young participants targeted. By contrast, study which uses a participatory method would result in outcomes which return data to the community in question, utilising and accessing the lay-knowledge of the participants and ensuring that any findings returned to serve and inform them in the end.

This is not a whole-hearted defense of PAR as a neutral practice – the work has its share of critics too. Participatory methods certainly carry with them an equally problematic set of ethical concerns, as will be discussed in detail during Chapters IV and V of this thesis. However, the methodology brings with it the possibility of increased participant voice within the academy. In fact the inclusion of the participant's voice is more than a possibility, it's a mandate. According to Westwood, this should move beyond merely a voice, 'toward a full speaking position' (Westwood 1991, 83, cited in P. Taylor 1996, 74).

As geographer Ben Malbon points out, this separation of action and theory, of a distanced viewpoint is a common pitfall for many academic researchers working with young people, or with elements of popular culture. Indeed, as he articulates, much of the academic work in popular culture fields which examine nightlife practices like clubbing result in an 'observed yet distanciated knowledge in place of a tactile understanding' (Malbon 1999).

Malbon critiques the CCCS approach, stating that the debate was often 'simplistic and totalising, taking little account of young people's *imaginative and practical* construction of their own experiences, and instead privileging only the macro-political dimensions of so-called 'resistant' behaviour' (Malbon 1999, 18, italics my own). This kind of critique is representative of a new wave of participation-centric work which privileges a grounded understanding, sustained contact with participant communities, and a more direct relationship between the researcher and the subject of research, seen as co-researchers.

Grounded methodologies: Ben Malbon and clubbing

Malbon's 1999 work on clubbing and club cultures situates itself within the field of human/cultural geography, delineating itself neatly away from youth cultural studies. He attributes his starting points as 'geographies of young people at play and broader, but related, geographies of consuming', with a particular emphasis on the notion of play as key (Malbon 1999: 11). While there are other scholars interested in the field of experiential consumption and youth identity (Warde; Strinati 1995; Miles, Cliff, and Burr 1998; Skeggs 1999; Chatterton and Hollands 2002; Chatterton and Hollands 2003; Lukose 2005; Shildrick 2006; Featherstone 2007); Malbon's work represents a methodological rarity within the field of both youth studies and cultural geography. It targets a specific area of 'experiential consumption' which has been neglected, as Malbon argues because: 'these forms and spaces of consuming […] are either less easily accessible to the research, and/or unworthy of or unsuitable for study' (Malbon 1999, 23).

This reticence to engage on a grounded level with young people's performative experiences of the everyday has limited the research potentials, leaving the 'experiences […] disembodied, decontextualised and bereft of emotions, imaginations and sensations' (Malbon 1999, 23). Malbon is clear in pointing out that there is either an 'inability or reticence on behalf of the researcher […] to access these significant areas and practices' (Malbon 1999, 20). He recommends that further specific and focused work into the particular methods of grounded identification is called for. Interestingly, in the decade since this work was published, there has not been a significant swell in publication which engages in on-the-ground exploration of these 'more elusive geographies' (Malbon 1999, 21).

This may well be because a grounded experience of urban night life and the lives of many academic researchers are at odds, but also perhaps because the cross-section of fields leaves many researchers under-equipped to explore such rich ground. Malbon's effusive salute to Erving Goffman's groundbreaking work in using theatrical performance to understand social interactions hints that a performance analysis lens might well continue this line of inquiry. As Malbon states,

> […] through fusing Goffman's recognition for the role of territorialisation and regionalisations with Butler's notion of social identity and self being performed concurrently, we arrive at a more textured and practically usable lens through which to approach notions such as belongings and the practices of sociality that sustain them (Malbon 1999, 29).

Malbon uses these two theoretical frameworks to look at young people's nightlife urban experiences as performance, detailing the role of the crowd as both actors and spectators, the 'stagings and spacings' of the night out as having elements of backstage and front stage, props and scenery. He expands into discussing notions of 'scriptings' which structure the ways in which a night out may unfold, and the surveillance element, which he calls 'directing' of young people's experiential consumptive practices (1999, 30).[8] His findings stand as a rare grounded example of how young people are seeking a sense of belonging or of distance from each other, and the more grounded and participatory methodology is therefore worthy of discussion as an important cross-disciplinary link to the Vital Spaces work.

Malbon's methods included over a year of intensive practice, about 150 'nights out' in London, and with a series of interviews with 18 participants who answered a request for volunteers via club media such as music magazines and through internet websites. This work has ethnographic methodological elements to it, but Malbon's use of conversation, longer-term involvement with the young participants, active experience of clubbing in their environments, and use of their actual language begins to resemble a PAR methodology. Much of the text includes direct transcripts of interviews, including the following:

> I've grown up believing and being told that life is pretty grim and you've got to fucking work your bollocks off 'cos otherwise

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8 This kind of surveillance is further explored by Chatterton and Hollands in their research which examines how urban nightlife is created and regulated by corporate interests. For more information, see Chatterton, P. and R. Hollands (2002). "Theorising Urban Playscapes: Producing, Regulating and Consuming Youthful Nightlife City Spaces." Urban Studies **39**(1): 95-116.

you're not going to get anywhere – I've still a very strong work ethic, that's inherited from my Asian background...ummm...but what I really like about going clubbing is...is...just, it's just the trash Western, hedonistic nonsense of it all, y'know, just going out to have a good time for the sake of it, and just meeting people and actually being there on the scene […] I just think this is my culture, this is the the only thing that I have that I can call home, I'm not English in the normal sense of the word, English, I'm not Indian.. by any means... umm...to me that's the nearest I have to a ...well, it is, it's my culture, it's how I choose to spend my time ummmm...I just think it's... Julie Burchill once said 'Western civilisation is the only culture where life isn't a toss-up between horror and boredom' and I really like that. I like Western twentieth century flash, tacky materialist culture because it's just so fast and so quick and always moving and it just keeps me, my head, active […] Y'know it's... I think actually that sheer hedonism is actually in a way more profound than y'know poetry and literature and art and philosophy and mathematics and all that stuff [right]. To me this is the fucking point, this is the life, y'know? (Malbon 1999, 46–47, transcript from an interview between Malbon and Sun, one of the project's co-researchers).

This transcript serves as a reminder that when academic texts honour the voices of the participants in the research, the tone, style, format, rhetoric, and legitimacy of authorship are all called into question. Sun's reflections up on hedonism and Western Culture mirror some of the academic writing on the subject, (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006; Featherstone 2007) but the style of Sun's delivery which Malbon honours in his written work draws on a different set of literary and communicative codes from those traditionally used in academia. Inclusion of such voices seems imperative to the future of youth cultural studies, and in work that involves young people across disciplines.

Constructing identity

There is much that eludes and evades these academic conversations. Lois Weis and Michelle Fine point out that a '...a sustained look at the ways in which youth develop political and social identities, investments, and relations, both within and outside school contexts, is noticeably absent from the literature on education and on adolescence' (Weis and Fine 2000, xi).[9] However, they go on to point out that this work needs to be done in partnership with young people, not as empirical study, but as a collaborative participatory project.

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9 Exceptions include: Christian-Smith & Roman 1988, Giroux and McLaren, 1994, McLaughlin & Brice-Heath 1993, Seller & Weis 1997.

In what seems to be a notable British exception to this absence of sustained study about young people's identity development, Henderson and Holland et. al., conducted a decade-long study of 100 young people which emphasised the importance of locality and situated experience in this kind of identity construction (Henderson et al. 2007). Influenced by psychological development, geography, and notions of narrative autobiography, the study is one of the few long-term evaluations of how young people are developing a sense of self in the UK and the findings correlate to an understanding of identity as a situated process.

In their words, 'The UK is a diverse and unequal society relative to many of its European neighbours and it is not possible to talk of standard 'youth transitions' in a society in which young people's lives are shaped by such uneven material, social, cultural, and symbolic resources' (Henderson et al. 2007, 4). The study was conducted from 1996 to 2006, and the authors situate the research data within Anthony Gidden's 'reflexive narratives of self', citing other theorists from Late Modern Theory who emphasize the importance of narrative (Giddens 1990; Giddens 1991; U. Beck 1992; J. Beck 1998). Giddens' concept of reflexive identity echoes much of post-structuralist theory, but honours the importance of a self-authored story and individual critical understanding of the performativity and social forces which shape conceptions of self.

Giddens and Beck emphasize the importance of this strong identity narrative, as does McLeod in her analysis of how young people are shaping self as a gendered concept. McLeod refers to the self 'as a project to be produced and reflected upon', a process which is both necessarily social and ultimately individual (McLeod 2000, 211).

In a similar vein, Colette Daiute's 2000 study looked at young people's creative written narratives which occurred in a classroom setting, as a container space for both critical consciousness and a strong identity narrative. Importantly, both McLeod and Daiute point out that where there is a disruption in consistency between home, community and school, students tend to create more varied and at times conflicting narratives to make sense of the injustices or gaps they may be encountering in their lived experience. In Daiute's view, the diverse writing styles that young people experimented with demonstrated a deep ability to not only 'read cultural scripts', but also 'work with them and

embed them in their own sense-making processes' (Daiute 2000, 229). Despite this innate ability, Daiute advocates that support is needed: 'Young people need support in their efforts at trying on different ways of being in the world. Narratives that do not seem to follow cultural scripts may well be young authors' committed, personal interpretations of the cultures in which they live - even when these narratives are nonconforming or critical' (Daiute 2000, 232).

Theatre & narratives of self

As can be seen in Daiute's work with written narrative, creative sites to explore and support alternative readings are essential – spaces where, in Kathleen Gallagher's perspective, another story can be told from those usually granted cultural legitimacy (Gallagher 2007). Gallagher and other critical ethnographers represent some of the best practice and most reflective research methodologies in terms of how adults engage with young people around issues of identity. In looking at the ways that urban young people are using drama classrooms as a site to 'talk back' to the injustices of school systems, Gallagher's work proposes theatre sites as important places for experimentation, freedom, and exploration of identity and critical consciousness.

> The performances of adolescents/adolescence in the drama classrooms that we observed in our ethnographic research made explicit the dialogical relationship between the material subject (and her/his histories) and the imagined one. If we are raced, classed, gendered in particular ways, and entangled in certain configurations of power/powerlessness, how do we move beyond limiting conceptions of ourselves and others, if Sartre is to be believed when he posits that we are forever in the 'look of the other'? For we are both self- and other-constituted (Gallagher 2007, Section 3, Para 4).

Gallagher's work points out ways in which drama classrooms create a site to become critically aware of these shaping forces and to engage in a peer-supported learning environment. She advocates for the importance of drama classrooms which engage with these ideas, even while accepting that many school curriculums do not allow the freedom to adequately explore such concepts. I end this chapter with Gallagher's analysis because it prompts a discussion about the possibilities and limitations of discussing notions of youth identity within a classroom setting. For a variety of reasons, the Vital Spaces

work found itself moving further and further away from school sites, and instead became increasingly embedded within the public sector, supported and limited by organisations such as local councils, the county offices, area youth centres, and ultimately, theatres.

Conclusion

Ironically, that which seems to have been consistently absent from the research in youth cultural studies, ethnography, performativity, and geography is research which involves young people as co-researchers about these issues. What emerges from both Fleetwood and Malbon's respective analyses is the common notion of play as a key characteristic of how youth identity is performed every day. As can be seen in the previous excerpt from Sun's interview, subverting expectations, drawing succour and strength and identification from play constitutes an act of both rebellion and belonging for many of Malbon's co-researchers. In terms of Fleetwood's work, many intricate, delicate, subtle and small-scale acts of playful boundary-testing were markers of young people's performance on public transit – from graffiti marking on bus walls to the unexpected burst of music being played within a non-musical space. For the theatre practitioner, then, what necessarily follows is an examination of how theatre practices are already involved with these kinds of grounded performances, and the ways in which questions of identity and belonging are being explored in such artistic mediums.

In Chapter II, I examine the state of current youth theatre practice in the UK, overviewing the present field of participatory work which involves young populations around issues of identity, belonging, territory, language and site. In particular, I examine this as a hybrid and evolving form of Theatre-in-Education, which aims to bring a notion of critical pedagogy to work with young people around their sense of identity. The Vital Spaces Project explored these topics within both institutional spaces (schools, youth centres funded by local authorities) and more open spaces (city streets, professional theatres, community halls). The inherent contradiction demonstrated here: of exploring issues of subversion, identity, territory and language in highly coded and hierarchical spaces such as youth centres is problematised, and models of best practice examined. My own action research is contextualised within the larger

field of practice, and the ongoing conversation occurring about theatre as an intervention medium in young people's lives.

Chapter II
Young People's Participatory Theatre:
practical and policy contexts

Introduction

Chapter I looked at sociological and cultural studies of 'youth', concluding with reflections that performance studies could bring a significant contribution to the field. This chapter will examine models of performance within policy contexts, asserting that the existing landscape of practice may be already exploring some key elements of identity and performativity for the young people who participate. This chapter will identify youth participatory theatre as a genre, aiming to explore through a range of case studies what the practice looks like – or the many ways it can manifest. In so doing, a range of issues about agendas, institutions, authorship, ownership, and perceived deficit will be raised. This chapter will argue that unspoken agendas tend to motivate and subtly shape the existing practice and that making such agendas explicit is a necessary first step toward building stronger models of practice, particularly when such targets are linked to material support for projects/artists. In addition, this chapter will map some of the existing practice here in the UK, contextualising the work within its historical and political rooting with particular attention to ethical questions of aesthetics and participation.

Intentions

Perhaps the best place to begin with a discussion of intention in a field of such diversity and complexity is with my own.[10] The medium developed within the Vital Spaces Project drew on a collaborative, devised, ensemble-based studio practice, which explicitly sought to begin a dialogue both during the studio process and with the audience as a result of the performances. This dialogue was often about the role of youth in society, definitions of the label youth, or about stereotypes perpetuated about young people. Sometimes, when we got lucky, the dialogues were about how youth might be performed. However, these dialogues were often about other things too including, for instance, doing your own laundry, texting, what it means to be 'grown up', fear

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10 I wish to be clear that the Vital Spaces work, as a set of PhD action research pilots, was relatively free from external funding agendas beyond those of the researcher, an unusual rareity in youth participatory practice. However this does not denote that the work was free from agendas full stop – as I will discuss in Chapter III, this is impossible.

of singing in public, soft toys on the bed, binge drinking, frolicking through fields of hay, silence and business suits.

Central to all of the work was a core question about how youth is performed both in daily life and in theatre forms. This is a messy question. Necessarily, this requires that we explore whether or not young people identify as 'youth' at all and how that label may not serve their own self-identification. Similarly, it demands the audience interrogate their own perceptions of what youth denotes culturally, materially and affectively. These are both social and pedagogical questions. They have complex and conflicting answers, depending on the context and situation in which they are asked.

The theatre methodologies employed in the Vital Spaces work owed a strong debt of gratitude to the history of Britain's DIE and TIE movements, in particular to those movements' emphasis on young people as active producers/creators. In addition, the clear establishment of drama as an imaginative emancipatory act was well-articulated within DIE/TIE, creating a natural link to critical pedagogy which is echoed in this thesis. Finally, the DIE emphasis on a reflective cycle between process and product has a robust relevance to much of the ensuing practices which will be discussed - between seeing oneself as a part of the creative act, in an 'as if' world, and then witnessing it as a percipient (Bolton 1979; Davis 2010).

However, the Vital Spaces work lives in a strange middle ground, moving beyond DIE's emphasis on 'cognitive development' as described by Gavin Bolton, and beyond the external (adult) theatrical authorship which tended to characterise TIE through its engagement with students as spectators. The emphasis here is less about the young people developing new understanding about an issue, and more about expanding potential literacies for exploring and discussing identity. Yes, this could include cognitive development, but usually a diversification and amplification of self-expression is the primary aim. Perhaps the most important distinction between the practices I will explore and those of TIE/DIE is that none of these models are embedded in the school curriculum, but instead negotiate a complex web of institutional partnerships, multiple funding sources, and a myriad of spaces.

The Vital Spaces work also embraced a dialogic aesthetic which drew on recent research practice in the USA exploring civic dialogue in the arts[11]. This sets the work apart from the vast majority of participatory youth theatre projects currently in existence in the UK, many of which are excellent models of practice. For this particular thesis however, the analysis will be undertaken within a Participatory Action Research model, and the final evaluation will hold the work up against a lens of critical pedagogy – with an emphasis on the dialogic elements. These encompass dialogic components such as diversification of literacies – is the work creating spaces where the performers and audience are speaking different codes to each other? Is it creating a space where they can try on different embodied literacies or languages? And perhaps most problematically, whose codes are seen as legitimate? Can we talk to each other across them?

In order to explore these notions of literacy and dialogue further, it is important to define the critical lens of analysis fully, articulating clearly what 'critical pedagogy' might mean within a theatre site. This will be fully discussed in Chapter III. In this chapter, however, an analysis of the existing landscape of young people's participatory theatre practice here in the UK will be explored, with particular regard to intentionality, ownership/authorship, aesthetics, and levels of participation within the work.

Existing landscape and historical context

Despite a legacy of critical pedagogy embedded within the decades of Theatre-in-Education and Drama-in-Education within British schools, the current trend in youth participatory performance work in Britain has shifted outside of drama classrooms – perhaps motivated by the inflexibility of the National Curriculum, and perhaps by a public sector interest in participation work generally. However, the existing body of youth participatory theatre work tends either toward youth empowerment or improved theatrical skills as its intended outcomes, a binary which is queried by Hughes and Wilson in their overview of youth theatre practices within the UK (Hughes and Wilson 2004). This creates

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11 The Animating Democracy initiative, which ran from 2006-2009, was funded by the Ford Foundation and Americans for the Arts. This nation-wide project evaluated a set of interdisciplinary and partner-created arts projects on their dialogic outcomes. Civic dialogue in this instance is defined as "dialogue in which people explore the dimensions of a civic or social issue, policy, or decision of consequence to their lives, communities, and society.' For more information, see Romney, P. (2005) "The Art of Dialogue." Animating Democracy, 1-22

a dualism which is somewhat problematic in locating the work for the purposes of this thesis - is it youth theatre[12] or is it educational theatre? The pedagogical ethos emerges from some of the theoretical groundings of TIE and DIE, but the form in which it manifests has moved away from delivering theatre and drama workshops *to* young people and instead looks at how young people could be creators and producers of the work themselves.

Despite its apparent appropriateness, the term 'youth theatre' is also an imperfect container for the practice because it lacks pedagogical rooting. There exists a rich history of young people creating theatre in the UK which is far too detailed to adequately summarise here. Contemporary youth theatre in Britain is defined by Artservice and the National Association of Youth Theatres as follows.

> Youth and participatory theatre activity is the creative use of young people's time outside of formal education, usually but not exclusively facilitated by adults, giving young people an opportunity to express themselves creatively through theatre and develop personally and socially within a group. The definition of theatre includes circus, street arts and experimental theatre (Artservice 2006, 12).

This definition encompasses a diverse range of youth performance practices, which are only just beginning to be mapped and discussed in the UK. Youth Theatre with entertainment as its exclusive aim is not part of the genre being explored in this thesis – despite the fact that musical cabarets, talent shows, X-Factor events, improvisational comedy games, traditional scripted work, published plays, musicals and other amateur dramatics are certainly popular and potentially rich territory for young people to encounter issues of identity. These too can certainly have pedagogical impact, and even transformative outcomes for the young participants, but are not grounded in an ethos of critical pedagogy. In this sense, the subject of study in this thesis spans both the field of educational theatre and youth theatre – the form of one and the lens of analysis of the other. Given the depth of analysis needed, I will not provide a full history of each of these movements, and will merely attempt to highlight several important contextual elements from the respective fields, in order to justify the blending of form and analytical lens.

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12 When I refer to 'youth theatre', I am purposefully using a label in common parlance around the UK, referring to theatre practice where young people perform for audiences. In some youth theatre formats, the work is scripted, in others it maybe improvised, devised, original works or musical. Often it involves jazz hands.

The economic history of Britain's educational theatre has far-reaching implications for contemporary youth theatre and this more specific niche of practice. Therefore, a brief summary of this financial genealogy which has had significant impacts upon the structure and form of TIE/DIE since the 1980s is necessary for the purposes of this inquiry.[13] At the heart of the TIE/DIE history however, is a simple set of questions about how pedagogy and theatre can meet, or if they can. These questions will continue to drive my own work and the analysis in this thesis and it is important to honour the ways in which theorists from the fields of TIE/DIE have laid the groundwork (Slade 1954; Way 1967; Bolton 1979; Redington 1983; Heathcote 1984; Bolton and Heathcote 1995; Hornbrook 1989; Doyle 1993; Whybrow 1994; P. Taylor 1996; Neelands 2004; Bennet 2005; Wooster 2007; Nicholson 2009; Davis 2010; O'Connor 2010).

As I discuss the two most recent Arts Council funding priority changes, I wish to clearly distinguish between policies and initiatives which aim to increase young people's *consumption* of theatre or 'culture' and those which aim to increase their *production* - or creation of artistic products. Just to be clear, this is not children's theatre, young people's theatre, or theatre for young audiences - all of which aim to create high-quality theatre experiences for audiences composed of young people (Siks and Dunnington 1961; Swortzell 1990; D. Wood 1997; McCaslin 2006; Schonmann 2006). Children and young people can be engaged in a variety of ways, and whilst audience engagement work can certainly have dialogic outcomes, actual experiential participation in creating theatre is the focus of this thesis. Initiatives which specifically focus on expanding young audiences and increasing consumption whilst laudable, will not be addressed here.[14] There has been, in contrast to these audience-creation schemes, a recent increase in the public policy language of arts participation for children and young people, as can be shown in a set of recent

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13 This is a brief overview of relevant financial shifts, not a full history of TIE/DIE in Britain. This book has fortunately been written and is highly recommended. Please see Jackson, T., Ed. (1993). Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theatre in Education. Abingdon, Routledge. Due to the constraints of time, I am unable to explore the fascinating longer economic history of young people's theatre in the UK here. Additional materials about the history of TIE/DIE can be found in both Wooster, R. (2007). Contemporary Theatre in Education. Bristol, Intellect., and Nicholson, H. (2009). Theatre and Education. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan

14 For examples of these kinds of audience-diversifying initiatives, please refer to Bennet, S., Ed. (2005). Theatre for Children and Young People. London, Aurora Metro Press. and Johnson, G., P. Pfrommer, et al. (2009). New Audiences Final Report, Arts Council England: 269.

reports and publications from arts funding agencies (Artscouncil 2000; O'Neill 2008; Forgan and Davey 2010).[15]

In 2000 and 2010, Arts Council England (ACE) issued two policy documents which marked a philosophical shift away from the market-driven agenda which had, in Jackson's words, 'decimated' TIE in England during the 1980s (Jackson 1993, 200). In 2000, an ACE policy change toward participatory practice was announced, prompting some of the youth theatre work I will discuss later in the chapter. More recently, the 2010 strategy paper, entitled 'Achieving Great Art For Everyone', specifically lists five key areas for focus over the decade to come. The fifth of these key targets is 'Children and Young People'. These two most recent moves become increasingly poignant and important when they are contrasted against two previous shifts in policy which took place in 1966 and 1988. Until the late 1960's, no government funding existed for work with young people, an exclusion which was remedied by the 1966 'Provision of Theatre for Young People in Britain' Report, commissioned by chairperson Hugh Willatt (TYA 1986; Jackson 1993). The subsequent recommendations for young people's theatre companies and for touring professional theatre helped to prompt much of the early TIE/DIE work. Subsequently, when the 1988 ACE Report recommended a focus on theatre 'centres of excellence', it drew funding away from TIE/DIE and other community-based or educational forms which were flourishing at the time (Kershaw 1992; Jackson 2007). In the 2010 paper, ACE forecasts:

> We will advocate for a coherent and targeted approach to high-quality arts provision for children and young people, working with the Department of Education, funded organisations and artists, schools, cultural partners, local authorities and higher and further education institutions. We will invest in the development of arts practice and programmes that are inspired by, and produced *for, with and by* children and young people. We will champion high-quality opportunities for children and young people to enjoy the arts in and out of school (Forgan and Davey 2010, 37, italics my own).

As a part of this stated goal, ACE's policy for the first four years includes improvement in both the 'delivery of arts opportunities for children and young people' and a 'raising the standard of art being produced for, with and by

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15 In Australia, a large-scale report commissioned in 2000 found that despite the bulk of funding existing for 'audience/consumption' initiatives, the more compelling outcomes from the arts were to be found in participatory models. For more information, see Saatchi, S. (2000). Australians and the Arts. Sydney, Australia Council.

children and young people (2010, 44). For many advocates and practitioners of TIE/DIE, this may represent a renewed interest in theatre forms which have had to adapt their practice to suit an impact-assessment model over the last twenty years. What was once a rich, experimental and diverse field of educational theatre practice in the late 1960s and 1970s was significantly impacted by the implementation of the National Curriculum (1988) and the Arts Council's 1986 Strategy Report which instigated a devolution of Local Education Authority budgets which had been supporting TIE/DIE practice in schools (Jackson 1993). These shifts in funding are relevant because they have shaped the way that practice is presently conducted and evaluated.

As Jackson points out, there is just as much money invested in TIE now as there was in the pre-Thatcher years, but the funding is now often issue-specific, measuring its effectiveness in addressing a particular problem or deficit with the young people involved, often behavioural or health-related (Jackson 1993, 200). Additionally, the aftermath of the National Curriculum and the 1986 report 'led to a steep decline in the number of specialist companies and range of work produced' (Jackson 2007, 203). More importantly, with the decrease of LEA support and the increasingly regimented school curriculum, the freedom once enjoyed by TIE/DIE companies has been largely replaced by impact-driven, issue-based work within schools. As Nicholson summarised, 'Without the political and educational commitment that characterised the best work, TIE gradually shifted from a movement to a theatrical genre, and it became synonymous with well-known patterns and repetitive methodologies' (Nicholson 2009, Section 6, paragraph 9). Little institutional memory seems to remain of the rich and experimental history of TIE/DIE's practice in its heyday[16], and despite a number of companies still in operation, the work now survives based on its ability to hop from funding pool to funding pool, often constrained within the 'well-known patterns' Nicholson identifies.[17]

At the same time, youth participatory theatre work is on the upsurge, with potential for future growth indicated by the recent ACE policy initiative in place

16 Roger Wooster advocates that TIE was 'a true inheritor of Brecht's political aesthetics.' but he also cautions that TIE practice is currently experiencing significant dilution in training and rigour (Wooster 2007, 21).

17 This can be clearly seen when the history of a TIE company like Theatre Blah Blah Blah is followed over a period of twenty years, moving from an integrated involvement in the education system (funded by LEAs) to their present location primarily delivering within Leeds-area youth centres, funded via local authority youth service policies. For an in-depth analysis of this kind of TIE company progression, see Whybrow, N. (1996). Blah Blah Blah: Stories of a Theatre Company, 1985-95. Great Britain, Alumimus. A more complete discussion of the aesthetics in the Blahs work will shortly follow in this chapter.

until 2020.[18] A 2006 national report on youth participatory theatre practice in the UK also indicated that a bridge may be built between the legacy of TIE/DIE and the present interest in participatory practice.   The report stated,   'In some aspects this work is taking up the mantle of Theatre in Education, developing new work of relevance to young people, with young people as active participants, and creating new ways of working and a canon of contemporary scripted material' (Whybrow 1994; Artservice 2006, 33). Whilst I agree that this may well be the case, and it is exciting to see the field of practice surveyed and discussed, I have two primarily areas of concern about the upswell of interest in young people's participatory theatre practice(s).

I wish to hold tightly to the pedagogical roots which under-pinned TIE/DIE as we look forward to what youth participatory practice can look like[19]...indeed, what it already looks like. This plea for a sustained connection to pedagogical rooting is echoed by Roger Wooster, who in his analysis of theatre education training in the UK warns,

> […] the future of TIE lies in the hands of a small band of ageing TIE theorist/directors. *Whilst the skills may be passed down to a new generation of actors, the pedagogical analysis that underpins and frames the approach may not.* There is a danger perhaps of allowing TIE to become a 'folk art' where the rituals of structure are followed but no longer with the pedagogical passion or understanding that inspired the original protagonists (Wooster 2007, 60–61, italics my own).

If youth theatrical forms with devised, participatory, and interactive elements are embraced as 'taking up the mantle' of TIE, it seems imperative that the work is viewed not as a sticking plaster on a myriad of perceived social ills, but as a genuinely pedagogical space where complex questions about self, society, and power can be explored by young people.

Secondly, much of the present youth work is also grounded in problematic deficit models which define young people by their degree of 'risk' or within particular categories of exclusion, deprivation or need.   These categorisations have a significant impact upon the nature of the theatre work which is delivered and upon its criteria for evaluation and success. These kinds

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18 These policy shifts show promise, but should be seen in the context of economic recession in the UK. The overall 2010-11 ACE budget experienced a 15% cut, with a further 50% cut required between 2012 and 2015. (2011). Annual Review 2011. London, Arts Council England: 144.

19 There does also seem to be renewed interest in TIE curriculum and methodologies from within the education sector, as can be seen via the increased accessibility made possible in digital mediums. Dorothy Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert' curriculum materials are now virtually available at http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/.

of social, behaviour and crime-reduction agendas are largely attributable to funding initiatives which continue to inscribe young people's identities within language of deficit, predicating the work upon problematic concepts of normalizing and citizenship which presume white, middle-class hetero-normative values and potentially run the risk of exoticising these deficits as the sum total of the young people's cultural and social capital. Worse yet, the theatre forms implemented within these kinds of justifications may well be used as a tool to support such ideological stances.

In terms of theatre interventions, these binary definitions of youth 'at risk' or youth 'on track' which tend to permeate youth policies have an impact upon what kinds of arts experiences young people receive (Irving, Maunders, and Sherington 1995). In particular, recent work in Australia has explored how young people who are perceived to be 'at risk' receive what de Roeper and Savelsburg call 'remedial intervention' which tends to fixate on their very marginality – attempting to decrease risk factors, behavioural problems, and violence, rather than providing 'richer cultural opportunities' which tend to be available for the less marginalised (de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009, 219). Often this kind of simplistic binary is based on funding which targets particular areas of deficit.

Recent movements toward more positive models based on critiques of deficit-based approaches include attempts to promote notions of 'resiliency' in young people within challenging circumstances, sometimes referred to as positive youth development work (Chisholm and Hurrelman 1995; Tanner, Hartnagel, and Krahn 1995; Field and Olafson 1999; Coleman and Hagell 2007; Donoghue 2008; Harreveld and Singh 2008; de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009; Schoon and Bynner 2003). According to Schoon and Bynner, attention to 'protective factors and processes' in the face of adversity can provide a more positive alternative in youth participation and outreach work.

As part of this shift toward articulating a positive model of youth work, more participatory policies have been touted as the solution, but it is important to note that participatory work is loaded with problems and concerns too (Tedlock 1991; Hart 1992; Rahnema 1999; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Goodley and Clough 2004; Hickey and Mohan 2004; Halse 2009; S. A. Chambers 2011). It may well be that work which self-describes as 'participatory' actually would be classed as 'tokenism' or 'non-participatory' by systems that measure the

grounded practice on continuums of participation (Arnstein 1969). Merely consulting, informing, or occasionally involving young people does not merit genuine participation by such standards, yet these practices tend to make up much of the youth-involvement for local authorities and other public sector organisations who need to establish an image of participation.

In addition to these concerns, even the attendance of young people in participatory settings is an important topic. In the largest UK efficacy study to date, looking at young adult participation as citizens in 2000, Susan Fitzpatrick et. al. postulated:

> Many adults [...] viewed young adult participation as a "training for adulthood" which would enable young people to "shape up to their responsibilities"...participation may, in this context be seen as a means for adults more effectively managing young people. Might it not then be more empowering for young people to be actively disengaged from these processes? Might deviance not pose a more effective challenge to adult dominance than involvement?' (Fitzpatrick, Hastings, and Kintrea 2000, 507).

Fitzpatrick's questions resonate with the concerns raised by Skeggs (see Chapter I) regarding the elective invisibility which many young people could well desire. However, what the Fitzpatrick study raises is the important question that the failure to show up at meeting which explicitly invite young people's participation may well be classed as a political act.

In addition, as Kathleen Gallagher points out, ideologies which refer to 'at risk' often 'carelessly link failure with identity difference' (Gallagher 2007, Prologue, paragraph 6). These ideologies, however, are deeply entrenched in the public sector and particularly in the custodial traditions of Britain's youth service – an organisation historically bound up in notions of intervention. This historical tradition has significant impact for any theatre work which takes place in the public sector with young people, as indeed it did for the Vital Spaces work. Today the aim of providing positive recreational activities during leisure time may represent a more silent agenda which underwrites much of current practice and can be seen most clearly in evaluative measures and final reports of many theatre projects. Historically, this is linked to the origins of the Youth Service in Britain – as a policing agency to manage the troublesome behaviour of (primarily) young men in public spaces.

The developments and changes within this branch of youth intervention is emblematic of approaches in the fields of education, the voluntary sector, juvenile justice and other services which have been established to 'deal with the youth problem'. Mica Nava refers to the youth service as 'provided leisure', and indeed this label bears merit – as much of the interventions which occur with young people have to do with providing alternative activities for them to engage with. The history of the youth provision dates back as far as the late 19th century, when a Christian push for 'wholesome recreation' emerged – targeted specifically at boys. From its inception, the service has been tailored to address issues of active delinquency, specific to social worry about social deviance. As Nava encapsulates, '[The youth service] attempted to capture and regulate boys and young men both physically and morally' (McRobbie and Nava 1984, 5). Part of the concern here had to do with financial independence, and therefore, unspent leisure time and resources. Because girls and young women were not economic earners, and because the public realm was not available them as a mass force, there was no provision established for female participants until well into the twentieth century. Indeed, the youth service still battles concerns about gender bias, and has been subject to very recent critiques about the equality of its programming and provision for young women (Roche, Tucker et al. 2004; Robb 2007).

The roots of the Youth Service are revealing about the state of current practice. The very origins are rooted in a deficit model predicated on the involvement of young people from lower socio-economic circumstances, and the labels which are used to refer to these young people have changed and shifted over time. 'Vulnerable', 'at-risk', and 'hard to reach' are some of current politically correct phrases of choice, but these echo past semantics which weren't quite so squeaky clean. 'Below-average' child was used by Pearl Jephcott in 1954 (Jephcott 1954, 110–111). She also utilized 'scruffily dressed', 'mental dullards', 'emotionally unstable', 'undisciplined', and 'semi criminal'. It is troubling to note that contemporary acronyms seems to echo some of the historicised ideas in new language - NEET, [20] Status0,[21] ASBO[22] and so on (Yates and Payne 2006; Donoghue 2008).

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20 NEET – 'Not in Education, Employment or Training'. This acronym originated in the UK but is now used internationally. In Britain, such young people are sometimes referred to colloquially as 'Neets'.

The youth service has never quite managed to balance its own internal critique of the 'custodial tradition' against the still-constant goal of needing to establish contact with 'young people at risk'. All of this begs the question, at risk of what? Vast research funds have been set up to chart, measure and clock what risks haunt youth – teenage pregnancy, dropping out of education, domestic violence, drug use, addiction and so on. Statistical data is often used to mark the 'success' or 'failure' of youth service provisions (as well as the fields of education, the voluntary sector, and local authority social work provisions.) This outcome-driven context is a challenging one for artists to work within, and yet the demand for artistic interventions to provide 'healthy' alternative activities to young people who are seen to be 'at risk' is on the rise. Here, the goal isn't so much about positive growth for the participants, but about *decreasing* negative activities. Whilst there is sufficient theory to argue that building resiliency is a much more effective model than decreasing anti-social behaviours, success for these organisations is often clocked by reduction statistics in crime rates, teenage pregnancy, ASB violations, hospital drinking admissions and school drop-out rates. It is in this issues-driven world that much of the participatory youth theatre practice now finds itself.

Participatory theatre within the public sector

With the embracing of a wider range of funding sources, aesthetic modes may be more limited for TIE companies attempting a shift toward a more participatory form. An example which helps to reveal this is that of Leeds-based company Theatre Blah Blah Blah, which tours the country, 'working regularly with acclaimed writers' and is cited on the Arts Council's website as having 'a unique approach to creating work for performance via dialogue with audiences and participants' ("Theatre Company Blah Blah Blah" 2008). Currently funded by the Arts Council, Yorkshire, art@leeds, and Leeds City Council, the company draws fairly directly from the genres of Forum and Playback theatre in a manner common to many TIE companies.

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21 The label which preceded NEET to mark out young people not in education, employment or training. It was ultimately replaced by 'NEET' because of concerns about the metaphor of having 'no status'.
22 ASBO - Anti-Social Behaviour Order was introduced in 1998 by the Blair government, and has recently been replaced by the acronyms CBO (the Criminal Behaviour Order) and CPI (a Crime Prevention Injunction) in an attempt to simplify the language and the policy.

Working in youth centres since 1985, the company has seen a substantial shift in youth service policy over time and this has shaped their practice. As company Youth Programme Director Ruth Cooper points out, 'It is important to remember that however structured or curriculum focused the activities are, youth centres are not schools nor theatres and to some extent a performance will always be in competition with socializing around the pool table' (Cooper 2010, 103). The company's aesthetic choices must therefore work to the strengths of the site/space, and Cooper further explains that the work is often staged in the round with no fourth wall, and is followed by a workshop with an audience. This structure, evocative of TIE and traditional forum methods, translates to their work in schools as well, which is decidedly TIE-based, even using Dorothy Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert' and hot-seating techniques.

Their recent work, *Reunion*, marked a self-stated deviation from such aesthetic choices and in Cooper's view, engaged in a more fluid participatory form. The piece toured nine youth centres in Leeds and Bradford, enacting a simple narrative structure in which former members of a youth centre get together for a reunion. Three professional actors were hired to perform a piece which drew on the myth of Echo and Narcissus, siphoning text from Ted Hughes' poem *Echo and Narcissus* as stimulus. However, unlike a typical Blah Blah Blah show, the young audiences were asked to participate throughout the performance piece, not just in a forum and workshop at the end. In this arrangement, the three adult performers serve as facilitators and actors, hearkening back to the TIE/DIE experimental days when the role of actor-teacher was considered the norm. In the middle of the piece, the young people watching are invited to 'participate' in the show by being handed pool cues and are informed through music cues when to start playing. Their involvement in the show, however, seems to not extend beyond a physical presence and the invitation for intervention, in a manner which resembles some diluted versions of Theatre of the Oppressed practice (Adrian Jackson 2009).

As Michael Balfour pithily points out, 'The problem with applied theatre as an adjunct to social policy is that it can and does lead to aesthetic engagement being eroded in the service of pragmatism' (Balfour 2009, 350). The central narrative action in *Reunion* focuses on toilet roll being stuck into the Hera character's trousers, and the resulting mockery and bitterness drive the remaining action. The performance follows Hera's character out into the hall –

so the audience is up on their feet, eavesdropping on a whispered conversation. Their format draws on promenade and immersive performance styles, ending with young people being invited to laugh at Hera's expense, and their 'role participation' is extended through dialogue in the final scenes.

The piece concludes with dual workshops, where the adult actors playing Hera and Narcissus, still in role, lead discussions. The workshop's location *within* the dramatic action, and the suspension of disbelief regarding the character's identity was kept intact, although Cooper admits that this aesthetically was a weak point in the show – as the performers struggled to maintain character and adequately facilitate a conversation. Additionally, the youth workers were asked to perform a 'cameo' role by 'intervening' at the point of crisis. Cooper's synopsis of this moment's effectiveness indicates it lacked depth, which may indicate a lack of serious investment by the youth workers present, or low expectations about their potential intervening skills.

My concerns about the aesthetics of this form are manifold, in particular the branding of the work as dialogic and innovative participatory practice. Cooper's belief that this performance represents progressive participatory practice by implementing different staging choices does not adequately address the fact that the piece is a conventional TIE format poorly disguised in similar clothing. The narrative, wherein 'we saw the squabbles, humiliations and victories of a youth centre in the context of an epic Greek myth' as Cooper terms it, still reads as a piece of top-down educational theatre which makes a pretence at participatory elements, but which leaves the power squarely in the hands of the adult artists (Cooper 2010, 108). The production, rehearsal, scripting and performance did not engage with young people's voices. Perhaps this project is most helpful in demonstrating the limitations of 'in role' drama to create genuine participation opportunities for young people.

These kinds of offerings, despite being predictable, are affordable, safe, and comfortable for the adult youth workers, and capable of ticking the 'arts' box on an evaluation form. As long as youth centres see this format of drama work as the best option, more progressive work which genuinely may help to address issues of leisure time and build genuine engagement for 'at-risk' young people with the arts will go underfunded. Models of how the messier, richer, deeper, more experimental, and more 'owned' forms of youth participatory theatre can

look are badly needed. Here, the Arts Council's Young People's Participatory Theatre (YPPT) projects provide useful visions of what could be.

Young people's participatory theatre practice in the UK

Mapping the field of current youth theatre practice, which includes a diverse range of practitioners, models, intentions, formats, sites, and methodologies is a daunting task and one that has only just begun in the UK. Because of the diverse range of work, much of the theatre practice is largely under the radar and not given much public press or discussion, making an overall analysis of the field difficult. Perhaps the challenges of the work can best be captured within the 2006 initiative the Young People's Participatory Theatre Project (YPPT). The three-year initiative ran from 2006-2009 and was commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport through Arts Council funding and in partnership with the National Association of Youth Theatres (NAYT). Its intention was to 'develop youth and participatory theatre in England' and it explicitly targeted young people between 11-25 'outside of school hours and formal education' (M. Taylor and Armitage 2009, 1). The project's accompanying report represented the 'first comprehensive mapping of the youth and participatory theatre sector [...][providing] a baseline assessment of youth and participatory theatre activity across England' (Artservice 2007).

Whilst the over-arching project goals were ostensibly about promoting young people's theatre and best practice, the populations targeted within YPPT were explicit: 'disabled young people, disadvantaged young people (including those at risk or hard to reach) and BME, culturally diverse young people' (M. Taylor and Armitage 2009, 1). Four of these projects will be discussed in-depth, as they contain some of the strongest possibilities and heaviest tensions of the work. At the heart of any analysis of young people's participatory theatre practice needs to be a core question – what is the intention here? There often are varied interpretations about the purpose of the work. Is it funded to help the participants grow and increase in confidence? Is it commissioned to reduce behavioural problems and provide leisure activities? Is it hoping to create high quality art and theatre? What if what the young people want from the project is different than the funding agency's agendas? The earlier concerns about deficit models which normalize a particular kind of 'healthy youth' are resonant here.

In Britain, participatory youth theatre practice aligns itself within a myriad of complex agendas, funding sources, and institutional partners. It has not been evaluated as a potentially dialogic practice in this country, despite the tradition of TIE/DIE which had previously positioned the work within a critical pedagogical frame. However, much of the emergent research into contemporary youth participatory theatre suggests a pedagogically rich way of working is already taking place... and that the theatre may well have quite a lot to say about youth – and how it is performed and witnessed. Three key points emerge from my analysis of the YPPT work: 1) the unstated intention which drives the work matters, 2) aesthetic choices are a complex thing for artists, facilitators, and young people to negotiate and, 3) the depth of participation within youth 'participatory' work can vary widely.

Concern 1: What (whose) intentions motivate the work?

The first of these concerns is partly compounded by the sheer diversity of practice which exists. An analysis of the YPPT projects is difficult (and representative of the complexity of the field) because they were administered by differently trained facilitators, various theatre companies, non-profit organisations, youth services, and local authorities with a range of intentions underpinning the work. Some of the YPPT work intended to widen participation to particular services/centres/resources, to bring young people in who might not attend otherwise. Other YPPT projects aimed to 'provide leisure' for young people who would otherwise be seen to be in trouble, or causing antisocial behaviour - to provide a healthy alternative. Some youth theatre mediums may intend to raise public awareness about grounded aesthetics already occurring amongst the young people, or simply to bolster self-esteem and confidence within the population targeted.

Even amongst more traditional youth theatre schemes, remits increasingly are tied to notions to inclusion. The National Association of Youth Theatres recently developed a programme entitled the 'Excellence and Inclusion Scheme', wherein they encourage member youth theatre organisations to evaluate their success and obstacles in terms of reaching and including young people who might not be involved ordinarily. This echoes much public policy rhetoric at the moment regarding inclusion and participation (Robb 2007). This can leave many providers having to justify and evaluate the efficacy

of their work against deficit models - have they improved things for the young people involved? Is there a behavioural, material, emotional, self-esteem, or lifestyle improvement because of their involvement with a theatre project? This kind of social efficacy imperative has been critiqued by theorists within the world of Applied Theatre and participation studies generally (Grady 1996; P. Taylor 1996; Ackroyd 2000; Thompson and Schechner 2004; Nicholson 2005a; Hughes 2006; Balfour 2009; de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009; Hughes and Ruding 2009; Prendergast and Saxton 2009).

What is at risk with social efficacy imperatives are the ways in which a theatrical aesthetic can be eroded for the sake of impact/outcomes. Examples of 'bad theatre' with social and educational aims are relatively rife, so if the Forum Theatre example of the Blahs serves as a cautionary tale, perhaps it is more useful to talk about the ways in which participatory forms can actually create stronger or 'better' theatre. 20 Stories High, a Liverpool based organisation, established in 2006 by Keith Saha and Julia Samuels, has consistently utilised grounded mediums to develop theatre work with young people. In this closer honouring of young people's chosen forms and interests, a higher quality, more evocative, more honest, more 'owned' and watchable theatre form emerges.

Grounded Aesthetics

What really sets exceptional youth participatory work apart is the aesthetic quality. When contextualised by effective consultation with young people, use of grounded methods can accomplish exactly the subversive tact called for by Nicholson, when she problematises the notion of a 'pure' aesthetic. Contrary to cringe-worthy work which trivialises young people's experience and forces particular modes of theatrical expression, companies like 20 Stories High build from the ground up, ensuring that the mediums are appropriate to the group and those best able to capture the themes they want to convey. The talent of the young musicians and dancers involved is startling, and defies traditional notions of what amateur youth theatre can look like. Ensemble hip-hop movement work is co-choreographed by professional dancers and the participants. Rap music which drives the narration is created by Liverpool area musicians. The artistry drives the project, and the social outcomes derive naturally out of that, as can be seen by Brodie, a participant's comment: 'Some

of the people from here are from Handfields and stuff, and usually you wouldn't speak to them […] but once you get to know them, they're like nice people, and it changes your views and stuff' (*Dark Star Rising* 2008). This kind of evaluative response begins to target what Hughes and Wilson see as imperative for the field of Applied Drama – articulating *how* and *why* the artistic process works to enact change, via qualitative methods with participants.

Perhaps the secret to the success is in their organic and young-person-centred approach to the devising of original material. As Artistic Director Keith Saha describes in a video interview for the Arts Council, 'Rather than just go in and create a show, we thought we'd get to know the group, and just see where the skills lie and what they want to learn more of, and develop different art forms and different narratives over the next six weeks' (*Dark Star Rising* 2008) Themes which emerged included 'making where we live a better place', bullying, and peer pressure, which Saha and Samuels amassed and then drew out a storyline, which was brought back to the participants for permission.

This kind of participant feedback and communication is key, as Tessa Buddle the Youth Theatre Evaluation Coordinator explained in a video interview: 'Everyone gets a say, every participant is involved in that evaluation. And it's not just a sort of ad hoc thing, we make sure that everyone has a chance to feedback to us. And we make sure that it's fed back in and we make sure that the participants are aware as well that their comments are being taken on board and we're using that information' (*Dark Star Rising* 2008).

For their YPPT project, entitled *Dark Star Rising*, they had to abandon puppetry and mask forms at a mid-way point in favour of hip-hop, theatre, and music, based on the interest areas of the young participants involved. Here, grounded mediums emerged organically as expressions already being practised by the young participants. Several of the young men involved were already active hip-hop artists, doing their own rapping, and so the performance piece was built around their body of work – a narrative structure emerging from characters and storylines suggested by the music. The *Dark Star Rising* project's aims were to engage young people from diverse and lower socio-economic groups.

Despite lacking a consistent facility, 20 Stories High demonstrated through their Liverpool work that sustainable practise can emerge naturally from pilot projects. The youth theatre element was relatively young – established in

January 2008, and it fed into their professional practice with older participants. Extended outcomes and opportunities were therefore built into the programme's structure, which was attempting to fill a void around grounded expressions in the local arts scene. Keith Saha further mused about this artistic ownership, reflecting that: 'So many young people on the street as artists who are writing lyrics, who are creating music, who are doing dance steps or poets, and their art forms aren't being developed into theatre -not often, very rarely, and when they are, they aren't being seen on the mainstage' (*Dark Star Rising* 2008).

Partnerships and recruitment, two regular challenges of this kind of work, were tackled in simple ways, as explained by co-director Julia Samuels during the project's evaluation phase: 'Some of them we met when we went out and did outreach workshops in schools and youth clubs, locally. We're working very closely with a company called Urbeatz on the project, so they put quite a lot of the young people in touch with us' (*Dark Star Rising* 2008)

In terms of social efficacy, the *Dark Star Rising* project specifically tried to target issues of urban territoriality. Within the evaluation video, Tessa Buddle articulated:

> One of the things we're trying to achieve with this project is to bring together young people from different inner city areas in Liverpool – sort of areas with a lot of tension, a lot of rivalry, so as soon as we started the project we were collecting monitoring information from everyone, particularly with postcodes, just because part of our evaluation was monitoring where the young people have come from (*Dark Star Rising* 2008).

This emphasis on a 'bringing together' as the social intentionality behind the project allowed for a greater freedom in terms of aesthetic choices. The diverse range of skills and experiences which participants brought to the project may have widened both the palette of arts mediums and the narrative lines possible. It is possible that this leaves increased freedom to explore aesthetic and performative strengths in the group, rather than trying to hit particular targets for social outcomes.

It is clear that 20 Stories High manages to enfold this kind of ethnographic archiving into a holistic theatre experience, where the young people's grounded aesthetics are seen as a starting point for the work. But what if such co-authored aesthetics are not so universally embraced by audiences? What if, in ensuring the work is democratic and participatory, the

production values go down? What if the young people's ideas do not look like 'good' theatre?

Concern 2: Who makes the aesthetic choices? Which artistic choices are seen as valid? To what degree does that limit the potential audiences of the work?

What if the young people's choices look like 'bad' art?

Perhaps the most technologically progressive YPPT Project example is +*verb* by C&T, which sought out 200 'socially excluded and learning disabled young people' across the UK, in locations as diverse as Worcester, Bradford, Lancing, East Yorkshire and Reading. As an attempt to attract young people to theatre who might not already be interested, the project used technologies like web 2.0 and gaming to expand notions of a virtual reality and the theme of 'control of your life'. It 'tested how technology might be harnessed to facilitate participation in theatre,' (M. Taylor and Armitage 2009, 5). The central hub for the project was a website, where the participants could upload audio and video files of their own work to share.

C&T Artistic Director, Paul Sutton, explained, '...across this network's activity, we're also working in pupil referral units, where pupils have been excluded from mainstream education, and we've also been working in day care centres with young people with physical disabilities as well. And what's great about using the internet for projects like this is that you can mix that all up, you can bring young people with learning disabilities together with socially excluded young people hundreds of miles away and they can collaborate and share and learn from each other' (*C&T Bradford* 2008).

This kind of digital collaboration both infinitely expands the opportunities, but also the challenges of this kind of theatre work – as the ethical demands around permissions and ownership of the material are complexified when they enter the public domain. The projects contained a live theatre element as well, which Paul Sutton points out in a video interview made by the Arts Council, 'Our project is about trying to make links between the ways that young people use technologies in their everyday normal lives and find out ways that those things can influence the ways that they make theatre and drama' (*C&T Bradford* 2008). Here, extending the participation of young people who wouldn't typically get involved in a drama activity becomes possible, as can be seen in the case of

participant Reece who also participated in the video interview: 'I was just like, browsing on the internet, and I saw this video of two Chinese boys doing a lip-synch, so I made one myself, and got a lot of comments and stuff, and like, views, so it made me want to make more' (*C&T Bradford* 2008).

Reece participated in *Live: A Lip-synch Drama by the Bradford Boys*. This live performance piece encapsulates one of the challenges when discussing aesthetics in youth theatre. The young men who participated in this performance were drawn in by the medium of lip-synch from the website images, and the devised theatre piece they created by simply devising narrative to connect their lip-synch performances together. Produced in a minimalist theatre setting, with black boxes and all-black costumes, the narrative is simple, and built around the multimedia of the musical interludes. As Tom, one of the participants summarises: 'The storyline is two school kids cheat on a test at school and they get excluded from school and one goes into like gambling, and one is trying to do what's best for everyone, like by breaking free and stuff' (*C&T Bradford* 2008). In the end, the performance contains a majority of lip-synched performances, rather than original or sung music.

As might be expected, heavy use of technology pervades the live performance as well, as projection, soundscaping, ensemble movement work, which all aids to tell the story. Animateur Greg Foster describes:

> It just seemed like an interesting area to look into as kind of a digital theatre company...its proved, really, that by engaging with those digital traditions that are now kind of emerging, you can engage young people in live work as well. It's kind of been a way in (*C&T Bradford* 2008).

What is laudable about the methods that C&T utilised is that the performance is *clearly* the ownership of the young participants. Whilst the standards of acting and stage presence might be queried by a director whose goal is traditional production standards, here, the emphasis is on ownership, as can be seen in Foster's reflections during the evaluation interview, 'With this group, it was just a simple case of let's play around with this lip-synch idea, let's just make stuff up in 20 minutes. It was them taking responsibility for interpretation, for re-purposing something, for taking ownership of something and that's actually grown throughout, until we've got to the stage where we have a piece of work that they own' (*C&T Bradford* 2008). This 'taking ownership', albeit by re-

interpreting a song still sung in someone else's recorded voice, is certainly a step toward owning and authoring the material.

Foster's perspective is echoed by the participants, including Dalton, who also participated in the video interview process: 'It's making it, and you know it's yours, and it's just like, putting it all together and improvising and having a laugh with each other and trying to sort everything out, it's just been really fun' (*C&T Bradford* 2008). Dalton's enthusiasm captures one reason why some Applied Theatre practitioners may be hesitant to discuss aesthetics. Here, the initial act of involvement is a worthy measure of success for many of the young men who participated in *Live.* What they are actually making is secondary to the fact that they are in the room, making something at all.

Foster further points out in his video interview: 'People like Reece would never have done this before, would never have been interested in doing theatre, because his associations with that were so distant from his kind of, you know, his cultural experience' (*C&T Bradford* 2008). The more traditional worries of a staged production – genuine character portrayal, genuine dialogue, effective breath support – these may be secondary to the actual aims of the production. An entire agenda may ride under the surface of the production, which on the surface could appear to be a somewhat fair-to-middling youth theatre performance with some fancy projections in it.

As Nicholson notes,

> There is often a messiness about work in applied drama, focusing on interrogating what Victor Turner has called the 'contamination' of context, which makes the 'flaws, hesitations, personal factors, incomplete, elliptical, context-dependent, situational proponents of performance' visible. Applied drama is, in Turner's terms, always contaminated by context, and is intended to be sufficiently fluid to address the concerns of local audiences and participants (Nicholson 2005a, 12).

This notion of 'contamination by context' which perpetually affects participatory work represents the concern that many practitioners may feel about aesthetics playing a larger role in the theoretical discourse. Here, certain elements within the process may be prioritised over production values, such as ownership of the material, or even developing artistic and critical skills within the participants which may serve them well beyond the reach of the individual project.

Greg Foster draws out some of the skills which are enhanced through devised practices, and clarifies where the facilitator's intent may be focused:

'One of the things I'm really keen on doing with them is getting to this space where you can critically feedback each other but it not being personal. Not only is that a vital skill, I think, for making collaborative devised theatre work, but that's also a life skill.' The impact on the young participants is evidenced within the Arts Council's evaluation videos, particularly within participant Tom's reflections: 'Normally, I used to think that drama was for girls and stuff, but now like whenever I'm like walking down the street and stuff, I'm seeing things that would fit into the show and what we could do and do for drama and stuff.' (*C&T Bradford* 2008). It is tempting to analyse these kinds of life outcomes through a pedagogical lens, pointing out the ways in which the participants' daily lived experience is starting to be critically viewed through their involvement with creating theatre. Foster's description of 'life skills' – being able to give and receive critical feedback, learning to respond to that feedback, seeing your world as a site where you have creative authorship, pedagogical outcomes which deeply enrich the participant's literac(ies) and cultural capacities.

As with much of this work, sustainability is inevitably a concern, as the impact of the work is directly linked to its duration and thickness in the young people's lives. As Reece described in his interview: 'I hope, like, we do another show or something. Like, at the end, it says 'to be continued...' so there might be a second one' (*C&T Bradford* 2008). The evaluation videos of many of the YPPT projects capture this wistfulness on the part of the young people and the artists – a yearning for the work's scope to be longer, encompass more contact hours, become more integrated with partner organisations, and eventually find long-term funding. In the case of C&T, an established company, other projects will certainly emerge which supplement and support the work of *Live,* but this assurance does not exist for many participatory projects run by organisations without long-term support.

What if the 'grounded aesthetics' are choices made by artists/administrators?
The Theatre Is... Company provides a helpful contrast in their delivery of a project entitled *It's our Theatre – Norfolk.* This work took the form of an artistic residency within a rural setting, using the medium of urban hip-hop. Whilst utilising grounded mediums, the project's stated aims were actually to 'identify and alleviate obstacles to participation for young people' (M. Taylor and

Armitage 2009, 8). The project's structure paired partner organisations such as The Garage in Norwich and Seachange Arts in great Yarmouth, and area theatres with the London-based Theatre Is... Company. Concerns about sustainability and grounded mediums could be raised within this project structure, as the diverse geographical sites and use of non-local facilitators create a less embedded model of practice.

The project's two primary goals in Norfolk were to increase participation, and to give the young people tools to 'become cultural entrepreneurs in their own right' (*It's Our Theatre* 2008). This was seen to happen through the community partnerships, but the continued success of the project clearly lingers within the theatre company, not the locality of north Norfolk. Perhaps this could be attributed to the contrasting use of urban grounded mediums in a rural location. As projects coordinator Claudia West stated in an Arts Council video interview, 'Yeah, bringing hip-hop into Norfolk, the point about hip-hop is that it's about your street. Now, if your street happens to be a country lane, and you walk down it, you're still talking about what's happening to you, and what's relevant to you. That concept has been absolutely transferable' (*It's Our Theatre* 2008). Despite this assurance that the concepts addressed within the hip-hop medium are relevant to the young people, the choice of genre still bears scrutiny.

A lead facilitator from Theatre Is... reflected in a video interview, 'It felt like a bit of a joke, you know, bringing hip-hop to North Norfolk, but I swear, some of the talent with these kids! You know, they could really make hip-hop crews, they could make a scene out of this' (*It's Our Theatre* 2008). Bringing a more urban aesthetic medium to a predominantly rural region is not in-of-itself problematic. In fact it could be argued that expanding the theatrical languages of the young people in the region is just one way of bolstering, diversifying, and strengthening their literacies and communication skills. However, this particular YPPT project was critiqued within the final evaluation report for concerns about sustainability and the implementation/consultation stages (M. Taylor and Armitage 2009).

In another facilitator, Rob's words, 'You know, you see graffiti because people are frustrated around grey buildings in London, not around trees in north Norfolk, and we're trying to inject a little bit of that kind of cultural movement to these areas, so they can have some fresh bit of new theatre that speaks about

them as young people, in their environment, even though it's you know, rural as opposed to being urban. You could be rapping about how you wake up and see the sea every day' (*It's Our Theatre* 2008). My concern here is that the urban medium of hip-hop seems to be given a cache and status which might be overriding forms of expression already embraced by the young people. Is it possible that certain aesthetic forms are seen to be inherently youth-resonant, simply because of their prevalence in young people's intervention work? Certain stereotypical approaches seem to emerge regularly with little critical appraisal – graffiti, hip-hop, and mural painting all seem to be universally embraced as 'grounded aesthetics' despite radical differences in the young populations engaging with them. In this YPPT project, developing skills as a hip-hop artist was a challenging and useful means of creating theatre, but when the artists were no longer there to facilitate the process, it left little scope for the young people to engage in a long-term manner. This project may well qualify as the 'plop-art' as identified by Kwon as a problematic model for site-related interventions (Kwon 2002).

The *It's Our Theatre* project began with a twenty-minute-long hip-hop road show, devised by the adult practitioners in the theatre company, which toured area schools and market squares for an intensive week of promotion. From this point, interested young people could apply to take part in the free workshops, and over 450 applications from all over Norfolk were received. Four week-long workshops took place: on rapping, graffiti, dj-ing and hip-hop dance, and from this phase young people were invited to apply to join the final company, who created a piece of performance in a one-week intensive residency.

Somewhat perplexingly to the Arts Council evaluation team, the visiting artists asked the young participants to respond dramatically to a range of stimulus about global warming, using the skills they had developed over the four workshops. The content was created in dramatic responses to the stimulus, including images such as news reports where the weather man is doing pop-and-lock moves whilst speaking about rising water levels. No indication in the project documentation or evaluation discusses this choice of thematic content. It seems clear that without a sustained relationship or a consistent organisation in place, implementing a phase of consultation with the young people about which issues they would like to explore would be more difficult.

The project's social outcomes are discussed by the facilitators in the evaluation videos. Rob reflected: 'Particularly in rural areas, a lot of people feel very apathetic, they don't feel connected to the community. If you want to get people involved and feeling a part of society, I think theatre is one of the best ways to do it, because it's so communicative, and it gives them something to do. They're healthier, they're fitter' (*It's Our Theatre* 2008). The primary concern here is with the sustainability of this model of practice. In 2008, the project organisers seemed optimistic about the extendible outcomes for the theatre practice continuing in the Norfolk area. As administrator Claudia described: 'On a long term basis, there is a very clear handover to those partners, so the project continues when Theatre is... is less active in the region' (*It's Our Theatre* 2008). This managerial optimism seems unlikely, further evidenced by the artists' view of how their 'outsider' status might affect the long-term work, as captured by Theatre Is… facilitator Charlie in an interview excerpt:

> So many of these youth projects, you go in you make great bonds with the kids, you really inspire them, and then you say oh, we're going back to London now, that's rubbish, you know? That's why this stuff hasn't succeeded before because people roll in and roll out. The point was our circus rolls into town and we invite everyone to take part, and then yeah, eventually we leave, but we leave the big top here, and we say carry on, make your own circus (*It's Our Theatre* 2008).

The trouble with bringing in innovative theatre projects to attract young people into resources and centres is that they have to be sustained to maintain the appeal. One-off events, without a sustainable infrastructure and welcoming partners, will not be able to continue the work, and ultimately this impacts the participants. Despite aspirations being lifted, long-term outcomes may be limited. In participant Josh's case, the work proved inspiring: 'I can't afford lessons, and it's free, so I tried it out, and it turned out to be one of the best things that ever happened to me. I want to take it into a proper profession, this is my dream' (*It's Our Theatre* 2008). Whilst the young people's response to the grounded mediums that were used was positive, the long term picture is a bit more bleak: Participants like Josh would find little opportunity after the 'circus rolled out of town', but Theatre Is... continues to deliver hip-hop workshops at various regions across the UK, building on the success of this pilot project.

The increased status enjoyed by the theatre company which delivered this project is part of the reason why theorists like Grant Kester are so sceptical about facilitator intentions and agendas. His warning cry about 'aesthetic evangelists' who descend upon particular communities to 'help them' is well heeded here, although I would caution with a grain of salt. It may simply be that the young people enjoyed the experience, and benefitted from increased confidence, self-esteem, and an expanded sense of their own embodied and spoken literacies.

Concern 3: What level of participation is adequate for the work to be seen as 'participatory'? How much is enough?

The final concern I wish to raise about young people's participatory theatre practice potentially runs the risk of opening an entirely new set of theoretical questions. This thesis cannot plumb the depths of the existing literature on participation as a concept, and this body of work is ballooning rapidly with critiques and questions about what participation looks like and how it can be effectively facilitated (Tedlock 1991; Rahnema 1999; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Hickey and Mohan 2004; S. A. Chambers 2011). Suffice it to say that this thesis will simply query what young people's participation looked like within the Vital Spaces action research. In contextualising this within youth participatory theatre forms, however, there are several outstanding best practice models which exist in the UK, placing young people's ownership, voice, and agency at the centre of the arts organisation.

Contact Theatre in Manchester has been lauded nationally for their work which builds sustainable and ethical performance practices with young participants. Run by Artistic Director John McGrath until 2006, Contact Theatre has been on the forefront of practice which asks the young participants to take on a more powerful role in terms of creating theatre, running the organisation and building sustainable practice. Says McGrath:

> A crucial part of the working process at Contact is that even if you enter as the most tentative kid from Gorton who is coming in for a drop-in session, it should be clear to you that you could end up as an emerging artist, a workshop leader or staff member at Contact. If it looks like there isn't a line through from one of those things to another then we have failed. I think in most youth theatre there is a huge separation from the youth

theatre and professional theatre, but at Contact we try and blur the boundary (Thompson and Low 2010, 406).

Their YPPT project, *Future Fires*, asked young participants who already worked with Contact Theatre to propose and deliver an arts project of their choice – including the steps of fundraising, evaluation, health and safety, and recruitment (Taylor and Armitage 2009: 6). There were five delivered projects during the YPPT phase, and this work has continued with clear success as part of the Contact Theatre provision.

Suzie Henderson, head of Creative Development for Contact Theatre, described the project: '[...] instead of coming up with an idea of a project for young people that is designed by adults and then delivered by young artists, we wanted to give all of that power and autonomy over to the young people, so they'd be the people coming up with the projects, the people developing those projects, fundraising for them and delivering them' (*Future Fires* 2008). This model of administrative as well as artistic ownership is clearly identified within the YPPT project evaluations to be the most successful and sustainable.

The five projects mentored by Contact included a film about experiences of living in Manchester as a young refugee, and work with senior citizens in sheltered housing to break down barriers between young people and elderly people. In the film project, the young artist, Borhan Mohammadi, an Iranian-Kurdish refugee brought in two collaborative artists and several writers who all come from the Manchester refugee community. Their previous positive experience with Contact meant that the leadership for the project was already possible. The script was based on testimony experience of young refugees who were encouraged by the 'gatekeeper' figures of Borhan and writer Marcus Hercules. Through rehearsals and workshops they discussed true stories of autobiographical experience, which Marcus then dramatised and fit into a narrative structure. This was given to the participants for their permission, and then rehearsals began.

In a video interview for the Arts Council, Ian Marsh, the project coordinator explained, 'The skills they're developing as cultural leaders, as workshop leaders, as project managers, the skills that will enable them to be able to go on and continue developing their own work' (*Future Fires* 2008). Indeed, Contact Theatre's commitment to the work being fully in the hands of the young artists is remarkable. Marsh continued:

> One thing that Contact's very clear about it, is although there's support for them, we won't do the project for them. You know, I'll go through a fund-raising application for them, and if they want me to, I'll read through it before they submit it, but I won't actually write the application for them. There's the support there, but at the end of the day, they've got to actually deliver this project themselves and they've got to go through this whole process (*Future Fires* 2008).

This is not an easy task for many of the participants. It can involve developing a complex set of literacy and social competencies in a short period of time in order to succeed. As Borhan explained during the evaluation interview, 'English is not my first language, and with the writing and all that I faced difficulties, but you know, I had someone to help me with the writing, but yeah, it's good, because they show you the way and they let you walk it, and they say, you walk it now, and they keep an eye on you, if you wobble, you know, they always give you a hand if you need help' (*Future Fires* 2008).

This emphasis on genuine sustainability is mirrored by the best practice model of the artistic work being done by members of the community. As Suzie Henderson points out,

> The best people to know what another group of young people need and want is someone – is a young person from that community, and if that is a young person whose had training and development, they are the best person to develop an idea for the young people from that community. And also, they carry a lot more kudos. […] Particularly for Borhan's project, the young people he's been getting to come along to this building for the last four weekends, would never have stepped foot inside this door, unless he'd done all the groundwork that he has in talking to them and convincing them that this was something worthwhile for them to be involved in (*Future Fires* 2008).

Whilst this project clearly exemplifies best practice in both administrative structure and artistic practice, the feasibility of it being used as a template elsewhere is diminished somewhat. Circumstances around Contact's existence are unusually excellent. The theatre facility has recently had a major refurbishment, and the close association with the University of Manchester means that progressive practice is encouraged, rather than revenue-seeking productions which many in-house youth theatres must regularly return to. Most of all, however, this kind of structure requires enormous faith in the young

people involved – it is a terrifying arrangement to those who would like to keep the artistic power squarely in the hands of the adult practitioners.

Whilst many of the YPPT models address social concerns, both Contact and 20 Stories High overtly aim to reach outward from the young population and target an external audience beyond the participants. It is no coincidence that these two companies also seem to have the strongest aesthetic output. The art is better – more watchable. In McGrath's own words, it constitutes a 'good night out' (McGrath 1996).

This resonates with McGrath's earlier appeal to subvert the usual expectations around why young people's theatre is seen to be of value. To amplify and create channels for young people's voices to be heard means that energies must put into cultivating diverse and wide-ranging audiences, to looking at the modes and conventions of the aesthetic choices, and to actively working to facilitate these skills with the young participants. The cultivation necessary requires access to hierarchical communication channels – an ability to market and make the work accessible enough that audiences can realise the aesthetic potentials. It also requires some de-bunking of perceptions around the cringe-worthy stereotypes of youth theatre.

This all requires a more holistic look at the implicit power structures which hold the entire package. Working with at-risk populations such as refugee and asylum seekers, young people in the criminal justice system, disabled populations – there are strong and necessary limitations on how public their work can be.[23] But unless best practice models like these are given their due accolades and a wider reception, the impact of this kind of work fizzles out before it is done. Performing powerful artistic work to 'near and dear' audiences relegates the artistry of the work to that of outcome-based process drama. Is it possible for it to be both socially efficacious and carry production-value weight which can expand and open audience perceptions of both what young people's capacities are artistically and personally?

As can be seen from the case studies above, many participatory youth theatre models contain ethical tensions – top down perceptions about what young people 'need' may drive the work, rather than a genuine attempt to

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23 For example, two of the YPPT projects, Geese Theatre's 'Inside Theatre' and Lawnmower's 'School's for Fools' were necessarily restricted in terms of privacy and permission. The populations which Geese and Lawnmowers typically engage are deemed vulnerable – in Geese's case, juvenile offenders or prisoners in criminal justice systems. The Lawnmowers work exclusively with participants who have mental disabilities, including a large percentage of their facilitators.

explore the unknown together – facilitator and participants. In Chapter IV, through the vehicle of my own three-year action research, I will further explore what shapes the practice, in terms of institutional agendas, facilitation needs, and the particular needs of individual groups, which can make any conversation about artistry difficult. This chapter has explored how such sited and specific analyses are necessary to the field, given the vast range and variety of models which exist. In attempting to articulate the ethical challenges with regard to ownership, authorship, intentionality, deficit, voice, and aesthetics within the work, specific case studies are badly needed.

Chapter IV will raise a number of questions which echo those expressed in this chapter – who is deciding this work needs to be done? How much voice and agency do the young people actually have in the process? What if what they want to do is not what the funding is for? These issues can only be properly explored through the grounded experience in a particular site with a particular population. As has been argued in this chapter, it can be relatively simple to state that a 'youth' theatre project will use young people's ideas, but in the milieu of the creative process, a complex set of negotiations, compromises, and coercions may actually be taking place. This may include advance presumptions about which aesthetics will be relevant to the young people, preconceived notions of deficit with regard to the participants, and diluted artistic methods which are driven/shaped by financial survival. The Vital Spaces work encountered these questions and more in its three years of Participatory Action Research - ultimately moving toward a more pedagogical and dialogic model to attempt to resolve some of these tensions.

Before an in-depth analysis of the PAR work, however, a clearer definition of critical pedagogy is required, in order to provide adequate rooting for the notion of youth theatre as a potentially dialogic practice which can embody and embrace multiple literacies and create spaces for dialogue. As Clar Doyle argues, the starting point for such a lens must indeed be the practical work and worlds of the participants. In his words: 'Part of the challenge for a critical pedagogy of drama is to take the world of students seriously [...] Critical drama should be praxis in the full sense of the word: a place to act out reflective theory' (Doyle 1993, 92). In the next chapter, as part of a clarification about critical pedagogy, I explore three examples of dialogic

practice which do 'take the world of students seriously' in an attempt to start conversations that might not happen otherwise.

Chapter III
Critical Pedagogy:
a theoretical context for young people's theatre practice

Critical pedagogy in young people's participatory theatre forms

In Chapters I and II, this thesis has examined the ways in which 'youth' has been defined socially and culturally through resistant, every day performative practices, and has moved on to looking at how theatre is often made with young people in the UK. What happens, though, when such theatre practice aims specifically to unpack questions about identity with the participants? Should such work draw on young people's grounded experience? How can such participatory practice engage with young people's every day cultural practices? If young people are being invited to participate in making theatre, then how? And what are they being asked to make? At its commencement, the Vital Spaces work intended to examine these questions through practice.

Throughout the Vital Spaces research, an emergent lens of analysis became increasingly relevant, and as the Participatory Action Research cycle spun, a pedagogical rooting became more and more important to the work. This was not explicitly intended at the start of the research, but its increased relevance needs to be honoured within this thesis. As the Vital Spaces work began to explore more pedagogical notions of dialogue and identity, it also began to situate itself more fully within a discourse of critical pedagogy – a discourse which is grounded upon a premise that young people cannot be seen as objects to be educated, but rather as creative agents who are capable of authoring not only their own identities, but also potentially their worlds. The diverse array of participatory theatre practices described in Chapter II make clear how important it is to be explicit about intentionality. With this in mind, this chapter will explore the pedagogical potentials of participatory performance practices with young people. This advocacy is an unexpected one for me as a researcher.

My own action research was begun in 2009 with a strong desire to avoid and move away from the banner of TIE/DIE. In fact, my own reservations about didactic and low-quality work influenced the very groups and locations we first visited, and my own dawning awareness about the pedagogical rooting has been a slow and at times painful journey through on-the-ground practice with

young people. The Vital Spaces Project began as an attempt to interrogate key questions about how to engage with young people outside of educational spaces about issues of identity, self, youth and place. To a degree, it retains this ethos at its heart now, but the work has been tempered and shaped profoundly by the sites and participants it has engaged with. It has been a series of wonderful failures. Chapter IV offers an analysis of the first two years of Vital Spaces grounded work, and reflects upon these failures. Firstly, however, this chapter will explore why a pedagogical lens might create a useful site for exploring such issues in theatre work with young people.

Henry Giroux states, 'Critical pedagogy asserts that students can engage their own learning from a position of agency and in so doing can actively participate in narrating their identities through a culture of questioning that opens up a space of translation between the private and the public while changing the forms of self- and social recognition' (Giroux 2011, Section I, paragraph 23). Critical pedagogy was developed as part of set of progressive education reforms to the 'banking model' of education initially critiqued by John Dewey. Despite an important set of post-critical feminist critiques (Lather 1992; Luke and Gore 1992; Orner 1992; Walkerdine 1992; Walkerdine 1989; Ellsworth 1997; Ellsworth 1992), the lens of analysis is still widely respected and used primarily within educational reform. However, the lens of critical pedagogy is certainly relevant to theatre practice generally, and to theatre spaces wherever they may be – whether inside school or elsewhere. It is, in particular, this flux that Giroux describes between the private and the public which theatre is uniquely suited to capture, explore and subvert.

Succinctly, critical pedagogy is rooted within theories of progressive and student-centred learning, but is particularly interested in how learning can permeate beyond the school classroom and how such practices can contribute to larger issues of social justice and democracy (Dewey 1934; Piaget and Inhelder 1969a; Freire 1970; Bruner 1986; Bruner 1990; McLaren 1998; McLaren 1995; Fine and Weis 2003; Fine and Weis 1997; Giroux 2011). Because of the institutional critiques which critical pedagogues have brought to bear against much of the educational establishment, recent scholarship has explored how private, domestic, and public spaces beyond schools contribute to young people's learning. While much of the existing literature about critical pedagogy and dialogue emerges from the fields of education, many of the same

texts see those systems of education as restrictive, socialising, and systemically troubled (Freire and Shor 1987; hooks 1994; Gadotti 1996; Ellsworth 1997; Tatum 1997; Giroux 2011; Monk et al. 2011). In moving the discourse of critical pedagogy outside of the field of education, this scholarship intends to see the young people involved in such projects as something other than 'student' or 'pupil.' Other theatre practitioners who have emerged from TIE/DIE share this concern, such as Paul Sutton, artistic director for C&T, who argues for their role to be considered as that of 'author' within the creative process (Sutton 2007).

Theatre scholars increasingly are advocating a necessary set of reflexive critical theory filters in evaluating educational theatre practice (Saldana and Wright 1996; P. Taylor 1996; Ackroyd 2006; Carroll, Anderson, and Cameron 2006). In particular, Sharon Grady's work in educational theatre research advocates this as essential to moving the work beyond simplistic propaganda aimed at young people:

> Emerging from this often reductionist past into my current position as a professional in the field of educational theatre, I find much of the work aimed at young people on the more simplistic side of the continuum and very little work focused on the complexities. I discovered the hard way that making manifestos, whether encouraging workers to unionize or children to examine what it means to be a 'good' citizen, doesn't get you very far without the critical engagement of your intended 'audience' (Grady 1996, 67).

In an attempt to avoid this kind of reductionism, the Vital Spaces work specifically will be defined as Participatory Action Research which explored two core issues of critical pedagogy: dialogue and literacy – who is talking, who is listening and what codes are being used? Dialogue and literacy theories are complex and debated fields in their own right, and therefore these concepts will be defined solely as elements of a critical pedagogy for the purposes of this thesis. Perhaps particularly because of the increasingly standardized, institutional mandates placed upon learning within school settings, these two core concepts of learning may well enjoy greater freedom, creativity and exploration space outside of schools.

Critical pedagogy contains within it a belief in the importance of a cycle of self-reflection prompting shifts in action – Freire's notion of praxis. As Nicholson reminds us, '[...] there is no guarantee that engaging with theatre, either as performers or audiences, will provide thought-provoking learning environments

for young people; it is possible that such engagements will be used simply to promote [...] saleable skills or to re-enforce a celebrity culture' (Nicholson 2009, Section 9, paragraph 10). By implementing the lens of critical pedagogy on the work, I hope to maintain the importance of sifting theatre practice with young people through a straining mechanism to keep it honest about its own inconsistencies, biases, and assumptions. This is connected to the reflective cycle which Participatory Action Research uses, but it also represents an external set of critical reflections which require additional questions to be asked about the purposes of the work itself.

Moving from educational to social spaces

Central to critical pedagogy is a notion that 'active rehearsals' of realities are essential to pedagogical inquiry (Freire and Shor 1987; Trend 1992; Giroux 2000; Perry 2011, 67). Because of this connection, theatre and educational theorists have explored the ways in which a critical pedagogy is powerfully matched within the drama curriculum, most commonly centred in educational spaces (Mearns 1929; Bolton 1979; Vygotsky 1986; Trend 1992; Doyle 1993; Bolton and Heathcote 1995; Vygotsky 1994; Neelands 2004; Bolton 1986; Davis 2010). For example, developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky's notions about how young people best learn with the use of the 'more capable peer' and within their own 'zone of proximal development' are essential elements of teacher training, but also core concepts within most theatre activity, as explored within the work of Bolton and Neelands. However, when such practices have moved outside the drama classroom to external sites, they often lose the languages of pedagogical critique to analyse the practice and how it is working. Tony Jackson articulates the positives behind such a move, based in some of the existing limitations within educational institutions:

> One reason why many educationists have embraced the opportunities for 'informal' education at cultural institutions outside schools – whether at museums or regional theatres or locally organised youth theatres – is that active-learning practices are more manageable and more acceptable, less constrained by national curriculum demands in those less rigidly organised environments (Anthony Jackson 2007, 43).

Jackson is not alone in seeing this move as a somewhat emancipatory (and financially necessary) move by artists and educators who may find greater pedagogical freedom outside of the National Curriculum.

Whilst I agree wholeheartedly that there is a freedom to young people's theatre practice which occurs outside of the school curriculum in 'less rigidly organised' spaces, It would be incorrect to label those same spaces as unaffected by institutional and material factors. These sites are assuredly not neutral, and are often bound by equally limiting institutional agendas. As Weis and Fine articulate, even as they advocate for non-school spaces to be seen as pedagogical, '[...] there are no neutral spaces, that all spaces are "political" insofar as they are infused with questions of power and privilege' (Fine and Weis 1997, xiii).When the pedagogy is isolated from the work, it runs a risk of being dismissed as frivolous or unimportant. This may result in a commonplace usage of the theatrical forms without the underpinning theory or understanding of the work's political rooting. As can perhaps be seen in Chapter II, young people's participatory theatre practice can span impossible divides with regard to intention, methods, and degrees of participation and agency on the part of the young people. The work is always sited, always political, always ethically plagued with concerns about ownership, voice, authorship, and agency. These diverse practices do not exclusively attempt to educate – and can sometimes attempt to educate in problematic ways. What might a model for analytical and reflective practice look like? I wish to advocate that such a model must be clear about its pedagogical aims.

In summary, this chapter intends to provide a clear and explicit pedagogical grounding for young people's participatory theatre work which is taking place outside of schools, but which still aims to create a rich site for exploration of deep concepts and dialogue. In doing so, it draws upon a legacy which is profoundly influenced by the writings of key critical pedagogues.

Paulo Freire

Theatre forms have been most commonly linked to a critical pedagogy through the theories of Paulo Freire, and this thesis is deeply indebted to his works in terms of its pedagogical grounding, its Participatory Action Research methodology and within the explorations of dialogue and literacy as key to the theatre work. The understanding of drama as a form of critical pedagogy is

perhaps most clearly seen in Freire's work, and he is widely regarded as one of the essential contributors to critical pedagogy as a philosophy. His critiques of 'banking methods of education' were followed by a wealth of literature which advocated a more equal exchange between teacher and students, and a method of education which honoured the identity and real-world circumstances of the learners in order to transform their reality (Freire 1970; Freire 1974; Freire and Macedo 1987; Shor and Freire 1987; Freire 1994; Freire 1998a; Freire 1998b). According to Freire, a constant cycle of self-reflection allows for theory to regularly re-invigorate, re-interrogate, and re-write the practice. This cycle of praxis creates reflexive work, as 'Within the world, we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed - even in part - the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus to speak a true word is to transform the world' (Freire 1988:75, quoted in Mutnick 2006, 37–38).

This notion of praxis as key to both participatory work and effective educational theatre pedagogy permeates the Vital Spaces project, in both its ethos and its methodology. This theory is both dense and complex to practice, and this irony is not lost on Mutnick, who muses, 'The idea of praxis - reflection plus action - is both a linchpin of Freirean pedagogy and a difficult concept to appreciate, let alone employ. How, after all, does one go from one to the other, from reflective inquiry to social transformation?' (Mutnick 2006, 37). This thesis demonstrates an at-times awkward attempt to move back and forth between reflective research inquiry and practice, but it is also grounded upon the belief that theatre work which does the same necessarily interrogates itself, its intentionality, and its emancipatory potentials. These notions of emancipation are hugely problematic, as will be explored further in Chapter IV.

Freire's theories around literacy as key to emancipation have been elaborated and explored by critical pedagogues who see an embracing of multiple literacies as integral to both improved social capital by those groups often seen as silenced, but also in terms of dismantling notions of hegemony and privilege (Freire and Macedo 1987; Hirsch 1987; McLaren et al. 1995; Finn 1999; Godley 2003; Gee 1990; Gee 2004; hooks 1994; Delpit 1995). It is important to note, in this context, that Freire's core concepts as key to liberation and social change are grounded in the Global South and in a set of material and cultural conditions that are far-removed from those experienced in industrialised

settings. His practical use of literacy education to work with peasants around reading and writing skills which enable greater human rights has been used in a variety of world-wide settings which vary in their material and economic realities. Many of these appropriations may well ignore the political grounding of Freire's context – and its rooting in a Marxist humanism.

According to Freire, increased literacy and praxis can result in critical consciousness – both of the individual and of their understanding of the larger social injustices which contribute to their lot in life. This widely-repeated concept of *conscientization* has been subjected to criticism based on Freire's written language, the links to Marxist politics and economics, and to the practical feasibility of the concept's implementation in daily life. Perhaps even more problematically, the underlying philosophies of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed have been used for an array of varying agendas. Critiques of Freire have included critical responses to his non-academic writing style, concerns about the use of sexist and Catholic-centric language, and the prevalence of shallow mis-interpretations of his work as a 'methodology' rather than a grounding philosophy (Youngman 1986; Jarvis 1987; Aronowitz 1993; McLaren and Leonard 1993; Gadotti 1994; Weiler 1998; Bartlett 2005; Crowther and Martin 2005; Schugurensky 2011). Despite these critiques, however, his work is enduringly seen as 'virtually canonical' by those in the field of education, dialogue studies, and literacy work (Burbules 2000, 255).

Freire's writings have regularly been drawn upon by theatre artists as a justifying theoretical context of their practice. The most famous of these, of course, is Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, but his impact can also be seen in the curricular shifts within TIE/DIE and in many forms of popular and participatory theatre. Importantly, his work underwrites much of contemporary Applied Theatre theory. As Clar Doyle explained, 'If drama presents aspects of the world with its deficiencies and injustices and moves against them in a manner that shows not only emancipatory critique but also action, then we are well on our way to a form of critical pedagogy. At its best a critical pedagogy can make breaks with dominant expectations and alienate the familiar' (Doyle 1993, 88–89). Theatre artists from Brecht to Brook to Boal have regularly been fascinated by the power of this moment where the familiar can become strange, and where we may be able to view with new eyes something we had taken as given before.

It is important to state that the Vital Spaces work also clearly owes a debt of gratitude to Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, although the Vital Spaces action research never explicitly used Forum, Image or Legislative Theatre as it is described in his texts (Boal 1992; Boal 1995; Boal 1998; Boal 1979). Boal's methods were an inspiration and a starting point, but not a template. It is also essential to state firmly that Freirean philosophy and Boalian methods are not politically neutral. As Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mandy Schutzman state,

> What fundamentally unites the two practices [Boal performance and Freire pedagogy] is dialogue - a true praxis of action and reflection that unfolds differently but engages the same principles in each realm. Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed foster but do not dictate action; nor, I believe, is their practice, as outlined by Freire or Boal, politically neutral, liberal or reformist. Freirean pedagogy and Boalian theatre are revolutionary in their commitment to struggles for social and economic justice; however, they do not aim to convert students to any particular organization or political philosophy. Their aims are broadly nonsectarian rather than narrowly political. The teacher eschews depositing knowledge of any kind into students, yet for real dialogue to occur, the teacher's authority must be "on the side of freedom, not against it" (Freire 1988: 67, cited in Mutnick 2006, 43).

There is a clear contradiction embedded in combining the form of youth theatre with a lens of pedagogical analysis which is inherently critical of institutions and systems of power. Youth participatory theatre work sits within a context of both material need and public policy agendas which may create an uncomfortable nest. As other critics have explored, it is very possible for theatre practitioners to use Forum and Image theatre methodologies without an implementation of Freire's notions of praxis and critical consciousness (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994). Critical pedagogy's debt to Freire is clear; but the natural progression from a belief in Freire's notions of *conscientization* and praxis to an exclusive usage of Boal's methods is not as mandatory as it may seem. I wish to advocate that a more fluid and diverse range of dialogic practices[24] are occurring which owe a debt of gratitude to Boal's work, but which also explore alternatives, new mediums, and manners of participation between the theatre-makers and the audience. Key to these forms is an ethos of critical

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24 Not just with youth.

consciousness and the central importance of dialogue as a part of the process and the product.

As will be discussed later, work which is conducted without notions of critical consciousness and social justice can contribute to a somewhat prescriptive following of particular forms and evaluative measures without the underpinning theory. Much youth participation arts work aims at empowering or enabling the young people in some kind of measurable way– either through an improvement in self-esteem or a reduction in 'behavioural problems', rather than interrogating the webs of socio-economic inequalities which might be contributing to the young people's sense of inherent worth in the first place. I certainly am not advocating that the Vital Spaces project achieved this depth of critical responsiveness; rather, it is the failures and tensions of the work which are interesting. In particular, the Vital Spaces work will be evaluated in terms of the alternative literacies which were honoured and the dialogues around youth identity which it helped to prompt.

In describing the work as such, I am purposefully framing it as 'participatory' and 'pedagogical' practice, but not labouring its inclusion under the banner of Applied Theatre. Certainly, the Vital Spaces work could easily be classed as Applied practice, but I wish to be more specific about its intentions and methods. As Nicholson points out, drawing on Sharon Grady, there needs to be clarity when allying Applied practice with critical pedagogy, lest the unspoken become a new kind of silent mandate, lest: '[…] practitioners who follow the 'critical pedagogies of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren become 'accidental Marxists' when they use these pedagogies in Applied Drama' (Nicholson 2005, 44). Heeding this warning, the Vital Spaces work then is firmly, explicitly, and emphatically classed as purposefully pedagogical – even if that link was one which emerged through the PAR work.

Nicholson's writings are essential reading for understanding how an 'accidental' or purposeful pedagogy may be present within Applied practice, and as she has articulated in numerous texts, such practice is often a powerful display of 'performative pedagogies' which are composed of a set of 'performative encounters'. In these moments, she argues, 'learning is negotiated and choreographed as encounters between the artistic practices of drama and theatre and the vernacular know-how of the participants' (2005, 45).

This bridge between performance studies and pedagogy has been well-built within the discourse of Applied Theatre, and within the Vital Spaces work, such pre-established defenses are useful. However, rather than dwelling on the fascinating debates which are ongoing within the field of Applied Theatre with regard to ethics, pedagogy, and impact, I wish to focus the analysis here on the specifics of language, literacy and dialogue which can be present within young people's participatory theatre work. As Nicholson further advocates, language is key to the pedagogical heart, 'In terms that are reminiscent of Wittgenstein's famous dictum 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world', Freire recognised that it is only through language that learners extend their cognitive abilities' (2005, 51–52). Within these theatre spaces, language can manifest in many radical forms.

Critical pedagogy and literacies

Notions of literacy permeate critical pedagogy – from a Freirean (modernist) understanding of literacy as the core building block toward individual emancipation and social transformation to more postmodern understandings of communication as a product of cultural norms, drawing on a Gramscian concept of hegemony and a Bakhtinian understanding of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1986; Mayo 1998). Without being drawn into the complexities of literacy theory, suffice it to say that language is power, and the ways in which we deem certain kinds of communication legitimate is based on our societal systems of power. In this context, literacy is seen as a survival skill, as 'Literacy involves gaining the skills and knowledge to read and interpret the text of the world and to navigate and negotiate successfully its challenges, conflicts, and crises' (Kellner 2000, 197). This implication that literacy is essential for a person's progress through life indicates a shift in understanding literacy as more than reading and writing.

In Henry Giroux's words, literacy is '[...] both a set of competencies to be learned and a crucial condition for developing ways of intervening in the world' (Giroux 2011, Section 3, Chapter 5, Section 5, paragraph 7). Increasingly critical pedagogues are intrigued by the ways in which social and cultural literacy can be honoured within education. In addition to the wealth of literature about the importance of media literacy for young people, scholarship is emerging which calls for them to also be able to serve as 'border-crossers' who

are able to engage and understand, tolerate and respond to 'matters of difference and otherness' (Hirsch 1987; Shor and Pari 1999; Giroux 2011, Section 5, Chapter 9, paragraph 2). This kind of social and cultural literacy is powerfully enacted, explored and observed in theatre spaces.

Theatre practices can create a site where alternative forms of communication are seen as valid which might receive less authority in daily life. The performed practices of youth culture can take on theatricality whilst languages not usually granted societal authority can be viewed as a legitimate and rehearsed performance. Within the Vital Spaces work, this was clearly seen, as it was within the examples of the YPPT projects.

Perhaps even more exciting for educators and artists, however, is the way in which theatre practice can create a safe site for rehearsal of different codes and literacies which may not be comfortable for the participants in their daily lives. When literacy is seen as a set of competencies, a diverse range of historically disregarded competencies becomes clear. Theatre practices can honour the 'alternative literacies' found in young people's daily lives, even as these practices are seen to be transient and fluid tactics which continually change and subvert dominant perceptions. As Kathleen Gallagher points out, drama classrooms within schools are often a rare space where 'historically marginalized youth' may be able to demonstrate their 'sophisticated ways of cultural participation' which are 'too often, not acknowledged or legitimated by schools' (Gallagher 2007, Chapter 4, Section 3, paragraph 1).

Through the important writings of Lisa Delpit, Helen Nicholson has also explored how theatre practices can articulate and honour alternative codes, whilst possibly creating a space to practice the necessary cultural tools for survival in the larger society (Delpit 1995; Nicholson 2005). Delpit's writings query the discomfort that many educators feel about teaching minority students to speak or write the codes of the powerful. As this can often denote specifically teaching 'white middle class' codes to young people who have their own forms of expression, this has been a hotly debated topic within U.S. educational reform (Brockmeier, Wang, and Olson 2002; Finn 1999; Godley 2003; Torrance and Olson 2009). As Delpit points out, students should not be asked to 'passively adopt an alternate code', but that they should be aware and outraged that they have to - that literacy teaching is both a set of skills and a

socio-political awareness about power, heteroglossia, and social justice (Delpit 1995, 40).

All of this indicates that concepts of literacy within critical pedagogy are explicitly tied to questions of power, privilege, status, and language. It raises compelling questions about what occurs within the devised theatre space. As Delpit argues,

> ...I suggest that students must be <u>taught</u> the codes needed to participate fully in in the mainstream of […] life, not by being forced to attend to hollow, inane, decontextualized subskills, but rather within the context of meaningful communicative endeavours; that they must be being helped to acknowledge their own "expertness" as well; and that even while students are assisted in learning the culture of power, they must also be helped to learn about the arbitrariness of those codes and about the power relationships they represent (Delpit 1995, 45).

In making explicit this 'arbitrariness', sites of critical pedagogy may then open up dialogue around which kinds of communication are viewed as valid; which forms of expression are granted status and weight. In a theatre setting, these are not neutral choices, and in a space which uses personal narrative and devised mediums, it asks that questions about identity, performativity, and society sit uncomfortably close to the creative process. This very closeness prompts dialogue.

Critical pedagogy and dialogue

The other core concept of critical pedagogy which will be used to evaluate the final Vital Spaces project is that of dialogue as a learning tool. This link is often attributed to Freire, and dialogue is increasingly used within theatre settings which aim at some kind of social efficacy. As Nicholas Burbules explains, 'It is widely assumed that the aim of teaching with and through dialogue serves democracy, promotes communication across difference, and enables the active construction of new knowledge and understandings' (Burbules 2000, 251). This understanding of dialogue as a means toward praxis and *conscientization* also draws on the work of developmental psychologist Vygotsky, as it depends upon a social learning situation in which every individual learns from others in the space.

Again, as with literacy theories, this thesis is unable to fully delve into the array and depth of theories and scholarship on dialogue from Habermas to

Bakhtin. It will draw on a selection of work which includes the following ? Buber 1958; Friedman 2002; Bakhtin 1981; Todorov 1984; Stam 1988; Benhabib 1989; I. Chambers 1990; Burbules and Rice 1991; Hermans 1993; R. Anderson, Cissna, and Arnett 1994; R. Anderson 1994a; Bakhtin 1994; Nichol 1996; Nystrand 1997; Vice 1997; Tannen 1998; Wells 1999; Yankelovich 1999; Skidmore 2000; Skidmore 2006; Friedman 2002; Bohm 2004; Atlas et al. 2005; Bartlett 2005; Romney 2005; Hirschkop 2011; Hirschkop and Shepard 2001. However, the specific critical pedagogy usage of dialogue is useful when evaluating both the Vital Spaces work and the examples of dialogic theatre practice described as models. It is to this definition and set of criticisms that I will turn in Chapter V to reflect upon the final Vital Spaces Project.

Essentially, dialogue within critical pedagogy is seen as the means to a more democratic, open, and egalitarian space for learning. However, in a somewhat feminist tradition, Burbules warns that dialogue is not 'inherently liberatory', that it is always on *somebody's* terms, and it cannot create a totally neutral, accepting, open space (Ellsworth 1992; Lather 1992; Ellsworth 1997). His questions, couched here in simple language, ask:

> Not everyone speaks the same language.
> Whose language will be used?
> Are the ground rules for participation, however thinly procedural they might appear, actually substantive restrictions on what can be talked about, on how things can be talked about, and so upon who can or will be part of the conversation? (Burbules 2000, 258).

Clearly, the codes and literacies, languages and conversational topics used in any participatory space have a political power. The pedagogical understanding of dialogue is of a practice in which participants engage in self-reflective conversation with each other in order to potentially change their minds, or embrace new understandings, or articulate their own perspective in a safe site where a multiplicity of truths can be honoured. This is not without problems, which will be explored in Chapter V within the context of the Vital Spaces action research. For now, however, when the work is described as 'dialogic', it is this pedagogical understanding of dialogue to which I refer.

Models of dialogic theatre practice which are emerging from work in the USA are often couched in a more diverse and general understanding of dialogue, which draws on a range of theory (Lazarus 2001; Atlas et al. 2005;

Korza, Assaf, and Bacon 2005; Korza and Bacon 2005a; Korza and Bacon 2005b; Romney 2005; Korza, Bacon, and Assaf 2005). For example, the work of the Animating Democracy project to which I will refer as a dialogic model uses a much more wide-ranging theoretical landscape to explore and justify the work. However, for the purposes of this thesis, an exclusively pedagogical understanding of dialogue will be used to sift through the action research. When I refer to dialogic outcomes, I am talking about work which prompts a conversation about topics in which all the participants are open and willing to embrace new ideas, to encounter new understandings, and ultimately, to change their minds. This process is what it means to learn.

Dialogue can be viewed as a simple conversational building-block construct, or as Patricia Romney describes, even as an utterance: '[…] it can be reduced to a minimum of three elements…an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two' (Romney 2005, 6). More complexly, it can be viewed as a meaning-making device, which necessitates a reciprocal and fluid relationship between participants:

> According to the renowned practitioner David Bohm, the word dialogue comes from the Greek dialogos: logos means "the word" or the meaning of the word and dia means "through." This derivation suggests the image of a "stream of meaning flowing among us and through us and between us - a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which will emerge some new understanding, something creative (Bohm 1992, p. 16, cited in Roberts 2002, 12:6).

This flow of meaning has been examined within Mikhail Bakhtin's writings, which have influenced a pedagogical understanding of dialogue as a tool for learning. Bakhtin's notion that dialogue is both an internal and external human phenomenon resonates with the devising process used in the Vital Spaces work. His advocacy of a 'responsive understanding' which can emerge both within an individual (encountering art work, encountering new ideas, negotiating challenges internally) and in external social interaction is the lens through which I will view the action research in this chapter (Bakhtin 1981). Bakhtin believed that we constantly create a series of dialogues within our own heads, which are composed of the voices of everyone we've encountered, read, spoken to, or learned from. These internal dialogues are potentially a way of negotiating new ideas with one's own lived experience and pre-existing beliefs. Therefore, when we encounter a new set of concepts or a new set of images

(via artwork or theatre) we internally dialogue in order to make meaning of it in a way that is sympathetic with our own world views and experience (Vice 1997).

This notion of internal dialogue resonates for the process of theatre-making as well as encounters with theatre products. According to Caryl Emerson's analysis, Bakhtin saw two possible ways of 'assimilating the words of others' – either through recitation or retelling in our own words. The process of recitation does not allow for the possibility of change, and therefore the idea becomes a 'relic' (Emerson 1986, 215). I would argue that this process of retelling is another way of describing the activity of devising with young people, rather than pre-scripted work. Emerson's perception of retelling as a 'flexible and responsive process' helps to capture the ways in which devised studio strategies use various kinds of storytelling, personal narrative, physical embodiment and theatrical languages to create resonance for the performers.

Nicholson echoes this in her description of how personal narrative interacts with lived experience: 'The act of retelling personal experience creates, as Joan Sangster points out, a dialectical relationship between the past and the present in which the speaker does not "relive" events, but "rewrites" them' (Nicholson 2005, 90). This is a different kind of encounter to the internal dialogues which take place when we participate as spectators, or even as readers of scripts. Through an active engagement in re-drafting, crafting and shaping our own life experiences, there is also a re-negotiation in how we understand them and ourselves. Clar Doyle defines this as the difference between 'the drama [students] *reproduce* and the drama they may *produce*' (Doyle 1993, 140–141, italics my own). In his estimation, theatre spaces which prompt such active engagement may become a critical site for understanding self-worth, reflection, agency, and social action within theatre.

This understanding takes place through a form of 'inner speech'. 'In the Russian model, inner speech is thus a benevolent quantity, a 'unique form of collaboration with oneself' (Emerson 1986, 217; Vygotsky 1986; Bakhtin 1981). This notion of inner speech does not imply (from Bakhtin's perspective) a neurotic relationship, as seen in psychoanalysis. For Bakhtin and other Russian theorists, it is a 'tool of pedagogy' (1986, 217). So while it is easy to see how this lens can translate to the world of dramatherapy and psycho-drama, the work can also be seen as a pedagogical tool with clear links to educational theory and practice.

Bakhtin's notions of external dialogue are also laced with an understanding of 'heteroglossia', defined 'as competing languages and discourses: the dialogically-interrelated speech practices operative in a given society at a given moment, wherein the idioms of different classes, races, genders, generations, and locales compete for ascendancy' (Stam 1988, 121). Heteroglossia could be seen as a constantly competing warfare which exists between different kinds of communication codes/styles, all of which are vying for status and authority within a particular cultural context.

> Bakhtin distinguishes the language of the dominant classes who want to have the sole right to define meaning, from the language of the oppressed who wish to appropriate language for the purpose of liberation. Dialogue, in his opinion, "becomes the space of confrontation of differently oriented social accents" (Stam 1988, 122).

This notion of differently articulated social accents brings with it a necessary degree of conflict. From a dialogic perspective, however, conflict is viewed as a positive means of articulating these different codes, and can be a tool toward a deeper understanding.

Theatre and art inherently always contain dialogic aims and content, but there is an emergent field of study and practice which explicitly cultivates and facilitates dialogue as a part of the artistic work. Practitioners like Suzanne Lacy, Sojourn Theatre, WochenKlauser, and those within the Animating Democracy network in the USA[25] represent artists who have negotiated the form as well as the content of their theatre to prioritise dialogue as integral to their art. Animating Democracy participating artist Suzanne Lacy mused that '[Animating Democracy] poses a provocative question about the form, not just the function, of art. Although some of its sponsored projects might aspire to be art that is surrounded by, enhanced by, or used in the service of civic discourse, others will, no doubt, aspire to creating new forms of *dialogic art'* (Korza and Bacon 2005, ix). Her view of dialogue as part of the aesthetic of the work is the core line of inquiry with which I would like to explore the Vital Spaces project *On Our Terms* in Chapter V. Here, there are glimmers of what best practice could look like, and the increasing literature from the arts field has attempted to unpack the theory and explore the work through their own practice.

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25 Theatre practitioners who participated in the Animating Democracy initiative included the Liz Lerman Dance Company, Urban Bush Women, Flint Youth Theatre, Perseverance Theatre, Dell'Arte and others.

These artists are often working with elements of dialogic response which have been used in the fields of pedagogy and education since the 1960s. Theorists such as Dewey, Vygotsky, Piaget, and Freire consider dialogue as integral to a student's cognitive development. These developmental understandings of how dialogue is fundamental to pedagogy are further bolstered by theorists like Habermas, who postulated that identity is a socially constructed concept, created entirely through discourse and dialogue. His belief that 'identity [...] is formed through social and discursive interaction' (Kester 2004, 110) complements the peer-learning and social education practices of progressive educators. The studio spaces of the Vital Spaces work most effectively explored unique constellations of peer-learning through the form and structure of a devised theatre rehearsal space. But this is certainly not the only theatre form where such concepts can be explored.

No particular form is the 'right form'

The Vital Spaces work happened to find the devised theatre format a useful one, and it certainly has a strong pedagogical rooting. It is not, however, the only 'way to do' dialogic practice. Indeed, this has been a dangerous pitfall in the past. As Adrian Jackson points out, Forum Theatre is a useful medium through which to investigate with Freirean concepts, but this does not mean it is the exclusive form in which such pedagogies can be explored. In fact, a rigid religious following is antithetical to the ethos which drives the work. In Jackson's words:

> The best Forum Theatre acts with this combination of seduction and provocation to release the innate dissatisfaction in its audience members so that, without coercion, they feel an overwhelming urge to make their thoughts and feelings known by taking action; in the form of intervention. *The worst manifestations of Forum Theatre simply replace one set of rigid theatrical and social conventions with another*, even to the extent that the audience feels compelled to participate as a sort of penance, and sometimes even to save a vicarious embarrassment for the performers as to whether the game is working or not (Adrian Jackson 2009, 45, italics my own).

As I move into an examination of several models of dialogic theatre practice, it seems important to caution against an adherence to a particular form as 'the' way of exploring dialogue and pedagogical outcomes. The theatrical languages used need to be fluid and adaptable to the various contexts and

audiences it might encounter. In its simplest form, all the work I examine is some form of young people producing collaborative theatre as part of a critical meaning-making about the world and themselves in it. This can certainly happen with pre-scripted work, but in the case of my own action research, I specifically look at collaborative devised methods with both live and mediated outcomes. Many of the examples from the field I will describe also use devised tactics. This is not accidental. There seems to be a surge in emergent literature on this topic of devised theatrical forms. Kathleen Gallagher, Mia Perry and Paul Sutton have recently discussed the growth in devising strategies with young people. Sutton in particular questions the language that TIE/DIE has used regarding authorship of theatrical works. He advocates within C&T's work that the young people be framed as 'authors' rather than participants. He identifies a reticence on the part of TIE artists, attributing it to a 'wariness of surrendering artistic control', but it could also be seen as a lingering manifestation of some of the divisive politics regarding process, product and pedagogy that permeated TIE/DIE during the 1980s as companies struggled to define their work in order to survive financially (Sutton 2007; Wooster 2007).

The collaborative format of devising has a particular relevance to critical pedagogy and to dialogic outcomes, as I will further explore in the final chapter of this thesis. Using devising processes as an experiential learning medium represents a distinct link to critical pedagogy, one which is already well established (Bolton 1986; Neelands 2004; O'Connor 2010; Nicholson 2005; Nicholson 2009; Perry 2010).

In addition, there may well be a case that devised theatre practices better access the plural, fluid, and shifting identities felt by the young people participating. The absence of a singular narrative often found in devised pieces may provide a better mirror to the multiplicity of stories/selves experienced by those creating the work, as Mia Perry also describes in her work: 'The conventions of the representation form were deconstructed; the linear narrative embedded in playwriting was often rejected in favour of the multiple voices and interwoven stories of collaborative play building' (Perry 2011, 64).

There is a growing wealth of literature about how devised practices can create powerful pedagogical spaces: 'Through collaboration in performance and performance creation, participants are at once learning through doing, comparing, and contemplating each other's input (critique) and at the same time

troubling and unravelling knowledge, experience, and subjectivity' (Perry 2011, 68). Despite this advocacy, however, devised mediums certainly are not the best or only way of exploring dialogic outcomes. The form is a choice, not a mandate. If anything, critical pedagogy creates an advocacy for a fluidity and responsiveness to young people and their needs which must stay alive in the theatrical form as well as the content.

Lessons can be learned, I think, from both the history of TIE and the history of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed as a commonly-used form of dialogic theatre. When particular theatrical forms are viewed with a sort of evangelical fervour or as an entrenched set of 'best practice' forms, there is a danger of seeing those methods as the only ways of exploring the deeper questions. Dialogue can be about many things, and does not always need to start/end with questions of the oppressor and oppressed in order to probe questions of social justice. Sometimes these can be difficult (and limiting?) binaries to navigate within – particularly within performance mediums which take place in the Global North. When working with white, middle class British young people – who are the oppressed in the room? What if some of them are middle class and others working class? What if some are heterosexual and others homosexual or bisexual? Could not all of these young people potentially have something important to say and a critical perspective on society which might be useful? In order to adequately address issues of white privilege, are you then limited in the time to address issues of youth oppression in a society which disregards them (Giroux 2012) based on a lack of cultural and economic capital? Later in this chapter, I will explore a diverse array of practices and forms which demonstrate the importance of not compartmentalizing what this genre 'looks like' – keeping an array of tools and procedures available beyond those already deployed.

It could also be argued that all theatre forms are, in some sense, dialogic. But the methods I am discussing explicitly embed dialogic practices in the process and product of the work and in evaluating their aesthetic value, dialogue becomes part of the criteria. In order to explain this fully, concrete examples are necessary. Perhaps it would be most helpful to begin with three international examples of practice which best capture some of the important positive elements of participatory dialogic work with young people. These models are not without certain challenges and problems, but they serve as useful (and inspirational) places to begin exploring some of the core theoretical

concerns within this work. It is also interesting to note that all three examples are lit by a contentious issue or matter of public concern.

Theatre can create a safe space for temporarily shifting or playing with established power relations in a material and hierarchical world. Theatre spaces are also sites where alternative representations, symbols and narratives can be constructed and witnessed. In a theatre space, young people can gain a kind of authority – a legitimated authority based on their lived experience, their ability to convey that in a theatrical language and ultimately through their ability to discuss that imaginative experience. This is not without its own share of troubles. As I will explore below, the examples of youth dialogic work may emphasise the importance of dialogic outcomes over the potentials of imaginative artistry. In particular, Suzanne Lacy's work problematises how much 'theatre-making' is actually necessary to start an affective and effective conversation about youth identity.

Case Study 1: Suzanne Lacy

'Everything that necessitates artistic transformation of reality, everything that leads to inventiveness and the creation of anything new, requires the indispensable participation of fantasy.' (Vygotsky 1994, 270).

The use of an arts space to nurture honest conversation about young people and the larger community in which they live is certainly not a new technique. Perhaps the best known practitioner in the field of young people's dialogue is freelance artist Suzanne Lacy, who has been experimenting with dialogic methods since the early 1980s in a variety of ways which test the boundaries of what is theatre against what is media spectacle. Her emphasis on cultivating the public gaze as integral to arts practice defies what is perhaps the greatest weakness in most youth arts work, and her projects model a strong vision for how the media and the public gaze impact young people's performance. The general theoretical lauding of Lacy's work within performance studies raises important questions about its theatrical/performative nature (Kester 2004; Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994; Romney 2005). Is this performance? Or is it simply youth on display in front of a media audience? I wish to begin with Lacy's work because I feel in many ways it is the strongest model of dialogic practice, but I also have reservations about the role of theatrical artistry within her practice. Lacy's work with young people was not

devised, rehearsed, or developed as dramatic events. Rather, the 'performances' grew out of a series of dialogues between the young people and the police, and the drama emerged instead from the staging and publicity choices – choices orchestrated by the adults in the production team.

As Jan Cohen-Cruz points out, Lacy's cautious use of personal story is unusual. Her tendency is to move away from 'any given single representational narrative' towards the plurality (and 'commonality') of many voices. Cohen-Cruz sees this as a sort of subversion of Boal's Forum structure, and points out that moving from the personal out into the political does not require a mediating artist, necessarily. But Lacy's emphasis on the gaze of the audience as paramount indicates the necessary skills of marketing, performance structuring, media savvy, and spin would all be helpful in the creation of this audience 'gaze' in the first place. The nature of the performance structure in *Code 33* and its earlier predecessor, *The Roof is on Fire*, gave the audience a role of 'eavesdropper', where, as Grant Kester states, they have been 'invited to overhear these conversations' (Kester 2004, 4). The presence of television monitors, and an additional 1000 people on the ground, looking up at the rooftop performance site increased the intensity of the gaze, and turned what would usually be a privatised dialogue into a witnessable event - an event which was marketed and spun by the adults involved in its creation. The eavesdropping was amplified.

Lacy's models of practice are useful in terms of evaluating effective media communication and wider public awareness, and in terms of looking at long-term sustainability. But the lack of narrative or theatrical methods within the events themselves poses a dilemma about the role of the facilitating artist, and the nature of the performative languages being used. There is a danger, I think, in staging young people as themselves, that the spectacle becomes about the stereotype, not about the imaginative potential of the young people's vision and voice. Lacy's work is inspirational and very little has blossomed in the decades since to which could contend in terms of scale, project duration, or media savvy, despite a marked increase in participatory practices. However, I think there are potential extensions to be suggested based on her outstanding models. The areas I would like to probe have to do with narrative structure, theatrical languages, and embodied practice. To begin with, however, a brief

summary of Suzanne Lacy's youth-based work is needed, given the breadth of her experience as a theatre-maker.

In 1992, Lacy embarked on a decade-long series of projects 'on the politics of youth'. The work was based in Oakland, California, and was collaborative with a team of artists, including photographer Chris Johnson (Lacy 2006, 96). Jan Cohen Cruz contextualised this work in the USA as dealing with, 'The social category of "urban youth" - a vast and disparate population facing impoverishment, dysfunctional homes, race discrimination, inadequate schooling, and stereotyping by mass media culture - first appeared as an urgent public issue in the 1990s' (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 2006, 96–97). This involvement of artists as interventions into perceived problems of social exclusion is a quintessential example of the models discussed in Chapter II, and involves a tricky balance between making assumptions about the wishes of the community which receives the 'necessary' intervention, and the relationship of the outside facilitator with the participants.

The Oakland projects took in public schooling, health care, criminal justice, public policy and a range of other social concerns which affected young people in the area. Lacy's previous body of work had included performance art which might fit well into the present-day live art movement. A sort of cross-over between visual intervention, media spectacle, and performance art, two of her many Oakland 'youth' performance projects are worthy of discussion based on the scale alone.[26] She acknowledges the debt to Boal, admitting that there is an 'uncanny resemblance to Boal's Legislative Theatre', and quoting Boal himself, '...every exercise, every game, every technique is both art and politics' (Boal 1998, 48). The Oakland projects were implemented because Lacy became inquisitive about groups of young people who walked to school near her workplace:

> I was curious: who were these young people with their hooded sweatshirts, baggy pants, and loud theatrical street discourse? The perceptual effect was an attractive one - textural, colorful, and sonorous, with a group synergy that clearly excluded me. I was vaguely aware of increasingly ominous images in the early 1990s California mediascape: youth as unwed mothers, truants, dropouts, addicts and criminals. (Lacy 2006, 98).

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26 Other projects within this period blurred the boundary between performance art and media spectacle as well. For example, *No Blood/No Foul* -(1996) was a highly-publicised basketball game between police and youth which commemorated the passage of Oakland's first Youth Policy (Lacy 2006: 97).

The duration and integration of the facilitator to the long-term project is always key to its success. Lacy goes on to describe how, after a year of working in an Oakland secondary school, 'My looking was refined and individuated by intimacy', and that she began to look inside the hoods, instead of at them, to see if it was one of the young people she knew (Lacy 2006, 98).[27] Here, her role as a resident in the community, her extended contact via a year's employment at a local school, and her decade-long investment all demonstrate a best-practice model in terms of facilitator protocols.

In the performance *The Roof is On Fire* (1994), 120 students from eight public high schools expressed their opinions and experiences on education and other youth-selected topics before a national news audience. This project set the stage for Lacy's largest scale project, *Code 33.* Lacy describes the *Code 33* project's intentions: '[…] to explore institutional intervention through visual performance art concepts, to practically reduce police hostility toward youth, and to provide youth with a set of skills and a public context more conducive to civic inclusion*'* (Lacy 2006, 97).

Lacy brought together Oakland-area urban youth and police officers over a three-year period of development, in a series of after-school 'intensely moderated encounters' (2006, 97–98). As Grant Kester points out, 'These more intimate exchanges laid the ground for, and helped authenticate, the conversations staged during the actual performance*'* (Kester 2004, 5)*.* The project culminated in *Code 33*, the title being drawn from the police radio code for 'emergency, clear the air waves'. Staged on a city building rooftop, overlooking city hall, the piece had no overt narrative structure and took the form of many improvised conversations, grounded in dialogues that had already occurred. Seated in cars under the 'spotlights' provided by dozens of headlights, the participants 'talk[ed] candidly and intensely about crime, authority, power and safety' to a roaming promenade audience of 1,000 people (Lacy 2006, 97).

Lacy intentionally chose a 'civic site', stating that, '…in this case, the rooftop garage overlooked City Hall, source of policy for the city's youth, and the rooftop's height represented street life elevated to theatrical status' (2006, 99).

> This unremarkable garage site was temporarily filled with significance: flooded with light (car headlights, stage lights, lit

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27 Lacy also points out that a similar growth in intimacy occurred during her year-long association with the Oakland Police Department. After a period of time, she stopped avoiding the police cars and began looking in the windows to see if it was an officer she recognised.

windows of nearby office buildings, the setting sun, and the spot of a circling police helicoptor); covered with fields of red, white and black cars; and surrounded by 30 television monitors perched on the perimeter walls. [...] But it was the collective gaze of the audience that lifted the normally privatized discourse to civic relevance - a multivocal and simultaneous civic discourse spotlighting the relationship between youth and police before the media and the community (Lacy 2006, 99).

There was no 'created' drama per se - this was not a rehearsed performance. The performance depended 'upon real people assuming the roles they played in life, with legitimate stakes in the event' (2006, 100). She points out the places where the boundaries around these roles dropped temporarily - where identity became 'transitional' between power and vulnerability... this was the power of the work.

Also part of the event's power was in the 'audience expectations of explosive confrontations,' built upon traditionally adversarial relationships between the police and young people in the community. The media's usual interest in spectacular deviancy, violence, and conflict was sparked by this sense of expectancy, and Lacy's knack therefore lies in her ability to tap this tension to create a national media spectacle about what was essentially a set of cultivated conversations.

Lacy points out how evaluation can emerge from this, then: 'This suggests that such art must be assessed, in part, on the life-likeness of its theatrical moments, and redefined to include public actions that are lifted into art not only by the artist's techniques but also by the public gaze.' (Lacy 2006, 100). Her savvy perception that the public gaze is necessary to effective youth arts work is a missing piece from much contemporary young people's participatory theatre practice, which tends toward more insular models.

However, there is a danger here in an abuse of this kind of format. Whilst Lacy conscientiously sited herself in the locality for a decade, and ensured through sustained relationships that the young people and police involved in the project were active contributors, the format does suggest potential abuses if re-invigorated today with our infinitely more complex worlds of media, internet, digital video, and mobile phone networking – often mediums better understood by the young participants than the adults facilitating the venture. Undertaking a similar project with young people today would be vastly more complicated, both

in terms of cultivating media literacy and in terms articulating which elements are 'the performance'.

Given the upsurge in reality television, it is perhaps arguable as well that staging 'real life' has become an increasingly commodified and limited genre, directly linked to an aspirational pandering to public approval, rather than a complex staging of real-world conflicts in their messy and difficult forms. Contextually, it could be argued that the climate of the late 1990s was right for both rooftop projects in terms of social, economic, and political concerns. In Oakland during this time, the population of young people of colour was booming, two police chiefs were supportive, and local politicians attended the events regularly, who 'could be called upon to increase media coverage with their public statements; in turn, their statements solidified their own resolve to establish policies favorable to youth' (2006, 100). With less favourable conditions, is there a danger that this becomes merely the staging of a potentially volatile spectacle of young people and the police? Where is the art?

By situating the work within a field of legislative theatre, Lacy aligned herself with a Boalian intentionality. This is inherently linked to a particular form of critical pedagogy, which demands that the work interrogate issues of oppression and injustice for the participants, particularly linked to legislative and policy outcomes. However, this is infamously difficult to achieve in a real world context. Whilst the work certainly facilitated conversations & dialogues between notoriously disparate parties, actual legislative efficacy is much harder to prove.

Lacy herself cautions, 'Visual and theatre artists working in communities struggle with a continuing quest to make their work effective and relevant. What they often cannot deliver is ongoing public policy and institutional change' (Lacy 2006, 100–101). This critical appraisal could be considered a damning condemnation of the limits of the work – but I would see it instead as a beckoning call for further exploration of the field. Certainly to deliver 'ongoing change' requires the project partners to be of sufficient clout within the realms of legislative power. Important questions are raised within the dialogic models Lacy created. How do you evaluate the impact of such events? Is it the quality of the dialogue? How is that measured? Or is success quantified via the number of participants? Or the fact that lots of people *witnessed* the dialogue? Or is it a performance of 'meeting' which does little to dig below the surface of problems, but quite a lot to humanise all parties? And if this is the case, isn't this still a

pretty good thing? The trouble with a critical pedagogical intention is that it wants to see actual results in the inequities of power. But could the humanising of the other party be enough of an outcome? A performed encounter which makes manifest plurality rather than a single stereotype? Lacy however, in her definitive branding of the work as 'legislative theatre' sought policy change.

Later, in an Animating Democracy keynote address, she stated,

> But after ten years of highly public programming, several large performances, scores of televised reports and documentaries, over 1,000 youth in art and video workshops, and models for police training programs and intervention between teachers and students, the institutions that would continue to affect the lives of Oakland's youth remained *substantially* and *programmatically* unchanged (Lacy 2001, 13).

Lasting social efficacy or even short-term action as a result of arts projects is a continual conundrum within the world of Applied Theatre theory. As Michael Balfour suggests, drawing on McDonnell, tiny transformations may be possible, but not large-scale outcomes (Balfour 2009; McDonnell 2005). Artists and arts spaces can provide a forum and space to change opinions, to create intimacy and compassion, and to build communication bridges. And there may well be something to this notion of tiny transformations, as Lacy's work is generally regarded as successful dialogic practice, despite her own reservations about long-term outcomes.

Perhaps an answer can be found if Lacy's work is viewed through a dialogue continuum described in early literature by pedagogue Nicholas Burbules, which stretches from 'agreement' at one end, through 'consensus' or 'overlapping consensus' to the other side of the continuum, which may only reach a state of 'understanding' or 'respectful tolerance' (Burbules 2000, 260). According to Burbules, there are educational benefits to each of these points on the continuum, even those which fall well short of agreement. In his later work Burbules increasingly advocates the importance of seeing dialogue as a situated practice, rather than a 'decontextualized pedagogy' (Burbules 2000, 261). If Lacy's work is viewed through this context, the sited and situated manner of both *The Roof is On Fire* and *Code 33* certainly fall at respectable points on the dialogue continuum. The larger questions which Lacy raises about long term, substantial change as a result of such dialogue remain as compelling prompts for further work in this field.

Case Study 2: Mary Ann Hunter & Skate Girl Space

If Lacy's work makes such practice tangible whilst problematising notions of artistry/theatre in dialogic models, then Mary Ann Hunter's examination of the Australian *Skate Girl Space* project manages to challenge notions of theatrical site and grounded expression as simplistic. In Lacy's model, the audience was cultivated via media spectacle, and invited to attend a site which they did not usually frequent – an urban rooftop. In Hunter's work, she explores the use of an urban skate park as a theatrical site, and interrogates how the territorialised nature of the location ultimately impacted the audience's response. The questions raised in Chapter I about how a performed identity might be theatrically expressed/explored in public sites were powerfully troubled by the experience of the young women who took part in the *Skate Girl Space* project.

This piece fits more naturally with the genre of devised collaborative young people's theatre practice I am attempting to define. However, Hunter is similarly concerned about categorising any piece of theatre as a work of 'youth arts'. Her caution is founded on a belief that this is 'slippery terminology' (Hunter 2001, 328). As she clearly establishes, identifying work as belonging to 'youth' is dangerous:

> The category youth has been variously described as rebellious, antiauthoritarian, deeply conservative, at the forefront of social change; under twenty-five, under thirty-five, "the young at heart". Across the category there are also distinctions of gender, race, sexuality, class, ability, education, and locality. So, when coupled with the equally diverse and pliable concepts of arts and culture, the result is a heady mix of confusing and stereotypical images of "youth cultures": raves, skateboards, religious rallies, cyber-realities, crime, drugs, fashion, girl guides, and sole parenthood, to name a few. Add to this the retro-perspective of adults surveying the under twenty-fives, and these images are sometimes further framed by nostalgia or fear (Hunter 2001, 328).

These kinds of concerns around defining youth culture have initiated some strategic shifts in youth theatre policy. The mere existence of Backbone Youth Arts in 1996 (Brisbane, Australia) was a result of a shift in practice for the previously-named La Boite Youth Theatre. This change was attempting to question how youth theatre was 'not a significantly meaningful "youthful cultural strategy" for most young people' (Hunter 2001, 329). Similar shifts in policy and

youth theatre methods can be seen in the United Kingdom, via the YPPT examples and in the USA and Canada. By focusing on devised contemporary performance which explores themes of critical consumption in young people's lives, the Hereford Sisters were formed as a participant-led performance group within Backbone's larger strategy. Their performance of 'Skate Girl Space [...] challenged the assumption that youth constitute a community of common interest, particularly as consumers of commercial culture' (2001, 334).

The 13-member company Hereford Sisters, located in inner-city Brisbane, 'emerged from young women's requests to develop skateboarding skills in an arts framework' (2001, 330). Hunter captures the challenges of working in an open-access site which has already-existing users and a cultural vibrancy all its own. For the young women involved, rehearsals had to occur at night, as access during the day was impossible given the level of usage of the site. Artistic Director Louise Hollingworth liaised with the Paddington Skate Park Committee to gain access to the site on the day of the event for a technical run, but the subsequent blockade to the park of the usual skate/BMX users resulted in sexual harassment significant enough to merit a police presence. The previously intended evening performance, which was based on a 'Wild West' narrative and technical needs such as a sound system, live band, video live feed on a large screen and a promenade audience had to be adapted heavily to accommodate the intimidating behaviour by some of the park's usual users.

Despite an audience of about 500, the piece's performance values were seriously impeded by the site's challenges. The abuse encountered during the technical run meant that the sound system failed during the performance, leaving the audience to invent dialogue for the caricatured Wild West cowgirls on the skate park stage. Without sound, the only voices clearly carrying were those of drunk male skaters with 'female companions' who heckled, throwing a glass bottle at one point. The piece was supposed to end with the cowgirls 'riding off into the sunset,' with a defiant look at the camera to indicate their eventual return to re-claim the skate park, but the few performers who were left on the site were physically assaulted by some of the spectators, so police intervention was necessary again.

Hunter's analysis of the project challenges the traditionally 'celebratory' nature of community-based performance, and while she does not specifically interrogate the absence of a healthy dialogue within the project, such a critique

is implied in her summary of the audience's challenges to the performance. Some of the public concerns included:

> What right did these women have to waltz (at times literally) in a culturally specific space, to declare a showdown with the young men who regularly used it? Haven't young men themselves been marginalized in their access to appropriate public space facilities? How were other skateboarders expected to react to the perceived generalizations made about male skateboarders? (Hunter 2001, 333).

The later suggestion that the project should have found a more collaborative format to avoid the negative confrontation attempted to honour some of these concerns. Hunter categorises the work as 'resistant performance', rather than dialogic. Whilst honouring this categorisation, I do wish to raise some of the problems for artists in facilitating young people's engagement in 'resistant performance' as a site for dialogue. Hunter herself is troubled by the case study: 'There is no doubt the Skate Girl Space was disturbing. [...] In the short term the event may have further limited young women's access to the Paddington Skate Park - the public space of their regional community' (Hunter 2001, 335). But Hunter's concerns fail to question how the work could potentially be re-imagined, maintaining the 'politically radical gesture' of the young women about public space and their invisibility within it, but facilitating the gesture within a medium that provides the possibility of reciprocal exchange, shared perspectives, and possibly increased understanding. The project was followed by a piece called Risk8 Theatre which used notions of 'positive risk' to play with physical theatre and skateboarding as theatrical languages.

Hunter's concerns about community-based performance raise essential questions about voice and silence: 'To ask honestly of community-based performance "the ethical and political questions - who speaks? Who speaks for whom? Whose voice is listened to, whose voice is spoken over, who has no voice?' is to risk creating more division than celebration - particularly when diversity within so-called community is at issue' (2001, 338). I wish to argue that in any dialogic theatre project, all parties involved have to want to talk to each other – and the primary impediment to creating a safe space within *Skate Girl Space* was the resistance of the young men already using the site as an important space for identity/meaning making. Here, the myth of 'open-access' sites providing a neutral or safe place is powerfully troubled. This case study

captures the 'collision and confrontation' that can emerge from both sited and community-based work, but I think that on the continuum of safe and healthy conflict, it failed to set up the necessary parameters of participant consent, and created a space instead that invited aggression and confrontation, rather than healthy conflict. Put simply, it created a binary where a plurality was needed.

For any facilitator working with young populations, these notions of health and safety become paramount to the success of the practice. Sited practice, interactive practice, participatory practice – all of these methods are inherently somewhat unpredictable and involve a necessary degree of risk for the performers and the audience alike. It seems essential, then, that the audience, particularly if composed of young people, needs to be consulted, informed, and involved in the process in a meaningful way. How you go about thoughtfully involving the creative artists and the potential audience in a dialogic fashion is a difficult question, and one that the Animating Democracy work attempted to explore during its four year funding scheme.

Case Study 3: Flint Youth Theatre & *My Soul to Take*

The last example of youth participatory dialogic work comes from the USA again, and was funded by the Americans for the Arts and the Ford Foundation as a part of the Animating Democracy Initiative. In contrast to the previous two examples, the FYT play *My Soul to Take* was created with the explicit aim of using a fictional (scripted) play to prompt civic dialogue about the issue of school violence. Both the clarity of dialogic intention and the artistic decisions made by FYT mark this production out as noteworthy. Prompted by the 1999 school shootings in Columbine, FYT Artistic Director and playwright Bill Ward had already committed to creating a piece of work about school shootings, when a local tragedy suddenly cast the topic in immediate emotional relevance for the community. Later in 1999, at nearby Buell Elementary School, a five-year old girl was shot and killed by a classmate, which in project manager Sue Wood's words, 'gave immediacy and gravity to our proposed project' (S. Wood 2001, 3).

While in many respects the FYT project is the strongest model of dialogic *theatre* I will discuss – they embedded elements of dialogue both in the

process/development of the work and in the final extended outcomes[28] – there are some questions about how much this can genuinely be considered a piece of young people's theatre. It certainly served as a catalyst and crucible within which a community talked about young people. Certainly young people were involved in every stage of the project's development. Students were involved and interviewed in a series of process drama workshops[29], conducted in local schools by British teacher/facilitator Gillian Eaton. These workshops led to deeper dialogic questions, articulated by Wood:

> In each of these sessions, participants did not specifically discuss gun control, metal detectors in schools or violence in the media. This was dialogue of deeper substance: What happens when a town loses its children? What might a psychological profile of a troubled teen in their midst look like? What makes a safe place unsafe, and what happens at the boundaries? How are lives affected when society is addicted to an object such as a gun? And, who pays the piper? (S. Wood 2001, 4).

These Process Drama sessions were continued after the performance was shown[30], with a total of 215 young people participating. The play itself also used teen actors in key roles, although, as Joan Lazarus points out, audience critical response to the acting ability of the teens held against the standard of the professional performers in the play questioned their capacity as actors (Lazarus 2001).

However, the reason I hesitate to class the FYT project as youth participatory theatre is that while the careful structuring and format of the process may well have been a conduit for young people's voices/opinions; the artistry and imaginative choices were those of the FYT artistic team. Some of the reasons for the shift from community consultation to professional artists creating the theatre piece itself can be seen in the history of FYT as a theatre-for-young-audiences company. With a 50+ year history of issue-specific theatre

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28 The theatre production was sandwiched between both pre- and post-event dialogic activity. This took the place of focus groups, in-schools process drama workshops, and study circles. Many of these groups met repeatedly, including a meeting that followed their viewing of the play itself. The FYT production was also bolstered by nine locally funded arts projects led in the community, which involved 3,500 local people all told.

29 These were consisted of three different role play situations, based on Teacher-In-Role work developed by Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton. Eaton's experience in the UK system with TIE/DIE certainly drew upon curricular strengths developed in Britain.

30 *My Soul to Take...* performed a total of nine public and 18 school performances, over a three week period in February 2000. In total nearly 3,700 people attended the play.

practice, the company saw the role of the theatre as two-fold: 'to create a compelling artistic product and to assemble, activate and inspire community partnerships that become pathways to dialogue and action' (2001, 15). Whilst this work is situated within an understanding of 'civic' dialogue which was central to the Animating Democracy projects nationally, what makes *My Soul to Take* of particular interest is the way in which the American notion of 'civic' dialogue was teamed with a pedagogical form of in-schools process drama, brought by the British facilitator Eaton.

Sue Wood and Bill Ward, together with Gillian Eaton who ultimately became the project dramaturg, expressed surprise at the growth in importance found within the Process Drama work with young people and adults in the community. Says Wood, 'Our primary assumption going into the project was that civic dialogue can be more than a facilitated conversation about the content (issue) addressed in a performance. This assumption proved true. The real surprise, however, was the degree to which the process drama sessions were also civic dialogue' (2001, 11). Ward observed these process drama sessions, and in the end, the play was created through the dialogues which led up to Ward's script-making. What resulted was a complex mix of ethnography, testimony, process drama, TIE, Theatre-for-young-audiences and dialogic practice.

The artistic team also acknowledges that Eaton's role as an 'ad hoc dramaturg' was a role that evolved with the project and an increasing sense of confidence in the process drama material as a rich and compelling ground for dialogic exploration. The final piece certainly used a multiplicity of community voices, including those of students and youth, but in a manner reminiscent of verbatim/testimony theatre, as Lazarus describes: 'Ward and Eaton spent countless hours talking about the issues and ideas from the process dramas that could be used in a formal theatre piece. Fragments of these ideas in various forms found their way into the performance' (2001, 5). In this sense, young people's voices, as primary agents, affected community members, and constituents in the process were heard, but mediated through an externally-written script.

As Joan Lazarus queries, how such projects are evaluated becomes an important consideration:

> Projects that span months, have multiple facets and move beyond easy categories and familiar venues demand a new and expanded kind of response. ADI [Animating Democracy Initiative] coordinators question how one responds critically to arts-based civic dialogue work which has civic as well as aesthetic intent. Whose response should be considered? Is the single critic's voice sufficient to describe and analyze the social context, artistic and community processes and various outcomes of these projects? And to what does one respond? Those working in this arena advocate for a more integrative aesthetic language that considers the social dimensions and the public engagement processes of the work. The need for a multiple-perspective critical response seems essential (Lazarus 2001, 8–9).

Sue Wood and Bill Ward both articulated a pre-existing tension for FYT regarding the possibly didactic nature of dialogic theatre. In Wood's view, theatre for young audiences has a penchant for 'issue plays' which aim to preach a particular message or lesson. This didacticism was something they wanted to avoid. Says Wood: 'At FYT we heartily resist the temptation to teach and preach. Our artists do not come from TYA or education backgrounds. To impose a teaching requirement, which is what the dialogic component often felt like, seemed to deny the value of intuitive and imagistic work' (S. Wood 2001, 10). This apparent divide between the aesthetic and the dialogic was one which the Animating Democracy projects sought to de-mystify through models of best practice work.

The official evaluation of the project by Animating Democracy reads the work as a positive model for future practice, articulating: 'This civically engaged work, positioned within an exceptional and diverse repertoire of theater for young people, is a significant model for the field of theater for young audiences' (S. Wood 2001, 19). The clarity here about FYT's work as 'theatre *for* young people' rather than *by* young people prompts pedagogical questions about dialogic work. Where does the expertise and authority lie? FYT's experience in process drama and the dialogic focus groups which followed the performances, paired with the production values of a professional theatre production created a dynamic package, and Animating Democracy clearly evaluates it as a model for future development. This seems to have enabled a high-quality production embedded within a thoughtful framework of pre and post-event meaning-making activity. However, I would like to articulate a belief that the young people are

equally capable of assuming artistic responsibility within such models of dialogic practice.

Whilst Eaton's process drama engaged within school settings, asking young people to participate in role play scenarios, the crux of the imaginative task was placed in the hands of the expert adults. This potentially creates a container within which young performers are cast in roles within an adult story about violent youth culture. In this particular case, it seems clear that much of the meaning making surrounding *My Soul To Take* was for the adults of the community, attempting to make sense of violent tragedy. For FYT, this seems to have been the right answer for a particular community, in a particular time, with a theatre company best utilizing their capacity as theatre-makers. However, I think the model raises compelling questions about the potentials of such work. To what degree can we create spaces for young people to author dialogic theatre about and for themselves? To what degree can this then be seen as 'good' theatre? And, perhaps most importantly, would it be a good thing to do?

These three international examples capture glimmers of possibility within dialogic practice, and begin to articulate some of the ways in which the work is part of a critical pedagogy. However, I wish to follow up these best practice models of dialogic theatre with the caveat that it can be a very fine line between the dialogic and the didactic. As Nicholson regularly reminds the field, 'Theatre can be used to drive home particular information, elucidate specific issues or impart moral certitudes, thereby leaving little scope for the imaginative, aesthetic or creative involvement of young people' (Nicholson 2009, Section 2, paragraph 4). FYT explicitly discussed their fear of this didactic nature of educational theatre, and the desire to avoid 'moral certitudes' continues to plague the aesthetic choices of many British TIE companies.

Dialogic or didactic?

I wish to conclude this section on dialogic practice by revisiting the difficult balance between dialogic and didactic within youth theatre settings. The existing models which self-define as dialogic within the UK can also be seen as sites for some of the more troubling (limp, soppy, trite, impotent) examples of preachy, condescending work. As far too many examples from theatre education show, some of the old ghosts of TIE still have not been exorcised, and it may be that tired aesthetic choices, limited budgets, and theatre company

survival strategies limit some of the potential for dialogic practice as a site for exciting and groundbreaking experimental theatre forms. Certainly the issue of didacticism was one which TIE/DIE found profoundly troubling.

Joe Winston further complicates the issue of didactic practice within TIE, pointing out that you simply cannot predict what young people will take away from performance work. He argues that even the most heavy-handed theatre may reach young audiences in an entirely unexpected capacity, concluding: 'When it comes to theatre, artistry is what we must harness as the most effective and hence the most ethical quality of our pedagogy.' (Winston 2009, 99). Perhaps it is this desire to move toward artistry and away from didacticism that prompts some theatre scholars to a leery uncertainty about 'dialogic' forms. As Helen Nicholson points out, artists like David Greig see 'dialectical solutions' as a dinosaur of the past, a lingering remnant from an idealistic 1970s social concern. Such resentments toward the former optimism which surrounded a sense of dialectical pedagogy three decades ago is understandable, and yet, I think the 'the multiple possibilities of the imagination' which Greig calls for in his plea for a 'rough' and 'unfinished' theatre are possible within dialogical practice (Greig, p. 212, quoted in Nicholson 2009, Section 8, paragraph 3).

The ghosts and spectres of an unfinished legacy which lay at the heart of the TIE/DIE movement are still with us. Rather than seeing the pedagogical work as a defunct dinosaur, however, I would advocate that it requires a radical hopefulness - an unshakable belief that the pedagogical promise is powerful enough to survive the financial drubbing and aesthetic dilution it has received over the last 30 years.

As I mentioned at the start of this chapter, this is an unexpected point of advocacy. The Vital Spaces work was begun with the intention of moving away from educational practice and toward work which was genuinely owned and authored by the young people. Over the first two years of Participatory Action Research, however, issues with ownership and authorship were continually raised, resulting in a re-affirmation that such practice needs to be explicit about its intentions – and my own unexpected realisation that those intentions were potentially pedagogical. Chapter IV will examine these first two years in greater detail, analysing the points of praxis which were encountered at a range of sites across South Devon from 2009 to 2011.

This early practice was grounded upon some of the same problematic intentionalities queried in Chapter II, and as I will discuss through a set of specific examples, dissonance emerged for the co-researchers and myself about conducting research about youth identity within such contexts. The later Vital Spaces work, which began to be increasingly identified as dialogic, will be examined in Chapter V, and will return again to the questions raised in this chapter with regard to dialogue, literacy, and pedagogy.

Chapter IV
What Shapes the Practice

Project intentions

Aiming to explore through practice the complex intersection of identity, performance and pedagogy for young people, the Vital Spaces/Vital Signs project was my attempt as a researcher to negotiate an intricate relationship, which Helen Nicholson describes as 'creative, unpredictable, and subversive' (Nicholson 2005, 20). This unpredictability manifested within the work, and the project shifted its focus, intention, methods, populations, and format significantly over the three-year duration. In doing so, it became less about exploring youth performativity in site-specific settings and more about starting conversations, or as they would later be termed: 'devised dialogues'. This chapter will focus on the Participatory Action Research conducted over the first two years of the Vital Spaces project, prior to the realisations which led to the inclusion of critical pedagogy and dialogue as tools of analysis. The first two years of work were messier, more complicated, and represent a set of adjusting intentions which ultimately found firmer footing in the discourses of pedagogy and dialogic practice as explicated in Chapter III. This chapter, however, will examine the trial-and-error sequence of Participatory Action Research which led to the emerging clarity about the research lens.

During the first two years of work, I found the practice caught between the necessity of building a trust relationship within the public sector agencies and with the young participants. This had a decided impact upon how radical and indeed how dialogic the practice could become. As Jan Cohen-Cruz expresses, 'By radical I refer to acts that question or re-envision ingrained social arrangements of power. Radical [...] performance draws people who comprise a contested reality into what its creators hope will be a changing script' (Cohen-Cruz 1998, 1). Being situated within the public sector meant that the Vital Spaces Project was regularly stepping away from a desire to pursue radical practice in order to maintain relations. In this sense, we found the work became what Bill McDonnell calls a 'theatre of little changes', and those changes increasingly became about opening up dialogue between the participants (McDonnell 2005; Balfour 2009). Whilst action research aims to be emancipating, even democratising, and providing 'a change which challenges

the existing system', it also operates within real world boundaries, and the resulting agendas can have a subduing effect upon the practicality of efficacy and radical intervention (Denscombe 2010, 130). What I originally envisioned as pedagogically emancipatory and radical quickly proved to be unethical when pursued under the banner of the public sector agencies involved, and the dialogic form of the practice became evident only in the second year of action research.

Initially as a researcher, I felt certain (although now cringe at the thought) that the most compelling use of theatre practice in exploring 'youth identity' would be to 'reach out' to deprived urban and suburban areas in South Devon and explore how alternative roles or selves were performed and *could be* performed by young people. Drawing on Butler's theories of performativity, the work was intended to be primarily site-specific and to follow a largely outreach model, which would then be distilled into a flexible 'way of working' which could be described in curricular language (Butler 1988). However, as the first year's pilot projects progressed, three main points of praxis emerged for me as the researcher, which shifted the focus of the work and raised questions for me about the (im)possibilities of having an honest conversation with young people about their sense of self within institutional settings and the ethical implications of building a curriculum out of such work. As Paul Willis suggests,

> Most young people's lives are not involved with the arts and yet are full of expressions, signs and symbols through which individuals and groups seek creatively to establish their presence, identity and meaning. Young people are all the time expressing or attempting to express something about their actual or potential cultural significance. This is the realm of living common culture. [...] being everywhere, resistant, hardy (Willis et al. 1990, 1).

During the first year's pilot work, it became increasingly clear that whilst these examples of 'living' and indeed daily performed culture are abundant, and rich for dramatic exploration, the consequences of doing so can be dangerous, if conducted in the wrong context. In particular, I was concerned by the ways in which my action research brought together notions of how young people explore and understand their own identity and the fact that this exploration was situated within a youth work or public sector context. The concerns centred on three ethical conundrums which were: site, intention, and audience composition and reaction.

This chapter will explore these three points of praxis, and begin to articulate how a different pedagogical model emerged - one which surprised me as a researcher and was constructed primarily on a way of working which was created by the young people who took part. This curricular approach of 'devised dialogues' represented a shift in my own research question, as well as the structure of the practical work. The challenges which emerged included cultivating diverse and wide-ranging audiences, attempting a genuinely collaborative model of aesthetic decision-making which honoured the young people's ownership of the material, and actively working to facilitate the necessary artistic, bureaucratic, and organisational skills with the young participants. In all of these areas of challenge, I feel that the project failed boldly and bravely. In terms of action research, this cycle of attempting change, failing, and trying again is integral, and there are moments or glimmers of possibility where I can see that the work began to tap into some of the best practice models being exemplified elsewhere. By no means do I consider this work to be on the same scope or scale as some of the stronger models from within the fields of participatory theatre or dialogic practice, but the work of the Vital Spaces team proved to be a useful practical means of working through the theory.

The action research which will be explored here and in Chapter V attempts to live within Conquergood's 'the thick of things' whilst honouring the fact that my role as a researcher decidedly changed this environment. The knowledge is still 'active, intimate, and hands-on' but the role of academia's eye and the status associated with university research meant that I was decidedly not seen as a 'young person' but rather an adult figurehead for the project (Conquergood 2002, 145). This is important to state from the outset, and I will attempt to unpack the ways in which I feel that my presence could have been better manifested as I explore the particulars of the practice.[31]

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31 For a variety of reasons, we found ourselves working within the sixth tier of Hart's 1992 ladder of young people's participation. Despite best intentions, the work could not fall at the tip of the tier, in the eighth idealistic bracket of 'Children and young people initiated shared decision with adults' from the Youth Participation (2002). Scottish Parliament: Information Centre**: 1-8. The practice over the three years stayed consistently within the sixth tier – that of 'Adult-initiated shared decisions with children', in which 'adults have the initial idea, but children and young people are involved in every step of the planning implementation.' From within the field of participatory practice, this might not represent best practice work, but for the nature of the research, it proved to be a workable middle ground. I would not categorise this as a success or a failure necessarily, but it does seem upon reflection that if the work were to continue, it should move up the ladder toward more fully young people-initiated projects. However, this kind of work does require a consistent space, regular funding, and a long-term commitment.

There will be little mention in this chapter of the health and well-being benefits for the young participants. There were certainly substantial personal outcomes for the young people who participated both as devisers and facilitators, but in an attempt to remedy what Balfour bemoans, 'The artistic dimension therefore is often relegated to the second division, a footnote to the value or purpose of the project,' I will discuss most fully the artistry, aesthetic choices and ethical challenges of the work as elements of a critical pedagogy (Balfour 2009, 356). In particular, this chapter will discuss how artistry is negotiated, mediated and owned within the practice. As increasing numbers of artists, educators and theatre makers are asked to traverse the cross-over of art and social services, clarity about the research focus is imperative. For the Vital Spaces work, the aesthetics spoke to the pedagogical aims, but not to a desire to make the young people 'improve their self-esteem' or 'feel more confident.' Side benefits these may have been, but they will not be the focus here.

This chapter also represents my own journey to attempt to articulate what Hughes and Wilson recommend is necessary within youth theatre practice: 'Without a clear set of ideas about how and why the creative process 'works', not only does provision (and those who benefit from it) suffer from lack of critical reflection but audiences outside of the arts sector will lack understanding of practice and remain unconvinced of its impact' (Hughes and Wilson 2004, 71). Beginning to detail and analyse this creative process is a challenge, and asks that the research look at a series of mediated and messy creative decisions throughout the project's three year history. Miwon Kwon refers to this as a 'continuous negotiation' (Kwon 2002, 141).

Project context

Whilst the inception for the Vital Spaces project was my own, and I instigated all practical projects and served in a managerial capacity, much of the actual delivery, workshop creation, and rehearsal work was led by the young people who participated. Within the Vital Spaces/Vital Signs project, the majority of young people's ownership took two forms: that of five core undergraduate facilitators who volunteered to commit to the three year work as the 'Vital Spaces Company', and also two groups of undergraduates (with some cross-over) who undertook the Vital Spaces Project work as a part of their coursework on DRA2026, the Applied Drama module in the University of

Exeter's drama department.

The projects followed a chronology which is described in the appendices for this thesis. Ultimately, the pilot projects from the first year's work which toured youth centres were abandoned in favour of theatre-based work which resulted in higher quality performance and a more fully realised 'safe space' which was not possible in the youth centre sites. At the end of the second year, however, a final project was devised by the company which returned to youth centres, entitled *On Our Terms*. This final practical project represented a finishing point to a cyclical journey, which responded to notions of 'safe space' in the way that Mary Anne Hunter advocates:

> The tendency of 'safe space' talk to censor critical reflection turns sympathy into sentimentality, open-mindedness into empty-headedness. That we need to hear other voices in order to grow is certainly true, but we also need to be able respond to those voices, to criticize them, to challenge them, to sharpen our own perspectives through the friction of dialogue (Boostrom 1998: 407, cited in Hunter 2008, 8).

Both within the rehearsal process and in the final production, this 'friction of dialogue' became an elusive goalpost – and one which I am not certain we achieved in the end. It is this failure, however, which provides essential learning for me as a researcher about the challenges and potentials of the work.

Increasingly, Judith Butler's assertion that 'the personal is political' became both the greatest challenge and the strongest outcome of the project (Butler 1988, 522). The initial aims about bringing the personal stories of young participants into the public space of the youth centre was quickly aborted – both by the subversive choices of the young people themselves and by the increasing awareness that to 'dig out' these stories would have detrimental results. As James Thompson fears, 'without extreme care theatre projects that dig up narratives, experiences and remembrances can blame, enact revenge and foster animosity as much as they develop dialogue, respect or comfort' (Thompson 2005, 26). However, within the confines of theatre spaces, this process of a collaborative and shared exchange of stories became a mutual act of risk-taking between older facilitators and young participants.

Unspoken agendas

The young people's participatory theatre projects described in Chapter II all ground their work upon young people's voices being at the heart of the artistic process. This said, who 'owns' the content of devised theatre pieces is a complex issue, and is negotiated by a fluid and ever-shifting set of hourly decisions by the practitioners, the young people, and the spaces in which they inhabit. This 'contamination by context' which Nicholson both praises and warns against requires that my own analysis focuses on apparently tiny and occasionally mundane moments when ownership of the material would shift back and forth between myself (and the other professional artists), the young people serving as facilitators and the young people who worked as participants (Nicholson 2005). As Michael Balfour admits,

> Gaining access/permission into a context is where the ideology of the practitioner is paramount, in discharging and advocating for aesthetics as central, and of establishing open-ended relationships that hold in tension the quality of the process that participants go through in making theatre and the quality of the work that is created. [...] The point of entry is where competing ideological values interplay with each other, some are articulated, whilst others are deeply subterranean within the practitioner, the institution, or a group (Balfour 2009, 357).

This fluid and shifting sense of ownership affected the aesthetic choices as well. Trying to develop an artistic practice which is run by the young people, but which asks them to engage in exploring new theatrical languages, in challenging conceptions of self/identity, in evaluating their world and engaging in dialogue on the issues that matter to them - this isn't a hard and fast set of rules. Ethical practice becomes a constant foray into the grey areas, then. 'Grounded mediums' is not as simple as tapping hip-hop and graffiti as inherently relevant to youth culture. As is discussed in Chapter I, youth culture is a richly varied, diverse, and non-uniform concept. As much of the practice occurred in suburban areas of South and central Devon, encompassing Torbay and Exeter, the populations of young people involved proved to have little resonance with hip-hop and other more conventionally extoled artistic forms of youth intervention work.[32]

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32 There were, of course, exceptions to this. One student involved in the Devon Youth Theatre project discussed later was profoundly interested in hip-hop and rap music, and composed his own hip-hop routines as part of the music workshops. This, however, was more of an individual interest, and it was supported as such within the larger process.

My initial naïve premise as a researcher was founded on theory that 'living culture' is as rich as a bourgeoisie aesthetic. This was challenged by the first two film projects in a myriad of ways. Aesthetics are implicated within scholarly debates about 'democratisation of culture', which Owen Kelly describes as 'the popularisation of an already decided cultural agenda' (Kelly 1984: 100, cited in Kershaw 1992, 184). This agenda is a means for legitimising an 'agreed hierarchy of values which is the necessary precursor of the centrally co-ordinated cultural package, more usually referred to as "serious art" (1992, 184). As discussed in Chapters I and II, a Bourdieuian understanding of cultural capital drives much participatory and grounded practices which aim to tap into what Kelly calls a 'living culture' in which 'direct participation' is necessary (Bourdieu 1984; Kershaw 1992).

On the surface, these aims seemed to be worthy, and I began the first few pilot projects with a sense of openness, hoping to tap into the already existing 'living cultures' of the young participants. But these notions are also problematic, as many have critiqued the CCCS for their 'heroic' models of youth culture and subculture as inherently rebellious and subversive – so too the 'aesthetics' of living culture are not always easy to work within, both from an ethical and an artistic standpoint.

One of the principal learning points for the Vital Spaces team within the action research cycle was the difficulty of negotiating a complex web of agendas. Neelands makes a compelling case that practitioners need to 'reveal allegiances', considering this an essential starting place for ethical practice (Neelands 2004; Balfour 2009, 354). However, there was less clarity about the agendas of the partner agencies. Throughout the project, separate needs of the local authority, youth workers, parents, the youth service administration, higher education, secondary teachers, and the young people all worked at varying degrees of harmony and dissonance. These partnerships, so lauded in current participatory practice, also bring with them immense challenges in terms of satisfying efficacious, aesthetic, and ethical 'success'. Additionally, as Denscombe points out, 'the '*partnership* nature of work can make matters rather less clear-cut. Who is charge? Who calls the shots? Who owns the data? These and similar issues need to be worked out sensitively and carefully by the partners to *ensure that there are shared expectations about the nature of participation in action research*' (Denscombe 2010, 131, italics in the original).

Throughout the three years of the project, a common thread emerged - which was that I, as a university researcher and an adult had ready access to the languages and communication mediums necessary to make contact with various local authorities. My awareness about how to use email and phone calls to set up meetings and to discuss possible partnerships meant that my contact and communication often resulted in quicker and more detailed responses than those which came from the younger participants, even the undergraduates.[33] Here is a point for future development of this kind of practice. It would be far more powerful for this contact and administrative set-up to be run by the young participants, but would require learning of these often subtle codes/languages.

As Lisa Delpit and other literacy theorists have advocated, literacy in a variety of languages and codes is essential for anyone, but in particular marginalised people to survive and thrive (hooks 1994; Delpit 1995; Kwon 2002: 135). Learning the languages necessary to engage with those in positions of power, then, becomes essential to the process of this kind of work. This sort of training takes time, and involves a different skill-set than that of theatre-making. It is a performance of another kind – that of a simulated adulthood, a willingness to speak the dialect/script of 'Office Speak', and to wear the costumes which are socially expected from one who is to be taken seriously. Additionally, since drama is another 'form of literacy', as Helen Nicholson points out, I would argue that there are opportunities here to explore dramatic mediums as yet another dialogic code in a literacy arsenal (Nicholson 2005).

Whilst I initially saw this necessity of my own interference in the administrative/planning stages as a failure, I now can articulate it as a learning point for the research. The codes and languages necessary to establish a 'professional' relationship have a direct impact upon the expectations of the partner organisation about the quality of the work. A 'student' project causes Bennett's 'horizon of expectation' to be diminished, leaving the audience/participating organisation with lowered or even patronising expectations of the artistic work. As Kershaw explores, drawing on Bennett, 'the

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33 In particular, we found during the planning stages in year two, that out of seven different attempts at contact with various secondary schools across Devon, the only respondents came in reply to my contact. The more ethical tactic of having the young people lead and initiate communication and planning resulted in little or no response. Several of the facilitators mentioned that they felt they weren't being taken seriously by the school administrations, and that the work was seen as a 'student' project.

'gathering phase' of a performance is 'designed to produce a special attitude of reception' in particular to enter the imaginative space mentally, and '[form] the horizon of expectation' (Bennett 1990, quoted in Kershaw 1992, 24).

I would argue that for many integrated or interventionist theatre projects, this 'horizon of expectation' begins much earlier than the first audience arrival. The early phone calls, emails, and networking which are necessary to establish contact and professionalism are all part of creating an 'attitude of reception' from the partner agency. Supporting young participants in how to be administratively involved requires training in how to speak the 'codes' of professional communication. Organisations like Contact Theatre have managed to build this kind of training into their infrastructure, and emerging models are beginning to demonstrate how such young people-driven organisation can take place, but for the limited scope and breadth of the Vital Spaces Project, I felt the balance we found was the right one, given the resources and time available.

Specifically, I am conscious that my own research agenda will have influenced the artistic decisions being made by the young people taking part. There was likely an unconscious (and at times conscious) desire to please and help me, because they were regularly informed about the nature of the PhD work, and referred to as 'co-researchers' within the process. I was keen from the outset to minimise my practical role in the project, and wary of McDonnell's cautionary statements about facilitators who see themselves as essential to the success of community-based work: 'It is this belief that we are necessary, that we can offer something which is, by definition, irreplaceable, that creates the crisis of engagement... If we could see that we are not necessary, then we might be able to form more useful human and political relations based on genuine dialogue' (McDonnell 2005, 70).

Making myself 'not-necessary' seems at odds with the fact that the project was instigated by myself, and it was certainly true that at moments I wondered about whether there were ways to ensure stronger ownership from the young people, in terms of their own administration, organisation and project structure. In retrospect, I held a reluctance to pass over ownership of the project's structure fully, perhaps partially because of my own research agendas. I felt a need to ensure that the artistic material would access themes of substance for the participants and not become subsumed by aesthetics/content

which can occasionally dominate devised processes. This tension between 'the cops at the door and the cops in the head,' as Neelands refers to it, is common in much Applied Theatre practice, and my only conclusion is that it is a constant series of minute-by-minute negotiations with your own ego (Balfour 2009, 354; O'Connor 2010; Neelands 2004).

The most helpful elucidation of this crisis of agenda occurred in our first pilot project – the Hele horror films and Torbay documentaries.[34] Ostensibly a set of film projects which were created out of consultation with the local authority and various youth centres in Torbay, these two pilot projects brought the Vital Spaces team to a point of crisis around the question of 'who owns the work?'. Following closely on its heels was the question that would haunt me and ultimately changed the focus of the research: who benefits?

The Hele horror films & Torbay documentaries originally began with a desire to specifically work in 'deprived' urban areas in South Devon where there was likely to be a need for theatre-based engagement work with young people. With this in mind, I made contact with Torbay Council, a local unitary authority, and established a relationship with their Arts & Culture officers.[35] Through this early connection, a film project was launched which would reach out to two 'deprived' areas of the local district. The Hele neighbourhood was classed in 2004 as falling within the top 10th percentile in terms of both low income statistics and deprivation affecting children (Census 2001). Here, Miwon Kwon's concerns about how community-based arts projects come into being is in fact actualised. She questions:

> In actual practice, how does a group of people become identified as a community in an exhibition program, as a potential partner in a collaborative art project? Who identifies them as such? And who decides what social issue(s) will be addressed or represented by/through them: the artist? the community group? Does the partner community preexist the art project, or is it produced by it? What is the nature of the collaborative relationship? [...] How does the collaboration unfold, and what precisely is the role of the artist within it? Does the partner community coincide with the audience?

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34 Excerpts from field notes will be marked by *italics*. Attribution to the researcher involved will follow. If they are my own notes, it will be indicated. If they are a quote or an excerpt from one of the co-researcher's notes, they will be attributed to either their real name. Co-researchers have all been sent copies of this thesis and been given opportunities to feedback, contribute, and alter things if so desired. With due respect for their work, research credit has been given to those who prefer to use their own names.

35 All participants (young people and adult youth workers) who took part in the first two Vital Spaces projects are referred to by pseudonyms.

[...] What criteria of success and failure are posed now, especially to the artists, in this major reconfiguration of public art that moves aesthetic practice closer to social services? (Kwon 2002, 117).

Local authorities are under increasing pressure to prove that they are implementing innovative interventions in areas of high need, both from a national remit and within their own constituencies. This can be difficult to evidence, when success and innovation are not easily translated to numerical indicators. Projects with a marketable image, such as youth film workshops become a helpful means of showing progress, regardless of whether there has actually been any substantive shift in the daily means of the people who live in those deprived wards (Stark 2010). Looking back to the points about deficit models raised by de Roeper and Savelsburg in Chapter II, this is not necessarily a reason to stop providing arts-based interventions in these areas (de Roeper and Savelsberg 2009, 212). These theoretical underpinnings which advocate for richer, deeper, more complex and challenging arts programming in 'communities of deprivation' prompted my interest in continuing work despite initial reservations.

The medium of short films was chosen firstly because access to equipment through the university would provide technologies not readily available to youth centres on a regular basis and secondly, because the medium of film was recommended by a youth worker at one of the youth centres, as being something which young people who attended had expressed an interest in. Initially, I was enthusiastic about the nature of the film project, which would have a dual aim of consultation with the young participants, whose opinions & thoughts would be brought back to the local authority. The means of this consultation was to take the form of videos being used on a new council website called 'Torbay Connected' and with the submission of the videos to a council film competition which was launched partly because of the film workshops. This support from the council and the opportunity to gain a larger audience for the work through digital mediums seemed to be a positive outcome during the planning stages. However, as the project developed, the ethical implications of exploring meaningful scenes from the young people's experiences and personal narratives became increasingly problematic – both in terms of co-opting their stories and bringing them back to a relatively

unreceptive audience and in terms of managing to start those conversations at all within the institutional settings of youth centres.

In 2010, following two months of weekly training sessions, the team undertook two film projects at two youth centres in Torbay. The two centres were differently structured - one (the Apple Centre)[36] was run by the local authority and housed a large-scale sports complex in one of the most deprived residential wards of Torquay. Its suburban location, and the scale of its alternative offerings meant that an unpredictable and diverse range of young people attended the site. The other youth centre (Central Youth Centre) was owned by a charity, but co-managed by the local authority and occupied a compact space in a central location in Torquay. Its limited size meant that young people had to sign up to attend sessions, and the charity sponsor's remit included specific provision for young people with disabilities. This narrower focus in terms of populations meant that the attendees were more predictable, consistent, and had stronger long-term relationships with the youth workers who ran the centre. For the purposes of this research, the suburban youth centre will be called the Apple Centre, and the more central charity-owned organisation will be referred to as Central Youth Centre.

Drawing on the TIE-based work done by the Blahs, discussed in Chapter II, the Vital Spaces team wished to experiment with the formulaic model of TIE practice – a performed scene, followed by a workshop/interactive model which is utilised by many theatre companies who work in institutional contexts. The Vital Spaces team aimed to find a more collaborative and participatory way of working – one which looked less like the delivery of a pre-packaged theatre piece. The goal was to develop theatre/film work together, but the venue of youth centres proved more challenging than first anticipated.

The context of the youth centre, and indeed the role of 'site' became a powerful lesson which was learned during this first year's work. The facilitators and myself had underestimated the impact that the site would play upon both the atmosphere we were able to create and the ways in which the young people were willing to engage with the work. My preconceptions were optimistic about the power of well-facilitated drama workshops to inherently change the way that institutional space functions. As Nicholson points out,

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36 Here pseudonyms are used in place of real organisations. The larger geographical area (towns, local authorities) information is accurate, but all other details are changed to ensure anonymity.

> Transforming highly regulated spaces into creative performance and workshop spaces is not just an interesting artistic challenge. It involves reconstructing how space is conceived, temporarily overlaying its codes with alternative spatial practices…If spaces for drama are to become 'seedbeds of cultural creativity', they will enable participants to experiment with the production and reproduction of space collaboratively, recognizing that its meanings can be complexly symbolized and layered (Nicholson 2006, 129, quoted in Hunter 2008, 15).

We potentially entered both youth centres sites idealistically, with an assumption that because we had been welcomed in to provide a theatre/film workshop, we would be able to engage in relatively open and creative exploration with the young participants. In both centres, this proved to be untrue, and for very different reasons. Additionally, the attempt to 'overlay' the site's own 'codes' with 'alternative spatial practices' proved difficult, as I shall explore with my own field notes.

Pilot 1 – Hele horror films

The Apple Centre film project began with a basic camera training session, which was led by the five facilitators who had been training in both film and facilitation for two months. This minimal training period meant that they learned a great deal by *doing* throughout the first year of work, and their personal development as competent facilitators was substantial throughout the overall project. As a result, both the facilitators and the participants in this first workshop were tentative, and as we delivered three separate workshops at Apple Centre, I wish to dwell on one small anecdotal moment from each session in order to explore some of the key ethical crises which emerged. In the following passages, my field notes will be indicated by italics.

> *In the first session, we began with a 'warm up circle'. Part of the support for the five young facilitators had been to rehearse challenging behaviour. We had been forewarned by the head of the AC that young people had showed a resistance to arts-based methods before, and that 'drama' in particular was a scary concept for them. As a result, there was a recruiting push prior to our first session, where the five university students wandered about the centre and engaged in conversation, encouraging young people to take part in the session* (Walcon 2010)*.*

This kind of 'recruitment' always raises my concern, and I think there are serious embedded questions here for arts workers both about what kinds of bad

practice have caused this resistance to drama activity and also about the fine line between coercion and encouragement when attempting to reach the 'hard to reach.'

> *The training session began with a 'recruited' group of 8 young people, aged between 11 and 14. All of these participants regularly attended the centre, and their usual Tuesday evening activities were playing pool, using the computer suite, and playing football. At all our sessions at the Apple Centre there was a stronger interest from girls, who clearly were interested in the option of alternative activities. The company had planned a co-facilitated session, in which they would begin with several warm-up activities, and then spend the remaining hour in small groups, doing basic camera training*.

> *However, almost immediately when the facilitators began the first exercise, which included a name exercise where each person in the circle had to speak, the young people ran from the room. They clearly were extremely nervous about taking part, and Miranda informed us that they had tried to run a drama session the previous year, but it had been cancelled due to lack of interest. We kept going, but our somewhat shaky confidence was shattered.*[37]

> *After that exercise, I went out in the hall and re-rallied the young people who'd all gone back into the computer suite. With the aid of Miranda and Rita, we convinced 5-6 of them to return, upon the promise that we 'wouldn't play any more drama games.' The session continued, focusing completely on camera training, with about 10 participants taking part all told. We abandoned all the 'drama' activities that had been planned. Rita later informed us that it had been 'very popular' based on the focus and enthusiasm of the group. The young people were asked at the end of the first session what they would like to make films about, and a dialogue ensued which I facilitated with the help of the facilitators. We asked them questions about their local community, about whether they would like to go into town and create some on-site documentaries... When it came to brainstorming concepts for the films, they ignored the prior discussion and the majority of the 12 participating students responded that they wanted to make horror or slasher films* (Walcon 2010).

This brief attempt at setting up a site-specific session in the city centre failed when two thirds of the students expressed difficulty with public transit and issues of access. In particular, the public bus system which runs to the city

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37 In later sessions, and with other groups, some of the same warm up exercises were used with great success. However, this first moment was devastating for the facilitators, and left them feeling like the first session had been less than successful. In retrospect, the fact that ten young people came back in and participated during the camera-training was hugely successful and showed growth in trust between the young people and the facilitation team.

centre was perceived as both too expensive and infrequent for their regular use. Their clear desire to remain on-site, at their youth club, and their clear interest in slasher films left the Vital Spaces team in an ethical quandary regarding the intentions of various partner agencies. The work needed to be young-person-led, and their artistic ownership was paramount. We had seen evidence that without a strong sense of control and agency in the session, we would lose all participation. We had consulted with them and had prompted several conversations around documentary genres, place, site, and their opinions on local issues. They had been informed that there was an opportunity for the films to be played for the local councillors/authority staff, which had prompted fear and some lessening of enthusiasm. The moment that it was clear they could just make films for themselves, the passion and interest increased dramatically. The Vital Spaces team decided to follow the leadership of the younger participants, and after creating three working 'film crews', they ran a storyboarding session and a filming session, in which the young people wrote, directed, and acted in their own original horror films.

This moment was one of the sharpest and clearest points of praxis in the entire project. It brought sharply into focus the challenge that happens when your own research agenda (talking about identity through young-person-led theatre) bumps up against best practice (artistic ownership, participatory work with co-researchers). In those two sessions, the young people had a positive encounter with drama workshop processes, enjoyed six hours of filming and devising, and created two-three minute long horror films which in no way discussed who they were, what they thought of Torquay, or how they manifested an identity within that place. In the moment of passing ownership to the young people, I was writing off any opportunity to bring their voices/ideas back to those at the council who had sponsored and supported the work. I was potentially losing the chance to talk about the artistic output in my research. But during those two sessions, and in the video editing session which followed, in which two of the Apple Centre students and Miranda (the primary youth worker) came up to the university to learn how to use film editing software, I watched a powerful kind of artistic ownership manifest between the young facilitators and the participants. The level of respect and trust had altered completely from the first session.

This exemplifies a 'grounded aesthetic' to me, and reveals how difficult it

can be for arts workers who walk into youth work settings with complex agendas. Nicholson's concern about the role of altruism in these situations is relevant. She maintains that any facilitator who enters into an Applied Theatre project with altruistic aims is inherently tapping into a truth that they are more powerful than the party they are 'helping'. Because the project had initially targeted an area of deprivation, and attempted to open up consultation, it can actually prompt 'the uncomfortable implication that, however well-intentioned, some acts of altruism may have the effect of keeping 'other' people in their place.' Particularly because myself and the Vital Spaces facilitators were not locals to this community (if indeed university students can be seen as 'locals' of anywhere), our role as 'outsiders' can be seen as 'patronising, authoritarian, and contributing to keep others marginalised rather than central' (Nicholson 2005, 30).

On Schechner's continuum of theatre practice which moves between the two extreme poles of social efficacy and pure entertainment, the films were falling far into the category of 'entertainment', leaving me fairly bereft of any meaningful outcomes from a research standpoint (Schechner 1988; Thompson and Schechner 2004). Yet, in the moment, the ethical decision was clear. We had asked the question, the young people had answered it. We had provided them with full ethical disclosure and permissions over their final films and they had decided to restrict their output. We had to honour these decisions. This certainly raises the point that there may have been a purposeful subversion of the arts workshop occurring by the participants. As Willis notes, 'it may be that certain kinds of symbolic creativity in the expressive and communicative activity of 'disadvantaged' groups exercise their uses and economies in precisely eluding and evading formal recognition, publicity and the possible control by others of their own visceral meanings' (Willis et al. 1990, 3). However, this may be over-theorising the situation.

It is tempting to write this decision by the young people as resistance to hegemony, a subculture subverting the expectations of the powerful. And perhaps there was an element of this - but my perception of the situation was less politically motivated. Documentaries aren't fun. Horror films are. Documentaries require them to 'think' in a way that looks and sounds a great deal like school. Horror films do not get done in school. I think, in retrospect, that the choice of genre was less about political resistance and more about

enjoyment of the project. Perhaps, the situation captured a 'rush' of deviance toward the original workshop task – a kind of risk-taking that, according to Conrad: '[...] highlights the seductive appeal of youth's engagement in such risky activities and the enjoyment they gain from such behaviour. In response to the overwhelming feeling of boredom, the 'rush' may be just what youth are looking for' (Conrad 2005, 35; Coleman and Hagell 2007).

There was no financial support from the local council – so I had the freedom to notify them that the short films were no longer going to be documentaries about place by young people. The young participants did not want their work to be shown online, although they regularly watched it at the centre and shared it with other young people and youth workers there. So the far-reaching, dialogic outcomes of the work did not extend beyond the immediate site of the youth centre. The complex web of partnerships which I had established became negated – and the young people's films only had a life within their immediate circle of 'near and dear'. Because of this (at the time seen as a failure), we began another film workshop at a more centralised youth centre in Torquay, where we felt that site-specific practice was more likely.

The aesthetics of the Hele Horror films were undeniably low quality, without any reference to 'grounded aesthetics'. The young people's ownership over the script-writing had been well-structured, but the short duration of the workshop series meant that little time was spent polishing or editing their work. As a result, the three films all shared little spoken text, and two involved much running and screaming. One included a (fully clothed) 'shower scene' which emulated the stabbing from *Psycho.* The facilitators did not lead these artistic decisions – they participated when asked, helped to hold cameras, and occasionally would guide an improvised section of dialogue if the young people required help. The final films were gruesome, heavily improvised, and lacked any kind of characterisation, narrative arc, or technical grace. They were clearly the young people's own work and their pride in them was clear as well. However, I felt that they did little toward creating a model of practice which could be considered 'quality.'[38] Without probing the cultural capital embedded in

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38 Whilst I honour Bourdieu's conception of aesthetics as a largely elitist concept, the failure of these films was partly our responsibility as facilitators. There is a difference between honouring a diverse variety of aesthetics and a simply under-developed and under-trained film project. In this case, the young people could have benefited from a much longer-term workshop model, with better skills training and storyboarding support. However, because of the strong resistance to drama activities in the early sessions, we withdrew much of our initial scaffolding work around building story, character and dialogue

aesthetics – these horror films were not even really watchable or enjoyable as horror films. They neither opened a conversation, nor asked the young participants to question or challenge their conceptions. There were virtually no dialogic outcomes for the participants. I attribute this largely to our inexperience in tackling the artistic process with challenging groups and my own reticence about pushing a particular agenda upon the groups we worked with.

Pilot 2 – Torquay site films

The second film workshops series resulted in further moments of dissonance between my own research agenda, the young people's desires, and the youth worker's requirements for the outcomes of the project. At the Central Youth Centre in Torquay, we followed a similar structure to the workshop model, but scheduled additional workshop sessions because of the accommodations and needs of the group. Over the four week workshop, we led eight sessions which covered camera/technical training, storyboarding, scripting, filming, and editing at the university's digital media suite. Here, the process and final products were heavily mediated by a stronger youth worker presence. Because the population being served at these particular sessions were exclusively disabled (encompassing a wide variety of disability), we were again entering into artistic work from a deficit model - only this time, it was not about socio-economic deficits and disadvantages, it was about mental and physical deficit perceptions (Croghan et al. 2006; Kingsnorth, Healy, and Macarthur 2007).

Here, again, the facilitators (including myself) felt out of their depth. Without training for how to support specialised needs, they were being asked to enter into the space as artists, and despite rather impressive support from the centre's youth workers, this was a steep learning curve in terms of how much accommodation was necessary for various physical, vocal, and mental disabilities. Central was always staffed by at least three workers, and their ratio of youth workers to young people was much higher than at the Apple Centre. Here too, there was a stronger concern about rules and regulations – with more stringent requirements for health and safety, risk assessments, prior consent forms, and privacy/ethics forms. Because of the disabilities present, and

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and simply let the young people drive the process. This immersion model worked well in terms of the young people's investment and ownership of the films, but I'm certain there could have been better ways of embedding some DIE methods within the workshop. Again, a longer time frame would have been necessary.

because of the ages of the facilitators, it was determined that one youth worker would always be present with each film crew – even when they went off site to film scenes in the city centre. This placed a financial and resource pressure on the centre's staff and director – who had to find additional staffing to support the artistic work. This unspoken tension is demonstrative of the hidden pressures which exist in all partnerships. Through the provision of a free film workshop, the youth centre apparently gains, but the logistical realities of bureaucratic red tape and the associated health and safety concerns when working with vulnerable minors make such an idealised view appear somewhat unrealistic.[39]

Additionally, the director of Central, who shall be referred to as Rebecca, had initially been enthusiastic about the idea of the young people leading the artistic decision making, but as the process progressed it became clear that her definitions of 'artistic ownership' different substantially from the Vital Spaces facilitator's perceptions. In particular, the amount of creative freedom available to the young people was increasingly restricted by the youth workers, and many of the facilitators from Vital Spaces Company found this to be a frustrating situation in which to provide artistic facilitation.

The young people who attended Central formed two film crews – one group created a piece called *The Ruins of Torbay*, which looked at the impact of drugs and alcohol in their local community.[40] The other group created a film called *Torbay Talk* which was a more free-form series of scenes films at various sites around the city and the youth club. Interestingly, both groups wanted to film interviews with passers-by, and whilst this was condoned by Rebecca, the nature of the questions asked was heavily mediated and edited by her and the other youth workers involved to convey a particular message and to 'perform' a particular kind of young person to the larger community of Torbay.

Field Notes excerpt:

> *Friday 21st: Beautiful sunny (hot!) evening. Session began cheerfully. I'd emailed Rebecca re: CRB madness in the AM and she spoke congenially about it, saying that she'd spoken to*

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39 The economic climate certainly affected the atmosphere at this second centre. The announcement of impending 20% nation-wide cuts to the public sector was looming at the time of this film workshop, which created a gloomy prospect for many youth centres and workers in particular. In fact, these concerns were certainly merited, as the Devon County cuts which were announced the following year included significant staff redundancies, particularly at the administrative levels, See Conquergood, D. (2002). "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." The Drama Review **46**(2): 145-156.

40 This title was created by the five young people on the film crew, and despite its negative connotations, was kept throughout a heavily mediated process. The lack of a change to the film's title is something which I find intriguing – as if by maintaining the original title, the many coercive shifts to the internal content could be masked.

her supervisor and that it would be okay as long as youth workers were present. (Isn't that what we knew before?) Then, as the young people trickled in, complaining of heat, Matt and I set up the film kits... As we got everyone onto the sofas for a kick-off meeting, Rebecca came over and began to ask (with her usual urgency) about the off-site locations for the Drug and Alcohol group... (quotes: 'I'm worried about how positive some of the questions sound. For example, 'do you think Torbay is one of the worst places for drugs and alcohol? How positive does that sound, guys?' and she was also worried about gaining permission for being in the film from interviewees - 'will you tell them, this is for a film? Will you show them the questions first?') (Walcon 2010)*.*

These concerns from the head youth worker at the site increased during the film process, as it became apparent that the young people were writing the film content and storyboard largely on their own, with purely structural support from the facilitators. Despite early rhetoric about the young people driving the process and 'owning' the artistic material, the second film project slowly moved toward a coercive model. Largely this was due to concerns from the youth workers about the suitability of the questions which the young participants wanted to ask. In particular, the *Ruins of Torbay* film intended to depict and describe how drugs and alcohol impact upon the young people of the region, via interviews with local residents, police and businesses.

The five young men involved in this film crew ranged from 16 to 22 years of age, and their abilities were diverse. Their interest in conducting interviews was initially enthusiastic, but it was curtailed by Rebecca, who cancelled their three planned 'shoots' at various businesses in the nearby area, expressing concerns about 'being good neighbours' or 'maintaining a positive relationship'. Whilst the impact on the young people's artistic ownership was limiting, it is important to see the situation from another perspective, which honours the often controversial nature of youth centres which are situated within urban consumer districts. This geographical location also brought with it challenges. Long term, Rebecca was negotiating her location with retail tourism industry giants who could strongly object to young people's activities on their site. There is a tricky act of diplomacy and negotiation at play.

The facilitation team found this interference by youth work staff to have a pervasive effect upon the aesthetic/artistic content of the pieces. They became increasingly uncomfortable with the fact that the project was advertised as

young people's film projects, when in reality 90% of the storyboard for the first film had been re-written by the youth workers.

Excerpt from an interview between Rebecca and myself:

Rebecca: If I'd been there... they haven't failed, but I want to avoid the disappointment that what they wanted isn't going to happen.'

Erin: Do you think they feel disappointed?

Rebecca: No, given the nature of the young men involved, their enthusiasm, I think they'll be okay with it. But since their original storyboard, the only thing that's still happening is the interviews with the young people. Not the Rec Centre, not the police officer, not the Inn. If I'd been there... we'd need formal permission, not just Peter showing up as a young person. I mean, that's great and all (subdued delivery), but.... the process has to come in a way that can be supported and can be done, being aware of what we can achieve with them. Not telling them what to do, as facilitators, but... helping them to revisit their original ideas at the beginning of the process. That's been lost - their ideas about phone booths and acting.

Rebecca: When the scripts came through, I thought, 'Hmmm... I'm not sure about this.' I just wish, this isn't your fault, Erin, but I wish we'd had a conversation earlier with them about well, actually this may not be realistic.

Erin: Sorry, what do you mean 'realistic'? Do you mean that the conversations might not be authentic ones with the police and so on?

Rebecca: Yeah. They wouldn't get authentic answers from the police, from the Inn, from the Rec Centre. Peter going in and asking permission, that's brilliant, but one of our neighbours now thinks we're a bit unprofessional - a young person going in on his own. With our neighbours we have to be very careful, there's a lot of politics. Can't just go and interview a barman.

Erin: (Summary) a brief statement about how some of this seems to be unique to their physical geography/proximity to other city centre amenities (Walcon 2010)*.*

As can be seen above, there was a marked desire from the youth workers to push the project toward fictional narratives, despite the young people's desire for documentary films. The dialogic and 'issues-based' content of the 'drugs and alcohol' film was far more restricted by the youth workers than the other film, perhaps revealing a desire to keep the artistic content in a safe place, where there could be no negative response from funding agencies, youth

service administration, or parents. These accountability measures had immense impact upon what was 'discussable' within the project. The other project's content was largely interview-based, and focused on perceptions of place and identity. This film included a site-specific dance which was performed along the harbourside and in the city centre by five participants and two facilitators[41]. This teaming of facilitators and participants was a powerful moment for me, and demonstrated a small success in the project – a moment of genuine artistic collaboration as they devised and developed the dance together and then took the collective risk of performing in various town-centre sites. This success marked a desire to further develop this kind of artistic process, which had much stronger aesthetic and personal outcomes for those involved.

The larger issues around artistic control manifested during the editing stages as well, when four of the young people travelled to the University's digital media suite for a two-day session in which they edited their footage into four-five minute short films. During these editing sessions, a youth worker paired with each team, and their involvement was thorough. For example, Rebecca removed her own interview from the other film's footage, despite strong objections from the young participants who wanted it to be included in the film. Her reticence to be included was founded on the fact that some of the questions asked included those with embedded criticisms of the local authority – including the question 'What could be improved about Torbay?' and 'What do you wish you could do in Torbay but you can't?'.

Ultimately, the five young men who participated in the *Ruins* filming managed to interview a police officer, but they were not allowed to make the contact themselves. When one of the young men, who also served as a voluntary assistant and had been attending the centre for several years, made contact with a local hotel to see if he could interview the staff about the issues, the youth work staff immediately rang to apologise for 'bothering' the business, and the subsequent interview was cancelled. For the VSC team, the positive relationships which were being built with the younger participants were heavily restricted by the inability to hand artistic ownership over. They felt that the process and product had been compromised. According to Hart's 1992 tiered ladder of participation forms with children and young people, this kind of

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41 This dance was performed to the Black Eyed Pea's *Boom Boom Pow,* written by Allan Apll Pineda; Jaime Gomez; Stacy Ferguson; William Adams. The young people performed it along the pier, in the local shopping district, and on the 'Torre Abbey Sands' – the nearby beach.

practice fails to fulfil the core requirements for a positive model of participatory practice. In fact, at times, the individual decisions made by various youth workers pushed the practice toward the deficit models of 'coercion' and 'manipulation'.

Baz Kershaw's caution that community-based theatre is particularly vulnerable because of its 'contextuality' and the funding consequences for both the artists and the sponsoring agencies is pertinent here (Kershaw 1992). The nature of an embedded/integrated context is challenging, and particularly so for artists who increasingly have to work in short bursts – without the benefit of a long-term integration and relationship which can inspire trust. In the post Thatcher-years, theatre practitioners increasingly have worked in particular specialised genres, descending in to deliver what can often be short-term projects. This can result in less natural, less organic relationship with the partner agency. In this particular project, the issues about ownership also seemed to reflect a power dynamic that was already at play within this particular centre.

> *Excerpt from field notes:*
> *Jessica had a couple of rough patches around the choreography (possibly linked to a prior confrontation with Rebecca). 'I'm 20, Rebecca. I know how to make noodles. I'm 20!' and stormed off. (I feel for her, this self awareness and rage about her situation came out at several points.) Not feeling heard in the devising & dance process. She had laid out a firm idea, but Sally didn't grasp it, & she stormed off there, as well, despite Laura and myself attempting to re-engage her. However, she sat only a few feet away and rejoined for the end, even took a permission form for attending the play ('it's something to do.' muttered under her breath.) (Walcon 2010).*

Regular demonstrations of this kind of friction occurred over the eight weeks of the project, but there was also clearly a long-term positive relationship, with many of the young people returning weekly, and attending the centre regularly for over two-three years. Many of the concerns about artistic control were also motivated by a desire to keep the centre a safe place for the young people who attended, and out of a need to please the administrative forces which funded the site.

In retrospect a conversation was missing here, between the young people and the youth workers, and it was perhaps the need for this dialogue that prompted a substantial shift in the practice for the second year's action

research.   During these first pilots, both myself and the Vital Spaces team lacked the confidence and agency to create a genuine dialogic space for this kind of power issue to be discussed. We felt grateful to have been welcomed into the centre, and saw the completion of the films as a positive outcome for the young people involved. We did not want to cause conflict, but in retrospect, the dramatic medium we were working in was well-suited to probe and explore the issues that erupted.   Further arts outcomes arose from the film project. The young people who participated in the Vital Spaces Project went on to attend various theatre events which the council sponsored, and to participate in two site specific performances and a community mural project which were also run as extension activities.   So there were far-reaching outcomes which had benefits for the council and for the youth centre, and the young people certainly enjoyed the process as a means of 'provided leisure'.   However, the more complex issues within the artistic process could have been addressed, and were not.

Ultimately, it was the outcomes for both sets of films which brought my most potent realisation. Both youth centres elected not to broadcast the films to an outside audience. For the Apple Centre, there was an agreement between the Vital Spaces team, the young people and the youth staff that the nature of the films was not 'appropriate' for the council's website – and so the grounded medium of horror films stopped at distribution within the centre. The films were generally a source of pride for the young participants, but no outside audience was ever to see them.   For Central, the films were always intended for submission to a local authority film contest – an outcome which had strong motivation for the young people taking part as it included a £100 prize. However, from the early sessions, Rebecca expressed concerns about the 'permissions' involved, as the entries for the contest had to be uploaded to youtube in order to be submitted. This dispersal of the young people's artistic product out into the public domain was ultimately not approved by either Rebecca or her immediate supervisor, due to the sensitive privacy needs of the young people taking part, and the films again found not outside audience beyond a few select and approved invited groups. One such viewing occurred at a council meeting where the arts and culture sector, tourism, and planning departments were represented. The response was positive, but minimal, and

the viewing of the films because a clear head-nod toward the tick-box that the project was perceived to be by both the local authority and the youth service.

The work was seen by the local authority and the youth service as part of an increased emphasis on 'citizenship' teaching, a move which is lambasted by Scullion, who posits that:

> The citizenship agenda emerges as just one tactic deployed by the state that seeks to equip the child in respect of these new public, private, and cyber relationships, negotiated identities, and community interactions. However, like any education policy, the outcomes of policies 'for' citizenship, are ultimately unpredictable and as likely to be counter cultural as they are to consolidate and affirm preferred (or assumed) cultural values (Scullion 2008, 381).

This notion of an 'unpredictable' citizenship was not possible to facilitate, nor was the 'friction of dialogue' recommended by Boostrom. Upon reflection, it is clear to me that as a facilitation team, we were tentative about how to structure or support dialogue and more extended outcomes, especially of a community in which we were not resident. Increasingly, the ethical concerns mounted for me, about whether it was our role to be descending as an outside facilitator, provoking and stimulating dialogue. Miwon Kwon muses, 'For some critics, the success or failure of a community-based art project rests precisely on the artist's status as either as sited insider (=success) or an unsited outsider (=failure). But the process is far more complex than can be accounted for by such a formulaic reduction' (Kwon 2002, 135). Our role as 'outsiders' to the community could potentially have provided the benefit of an external perspective on a heavily loaded power dynamic within the youth centre, but the dialogic environment was not created by the drama workshop in order to engage these issues. What renders a facilitator properly trained for this kind of work? Also, in our role as outsiders, wouldn't we be presuming a mantle of responsibility not really ours by starting these conversations?

I also found myself reconsidering the whole-hearted emphasis on the 'public space', and thinking more pragmatically about the limitations of working wholly within the 'custodial tradition' of publicly funded agencies like the Youth Service (McRobbie and Nava 1984). At this moment of crisis, in which the action research seemed to me to have entrenched ethical flaws, I read the quote from John McGrath which is cited in the introduction of this thesis (Thompson and Low 2010). Who is bearing witness to young people's artistic

expression? Who is listening? Is this work to benefit the participants, or does it have something to say to the larger society? McGrath's notion that 'society needs this art' resonated powerfully with my own reservations about theatre interventions which pretended to empower and really perpetuated societal inequalities.

> Just as the desire to engage "real" (nonart) places can prepare the way for the conversion of abstract or derelict (non-)spaces into "authentic" and "unique" locales ripe for development and promotion, so the engagement of "real" people in community-based art can install new forms of urban primitivism over socially neglected minority groups' The "other" of the dominant culture thus becomes objectified once again the satisfy the contemporary lust for authentic histories and identities. [Citing Foster:] "Almost naturally the project strays from collaboration to self-fashioning, from a decentering of the artist as cultural authority to a remaking of the other in neo-primitive guise." (Foster, quoted in Kwon 2002, 138–139).

The aim here, as McGrath, Foster and Kwon all reminded me, was not to 'bring' a helpful art into a deprived space, or to 'amplify' grounded expressions already occurring to those who may not have had genuinely emancipatory intentions at heart; the aim needed to be about creating a conversation between relevant participants. As Grant Kester puts it, an artist can '[claim] the authority to speak for a community in order to empower himself (sic) politically, professionally, and morally' (Kester 2004, 6). This self-serving intentionality is often unconscious, and so deeply embedded into the process that many artists have difficulty identifying its presence. Miwon Kwon defends the artists, stating that, 'But what looks to [...] Kester like a morally problematic identification perpetuated by the community artist, is often the result of institutional intervention and pressure' (Kwon 2002, 140).

This process, which Bourdieu refers to as 'embezzlement', is often couched within idealistic perceptions that the artist is 'necessary' to the process, and a resulting artist-centric model can be constructed, in which communities are gratefully receiving an artistic product/process which is 'plopped' within their daily reality without consent or consultation (Kwon 2002, 202; Bourdieu 1984). It became clear to me at the end of the first year's work, that we were 'plopping' drama workshops into communities based on their measure of deprivation, not on the young people's desire to take part in drama workshops. What was

needed in these centres was clearly a healthy conversation about what young people's participation within the public sector looks like.

Small arts projects which take place in youth centres are not attended by city councillors, youth policy administrators and school heads. I found myself puzzling over the question: how do you start a conversation with someone who is not in the room? The answer has to do with what the room looks like. Spaces are coded and powerful places. Site matters, as Mary Ann Hunter again points out,

> [...] the safe space to which artists and facilitators often refer is not just an insulating container for rehearsing social change, but a process of ever-becoming, of messy negotiations, of allowing and reflecting on moments of presence, it becomes a space in which individuals in a collective environment can be empowered to encounter risk on their own terms (Hunter 2008, 18–19).

Hunter further clarifies that risk-taking within these spaces has to be carefully considered with regard the degree of vulnerability it may create for those taking part.

Through these two film projects, I began to question the ethics of asking young people to risk any kind of personal narrative within a space that was fashioned by institutional concerns about the 'perceptions of youth'. To open up a conversation about young people's identity, beliefs, sense of self, and performed selves would be asking them to risk personal revelation and risk within an unsafe environment. I could not ensure the kind of artistic rigour and safe risk-taking in the youth centre environments we had encountered, and so it became necessary to develop an artistic curricular model with young people outside those sites, in an artistic environment, with an eye to returning again once the facilitation team and the process had built confidence and purpose.

The later projects no longer specifically targeted areas of deprivation, instead focusing more on the idea of using artistic spaces as a 'space apart' – in which to engage in conversations which would not be possible in the more institutional and restrictive sites of youth centres. I found this step to be a difficult one, and I find myself still struggling with it at the end of the project. Despite the array of literature about public access, site-specific, and grounded practice within the urban space, Vital Spaces team discovered a freedom within

more conventional theatre spaces. They functioned as a safe site for risk-taking and a place for identity to be more fluid and flexible.

Year Two: aesthetics and dialectics

The Vital Spaces Project then shifted quite substantially. Based on the outcomes of the Torbay Film Projects' site-specific pilots, the work instead began to focus on dialogic aims which had been largely missing from the initial PAR research. Additionally, the work moved away from emphasis on a 'grounded aesthetic' and away from the medium of naturalism within its theatre forms. The aim was to find a hybrid model of embodied performance which could speak multiple languages. In order to do so, the work returned to more conventional theatre spaces, and began to explore how the devising structure could open up conversations both within the process and through the final performances.

This opening of conversations began to move incrementally toward a model which I will continue to term 'dialogic'. Kershaw points out that 'performances which hope to address real needs must inevitably engage with questions of the community's values and beliefs' (Kershaw 1992, 60–61). But he additionally points out that a 'dangerous assumption' of 'increased empowerment' underlies much of this work, echoing various theorists' concerns about 'transformation' which can tie applied dramatist's hands into continually having to provide and prove some kind of transformative principle is at play in their work (Ackroyd 2000; Nicholson 2005; Balfour 2009; Adrian Jackson 2009; Prentki and Preston 2009).

The key, increasingly, seems to lie in the level of 'participation', as Baz Kershaw cautions. He establishes that vigorous participation from the community that you work with is an essential indicator in order to be certain that the artists 'are not misreading the community's needs and that […] they are actually wanted by the community' (Kershaw 1992, 62). However, this notion of participation is notoriously difficult to define in a purist way – and over the course of the first year's work, it became clear that the young participants' participation was clearly coerced in a myriad of ways - by the youth workers, by the Vital Spaces facilitators, by myself as the researcher. Even more confusingly, despite this coercion, some of the participation was certainly enthusiastic, vigorous and lively in appearance. The only young participants

who I felt certain had chosen to participate wholly of their own desire, interest, and accord were the five undergraduates who led the project. And perhaps the secret to their interest (beyond those clear advantages of socio-economic status, background and education) was also their ownership of the material. Their role as facilitators meant that they had substantially crafted much of the workshop materials, and their investment in the process and product was clearly established.

For the next year's work, this structure of undergraduate students mentoring those who were slightly younger became the focus of the project's structure, and the aim became what Steve Gooch is credited with articulating first, a 'conversation between equals' (Gooch 1984). Kershaw points out that Gooch's notion draws heavily on Eugenio Barba's idea of theatre as 'barter': a performative 'exchange as the only possibility of finding equality' (Barba 1979: 103, cited in Kershaw 1992: 80). The two larger-scale projects in year two were *Proof of Identity* and Devon Youth Theatre's *Borderline* – both of which aimed to create devised dialogues between university students and younger participants who engaged both in theatre workshops and shared performances with the older participants.

Proof of Identity: a devised dialogue

The first project, *Proof of Identity,* brought together two Exeter-area secondary schools with a team of eight undergraduate facilitators who were all students in a drama module: DRA2026 – Applied Theatre. From February to April of 2010, the two groups followed the same set of prompts and stimuli. The university students facilitated a performance interwoven with a workshop which explored issues around young people's identity, language, territory and access to power.[42] This first dual performance created a prototype for the work which followed.

The performance/workshop model was created by the eight university students over five weeks of training and development, and the work explored how young people shift codes/languages, depending on who is being spoken to. They experimented with 'hidden rehearsals of self' – layering of clothes, practising particular kinds of speech. Other elements which were present in the workshop development (although less so in the final devised pieces were:

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42 Please refer to Appendix B for the curriculum to this project.

assumptions and labelling, trying to create a safe personal territory for yourself, and the difficulty in expressing yourself to those who are not listening/hearing you.

Within *Proof of Identity*, the aesthetic choices substantially shifted. The work still looked at 'grounded' mediums of expression – but rather than attempting to document these in non-theatrical spaces, the workshop asked the participants to recreate their modes of expression and daily performances within the safe space of the theatre studio. Here, the ways in which the participants used clothing as a status marker[43], language and code-switching when speaking to others[44] all emerged as important themes when discussing how they 'performed' a sense of self.

Additionally, the concept of 'territory' was imaginatively explored, both in terms of personal space and geographical site[45]. All of these concepts were explored, discussed, and represented through *theatrical languages* – physical theatre, monologues, performed scenes, and abstract imagery. In the facilitation, artistic choices toward the physical and embodied languages were encouraged, and I found myself as a researcher wondering if the aesthetic choices were just as subtly coercive as attempting to unpack the living culture and daily performances of young participants in youth centres. However, two factors lead me to believe that this form of practice was more efficacious and more ethical.

Firstly, the dialogue that emerged between the university students (aged 19-22) and the secondary students (aged 13-16) was crafted by the university mentors. Their choices about what a daily performed identity for young people looks like were prompted by their own recent experience, and therefore much more grounded in a genuine understanding. They were not outsiders to their own recent adolescent experience. As soon as we honoured their own young identities within the space and made their experience a part of the research journey, the project stopped being 'us' looking at 'them' and started being a mutual exploration of young adult identity, using theatre as the language.

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43 A scene was developed around how a prefect badge could be a catalyst for status shifting.

44 A scene which told the same story about losing a mobile phone was translated into 'parent-speak', 'friend-speak', 'grandparent-speak and 'teacher-speak.'

45 A scene which used ribbons to frame performers in boxes and alleyways was progressively repeated around a single silent character. As it progressed, the ribbons were moved from a distanced and relatively free space to a constricting and tightly-binding cage. A similar scene explored personal space through a repeated cycle of a paired conversation in which a character's personal bubble was increasingly encroached upon. Both scenes spoke to issues of privacy, encroachment, and lack of autonomy or agency.

Gooch's 'conversation between equals' manifested, but the conversation slipped back and forth between actual rhetoric and a set of performed or embodied languages.

Secondly, the populations we were now working were no longer defined and targeted by their area of deprivation. Certainly, all the centres and schools that the Vital Spaces team attended throughout the second year of the project contained young people who came from lower socio-economic circumstances, and those with disabilities, and marginalised statuses, but we were not specifically selecting them as a group because of these 'deficits'. The groups were much more mixed, and the core idea that brought them all together was a focus on drama[46] - not on fixing or healing or solving or transforming. The focus was on the art, and the young people's predisposed interest in the art. And the art was embedded, studded with, laced through with strands of dialogue which interrogated what constitutes a youth identity in South Devon, as compared to other parts of England, how adulthood is understood or measured, and how young people have to 'perform' themselves in various ways in order to achieve what they need.[47] One of the measures by which I feel this structure is particularly successful is in its narrowing of the authenticating and rhetorical conventions present for the performers, who also were audiences for each other (Burns 1972). In the devised dialogues, the links between the 'possible worlds' created by the theatrical fictions and the performers' 'real worlds' were strong - but the aesthetics and mediums used to tell these stories varied in terms of polish, depth and skill because of the disparity age/training.

The university student's performance piece was devised using the same workshop tactics/exercises that were provided to the secondary students, and then the drama class from West Exe and the eight facilitators performed for each other in a black box studio at the University of Exeter. Here, the audience

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46 Whilst the PAR work here led away from youth centres in order to probe dialogic concerns, it did ultimately return to such sites in its final incarnation. Please see the conclusion for further reflections on this particular point.

47 This said, there are certainly issues about access for students of lower socio-economic status. The *Proof of Identity* project required less effort from the students, as it travelled to their schools for all sessions except the final showing at the University. However, Devon Youth Theatre's second phase required a substantial commitment from students and parents in terms of finances (£95 involvement fee, although there were scholarships available) and more importantly in terms of access/transport. Two students, although selected for the company, were unable to continue on with the rehearsals because of these concerns, and 13 students out of the overall 100 were unable to attend the final Showcase – most of them from St James School in Exeter, the lowest socio-economic ward we did outreach with. These issues are of profound concern, and there was certainly a difference in class/socio-economic status between the young people we worked with in year one and those who were able to take part in the arts workshops in year two. This, in part, was why the final project *On Our Terms* was developed, as an attempt to begin to address these issues.

was composed of friends and family, as well as the respective support structures from the university. The mood was celebratory, even joyful. The Westview Secondary School's piece ended with a 'graduation' scene which abstractly represented a rite of passage out of childhood, but also a survival of the challenges and turbulence of secondary school. For the year nine students taking part, their actual graduation was several years away – and the scene serves as a visioning or imagining of their own success in completing that journey with their own sense of self intact. This was profoundly influenced by their relationship with the university mentors, and the mutual trust and respect was clearly evident in the room.

However, the audience was decidedly select. As with much of youth theatre, the audience is often composed of the 'near and dear' parents, friends, and artists who are already invested in the process and personal stories of the young people taking part. Seldom does the work achieve a larger, more efficacious audience, unless the project is specifically intended to do just that.[48] Despite the success in the audience/participants decoding the conventions, and the rich theatrical languages which were used to explore these subjects, there was little outside presence to bear witness to the performances. Once again, as in the first year, the work was not marketed or communicated outside the immediate circle of influence around the young people's lives.

Based on these reflections from the Vital Spaces Company's pilots, the second year's focus moved both wider (in terms of population) and narrower (in terms of project focus and site). It also gained a sponsor - a development which can result in additional agendas upon the artistic content of the work. DAISI, the Devon Arts in Schools Initiative runs Devon Youth Theatre - a county-wide organisation for young people interested in theatre. According to DAISI administrator Peter Vanderford, 'The DYT projects have taken a variety of different forms over the years... from oral history with the police force to musicals' (Vanderford 2010). The varied foci of the youth theatre can be attributed to a shifting set of Artistic Directors, and the 2011 season was a unique structure, which deviated from DYT's usually more traditional adult leadership structure.[49]

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48 Suzanne Lacy's work, as discussed in Chapter II, is an excellent demonstration of this. Another example can be found in the 3-year Citizenship project discussed in Adrienne Scullion's work.
49 For example, the previous year's DYT project had been scripted by the Artistic Director, who culled the verbatim material from a series of oral history interviews which had been conducted by the participants

Devon Youth Theatre: *Borderline*

Although ostensibly under my direction as a researcher and practitioner, in reality the DYT project was run by a team of six undergraduate facilitators, who ranged in age from 18 to 22. With support from myself and Fiona Macbeth, convenor of the DRA2026 module, these six students created the workshop structure, developed the curriculum, delivered the sessions, and led the entire first phase of the project. The second phase moved into a more traditional theatre-production model, which rehearsed and performed on a traditional proscenium stage at the Exeter Northcott. This second phase, with a smaller ensemble of 27 young people was led by myself, a professional choreographer (Pip Jones), a professional vocal coach (Meghan Searle) and was supported by the six undergraduates in a lessened capacity. It is important to note that all three professionals have educational backgrounds as well as professional theatre experience, and I believe it is this combination of teacher-training and artistic-training which ultimately is necessary to make such student-led structures work.

The first phase of the DYT project represents a more peer-led model of participatory practice, albeit in a university module setting. The decision to include professional practitioners emerged for several reasons: DAISI had never led a fully devised production, entirely created by the young people, and there were administrative reservations about 'quality control' in terms of the professionalism of the project. Although initially reticent, I felt that the student ownership of the first phase was a large step forward for the organisation, and that this hybrid model would perhaps be a stepping stone toward more fully young-person-led practice in the future. Our role was to support the young people's leadership, which continued into the second phase and actually beyond the confines of the project itself. Five of the six participants continued to support the rehearsals voluntarily through the 'Company' phase, including the production week at the theatre. Additionally, five of the university students participated in an extension project along with the young participants, which continued for another two months beyond the DYT project's ending. This peer mentor system is constructed around theories of peer-learning and student-

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with retired members of the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary about their experiences during the Blitz. This topic had been pre-selected based upon funding which was available, and there was no consultancy with young people about the direction of the work other than their participation as interviewers and later actors in the adult-scripted production.

centred education, which place the notion of a 'more competent peer' as an essential component of a dynamic experiential learning experience (Vygotsky 1986; Piaget and Inhelder 1969).

Additionally, this hybrid model of partial-outreach and partial-theatre building based work has consistently arisen within best practice models of youth theatre work. There are advantages to both sites, and projects which can manage to find a happy marriage between site-based work which goes out to young people in their own communities, and still manages to make use of the 'magic' of devoted theatre spaces seem to achieve a success ethically and aesthetically. Several of the YPPT projects operated with this combination model – for example the 'Theatre Is...' company began with a 20 minute hip-hop roadshow that toured schools and market squares and then did four week long workshops at the local theatre. During the DYT model, I found the outreach workshops had a rawness and an immediacy to them – but the work done in studio and theatre spaces was inevitably stronger aesthetically and had greater personal investment from the young people. These were the spaces where they felt safe to take risks.

The decision to devise – wholly – when DYT had never done that before was a further risk for DAISI and the new partnership with the Northcott Theatre. Therefore there was a 'light touch' in terms of steering the artistic material in order to ensure quality for the Northcott/parents/audience to appreciate and the students to feel pride over and to ensure that the 'debate' points raised were metaphorical enough. As a head of a theatre company who is experienced with this notion of 'light touch', Geese Theatre's Artistic Director, Andy Watson states, 'I would describe our approach as responsive. We start where they are at. We ask them: 'Where are you at?' We ask them to create characters that they can have investment in, that they can have a belief in.' This participant-centred approach is amended later, with the addition, 'You're [the facilitator] slightly steering it. To get them to do some perspective taking. To think slightly outside of themselves' (*Inside Theatre* 2008). This 'light touch' was provided by the young facilitators in the first phase, and continued – perhaps less successfully – by myself and the other artistic professionals in the second phase.

The young facilitators were tentative at first, but over the six outreach workshops which they led across Devon, their confidence and skill set as

facilitators grew.[50] In particular, the hybrid role of both facilitator and participant in the workshops became clear as the project continued. Facilitator Becky reflects: '{through the use of} 'they give, we give', I believe we were successful in creating a safe space for them to explore creatively with their personal narrative.' (Rich 2011). Becky goes on to conclude that this risk-taking on the part of the facilitators led the younger participants toward a richer model of theatre practice:

> *By giving an open and honest example myself, I would have potentially provided the participants with the option of disclosing a risky sentence that fell safely below the risk levels of mine. By demonstrating that I felt confident and safe enough to disclose something personal and difficult, perhaps they could as well. It also showed them that we would not ask them to do anything that we would not do ourselves. We continued this thread by constantly having facilitators taking part in all the exercises. At least one facilitator would take part in the Standing Alone line along with the participants, and they would help set the frames of risk by saying a comedic and light-hearted sentence for the first starting sentence and then a very personal one for the second to show the participants that they were safe to do so* (Rich 2011)*.*

This emphasis on personal narrative emerged early, and was tempered by a regular use of physical theatre techniques provided through training sessions with choreographer Pip Jones. This emphasis on embodiment and the use of the body was embraced by the facilitators, who found it to be a safe way of expressing some of the riskier elements of personal narrative which could emerge through the workshops. This kind of theatre technique is not often taught within secondary schools drama programmes, incorporating gesture and contact improvisation to build devised physical pieces. For me as a researcher, this was a difficult choice, but one that I wanted to honour the leadership of the facilitation team in incorporating.

This emphasis on embodiment was perhaps somewhat imposed from the outside, and I am reticent to refer to it as a 'grounded medium', since much of it smells of avant-garde university theatre practice. Part of the aim here was to create an 'act of translation' which could speak to university students, younger participants, the local authority, and the parents involved. Embodiment gradually emerged as the primary medium in which this could occur – depicting personal narrative events as diverse as familial divorce, first love, friendship

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50 See Appendix D for the outreach phase of DYT.

conflicts, toys coming to life, and job redundancies. Baz Kershaw describes a performance's 'inter-textuality' as 'the ways in which a performance text gains meaning for an audience through its relationships to other texts, including the non-theatrical texts which communities produce, in the form of folklore, oral history, stories, legends and mythologies' (Kershaw 1992, 33).

In terms of intertextuality, it is tempting to think that for a youth culture, then, the relevant non-theatrical texts would be film, tv, facebook, music, hip-hop, graffiti, magazines, myspace, graphic novels, cartoons, internet, and youtube. In this particular devised process, however, for our final 27 participants, the intertextuality which emerged as resonant was that of a 'toybox'. Here, the relevance of rural/suburban Devonian culture may well have played a part. Many of the stereotypical symbols of adolescence and 'youth' are inherently urban, technology-based, and often involve social networking. For the young people involved in the second phase of DYT, however, the theme of toys appeared within one of their devised pieces, and it was quickly embraced and welcomed by the rest of the company in the devising process. It may be that the choice included a degree of nostalgia for childhood, but the ensemble's choice of a story of a young boy attempting to make sense of his parent's divorce whilst playing with his toys also touched upon nuanced and bittersweet themes. These subjects included: emerging social awareness which can include an emotional ache, forgiveness, controlling your emotions and of seeing your parents as flawed and human were all present within the simple narrative. And fascinatingly, a parallel narrative explored larger social issues, although slightly less explicitly. A subplot within the story used the same metaphor of toys to embody the story of a puppet needing to be 'let go' because she was 'redundant' and the toybox was too full.

This piece was devised in the same week that our theatre site, the Exeter Northcott, was informed by the Arts Council that they would be receiving a 100% cut in funding the following financial year. The young people were keen to explore what they saw as a 'tragedy' being enacted before them, but were not sure how to best embody the narrative on stage. Ultimately, the other devising ensemble's use of toys as metaphor for childhood/adulthood became resonant to both storylines, and the entire piece was told within the seven-year-old boy's bedroom, with both realism and fantasy intertwining in various physical and embodied ways.

In retrospect, as both director and the project coordinator, I can clearly see the hand of the professional artists in this devising decision making. I encouraged the devising ensemble to try to tell the story of the Northcott's redundancy in the manner of Clark Baim's 'one-step-removed' format, to make it more viewable for the audience (Baim, Brookes, and Mountford 2002). The young people's desire to be more literal (and perhaps assertive?) with the narrative would have resulted in some fascinating dialogue, but I was conscious of the precarious partnership newly formed between DAISI and the professional theatre, and wanted to ensure that our project was helping not hurting this kind of cross-cultural exchange. Here, the adult and agency concerns clearly overrode the students' own impulses, artistically. Interestingly, in later conversations, it did emerge that the students felt the 'one-step-removed' narrative was 'better'. As participant Tania reflected, 'It didn't *tell it*, you know? It kind of suggested it, and the audience could make up their own minds.' Was this result positive or negative? I am not sure. Here is a case for longer-term projects which can build up trust over time, gradually developing an atmosphere for greater risk-taking in terms of dialogic aims.

There were other moments in the second phase of DYT where the adult hand was too heavily involved. The devising process is wholly democratic until the 'splicing' stage, when decisions have to be made about key themes, and development teams assigned to various 'narrative strands'. The pulling out of key themes from the young people's work was done by the three adults, with support from the younger university students and collaboration by several of the oldest DYT members. These themes were then developed by three creative teams, and the resulting 'narrative strands' were woven together by myself and the other two professionals. Here, older members of DYT contributed suggestions, clarified their ideals, and assisted, but the bulk of the decision-making (and therefore the final structure) was adult-written. Whilst this structure was still much more young-person led than any previous DAISI venture, I can clearly see how this element of the process could have been run by the young participants elected leaders, with adult help and guidance. Here again, the desire for a 'professional product' influenced the artistic process.

Perhaps this instinct was felt by the participants, who seemed to work toward a 'university' aesthetic at times. Also, the use of text and dialogue within the piece was quite minimal, consisting mainly of several monologues, two

scenes within the toybox and three short scenes between the two boys who play with the toys. Far more of the show's content was physical and gesture-based. Suzy Graham-Adriani reflects upon this phenomenon within her own work at the National Theatre, where she is the Producer for Youth Theatre Programmes:

> But what I was seeing was very predictable . . . It was young people borrowing from the adult canon of work, which meant they were 'ageing up', that they were attempting adult plays with adult themes . . . Or they were devising work, but the problem was that the themes that they chose were very well worn; we'd have 'war', 'growing old', 'drug abuse', mostly pieces with 'a message'. The good pieces that did come back from time to time really relied on visual effects and physical theatre, and were sometimes arresting, but if we were looking at it as 'a script' it only seemed relevant to the company who made it, and it wasn't going to be passed on. It seemed to me that we weren't making a difference, and the work wasn't really improving (Graham-Adriani 2006, quoted by Deeney 2007, 336).

Graham-Adriani's comment about a stagnation of artistic practice is one that I find particularly haunting. Although written work was a regular part of the devising process during the second phase of DYT, very little of their written work made it into the final piece. The time required to draft, edit, and refine the written pieces was not devoted, and ultimately, the physical pieces seemed to have greater relevance and inter-textuality for the feedback audiences. But there was a safety to this aesthetic choice, Matt reflects:

> *Because we were teaching them to […] hide their stories in movement work, we could never […] get them to properly put themselves on stage. In other words, the theatrical languages allowed the participants to **take less risks with their personal narrative choices** by dressing their stories up in mediums which did not require detail* (Pocock 2011).

The 'dialogic' components of the DYT project emerged in two primary ways. Firstly, the facilitators engaged in feedback sessions with the younger participants during the outreach phase. During an all-day session, the Vital Spaces team would lead a series of warm-up activities throughout the morning, intending to introduce a 'range of theatrical languages' which could be drawn upon during the afternoon's devising. Following lunch, they would pull out 'the Box' – an antique trunk filled with various objects which served as devising stimuli, all of which they'd chosen themselves. The Box also contained a set of

postcards which were sent on from the previous outreach group to the next one. This notion of a devised 'exchange' was loosely based on the excellent structure developed by Noel Greig and the other founders of the *Contacting the World* festival, based originally in Manchester at Contact Theatre, but now a world-wide project (Greig 2008). Although the DYT project was limited in its scope to be able to 'exchange' theatrical languages back and forth in a genuine dialogue, the outreach phase was successful in creating a line of communication which was finally realised on a Showcase day at the Roborough Studios in Exeter.

After being introduced to the Box's devising stimuli, participants stood by the object which they found most interesting, and from these self-selected groups, devising ensembles were formed. Each facilitator elected to join the groups (usually sized 3-4) and they stayed with them during the afternoon, supporting and aiding their devised process. Here, an intimate process of dialogue occurred, in which a mediated process of artistic ownership between 20 year old and 15 year old developed. As they facilitated the process, several key points emerged: firstly, that the strongest model was to let the younger students work in an entirely independent way until they performed for 'group feedback', and secondly, that 'embodiment' was rarely a used theatrical language, despite the array of exercises which had introduced it during the morning's session. There was a strong tendency toward the literal and the television-esque. Rather than feedback this individually, the VSC mentors often chose to wait until the devising ensembles received feedback from the larger group (written on post-it notes). Here, their peers would often articulate the necessity for a more subtle or metaphorical approach, negating any need for the VSC facilitator to critique the work.

There is a dance here, which is ethically perilous. By providing additional theatrical languages, and by pushing an aesthetic agenda, we were imposing university theatrical values upon younger student's performances. A particular moment from a workshop in Newton Abbot elucidates this. As the facilitator, George, described the moment in his own words:

> At the Newton Abbot workshop, a boy named Logan[51] was insistent upon using gun warfare within his piece to convey narrative only through a naturalistic stance, despite all the theatrical languages explored during the morning. The feedback

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51 Logan's name is a pseudonym, as are all Vital Spaces under-18 participants.

his group received was almost entirely negative, from which he seemed highly disappointed by. Selecting the "right guys, this isn't working" attitude, I threw an opportunity to redeem himself back at him, to which he more than rose to the occasion. [...] A 'letting them fail so they may succeed' method seemed ideal in the case of Logan (O'Neil 2011)*.

George found that the group's first devised response to an image of a protest aftermath was passionately driven by the youngest member of the devised ensemble: a twelve-year-old boy who had a clear concept and vision. As a home-schooled student, there was also an assertive sense of agency which quickly led the other two students toward his vision, and George felt that to interfere would have been inappropriate. His decision to let the peer feedback drive the process was a brave one, but his reflections are also loaded with judgement statements about what constitutes a 'good' or 'appropriate' theatrical choice. For Logan, this process of receiving peer feedback on post-it notes was a difficult one – as it became clear that his vision had not translated to the larger group effectively. The group spent the last hour of the day's workshop recreating their piece in a more abstract and embodied way – retelling Logan's original narrative of a prison escapee who takes refuge in an elderly couple's home – through a series of gesture-based movement sequences. In this latter session, the two girls in the group became much more vocal, clearly investing in an increasingly democratic and open creative session, and the VSC facilitator took on a stronger voice, providing them with an 'outside eye' and critical response. The feedback from the larger group at the end of the day was powerfully positive, and the triad seemed proud of their growth. However, Logan did not attend the final Showcase day two weeks later – whether this was due to his rural location and issues of access/transport, or whether this was due to the democratisation of the devising content was unclear.

I find this moment compelling for several reasons. Here, a 19 year old facilitator found a comfortable balance between facilitation and participation in the younger group's artistic process. Here, an alternative theatrical language was at first rejected, then embraced by the devising ensemble and the larger group. And finally, here, an individual student's personal vision was critically received, and his participation in the project ended for inexplicable reasons. There are no easy conclusions to draw, but I find myself wondering about

'grounded mediums' and the elitism of aesthetic choices. I too was unmoved by the original performance piece. It was largely violent, involved several 'shoot outs' and Logan was the only participant with lines to speak – he had instructed the other two older girls to be silent victims within the scene. Despite my personal distaste for the original aesthetics, his investment and ownership of the material was clear. However, when the piece was recreated, the concept of a 'convict in prison' was recreated through a physical theatre sequence in which one of the girls attempted to escape the cage created by the other two students' bodies, and a rhythmic chant of 'In.' was echoed by her plea of 'Out?'.

This more abstract piece became relevant to the audience, as its ambiguity was applicable to many of their lives – and the resulting choices – told in a dance-like rhythm – were a moving piece about escape and redemption. Was this us imposing an adult aesthetic upon them? Were the Vital Spaces team asking the younger students to 'age up' as Graham-Adriani suggests, or was it a powerful lesson in finding metaphorical language to express a deeper truth? Ultimately, the facilitators and myself saw this as a successful moment, and I still feel that because the criticism came largely from other students, this was a valid and ethical moment of growth. However, Logan's discontinued involvement speaks to the dangers of disrupting student ownership of devised work, and there are concerns here about which aesthetic choices are rewarded.

Alternatively, the outreach phase of DYT contained a plethora of the opposite choice. There were several times when younger student's devised choices remained simply because of this issue of ownership and trust being so paramount. As Matt muses:

> *In one of our workshops, a devising group were working poorly together. They were stuck on a very complex idea which restricted the quality of their product, and would neither compromise nor relent. When it came to structuring all the devising groups' work together, they solidly stuck with their idea, and left it unchanged. Therefore, its inclusion reduced the quality of the final product: aesthetically, it would have been better to take it out. […] This shows that we somewhat favoured the 'social agenda' aspects of our workshops over the aesthetics. We created this 'safe space' by obeying an unwritten contract: every idea is valid, any story shared would not leave the room, and the young people could choose not to participate if any exercise made them feel uncomfortable. To have not included the aforementioned piece in the showcase would have*

broken the 'safe space' contract, which was integral to the correct functioning of our process (Pocock 2011)*.*

The clarity with which the older facilitators saw the need for 'every idea to be valid' also enriched their own experience after the Showcase event. Following the younger student's final Showcase, the six members of the Vital Spaces company devised their own piece entitled *A Play in Six Acts* which used the same strategies of devising creation they had implemented during the DYT workshops. At the Showcase, the 100 participants had written postcards to the facilitators, prompting their final piece, and after a week's intensive creation, they showed the work to the 27 members of the DYT company in a manner which echoed the devised dialogues form. This final element was perhaps the most powerful for the facilitation team, as Becky explores:

> *We did not want our piece to be distressing in anyway, but for it to demonstrate to the young people how they can use narrative from their own lives, if handled sensitively, in theatre making. For us personally, especially the two of us who had very difficult and personal scenes, this piece was not only to show how the personal can be turned into fantasy through aesthetic measures, but also for certain mastery over the personal issues we were demonstrating* (Rich 2011)*.*

This final piece aimed to ''Demonstrate an alternative aesthetic in the presentation of high risk personal narrative', and as George states,

> *Harnessing 'Standing Alone' as a through-line connecting our individual narratives, our performance propelled our audiences' through a 'Cabaret of Life'; a kaleidoscope of intensely ranging emotions presented in alternative aesthetics, for example through multimedia, puppetry, song, dance and sound. This performance affirmed to ourselves, our peers and the D.Y.T participants (who had shared their histories so honestly), that the process constituted through our workshops is valid and applicable in creating tasteful performances* (O'Neil 2011)*.*

Their final performance for the DYT Company was a powerful ending point to their journey as mentors, partners, and co-researchers in this process. The piece explored a range of theatrical languages and personal narrative topics, utilising one of the core exercises *Standing Alone* which had been delivered to all the groups during the outreach phase. This echoing-back of the process made palpable in the product was effective, and the young people who witnessed the piece then went on to devise further pieces that day, using the *Cabaret* performance and subsequent 'motor' writing as their inspiration.

This balance between process and product is one which several of the VSC facilitators found important, in their reflections and field notes. Matt reflected:

> *We looked for personal narrative in order to create a 'good product'. We hoped that the student's shared experiences would form a socially valuable piece which enacted McGrath's proposed 'transformation', delivering some truth on the condition of being a 13-19 year-old in the UK. Not only that, but we hoped the young people involved might feel an affirmation similar to that they experienced in 'Standing Alone'. Seeing their identities reflected on-stage in this 'aesthetic and emotional outlet allow[ed] for potential catharsis.' This could provide a really strong moment of affirmation. This summarises the aims of our product; we tried to create a socially valuable performance which displayed the identities of the participants, and which allowed those identities catharsis* (Pocock 2011)*.*

Matt goes on to reflect upon the fact that many of the parents and audience members seemed to see the final pieces, both at the Showcase and the final performance of *Borderline* at the Northcott, as a blend of process and product.

> *Since the product had elements of the process (the journeys of the young people, their personal narrative, the dramatic skills they had learnt) crystallised within it, perhaps the spectators focused more on these instead of the aesthetic value of the show:* **perhaps the social agenda formed part of, and actually increased, the work's artistic merit.** *The so-called tension between the two elements seems now to be more of a collaboration* (Pocock 2011, bold text my own)*.*

This mediated perception of the 'quality' of the final performance as being more worthwhile because the process which led to it had been worthwhile for the participants embodies the tension which laces through much of Applied Theatre. As Matt refers to it, this 'collaboration' is a heady brew – and one which makes for powerful viewing for the audience. The DYT Company had written several original songs, one of which was used as the final aesthetic choice in the performance. Singing the original lyrics/music, accompanied by a piano, the young people stepped forward over a white line which stretched across the front of the stage. As they crossed over it, and stepped up into the centre aisle of the audience, they sang,

> *You are yourself and yourself alone.*
> *One spirit, one soul, one body, no clone.*
> *You are yourself and yourself alone.*
> *How do we get through to them?*

At the final performance of *Borderline*, the administrative head of DAISI was unable to speak at first during her post-show speech because she was choked up with emotion. This immediacy for the near-and-dear audience however, was difficult for me as a researcher and practitioner to celebrate because of the lack of an outside audience. Despite the increased size/scale/scope of this project, the marketing had failed to permeate assumptions about 'youth theatre' being for a select audience only. Additionally, as I will explore in Chapter V, there were unseen themes and under-realised dialogical intentions which the young people had hoped to make clear within the piece. These absent elements were the starting provocation for the last Vital Spaces project, and this shift in intentionality again is mirrored by a shift in this thesis. I will conclude this chapter by reflecting back upon the first two years of work, before embarking on the fifth and final chapter which interrogates explicitly dialogic participatory theatre work.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored key praxis points which emerged within the Vital Spaces PAR research. The findings from the first two years increasingly prompted questions about three core concerns within young people's participatory performance: site, intentions, and audience.

The projects conducted at the Apple and Central youth centres prompted concerns about site as a powerfully coded space, and exemplified why interrogating notions of youth identity and grounded aesthetics are ethically problematic in sites such as youth centres. Increasingly within the PAR work, more conventional theatre spaces began to be seen as a site where Paul Willis's 'suspension of the given' in young people's lived experience could be actualised. This was particularly true in the development of the *Proof of Identity* devised work, which managed to raise questions about youth identity far more powerfully within theatre studios. The 'adventure or promise' Willis describes was best realised in arts-devoted spaces, where there was greater freedom (1990, 101). I am not advocating that theatre spaces are the only site where the given can be suspended, and I would hasten to add that long-term, sustained, integrated partnerships with youth centres could be rich ground for future development of young people's participatory theatre work. However, given the restrictions of funding and existing economic climate for youth

services and arts workers, this suggested model seems a long way off. Additionally, it seems important to point out that asking young people to attend/access a theatre space may well help to ensure they genuinely want to participate, but it also eliminates the potential for young people to discover an unexpected interest in theatre within their usually frequented sites, or for those with restrictions up on their access to take part. There is no perfect solution here.

Concerns about intention – whether unspoken, underlying or explicit – also became a powerful praxis point over the first two years of work. Again at the Apple and Central youth centres, there were moments of dissonance and negotiation between facilitators, institutions and the young people. The resulting questions are important ones for future work: what 'deeply subterranean' ideological values (Balfour 2009, 357) may be invisible at first glance? What if the young people's agenda is different than the research agenda? What if the facilitator is really steering the work toward her/his own interests, and the young people's involvement is actually coerced or manipulated to appear participatory? Andy Watson terms the necessary contribution as a very light touch on the part of a facilitator, which I increasingly began to identify as good *pedagogy*, rather than good artistry. Maybe it was both.

Lastly, misgivings about audience composition and expectations emerged within the later projects. Within the performances of *Borderline* and *Proof of Identity*, questions emerged such as: what is this practice supposed to 'look like'? Who listens to it, and what limits it from being a wider audience? How do you start a conversation if no one acknowledges you are speaking? The devised dialogues within *Proof of Identity* and *Borderline* were powerful, pedagogically rich models of Gooch's 'conversation between equals', but they were also profoundly insular. They could not move outward, or expand the conversation to others who might need to hear what was being said - it was young people speaking to themselves, about themselves. This was useful, but it felt that more was needed, based on the absence of important conversations within the early Vital Spaces work.

The first two years of Vital Spaces research were marked by a set of missing, absent or under-realised dialogues between young people and the adults who surrounded them. There were conversations that needed to happen

here, and for a variety of reasons we were not prepared to facilitate them. With these frustrations in mind, I now wish to interrogate the ways in which the youth participatory projects may or may not be successfully dialogic with regard to facilitating conversations between young people and other populations, and to look at this within a pilot model which was developed over the two months following *Borderline*.

With the participation of four volunteer secondary students from the DYT ensemble, and 15 undergraduates from within the drama department, the final practical component for the Vital Spaces project was a touring production called *On Our Terms*. The piece aimed explicitly to reach audiences which wouldn't seek out youth theatre performances, travelling to youth and community centres, schools, and Devon County Council's own offices to open up conversations around issues which impact young people's lives. This explicitly dialogic model drew on the curricular materials described in this chapter, and overtly built conversation into the structure of the theatre pieces using various pedagogical models. This pedagogical rooting and resulting hybrid performance style were unevenly realised within the piece, but I wish to examine its successes and failures separately, as it seems to indicate potentials for future dialogic participatory work. The final chapter of this thesis will discuss in greater depth the quality and consistency of dialogue which permeated *On Our Terms*, including the ways in which concepts of youth identity were explored at the various sites with a diversified audience.

Chapter V
Internal and external dialogue about youth identity within participatory theatre

> What seems to recommend dialogue as a pedagogy is its capacity for active participation by all parties; its room for the co-construction of understanding or knowledge that can be negotiated between the perspectives of different members; its critical potential, which allows for not only questioning "within" the dialogue, but questioning its very terms and assumptions; and its open-endedness, its capacity for continuing and expanding the conversation to include multiple voices and perspectives - indeed, for many purposes, actively seeking them out (Burbules 2000, 257).

This concluding chapter will explore the final Vital Spaces project, specifically examining the ways in which dialogue emerged and was sustained, and which literacies it utilised. Specifically, this chapter will examine the ways in which theatrical languages may have created a space where alternative codes were possible, legitimate and granted an authority they might not have elsewhere. I will explore the moments within this final project which touched upon the dialogic, exposing sites where multiple literacies were (or could have been) implemented.

As explored in Chapter III, dialogue and literacy are vast and contested terms from across a variety of disciplines, and the critical conversation within performance studies is emergent. Because of this scale and scope, it is important to state from the outset that I cannot examine a full exploration of dialogue as a concept, but will instead critically utilise a pedagogical understanding of the dialogic, supported and bolstered by the scholarship from within critical pedagogy, and in particular to Nicholas Burbules and Elizabeth Ellsworth's writings on the situated nature of specific dialogical exchange as a key element of pedagogy (Burbules 1993; Burbules and Rice 1991; Burbules and Bruce 2001; Burbules 2000; Ellsworth 1997; Ellsworth 1992). This is not, under any circumstances, an attempt to theorise dialogic theatre as a field. Rather, it is a grounded and reflective set of praxis points from our experience of devising and touring the final Vital Spaces piece.

Project impetus and aims:

Whilst all the Participatory Action Research undertaken in support of this dissertation has included dialogic elements, the final piece entitled *On Our*

Terms encapsulates some of the richest possibilities and most plaguing challenges of this model of working. I will use it as a vehicle to explore more fully how processes of dialogue permeated the earliest studio stages all the way through the performances (and beyond) and what I feel to be the potentials of such practice in terms of working with young people. The efficacy of this final project will be evaluated, not through behavioural adjustments within the young participants, but within the quality of dialogue and critical reflection which emerged from the work.

The final project was undertaken with the specific aim of what I am calling 'dialogic outcomes', and I freely admit that these emerged from my own agenda and background as a teacher and researcher. In this respect, it marked a clear departure from the previous Vital Spaces work which had (at times accidentally) opened opportunities for dialogue, but not explicitly facilitated it as part of the artistic content. At the start of the *On Our Terms* project, these outcomes were not yet articulated as a specific set of goals, but simply as the aim of opening conversations with those in positions of power.

This clarity of intention and the impetus for the project were crystallized during the final moments of Devon Youth Theatre's *Borderline* performance in April 2011. The *Borderline* piece was planned to end with an 'Audience talk-back', which was to be facilitated by Liz Hill, the executive in charge of DAISI in Devon County Council. As was explored in Chapter IV, the piece had included some complex themes, including the politically charged issue of the budget cut received by the Northcott Theatre as well as the more domestic/identity-laden themes of a tense friendships, young love, and family strife. However, during the talk-back session, the adults involved in the project (myself, choreographer Pip Jones, and music director Meg Searle) were invited down onto the stage to participate. The young performers had just taken their curtain call, the house lights were brought up, and Liz informed the audience that we would be staying for a short 'conversation' about the process of devising the piece.

This conversation primarily took the form of a mini-lecture, in which Liz described the working process to an audience composed almost entirely of family members and friends of the cast. The few questions raised by the audience were mostly directed to myself and the other adults, and the young people became silent (talked-about) figures on the stage, at the end of their performance.

Additionally, it became clear that the audience was appreciative of the physical forms used in the show (often referred to as 'dancing') but that they had not perceived the political messages of the piece as being about economic concerns and arts budget cuts, but rather about young people growing up and gaining independence from their families. In other words, the narrative sub-plot involving the puppeteer and the puppet (intended by the cast to represent the theatre and its funding body, the Arts Council) was seen as a metaphor for a teenager and their parent. Certainly within the larger context of the piece, which included themes about young love and adolescence, this was a merited reading, but it was not the original intention of the performers and it left us with a number of questions about audience, dialogue and young people's devised artistic content. Based on these questions, I invited five former DYT members to participate with ten university students on a short extension project which would tour Devon during the university's third term, in April, May and June 2011.

Perhaps it is fair to say that is was my own perceptions of the failures of both internal (studio process) dialogue and the lack of genuine external (performance-based) dialogue that prompted *On Our Terms*, but I wish to be clear that this was an experiment, and the work responded to the young people's interests first and foremost. *On Our Terms* in many respects failed as an attempt at in-depth external dialogue. I will attempt to probe the most resonant moments of failure to explore the potentials of such work, and to interrogate what effective external dialogue might look like within young people's performance practice. Certainly with *Borderline*, the proscenium space was not configured to facilitate a conversation, but within the development of *On Our Terms*, the ensemble actively worked to create a more fluid, interactive and participatory space which made such intentions clear from the moment the performance began.

In this chapter, I will build upon the pedagogical frame established in Chapter III and draw with greater specificity upon a few key theorists of critical pedagogy who explore elements of internal and external dialogue. This chapter will reference in particular Mikhail Bakhtin, Lev Vygostky and critical pedagogue Nicholas Burbules to situate and ground the PAR practice. In his extensive writings, Burbules has both advocated for and critiqued the link between dialogue and critical pedagogy, pointing out that the conversational process itself is certainly not neutral and can be profoundly coercive, problematic, and

anti-liberatory. His critiques have included recommendations that dialogue which aims to work as a form of critical pedagogy needs to be a 'situated practice' rather than a 'decontextualised pedagogy' (Burbules 2000, 261). Burbules advocates that this situated practice name explicitly 'the particulars of who, when, where and how the dialogue takes place' (2000, ibid). His writings are important because of the way in which he and other critical pedagogues have called for alternative models of dialogue which look specifically at the 'situated, relational, material circumstances' (Burbules 2000, 264). This chapter will explore Burbules' 'who, when, where and how' of the *On Our Terms* process, and ask questions about how the re-framing of the dialogic within the young people's rules and expectations at various sites may have helped to ensure a pedagogically rich structure.

In his analysis, Burbules points out that *how* a dialogue occurs has bearing upon the pedagogical possibilities, including the importance of embodiment. In a call which seems specifically relevant to the field of performance studies, he states, '[...] in an immediate, face-to-face circumstance, these "texts" include not only the words themselves, but facial expressions, gestures, and similar representational forms' (Burbules 2000, 264). This chapter will attempt to explore some of the ways in which embodied practice prompted a non-verbal version of dialogue. Even more importantly, it will explore the ways in which written interactions are powerfully coded sites, as Burbules also points out: 'Yet dialogue often also takes place in mediated forms: a dialogue between a book's reader and its author; a dialogue between correspondents writing to one another; a dialogue over a telephone; a dialogue through e-mail; and so on' (Burbules 2000, 264). This emphasis on the mediated dialogues which make performance work possible is resonant with my own emphasis on multiple literacies (see Chapter III).

On Our Terms was devised over a four week period in April and May 2011. The impetus for the project also arose from a marked desire from the young participants to engage in more intensive cross-ages work between the secondary students and the undergraduates - on equal footing as co-artists. Initially proposed as an 'Act of Translation' between young people and those in positions of power and authority,[52] the project adopted a touring model

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52 As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, by 'positions of power and authority', I mean simply people who are in positions to make decisions which impact on young people's lives. This included school

and was billed as an interactive performance. Ultimately, the piece performed seven times - four times in secondary schools, twice in youth centres, and once at Devon County Hall.

Unheeded literacies

The work aimed to start a conversation between young people and those in positions of power, and to create an artistic space within traditionally territorialised sites, such as youth clubs or county hall offices. The sites for performance were determined through a series of emails and phone calls between the project's Booking Manager, an 18-year old university first year student, myself as a mediating agent, and various public sector officials, school employees, and youth workers. This process of booking the site-specific performances involved a clearly demarcated (hierarchical) set of codes and language choices, and the success rate we found with student contact versus my own contact as a PhD researcher revealed differences in the seriousness with which we were taken by the prospective sites. Kate Welsh, the Booking Manager, kept a detailed log of her attempts at communication and some excerpts are included in the appendices of this chapter.

Contrary to the *Borderline* project, which was primarily marketed and administrated by adults (with the exception of a few young people involved in internships), the extension project was almost exclusively administered by the young participants, and my involvement occurred under duress when it became apparent that the young people's contact was not being taken seriously. In honouring the difficulties encountered in booking the piece through the young people's communication, I wish to explore three forms of pedagogically-rich dialogue which occurred throughout the project: the internal dialogue which took place during the rehearsal studio sessions amongst the performers themselves, the facilitation of external dialogue within the performance structure involving the invited audience, and also the digital and phone contact necessary to mark such work out as 'legitimate' theatre practice. Each of these forms of dialogue required a different set of languages and codes, and it is this shift in tactics and communication style (literacies) which begins to fulfil elements of a critical pedagogy within the work. As Burbules reiterates, 'The tendency of previous

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headteachers, police, parents, local councillors, youth workers and those employed by the local authority within Children and Young People's Services.

accounts of dialogue has been to ignore such factors or [...] to relegate them to trivial significance...' (Burbules 2000, 264).

As discussed in Chapter III, Bakhtin's emphasis on heteroglossia and the arguments of educational lobbyists like Lisa Delpit echo here – the necessary literacies required to create a project like this include an understanding of certain codes which operate within a culture of power - in this case within the various sites of the local authority. These codes include well-worded emails, certain tones and expression in phone calls, and a recognizable status/label from the artist(s) who create the work. Delpit describes this verbal literacy as 'discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow [...] success in the larger society' (Delpit 1995: 28-29). Without these elements in place, the artistry never makes it to the sites. In this case, the cultural capital of the young people involved in the project matters, and despite a competent and highly literate set of skills demonstrated by Kate, response was limited to the student contacts.[53] Delpit's advocacy for explicit teaching of these skills within critical pedagogy is grounded on an understanding that they are a 'reactive, alive, fluctuating set of critical and cultural literacy tactics' which need to be grounded in an understanding of social justice and inequality (Delpit 1995, 44–45).

I wish to point out that the 15 performers of *On Our Terms* were (in varying degrees) all capable students, from relatively middle class homes, who were able to access the necessary public transport and whose parents were sufficiently supportive and able to permit their involvement. The young people at the various sites we travelled to represent a much wider range of socio-economic backgrounds and cultural/social capital (Bourdieu 1984). These differences mattered, and in my later discussion of the 'failures' of the external dialogue, I will explore the ways in which dialogical exchange was more or less possible at various sites.

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53 In retrospect, I now refer to this a 'bureaucratic literacy', and the experience Kate encountered in *On Our Terms* suggests that more than just a basic skill set is necessary. The contact points at various schools and local authority offices were unwilling to engage with her despite a clear competence, and upon reflection, I would argue that this was motivated by low expectation and a trivializing of the work, based on it being a 'student' theatre piece. When I began to contact the organisations, the titles of 'PhD Researcher' and 'Artistic Director' suddenly opened doors, despite very similar codes and languages being used in the emails and phone calls. Clearly there are issues here with social status.

Theoretical and practical contexts

In retrospect, I am now able to see this PAR project as part of a wider field of practice, which I have already described in Chapter III, and will continue to term 'dialogic performance'. This is a container-term, one which can hold a diverse range of theatrical, mediated, and performative practices which aim to cultivate dialogue – either as a part of their creation process, or as an outcome of a performance with an audience. I retroactively qualify *On Our* Terms as a dialogic model in contrast to *Borderline,* which does not fit within that category because the intention of the work was not explicitly to start a conversation.

The talk-back tacked onto the end of the performance was not enough to merit a dialogic intention, and it would have to have been much more carefully constructed and facilitated in order to do so. Additionally, the physical arrangement of the space within a proscenium arch severely limited the possibilities, even if there had been an intention to turn the talk-back into a conversation. Certainly there are models of theatrical practice which can utilize a talk-back session as an effective means of facilitating dialogue with an audience[54], but in the case of the *Borderline* piece, the session was not created as a holistic part of the performance, nor was it handled as an effective democratic space in which to open up conversations. Instead, it became a tokenistic and somewhat uncomfortable space in which the adults talked *about* the young people, thereby negating some of the creative agency demonstrated within the devised work which had just been witnessed.

What the Vital Spaces team hoped to explore, then, with *On Our Terms* was a model which placed its very criteria for success upon the dialogic elements. This meant that the artistry would be inextricably interwoven with the importance of dialogue, and that each creative choice would be plaited with dialogic intent. Grant Kester's book Conversation Pieces critically evaluates 'dialogical aesthetics', drawing upon his expertise as a theorist of visual art. Kester posits that the work actually measures its success within the quality of the dialogue that emerges:

> An alternative approach would require us to locate the moment
> of indeterminateness, of open-ended and liberatory possibility,

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54 For some international Theatre-in-Education examples of some of this best practice, refer to Jackson, A. (2007). Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

not in the perpetually changing form of the artwork qua object, but *in the very process of communication that the artwork catalyses.* This requires two important shifts. First, we need a more nuanced account of communicative experience: one capable of differentiating between an abstract, objectifying mode of discourse that is insensitive to the specific identities of speaking subjects [...] and a dialogical exchange based on reciprocal openness (Kester 2004, 90, italics my own).

This notion of reciprocal openness is often repeated in discussions of the dialogic. As a pre-existing principle of dialogue, the participants are willing to engage both in genuine conversation, but also remain open to the possibility of having their opinions and beliefs altered within the exchange... not through reasoned debate (courtroom style conversation) but through a kind of empathetic listening. Creating an environment which is conducive to this sort of communication is part of the artist's task.

Theatre making which intentionally aims to provoke, cultivate, nurture, and sustain conversations potentially has a different set of aesthetic/success criteria. It demonstrates both an alternative model for evaluation within Applied Drama and a space where reciprocity between audience and performer is as integral to the aesthetic impact as the performance elements themselves. Dialogic art is as much about the art of the dialogue as the art of the art object itself. Certainly an artistic emphasis on the quality of dialogue echoes elements of the TIE and educational drama pedagogical ethos, but curiously the current literature around dialogic art doesn't often refer to these connection points.

There is of course an alternative perspective; isn't all art somehow dialogic? And what happens to the quality of the work if artists start to focus only on the dialogue and not on the artistry? As Wayne Winborne articulated at a conference on civic arts-based dialogue, 'It's fascinating that artists experience this angst. If you make good art, it will stimulate dialogue. A good facilitator will get it there. You don't have to worry about whether you should represent all voices in the art... the dialogue folks can handle that stuff.' (Lacy 2001, 11). The phrase 'good art' conceals complex hierarchical issues, embedded with cultural capital and access to particular codes, languages and education.

And ultimately, anyway, this is all an exercise in naming.

Whatever we call it (and each new naming functions to further discourse), this art is fundamentally a process of research and exploration. In an important way, such art is not about language

per se, but about the space language takes place in, about speakers and their relationship to each other, and about the direction, intention, and effects of the conversation. It is about values and listening and inclusion (Lacy 2001, 11).

There are unique challenges and possibilities in undertaking this kind of work with young people. By implementing the lens of critical pedagogy with a specific focus on elements of dialogue and literac(ies), the Vital Spaces work places its potential efficacy in a frame which excludes questions of behavioural change or self-esteem improvement. These outcomes may well have been by-products of the work. However, by asking questions about 'the space language takes place in' and about the 'direction, intention and effects of the conversation', we frame the artistic process within a different set of questions about young people and about young people's art.

The process of making *On Our Terms*

The final piece was created over eight studio sessions, four of which were attended by both secondary students and university students. The limitations of the secondary school schedule and public transport access within South Devon meant that the younger participants were only able to attend half the rehearsals. In fact, the public transit concerns ultimately meant that one secondary student had to drop out of the project, and another was only able to attend one performance.[55] This meant that the studio sessions varied in size between 12 and 15 participants, ranging in age from 15 to 22.

The project began with a consultation session in which the group discussed which themes they would most like to explore with a more diverse audience than they'd managed to access with *Borderline*. The group was interested by the possibility of opening up conversations around issues that affect young people, and the current economic climate continued to be of pressing concern. The outcome of this consultation session was that the piece would be a touring and interactive performance, which specifically went to sites that might not be gathering spaces for young people or might not be regular sites for people in positions of power/authority.

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55 In this respect, I wish to be very clear that the short-term, one-off, small-scale format of *On Our Terms* is not in any way a best practice model. Certainly some of the challenges we encountered around bureaucratic language and site could have been alleviated if the project took place over a longer time frame, with sustained contact to the various sites. But as a pilot project, it demonstrates some useful learning points, albeit as a microcosm for larger issues.

The key questions which emerged were: what is it to be a 'youth' in Britain today? What about that label feels comfortable or uncomfortable? Why? What do you want/need to say to people in positions of power and authority? How would you like to come into contact and exchange ideas with them? With these key questions, a project frame was developed - a touring model, an interactive piece which contained more workshop elements than performative elements. The final piece was complexly hybrid - bringing together practices from the field of education, Applied Theatre, physical theatre, and public consultation strategies.

This final structure of the piece was a product of the studio practice, and ultimately not determined until the last two rehearsals. The majority of studio time was spent exploring the questions above through theatrical exercises which prompted internal dialogue – and intentionally worked to move between an internal process in the participants' own heads, and a voiced, embodied or written set of dialogues. These dialogues were characterised by a tension between resistance to the impending realities of adult responsibility and a yearning for the full title of adulthood. The primary themes which emerged within these processes were about entanglement, performing many selves, and hedonism/play. These themes did not all translate with equal weight into the final piece, and this process of mediating and negotiating themes was part of the internal dialogue of the group. It is this process which I wish to explore more fully here.

Internal dialogue

The phrase 'internal dialogue' is most often used within dialogue theory which draws on Mikhail Bakhtin. To fully explore Bakhtin's theories of dialogue would require another thesis entirely, but it does seem vital to point out the ways in which his notions of internal dialogue are echoed by critical pedagogues. Bakhtinian dialogue models characterize two 'perpendicular activities' which occur in the human psyche constantly: those of horizontal relationships, which involve engaging with other people 'in specific speech acts' and those of vertical relationships, which can be viewed as internal work between the outer world and your own psyche. The vertical relationship leads to a sense of 'inner speech', which in turn, leads to an inner life which mirrors outer social discourse

(Bakhtin 1981; Emerson 1986, 209). To put it simply, we make meaning of the world through a set of imagined conversations we have inside our own heads.

Drawing on similar notions from within psychology, the educational theorist Lev Vygotsky saw the word as *'the* significant humanizing event' and considered it a tool for identity formation. 'One makes a self through the words one has learned, fashions one's own voice and inner speech by a selective appropriation of the voices of others' (Emerson 1986b, 215; Vygotsky 1986). For the development of *On Our Terms*, the studio sessions experimented with a range of methods to encourage, enliven, and make vocal this sense of inner dialogue.

The *On Our Terms* studio process encouraged dialogue in two ways within our studio sessions: both inside each individual's head and within the small (relatively safe) ensemble of devising performers. The individual internal dialogue was brought into the space through free writing and oral riffing[56], both of which intended to make the participants' internal dialogue audible within the room with regard to the topics of 'youth' and 'performing identity'. In this sense, this process of individual internal dialogue could be defined pedagogically as a type of self-talk.

According to educational psychologists, self-talk is a common practice with younger children, but it is a tactic which diminishes throughout childhood development, and tends to be virtually non-existent within adolescents without developmental disabilities. This does alter slightly within stressful or high-need situtations, as can be seen in Vygotsky's work which demonstrated that a younger child's self-talk doubled when 'presented with obstacles' (Emerson 1986, 214). This silenced dialogue could be viewed as an inaudible process which studio practice attempted to make more audible.

> In Vygotsky's model of language acquisition, a child's first speech of social words evoke specific responses and must be reinforced by adults. Only gradually does language assume the role of a 'second signal system', that is, become for the child an indirect way of affecting his environment. When it does, his speech differentiates into two separate though interlocking systems: one continues to adjust to the external world and

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56 Oral riffing is a concept drawn from the notion of 'blues riffing' within improvisational jazz music. It uses short prompts and bursts of timed solo speech within the studio to allow participants to speak without thinking or censoring their speech. This is a common tactic in improvisational theatre, but the phrase used here is one I've developed within my own practice.

emerges as adult social speech; *the other system begins to 'internalize' and becomes by degrees a personal language,* greatly abbreviated and predicative (Emerson 1986, 214, italics my own).

Vocalising self-talk into the studio space required a degree of trust, and a certain degree of self-confidence on the part of the participants. Power in the rehearsal space was a regularly negotiated concern, manifesting both in the form of my power as project coordinator, but also in the power difference between the university students who were rehearsing in their own studio spaces, and the secondary students who had to travel to the site and were somewhat unsure about their own skill level and confidence. My role in this consultation session and in the early rehearsal sessions was that of a question-asker and a prompt-poser. Here, the sustained relationship amongst all participants that existed over the previous five months was helpful in allowing the work to begin from a deeper place of both trust and content. Still, there were developmental differences within the group's age ranges: from 15 to 22. Within the studio, the presence of the adult facilitator and the 'more capable peers' represented by the university students both became assets and problems in facilitating healthy internal dialogue (Piaget and Inhelder 1969).

For the first three sessions, I created a challenge or a prompt which they would attempt to answer either through written flow writing, oral 'riffing' (the same kind of flow process, but with the spoken word rather than the scribed word) or through scene/devised pieces which were then performed for group feedback following the rehearsal processes set in place during DYT. Themes about youth were the starting point, and they were asked to respond about what the word youth elicited for themselves, internally, and then to explore those responses through theatrical languages. This process of translation into theatrical languages is key to the pedagogy being explored here. In the act of creatively embodying or re-telling their self-talk the participants were not aiming for dramatherapy, but for a kind of communication that might be understandable by an external audience but still owned by the young people themselves.

This kind of ownership is not inherent to the process. Even the most thoughtful and respectful of studio environments cannot ensure all participants are equally comfortable and able to voice their honest responses to the prompts. For some of the secondary students, these questions were not natural ones to consider, and they found them difficult to answer. The fact that the

thematic agenda had been primarily set by the university students (who, it is worth noting, had been involved with Vital Spaces for three years and had a clear idea of the research agenda) may have imposed concepts which were developmentally a step advanced for the 15 and 16-year old performers. However, the process of their internal dialogue throughout the eight studio sessions was visible, and a particular example from the youngest participant (Heather)[57] helps to elucidate this.

The process of exploring many selves and the ways in which we perform them was scaffolded within the first devising session through low-stakes activities which progressively became more and more high-focus within the group (Baim, Brookes, and Mountford 2002). The first prompt given was a written one, building on the skill-set they'd developed as participants and facilitators in DYT. They were asked to 'flow-write' in response to the question 'How many selves do you have?'. The following prompt, which elicited more response, was 'Which self is the easiest? Which is 'most you'?' Various responses included:

> **Field Notes Excerpt:**
> *Rachael: No matter how responsible I am, I'm still not independent. As in, I don't pay for my living, the government does. Does that make me a youth? I asked my house mate recently because I've been thinking about this a lot- he said I'm already grown up. (Laughter, Josh said 'You are!' More laughter.) When I stop to think about it, I do usually wear this sort of hat of responsibility. So if I'm a grown-up, is it a personality or a behaviour? Does it matter how I see myself, or how other people see me?*
>
> *Piers: Childhood was definitely the easiest self to be. I have a certain kind of 'back in the day' nostalgia for childhood – mine was pretty brilliant, really. Yeah, like, lots of running through cornfields, very innocent. (Laughter) So then when I came to uni, there was, uhh, this, ummm, reinvention. Having to create a self with new people - first impressions. Yeah, my self at uni was a completely new self. (Emma: Me too.)*
>
> *Stephanie: I keep thinking about audiences of my life and how that makes certain identities become sort of habitual, maybe because the audience expects it. It becomes really difficult to eradicate that certain habit, get rid of it – you would almost have to arrange for different crowds. I often find myself hiding behind jokes, in order to scare them off.*

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57 A pseudonym.

> *Kate: When people first meet me, I think they see me as very organised, very unemotional, but there's a more emotional side to me. A very caring, motherly role. I'm really fascinated by why and how people tick. The way we are constantly performing to each other. Really like the kind of passing in the hallway moment – when we're all, hiya, hiya, hiya (nods her head) to each other, but none of it actually matters. None of it actually checks in with anyone. I could be having the worst day ever, but no one would know.*

The written responses were read out in a 'share circle', using curriculum techniques from creative writing teachers who self-identify as critical pedagogues (Christensen 2000; Au, Bigelow, and Karp 2007). The participants are told at the start of the exercise that they will be asked to share an excerpt of their final written piece, but they can decide how much. It can be a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or the whole piece of writing. Most of the university students elected to read large portions or the entire text, with the secondary students selecting one or two sentences. Heather read a short phrase from her piece: 'Who am I?' Typically in my facilitation and teaching experience, when a participant chooses a short vague excerpt to share, it is often a sign that s/he is reticent or lacks confidence in terms of sharing their own thoughts with the group. At the time Heather elected to only share this tiny phrase, I interpreted the minimalism as a sign of low confidence. However, a studio process which implemented oral variations on flow writing revealed the individual internal dialogue to be very different from my perception as the group facilitator.

From this phase, the work was bumped up a level to be high focus, whilst still relatively low-stakes. The exercise Interruptive Monologues is one I've developed out of 'shifting' work used by choreographer Ruth Zaporah in her Action Theatre exercises (Zaporah 1995). The exercise asks that participants keep speaking until interrupted by another performer, and these vocal interruptions are embodied through a sudden physical spin. The improvisational and ensemble-based form means that no one is the centre of attention for a long period of time and that they can select the level of disclosure they feel comfortable with. This kind of activity often elicits very different responses to flow-writing, which has lower focus but higher stakes. It can veer from comedic and silly to quiet intimacy. In this particular case, it

created a forum where one of the youngest participants was able to speak more honestly, and in Heather's case, the shift in theatrical language tapped into a deeper understanding of her own self-talk.

***Field Notes Excerpt from Interruptive Monologues:
Second Prompt: How do you perform these selves?***

Piers: Singing in the shower. (He demonstrates) (General laughter)

Josh: Oh, God, it was definitely meeting my girlfriend's parents. I wanted them to like me so much. I've never been that nervous, it was like I had to be my very best self, so unnatural.

Emma: When I was dancing all the time, that was the label, you know? It was this kind of security, a constant identity that I was safe inside. EP does ballet. That's who she is.

Rosalie: People think I'm performing when I don't mean to. I'm just being, you know, usual me, and they think I'm putting on some kind of act. I hate that.

Matt: I find it hard sometimes, reconciling all the different parts of myself - some old friends just came to stay, I hadn't thought about myself as changing in a long time, not since I moved away to uni. I've only been looking out, not looking in. But being around them again, I've been so aware of the ways that I've changed in the last year. It was like I had to pretend to be the old me. It's like, in order to meet yourself, you have to forget yourself.

Kate: It's so tiring, performing self. I'd rather just be going 'ummmmmm...' (general laughter)

Becky: I don't really know who myself is...there's this one particular stuffed dinosaur on my bed. He's called Howard. Sometimes I speak through him. Is that one of my selves?

Rosalie: I think about performing as in on stage. When I'm up there, I can't hear myself, not when I'm performing. I'm not even shouting. I don't realise I'm being really loud. When you sing it feels like there's a complete wall between you and the audience.

Alex: Sometimes I can't be bothered to make an effort. I just can't be asked.

Heather: I don't, really.

Erin's Field Notes: Heather responded to the question 'How do you perform these various selves?' by a sort of confused silence and a shrug. She found the question really difficult to answer, and seemed still to feel intimidated by being in the studio with a group of older students. Her final response was 'I don't, really,' to which I responded 'Okay, brilliant. Thank you for being honest in response.' I don't think this response would have come out at all if we hadn't moved into oral improv, rather than written.

Her decision to provide a different response showed courage (she was the youngest participant in the group) and I think she read it as 'not understanding the question', based on her lack of confidence in delivering the response. However, the deviation from the university student's thoughtful and potentially overly-critical responses was refreshing and blunt. She simply didn't feel that she *did* perform various selves...

These moments of non-response are important – the quality of the prompt question was one which the university students readily took to, but the secondary students found quite difficult to answer. The messy, overlapping, interrupting, multi-voiced studio process also potentially made it difficult for the younger participants to get their voice heard. Interruptive monologues evened the playing field a bit, and asked for their contributions in a different way.

Outcomes from these various forms of dialogue were always expressed in an artistic form -so that regardless of the nature of the conversations, all sessions were moving toward theatrical languages, rather than seated dialogue. The words and concepts were continually in a process of being embodied, or metaphor-developed, or turned into poetry. This meaning-making moved back and forth from a cognitive understanding of the material to an artistic or metaphorical conception. Young participants posed themselves questions, mulled them over in dialogic conversation, and then explored them in artistic practice.

Archiving & necessary omissions

As the facilitator and now the researcher exploring this messy studio interaction, the pressing question for me is: how do you capture this process? Or even these moments – as described above. Thus far in my work, I had resisted the now relatively common devising practice of bringing a video camera

into the rehearsal space.[58] Reasons for this were manifold – including the stack of additional ethics permission forms it would entail, but also more directly because of the alienating impact and loss of intimacy/privacy which is necessary for a healthy studio space. At best, the field notes serve as a sort of archive of the 'residue' – the bits of internal dialogue which became externalised through writing or flow exercises like Interruptive Monologues. One of the rehearsal tactics we used in the studio was the use of a company book. Our 'Green Book' was a conscious attempt to hold onto internal processes, without the gaze of a video camera lens. This certainly is not a perfect science and often meant I wandered around after each session picking up crumpled sheets of notepaper and shoving them into the book. But ultimately what gets kept is what gets written down.

Similarly, what gets carried on into the final production is a process of distilling and forgetting, of reinventing and leaving out. Most of the internal dialogue of the rehearsal process never makes it into the final performance. A full separation of the process and the product is a false dichotomy, however, and I'm not going to delve into the oft-repeated debate about drama versus theatre or process versus product. For the devising of *On Our Terms*, the conversations which took place within the head space of each participant, between them in small groups, and within the ensemble all informed the final piece, although perhaps not in clearly visible ways. The questions asked in the studio were ultimately the questions we were trying to ask through the interactive performance of our audience. The internal dialogue was not always appropriate to translate into external dialogue. Within devised theatre practice, sometimes it is the things you leave out that are most interesting. Mia Perry explores the ways in which this process of devising is pedagogically rich:

> In this way, devised theatre in education can support pedagogy by opening up the spaces of living experience and relationality, by exposing the self in relation to pedagogy and always in motion (Ellsworth, 2005). The creating/performing self can react to, respond to, and rupture pathways of embodied inquiry, mapping a process of learning in resistance to, but in the

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58 For an interesting exploration of this, please refer to Graham, S. and S. Hoggett (2009). The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre. Abingdon, Routledge. In this excellent source text, the artistic directors explore their adaptation of technology within the devising studio and explore the benefits which have resulted in a now regular-reliance on video cameras to preserve the devising process (Graham and Hoggett 2009).

context of, the "endpoints" of knowledge and curriculum (Perry 2010, 157–158).

In order to respond to the ideas which arose in the devising process, a necessary fluidity and malleability within the rehearsal space became essential. The imperative of responsiveness meant that it was impossible to prescribe a set rehearsal schedule, and given the short time frame for developing the work, this could have prompted stress both in terms of marketing and completing the piece. The frame of dialogic and devised practice requires, however, that this fluidity be nurtured and that apparent tangents and deviations are vital moments of exploration. Being responsive to the ways in which self-talk was vocalised and evolved into dialogue was key to my role as a facilitator. At times, this meant that the content of rehearsals could appear to contain 'wasted time' from a conventional theatrical standpoint.

> *Field Note example: One week we abstained from the planned studio work, and the young people engaged in a 90-minute dialogue about hedonism, excess, and binge drinking, prompted by the previous night's events and some lingering worries about the behaviours they were seeing amongst their friends. This would not have happened within the studio space, had it not been a prime example of 'performing youth', the previous rehearsal's theme. The young people were clearly puzzling over their lived or grounded experience of the concepts being explored in the studio. This praxis needed to enter into our rehearsal space, and I willingly sacrificed the previous plan and gave the session over to it.*

This conversation could never have been pre-engineered, and it was not directly utilised within the final performance piece, as the subjects discussed were later termed to be too 'personal' by the participants and possibly of a tangential subject to the overall aims of the piece.   This Hedonism Conversation, as I later termed it in my field notes, was resonant, relevant and timely as a rehearsal strategy, and perhaps most importantly, as a piece of internal dialogue for the participants involved.   This was by no means dramatherapy – there was no overt 'working through' feelings or group support in a therapeutic way, nor was my role as a counsellor, but rather as a question-poser and a listener. These individual and small-group dialogues create what Grant Kester refers to as ensemble solidarity - through the question asking of the lead artist (solidarity creation) and the subsequent dialogues which emerge within the collaborators (solidarity enhancement) (Kester 2004, 115–116). The

Hedonism Conversation was an example of solidarity enhancement, and its purpose proved to be simply that and no more. Kester argues that these kinds of dialogue create levels of empathetic insight, which lead into the potentially counter-hegemonic dialogue which results from a larger external audience.

The conversation covered vast ground, from the performative nature of the club dance floor to the various roles played during a typical night out. There was potentially rich theatrical material here, but the final performance was intended to start 'serious conversations' with people in positions of power, and the ensemble determined that the ideas explored here were not relevant and potentially damaging to their ability to open up dialogue about issues of concern. The stereotypes around youth and partying are rife, particularly in the media, and there was a marked desire from within the ensemble to not pander to any stereotypical images of 'youth' but rather to unpack those images, exploring the label and its associated media baggage.

In a similar vein to Bakhtin's notions of internal dialogue, psychologist Crapanzano describes a 'shadow dialogue' or third party dialogue that is often present in ethnographic interviews - an internal process with real or imagined people that the respondent knows inside their own head (Crapanzano 1990; R. Anderson 1994, 105). Here it could be argued there was a shadow dialogue which occurred for the participants – both between themselves and their social peers, and also an imaginative projected one between themselves and the future audience. This engagement with the way in which their identity might be perceived by a potential audience reflects a powerful moment of literacy, and also exists on the continuum between 'dramatic playing' and 'performing' theorised by Gavin Bolton in 1986. In his writings, he articulates how DIE fluctuated between the two poles in its process and development, stating:

> The critical distinguishing feature between these two modes is that of intention, between being in the 'as if' mode for oneself and one's fellow participants as opposed to being in the 'as if' mode for other people. In the former one submits oneself to the experience, in the latter, one projects what one has already determined (Bolton 1986, 14).

In the moment where the company decided not to continue developing theatrical material around the narratives of hedonism, excess, and binge drinking, a developmental leap in literacy occurred. The performers began to sift the devised material not on its truthfulness within the studio, but on its

relevance for potential performance to a particular audience. This decision was about presenting a particular kind of self for performance. Their decision to omit this content from the final piece was not necessarily explicitly discussed, but a collective one nonetheless. For the same reasons, I intentionally abstain now from including specific quotes from this session, to honour the group's decision to hold back this internal dialogue from an external audience.

The Hedonism Conversation captures something important about the studio space and the internal dialogues which make up the devising process. The ability to engage in artistic tangents which can then be discarded from the final performance is essential to the artistic merit of the final piece, the quality of the internal dialogues which carry it there, and to the trust relationship of the ensemble. If the performers have the power to delve complex issues (and the luxury of studio time/space to fully explore them), they will potentially be able to engage at a pedagogically-rich level with the ideas they encounter. But this must include the caveat that the content does not have to carry forward. At all times in the devising process, a discard clause had to be available. This occurred in all the rehearsal work which took place during the three years of the Vital Spaces Project, but it was most imperative during *On Our Terms.* The explicit focus on audience and intention which permeated the rehearsal process also meant that the piece was constantly being shaped in such a way as to 'translate' the topic of identity of young people into a healthy and proactive conversation, which managed to sidestep the usual archetypes and stereotypes of 'youth angst' art.

The total discarding of the Hedonism Conversation as artistic fodder for the final piece could be viewed as a waste of a full rehearsal on a tight schedule, but the internally dialogic outcomes of the conversation, which took place between three different year groups may have had lasting impact upon the performative grounded behaviours of the young people involved. I'll never know, but it is clear that the consequence of the discard clause was powerful in creating a safe rehearsal space and an environment in which the performers were willing to engage honestly and with a degree of personal risk, using their own experiences with faith that they had power over the final content.

This too, naturally raises questions about the ethics of undertaking such work with young people. There was a very fine line being walked between asking and preaching during the Hedonism Conversation, and my concerns

about their student welfare and healthy decision-making were certainly present in the room as they discussed binge-drinking behaviours amongst their peer groups. The quality with which a facilitator listens to self-talk made audible is important, as are the nature of the questions we ask. These questions are, of course, linked to our own agendas as people. My decision to not include the specific content of the Hedonism Conversation here in this thesis is a purposeful choice, and one which is prompted by a desire to honour the young people's safety and privacy around the content of the conversation.

Role of the facilitator

Within critical pedagogy, the teacher is seen as another learner. Besides a clear role as a Socratic question-poser, my role in the studio was also to learn. In Paulo Freire's words, 'the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself (sic) taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught, also teach. They all become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (Freire 1970, 61). But this somewhat idealised notion of a teacher who willingly relinquishes authority or expertise in the name of liberation also potentially ignores some problematic concerns about facilitator intentions. If the aims of the participatory project are not clear and explicit, there is a distinct opportunity for facilitator evangelism or coercion to permeate the process. This was true for me as the facilitator of the Vital Spaces group, but also a factor in the touring phase of the *On Our Terms* performances, where the young people did their own facilitating with various audiences/populations.

Nealon sees this involvement as a potential flaw in Bakhtin's theories about dialogue – a lack of critical perspective regarding the alterity of the 'self' who, 'like Odysseus, returns home from experience each time and finds itself changed and enriched, more open to its own possibilities as it travels through different worlds of Otherness. [...] In the end, what is important is authoring my text: the story of my 'independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability and indeterminacy'' (Nealon 1998, 42 and 47). There are perhaps concerns about how dialogue can be optimistically written as a 'transcendental awakening' for the self through interaction with Other and an imagination of their position. As Kester states, 'This identification can never be complete - we can never claim to fully inhabit the other's subject position; but we can imagine it, and this imagination, this approximation, can radically alter our sense of who we are'

(Kester 2004, 115 and 119).

For me the questions are manifold, and they begin here in the relatively safe studio space. What were (and are) the ethical best practice techniques when facilitating an unpredictable and spontaneous dialogue which emerges within the artistic space? In working with young people around issues of identity, what kinds of questions should be asked and which should be held back? What if the young people want to talk about it anyway? What facilitator agendas are ethical, or are any? Kester calls to question the aims of any self who aims to open up dialogue with a population not their own, arguing that such 'collaborations [..] are characterised by a degree of paternalism (albeit well intentioned and often well received). The artist remains in a position of relative mastery, operating as a living paradigm of the expressive personality that his or her collaborators can aspire to or temporarily adopt as their own...' (Kester 2004, 150).

Whilst I agree, and am troubled by the notion that many artists see themselves as indispensible tools in their practice, I also wish to disagree with Kester's rendering of the 'typical' artist who 'seeks to engage his or her collaborators in a process of critical perception or self-exploration […]' (2004, 151). The negative perspective here about the 'typical artist' may well ring true to both myself and the 15 performers who then went out to larger sited populations. However, I'm unwilling to write off all practice which works with young people as unethical, nor to see all artists as utilitarian Odysseuses who exploit passive populations. If the work is undertaken in Bakhtin's willing-to-be-changed state of mind, then the notion of reciprocal openness results in an exchange for both parties, not a simplistic plunder and retreat.

Inherent to all models of dialogue is a precept that participants must be on equal footing. Both in the studio space and in the sited external dialogues, I am not certain we achieved this, or even how it might be achievable, except that I do still believe arts spaces may hold some of these answers. My role as project facilitator always contaminated any total equality in the studio space, and I must say too, I believe this to be more ethical than pretending at an egalitarianism that doesn't really exist. In working with populations of young people, there is a necessary sense of leadership, momentum, and perspective which a gentle facilitation touch can provide without any authoritarian agenda-pushing. In terms of our four-week project development and the subsequent

touring to seven sites around South Devon, I continue to reflect upon my own involvement, I hope not as an Odysseus seeking to find personal transcendental awakening through the use of other populations, but as a facilitator who found again and again that the dialogues which emerged from the process left us *all* thinking in new ways about youth in society, the mantle of power and authority, and the many spaces in between.

On Our Terms – the performance and the following dialogues

In order to explore the external dialogues which developed with the various audiences, I feel it necessary to more clearly depict the content and structure of the final interactive piece. For confidentiality reasons, the performances were never filmed, and so the only surviving archive of the work exists in my field notes and in short video excerpts of the physical theatre pieces without any interaction. I include a narrative summary below, which I will follow with discussion of the various sites and varying dialogues which occurred. The summary is of the performance at the County Hall (Devon County Hall) and it is important to note that the piece's structure was altered for and by the school and youth club sites. This is one of the chief challenges for me in discussing devised/interactive work – each performance is distinct, and the very matter of the piece meant that it substantially shifted from site to site. However, I feel the positive outcome of providing a clear description of one performance outweighs concerns about an equally fair representation of all seven performances.

Field notes description of the County Hall performance
Devon County Hall (3 June 2011)

White Carpet

The audience of 10 or so local authority employees enter the room individually and in pairs and are greeted by several young people who ask them if they'd be willing to remove their shoes before stepping onto a long white roll of paper, directly underfoot. The audience members are asked if they'd like to draw around their foot, to mark their entrance into the space. For those with mobility problems, the performers offer to help. They are handed a pen and encouraged to proceed down the white carpet, answering as many questions as they would like. Questions include: 'If you had a superpower to fix something in the world, what would it be?' 'What did you have for breakfast today?' Others are more serious: 'What do you think of when you hear the word 'youth'?' 'What do you think of politicians?' One participant stops and looks at me. 'I can't answer that. I am one.'

Continuum/Mapping

In a few moments, two facilitators step to the front of the room. They welcome the group, which is made up of 10 adults and 10 young people. Suits and jackets help to make this visible in the space. The facilitators set up ground rules and explain that the performance will take about an hour. Everyone is free to abstain and not participate at any point, although they hope you do. Everyone is asked to stand up. They ask the group to imagine that a long continuum stretches the length of the Board Room, at Devon County Hall. They are asked to stand at various points which show their opinion - again, on varied subjects. 'How do you feel about Marmite? How much of an 'adult' do you feel? (All the way, not at all, a bit of both?) How positive do you feel when you hear the word 'youth'? How far did you have to travel to get here today?' Sometimes they discuss their embodied votes with those standing near them. Sometimes the facilitators just note the positions and then move on.

The Maze (physical theatre piece)

The audience sits to watch 'The Maze.' It is a piece of physical theatre - with almost no dialogue. Accompanied by a rhythmic back beat, two performers attempt to reach each other, but are regularly stopped by a maze created by the arms, legs, and bodies of the other performers. Sometimes they try to speak to each other, but are stopped by a hand clamped over their mouth, or arms pushing them down to the ground suddenly. When they finally manage to break free of the maze and reach each other, the piece stops. The facilitator asks, 'What was that about for you?' There are differences of opinion. Some say it's about young people trying to reach people in positions of power. Others see it as youth workers trying to reach young people and failing. One person saw it as themselves just trying to get through to colleagues and get through their email inbox. Everyone stands up again.

Standing Alone

In a circle, participants take turns stepping forward. Each completes a sentence: 'I feel happy when...' If anyone shares the sentiment expressed, they take a step forward into the middle of the circle. There is a lot of laughter. 'I feel happy when I'm on the beach on holiday.' 'I feel happy when I've finished my to-to list for the day.' 'I feel happy when I'm relaxing with my friends.' The sentence shifts, 'I feel frustrated when...' 'I feel silenced when...' 'I think...' This is much more free-form. One young person steps forward and with a sense of urgency and emotion says, 'I think people in power should try harder to reach out to young people and help make their lives better.' Before anyone has a chance to respond the facilitator steps up: 'Would anyone like to engage in a conversation about this topic?'

Fishbowl Discussion

Four volunteers step forward - two young people, two city councillors. They sit together in chairs, and everyone else sits in a circle around them. They dialogue about the question. When other people want to join in, they step forward and tap one of the dialoguees out, and assume their chair. It is a rotating performative dialogue. It covers a lot of ground. It is sometimes very heated, sometimes very congenial. The subject of budget cuts, job losses,

youths centre cuts, and apathetic young people are all discussed. After about 15 minutes, the facilitators steps in again and ask the group to write down on a post-it the thing they would have liked to say, but didn't get a chance to say.

Entanglement (physical theatre piece)

The audience sits to watch another piece. In this piece, four performers sit intertwined on a table. They repeatedly try to free themselves, but find themselves pulled back into the tangle with rising frustration. Adele's song 'Turning Tables' plays in the background (Adele 2011). One person manages to free themselves, but can't see over or around the other three, who've now risen to the size of trees, standing tall upon the table. The tiny young woman pushes and pulls, trying to get through the legs. She says that she looks young, that she is always being taken for a child. She hates this. She is pulled back into the tangle. Another performer tries to talk to the audience, but is caught up in a rhythmic pounding which cycles around the table. She says that she is afraid of not being good enough - of not keeping up. She is sucked back into the cog-like rotation and back into the tangle. Another performer tries to speak, but the words won't come out. They are caught in her throat. The other three stare at her, waiting. They push on her shoulders and her head, but the words won't come. The fourth performer gets stuck under the table. She shouts at the other three, who are waiting on top. They can't hear her. They bang to try to get through. The table stays firm. She pushes against it, shouting, but they eventually give up, and sit impassively on the table, ignoring her.

Closure

The facilitator steps forward. She asks the audience about the last image - that of a single person, pushing up against the table top from underneath, whilst the other three sit, staring neutrally outwards. Because of the fishbowl discussion, the audience has read this in a very particular way, with slight variations. It has become about the subjects of the discussion. They see it as a young person trying to get through, as themselves trying to get colleagues to embrace new tactics/techniques. Some audience members are moved, emotionally. Others are quiet - thoughtful. There is a long dialogue. At the end, the facilitator thanks them for taking part. They are asked for their feedback on the piece. They take their shoes and depart.

External dialogue & important failures

As the company moved from the studio sessions, which existed in Bakhtin's 'vertical relationship', they were also constantly rehearsing and developing their skills with 'horizontal relationship' – engaging in social interaction with others. As I discuss the outcomes and efficacy of the external dialogues which took place at each of the seven performances, I wish to be clear that this work did not create best practice models for effective, deep, and meaningful audience conversations. In many cases, the dialogue never moved beyond a simple question-and-answer model, and in some sites, the absence of important figures meant that the necessary dialogues couldn't take place.

However, the emergent ways in which the young people framed the artistic and dialogic space creates potential for more extensive practice in this area. In Burbules's critique of how dialogue is implemented within critical pedagogy, he raises important questions about whose terms frame the work. What makes *On Our Terms* a significant PAR model is the way in which the dialogic frame was created and facilitated by the young people. In addition to participating, it was *their* terms on which the dialogue was structured. As can be seen in the summary given above, opportunities for dialogue permeated the final piece, resulting in an interactive performance which resembled a workshop at times far more than a conventional theatre presentation.

Dialogue was facilitated within the small 'burst' dialogues in response to the Continuum, the facilitated question and answer sessions that followed each physical theatre piece, and most importantly, in the Fishbowl Discussions which took place at the heart of the performance. Layered around these dialogic interactions were scaffolding structures to help the performers and audience to gain trust/comfort in the space and to practice their skills – written responses on the White Carpet, moving their bodies in response to the Continuum, and their own personal contributions during 'Standing Alone'. Some of these elements required a degree of personal risk and vulnerability, and I experienced significant trepidation prior to the County Hall performance that the Fishbowl might erupt into a non-productive dialogue between the young people and local councillors. This kind of work is potentially quite risky, and depends enormously on the dynamic of the group which participates in the piece. The quality of the dialogue shifted substantially from site to site.

Most dialogue theory allows for this kind of variation in pedagogical efficacy/depth. As a responsive form, it can fluctuate widely in is success, as Burbules also points out:

> In some of my earlier work, I suggested that dialogue could yield a range of outcomes, ranging from *agreement*; to a *consensus*; (or in Rawlsian terms an "overlapping consensus") that falls short of full agreement; to an *understanding* that falls short of agreement or consensus; to a respectful *tolerance* that falls short of full understanding. Each of these, I suggested, can have fruitful educational benefits (Burbules 2000, 260, italics in original).

One of the small successes within the *On Our Terms* work was the nurturing of forthright conversations, both amongst the young participants, and with their respective mixed audiences. Strong moments of honesty emerged, both external and internal, directly elicited by both the devising process and the hybrid nature of the final interactive piece. This honesty varied depending on the make-up of the audience and the site. Categorically declaring some of these conversations as effective and others as ineffectual feels wrong, and yet I'm troubled by a lingering sense that generally, we didn't push the conversations far enough. Despite a regular attempt at opening risky conversations about contentious topics, the work tended toward emotive generalities, or to put it differently, safe ground. Here, I use the word 'risk' in a positive sense – indicating work that pushes the boundaries and challenges the participant's preconceptions in a healthy way (2008, 8). This echoes Mary Ann Hunter's plea for theatre work which creates 'safe spaces' which allow for 'rules of engagement that scaffold the creation of new work and, somewhat paradoxically, invite a greater degree of aesthetic risk.' Hunter questions whether 'making a space "safe" may mean making it risk-adverse [...] or risk-attractive' (2008, 8-9), and points out that risk-attractive spaces can lead to 'an invigorating sense of liveness often missing from more polemical theatre for social change' (2008, 18–19).

This failure to achieve risk-attractive space occurred in several ways – in the embodied scenes which left the *possibility* of deeper interpretation, but didn't force it, and in the facilitation questions which occasionally veered away from risk and toward the safer ground of 'self-help' language, or tokenistic responses by victims to large social problems of inequality (Kershaw 1992b; Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 2006b). The facilitators, who were rotating members of the company, were trained in TIE/DIE strategies, Theatre of the Oppressed principles, Forum, and Image work, but less experienced at facilitating dialogue. As we discovered together, it was easy for the work to turn into a pat version of a trite TO workshop, simply by asking the wrong questions.

> *Field Notes from Secondary School 2:*
>
> *Entanglement Facilitation:*
> *Facilitator A: What do you feel is happening in this scene?*
> *Participant responses: (anonymous)*
> *They're being suppressed by adults.*
> *He's trying to get them to listen.*

He's trying to be free but couldn't. They're holding him back.
Facilitator A: What does the table represent to you?
Participants:
It was always there - the same thing kept happening again and again.
It's the structure that holds us.
To get it completely to go isn't possible. We have to deal with it.
Facilitator B: What are the little things we can do to deal with these problems?
Erin's Field notes: This isn't a coping workshop, little things aren't our job here. Need to re-phrase this question on the break.
Participant responses:
Exams, homework stress.
Trying to get your anger out... with a friend?
Little bits at a time make things doable.
Get someone to help you.
Do something you enjoy.
Find a teacher or a person to speak to.
Little things aren't actually that helpful...
In-depth, look into it. How to overcome the problem. Be aware of it.
It's easy to just be quiet and think I'll let them do it.
Sometimes you just need to put yourself out there.
Field Notes: Can we rephrase the last two questions? (I met with the facilitators on the longer halfway break and we hashed this out. It was a structural flaw which we hadn't encountered at County Hall because they were a group of adults thinking strategically about reaching out to young people. When you move the same question to a group of young people, it becomes victim-blaming.

As can be seen by my field notes, scribbled during the facilitation, the questions asked were a work-in-progress from site to site. Questions that had elicited a vibrant discussion at the County Hall about strategic policy and youth consultation practices were suddenly ineffectual at the secondary school. Indeed, they placed a victim-blaming message into the piece which was wholly unintentional by the facilitators, both of whom were glad to re-write the questions after the session. As Facilitator A stated: 'Yeah, that didn't feel right.'

Beyond just these concerns with specific phrasing of questions, there were problems with the physical pieces themselves as dialogue stimuli. In the studio, the performers had begun from personal narrative and inquiry into their own perceptions of self/youth... but the final embodied pieces left perhaps too much room for interpretation. In attempting to accommodate our diverse

audiences and sites, we may have left the stories too open to wide interpretation, thereby limiting the potential dialogues that followed.[59]

> *Field Notes from Youth Centre 2:*
> *Maze Facilitation:*
> *Facilitator A: What do those bodies represent to you?*
> *Participant responses:*
> *Social barriers.*
> *Breaking through to get to someone but not quite being able to do it.*
> *A boyfriend.*
> *A student.*
> *Myself.*
> *Dad.*
> *Rebel.*
> *Someone in charge.*
> *Mrs Jarrop. (general laughter)*
> *Facilitator B: Who's that?*
> *(Participant shakes his head, laughing)*
> *Youth Worker: The headteacher.*
> *Participants:*
> *Someone in charge, but like a male/female dominant relationship?*
> *He's trying to fight through, but people's stopping him.*
> *Friends.*
> *Police officers.*
> *Facilitator B: What are the obstacles?*
> *Challenges... like struggling to get A stars.*
> *Time.*
> *Money.*
> *Expectations.*

Generally, the embodied scenes were difficult to evaluate, on any terms. They emerged out of the third rehearsal session in which we specifically stated: 'We're not going to do issues-based Applied Theatre, we're going to create some good theatre, some real art, and then think about how we can use it within the interactive piece after it's beautiful.'[60] As a consequence, *The Maze* and the *Entanglement* pieces were based in personal story, but so fully placed within an embodied language that the words became almost silenced. *The Maze* included only two lines of dialogue, and *Entanglement* was distilled down to four

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59 Other artists have advocated the power of narrative to create a shared site for meaning-making. Suzanne Lacy, in a speech delivered in 2001, stated, 'personal stories are how one enters civic discourse with dignity' Lacy, S. (2001) "Seeking an American Identity (Working Inward from the Margins)." <u>Animating Democracy</u>, 1-16.

60 While dialogue is an important component and an aesthetic strategy of her work, Liz Lerman insists that "the goal is art". She contends that if the stated focus is "civic dialogue," personal transformation, or social change, those things may never be achieved; but if the goal is making the best art possible, together, all these things will happen in the process (Korza and Bacon 2005, vi).

short monologues (spoken self-talk) which were improvised by the various performers in repertory. Was this a bold choice or a cop-out? I'm still not sure.

The feedback was mixed – some audiences read the pieces as being prescriptively about 'youth versus bureaucracy' and others read the pieces as being about their own individual journey/narrative, as if sifting it through their own internal dialogue whilst watching.

Field Notes from Secondary School 3:
Maze Facilitation:
Participants:
I didn't get it.
Under pressure - really tense.
They're all looking at him.
Peer pressure.
Peers getting in the way of him talking to her.
Had to fight through - all watching him to make sure he does it right?
Preventing him from getting where he wants to go.
Other people are blocking.
Facilitator: Why is he being blocked?
Participants:
It's a barrier between children and old people.
Fighting his own emotions...
They're things a 'youth' would have to deal with... he was trying to overcome all that.

Whilst *The Maze* resulted in widely ranging interpretive responses and conversations, the *Entanglement* piece resulted in more emotive outcomes. Several adult audience members at the County Hall were in tears after watching *Entanglement,* finding it a powerful metaphor for their own lived experience of being caught within a system that doesn't always leave room for individual voice or belief. At the school and youth club settings, the participants picked up on the meaning found within each short monologue and often responded to the words much more than the physicality of the piece.

Field Notes from Youth Centre 2

Entanglement Facilitation:
Facilitator A: What was that piece about for you?
Participant: Conformity, communication.... that girl kept going on about how she had to be like everyone else, and that's sad, you know? She didn't have another option, just had to conform. School's kind of like that, except if you're really your own person and not everyone's strong enough to do that.

Participant: No one was listening to her. They're trying to make her be who they want her to be.

Facilitator B: What's the table?
Participants:
Obstacles of life.
Their mind.
Mental barrier.
Something that's stopping you... trapped in a cycle.
Whether you're gonna fail. Fear of failure.
Trapped on it, under it. Struggling.
It was representative, because they all stayed really close to the table, and there was no one there helping them from the outside. No one to help them get out.
Different frustrations that people feel... struggles, barriers.
Chocolate biscuits.
Barriers and struggles.
Grades.
Age restrictions. Voting, driving.
Lack of support.
Lack of confidence.
Money. Family.   Family feuds.
Friends.
Values - trying to stick to them.
What other people think - expectations of what they want.

Facilitator A: What's your table?   What does that represent in your own life?
Participants:
Yourself.
Peer pressure. Other people's opinions.
Age. Limitations.
Wealth barrier.
Being bullied. Chavs. It's pretty much turned me into a sociopath.
Slow internet connection.
Way that politics work - we can't vote.
Bad phone line (metaphorically). I can't just ring up David Cameron. We can't get our messages through. We need a David Cameron hotline. Free for anyone, not just our age.
They do think about us, the public. They do sometimes talk to us, but...technology is stopping us from doing that. Emails?
The ways that we contact people in authority.
Nerves. You know what you want to say, but trying to get it through is hard.
Judge against you, you can't speak your opinion out. You didn't speak up - to defend yourself. You wouldn't be listened to.
Age is holding you back. You might know things, but people assume you don't know or do things because you're young.

This diverse range of interpretations without any extended interaction between audience members at first left me feeling defeated, as if in our attempts to reach for 'art' we had ended up taking a safe out and avoided more

direct conversations. But further reflection has allowed me to see the overall piece as a composite of nestling and complementary elements. The rawness and vulnerability required by the Fishbowl Discussions created a need for some resting places in the final performance – sites where meaning-making could be gentler, softer, and more individualised.

My first perceptions of the embodied work as a failure were later replaced by a sense that in some respects they were the most successful moments in the performances – least open to academic dissection, and most amorphous. I feel that I can call them successful because they worked in tandem with the more intellectual dialogue of the Fishbowl and the facilitated discussion, but that they helped to create a heart space within a piece that could have been entirely head-space. As Pam Korza wonders, within the Animating Democracy work,

> How do we facilitate the transition from heart space, the personal experience that art evokes, to the head space and collective experience of civic dialogue? How might dialogue facilitators work more effectively with the passions and emotions inherent in artistic work as a point of departure for dialogue? A better understanding of the relationship between feeling and thinking in public discourse would help, as well as rethinking the assumption that emotion is private, not public, or that public dialogue equals rational dialogue (Korza, Assaf, and Bacon 2005, 10).

Is it possible that it is only in the hybrid cross-over where a deeper, more friction-friendly dialogue occurs? In the space where the audience is given room to invest with both their heart and their head? It didn't always work. Certain repertory combinations were more successful than others, certain audiences more receptive than others. Certain facilitators better at drawing out the key questions. But for me, the rehearsal moment when we told ourselves that we weren't going to worry about what the piece needed to 'do' and instead would just focus on making theatre, this was an important moment. From an evaluative standpoint, the two embodied pieces which emerged from this are the least easy to measure/assess, but they potentially contain the visual images which will stay with the audience after the piece ends.

Perhaps easier to assess was our success at facilitating conversations within the Fishbowl Discussions. This tactic, taken from progressive child-centred education pedagogy, is a classroom technique used to enable shy students to participate in debate (Au, Bigelow, and Karp 2007). Because of this,

the Fishbowls tended toward more lively back-and-forth conversations between participants, with more points of friction, conflict or disagreement, and there was a sense of performance to them at all the sites.

> ### Field notes from Secondary School 1 Fishbowl Conversation
>
> *Participant A: In school, we have to look a certain way... so we look like a lovely smart school. It's like, 'There's no hooligans at this school'*
> *Participant B: But there are, we just don't want to admit it.*
> *Participant A: No, that's what I mean, it's like we pretend everything's better than it actually is, you know?*
> *Participant C: I don't agree with that at all, I think we've got a pretty soft life out here, small village, no violence. (general murmur of assent)*
> *Participant D (also a facilitator): Would you want to change anything, if you could? If you had the power to change something about the school, what would it be? (short silence, Participant B shrugs)*
> *Participant A: We don't really think about that.*
> *Participant B: Yeah, you know, maybe you kind of like need the negatives, so there's like, you know, a challenge. To life.*
> *Participant C: I think things are okay as they are.*
> *Participant A: Maybe the broken netting on the cage by the pitch. It's naff. (Laughter)*
> *Participant D: Do you have a chance to change things or take action at school?*
> *Participant A: Yeah. Student council, there's avenues to make changes if you want to.*
> *B: Now's our time to be lazy, have no responsibility.*
> *C: I think young people are just lazy. They just can't be asked. They shouldn't spend so much time playing with consoles.*

At this school setting, the predominant theme which emerged from both the Mapping exercise and the Fishbowl discussion was that of apathy. Generally, there was a sense that things were quite comfortable how they were. The session took place within the school day, in their usual drama classroom, with a group of Year 8s. All the participants were in school uniform, and the teacher had invited the local newspaper photographer to attend and take several photos of the performance. Consequently, halfway through the mapping exercise, she had stopped the performance and asked them all to tuck in their shirts, button the top button and tighten their school ties before the

photos were taken.[61] This had an impact upon the way in which the young people participated.

Additionally, the presence of the school's Assistant Head at the performance (she removed her shoes and participated fully, along with two other teachers) caused some reticence amongst the students in replying to the facilitator's question about 'changing things at school.' She elected not to tap into the Fishbowl at this point, which was a missed opportunity for dialogue, but the benefit of a Fishbowl structure is that it allows for this kind of participatory self-selection, keeping the environment safe for all participants. Interestingly, the participants were willing to be critical of young people, but when describing the behaviours they found 'lazy', the pronouns switched from the collective 'we' to the third person 'they'.

> ***Field Notes from Secondary School 1 Fishbowl Discussion***
> *Facilitator A: Why don't young people get involved in changing things, if they don't like them?*
> *B: You can. There's student council. But I've never put forward an opinion and I don't know anyone who has. It's like no one really cares enough about anything.*
> *Facilitator A: What about an MP coming to your school? Would you talk to them about anything?*
> *C: We wouldn't have the confidence. Well, no. If an MP came in, like, not to government, but in our drama class and we all had a discussion like this - we'd be more comfortable. I might say something then.*
> *Facilitator A: Not in like a 'sea of faces' at an assembly though?*
> *C: No, then no one would be brave enough to speak up or say what we really thought.*
> *D: I keep thinking about tax increases, tuition increases. I've got no job, I've got no money, but now I'm about to turn 18 and will get taxed. It's becoming real. That's what I'd want to talk about.*

The general atmosphere for performances like this was markedly different to the youth centre sites, where participants attended voluntarily and in their free time, wearing their own clothing. The more social and recreational space of the youth centres gave rise to a different kind of Fishbowl, where the conversations were sometimes surprising. At the second youth centre, one of the Vital Spaces secondary students facilitated with a group of young people from the centre she usually attended in the week. Because of this pre-existing relationship between her and the participating young people, there was a

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61 The irony of this moment as a capturing of the 'performativity' of youth as a carefully constructed media image was not lost on the Vital Spaces team, as they discussed this moment in the car on the way home.

camaraderie and trust to this performance that perhaps enabled a deeper conversation, with stronger statements of honesty.

Field Notes from Youth Centre 2 Fishbowl Discussion

Facilitator A: Do you think there's a problem with young people today showing respect?
B: Yeah, definitely.
C: Agree.
D: Yup. (overlapping responses)
Erin's Field Notes: This was moving, actually. They clearly believed it - it wasn't just a front, and all four of the young people in the centre nodded and responded in unison.
B: I hate how people cringe when they see young people in a group... walking away on the pavement. It just happened yesterday, actually, I was walking along with a mate of mine and this older lady crossed the street to get away from us. We were just being ourselves, right, not even being idiots or anything, but she gave us just the dirtiest look and walked away. But then when I watch how some people at school are, like all the time, I totally get why she would do that.
A: Do you see people not having respect?
B: All the time, yeah, all the time. (general agreement)
C: Yeah, like last year with Miss.... (laughter)
A: What happened?
C: Well, our maths teacher last year... was it last year? Yeah. She was new, and just didn't have any control over the class, you know? We were wild in there, and it just got worse and worse.
A: (adult, tapped in) But shouldn't people have to earn your respect, even if they're adults? Was she a good teacher?
C: Well, she's gone now. (laughter)
D: No... (short pause) No, I wouldn't have called her a good teacher. She didn't have any control of the class. We didn't learn anything. I couldn't respect her.
B: But we still should have treated her respectfully. We were pretty mean.

Here, the emphasis on 'respecting elders' was raised as a subject by the young people and sustained throughout the Fishbowl. It was a subject we never would have introduced, fearing that it was a bit too trite for a meaningful conversation, but the young people clearly felt passionately about it. One participant asked if a police officer deserved the same level of respect walking down the street in their street clothes than with their uniform on, and the group responded that they should get the same respect regardless. Later, after the performance, one adult audience member approached me and showed me her police badge which was hidden inside her handbag. 'I thought about going in to

the conversation' she said, 'but then they brought that up about the police and I just wanted to hear what they would say first.'

Absences & missing voices

The external dialogues cultivated by *On Our Terms* were largely unsuccessful at achieving a deep level in terms of content. This can be attributed to two primary factors. Firstly, the project was an experiment, and lack of facilitation and training for the young people involved and the short development time frame meant that the skill set just wasn't present to adequately support and drive the conversations forward. Secondly, there were significant absences in the attending audience at many of the seven performances. It is these absences which demonstrate one of the strongest praxis points about young people's participatory performance. As discussed in Chapter II, these performance mediums often have trouble gaining public recognition outside the 'near and dear' audiences of family and friends, as well as moving beyond prescriptive theatrical content. This particular project was attempting to shift both of these traditionally binding concerns. The topics raised in dialogue were often closely linked to financial decisions being made in the local authority with regard to children and young people's services.

On Our Terms took place at a time of pressing budget cuts at the local authority level. In a report presented by Devon County Council's executive director Children and Young People's Services Anne Whitely on 26 April 2011, the youth service's budget was reported to have received an immediate in-year cut of £854,375 and 'the bulk of this saving has come from staffing' ("Disappointment at Youth Service Cuts" 25). As a consequence, the touring weeks approximately a month later were co-aligned with the implementation and fall-out from these financial cuts, and the atmosphere of the dialogues was affected by this context.

At the Platform Youth Centre, where our final performance took place, the recent Devon County Council redundancies had already been announced: it was losing two of its three youth workers in a month's time. This move was not an isolated incident – across Devon all youth centres were being paired and placed under the leadership of a single youth worker. In total, 24 youth worker redundancies were expected, including two from senior management. This political context was of high importance to the audience at this site, but also to

several of our company members, including one secondary student, Sarah. Sarah and another 16-year-old secondary student, Jane, whose youth centre was also affected, had begun a petition in February and March of 2011, collecting nearly 9,000 signatures over a three-week period. Jane had presented this petition to Devon County Council's cabinet in March 2011, but stated in April that,

> Our youth centre in Sidmouth has been affected as we won't have an area youth worker there for every session. We will have to share one. If there's something people want to talk about, I think most would wait to talk to the youth worker rather than a volunteer. […] I know cuts needed to be made but they could have been to equipment rather than people – youth workers are the most important aspect. I'm not sure how much our petition was taken into consideration […] I don't think the councillors talked to young people about the service ("Disappointment at Youth Service Cuts" 25).

In spite of this audience at the County Council cabinet, Jane and Sarah had not managed to achieve an audience with the councillor in charge of the Children & Young People's services[62] at the county level which seriously engaged with their action. Sarah had been keen to ensure that this councillor – Christine Channon – was in attendance. In addition, during the marketing phase of the *On Our Terms* performance, both Kate Welsh and myself had made contact with the head of Devon Youth Service, who had personally invited all area/local councillors to attend the performances in their respective wards. This invitation was then repeated by two Exeter City Council employees who attended the Devon County Council performance and wrote to local ward councillors to encourage them to attend the youth centre shows. Channon had received and RSVP-ed to the invitation, indicating that she would attend the Platform performance. At this same youth centre, two of their three youth workers had immediately been made redundant, and one of these workers was present during the *On Our Terms* performance. There was opportunity for an important, timely, and lively conversation about the youth provision to take place, facilitated by the young people. 17-year-old Sarah was the designated facilitator at the Station performance.

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62 Christine Channon, the head of the Children's Trust and the councillor in charge of schools, dismissed the petition, stating that many of the young people 'didn't know what they were signing it for.' "Dismay and Disgust at Youth Service Cuts." (23 April 2011) <u>This is Devon</u>.

Unfortunately, none of the invited councillors for the district attended the performances, leaving the adult presence in the space to be represented by youth workers, a few parents, and several other attendees. Additionally, in the school settings, the administrative demands of a regular academic day were effective distractions for heads, and kept other teachers from attending the performances. Our audience of 10 for the Devon County Hall performance was initially booked at a capacity of 22, and the schools performances resulted in the attendance of only three teachers and one head, those who were able to cross to the drama classroom on their planning period. It is possible to understand these low attendance rates as the product of pressing and stressful work, particularly for those in the state school system. The councillors and public officials who did attend the Devon County Hall performance provided a helpful insight into how difficult it can be to make time for artistic/creative consultation activities when working within local government. All the attendees had some professional mandate around 'youth', and the three councillors present were all newly elected officials. This prompted dialogue during our fishbowl discussion about energy, priorities and jadedness of political leaders.

Certainly, this issue of getting local authority representatives to attend the youth-site performances was one of the project's great failures. At the Blackbird Youth Centre, which was located in one of the most deprived economic districts in the Exeter urban area, both invited ward councillors did not attend, despite similar RSVPs in response to the invitation. This site, therefore, had the most imbalanced audience – composed almost entirely of young people, with only myself and the two youth workers present as adult representatives. However, the group we performed to was a 'protected' youth group – an all-girls Wednesday evening session, which had been created because of behavioural concerns by young men at the youth centre on their open evenings. The lack of outside adults actually meant that the conversations were insular, deep, and searchingly honest. The young women who attended ranged from 12 to 18, and they were resistant to the interactive components, but warmed to the piece enough that all returned to watch the second half after the allocated smoke break.[63]

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63 This smoke break was built into the performance structure based on advice from the lead youth worker at the site. She informed us that previous events had failed because the girls would only focus for about 40 minutes or so before they wanted to go out for a smoke, and encouraged us to give a break halfway through. Initially, we were fearful that no audience would remain for the second half, but we actually had

The lack of presence of those whose decision-making had concrete impact upon young people's experiences meant that the nature of the dialogue shifted. There is a catch-22 here – with these people in the room, the conversations would potentially have been quite stilted (or safe?). But without the councillors in the room, the outcomes of the conversation are limited to an impact solely within the group itself. Verbal competence within dialogues is not automatic. Asking young people to engage with local bureaucrats in dialogue on equal footing is a relative impossibility, given the disparate access to codes, languages, and literacies that exist for both parties (Vice 1997; Hirsch 1987; Delpit 1995; Finn 1999). Subtracting the councillors from the dialogue freed the participants to speak in a kind of grounded short-hand, and no translation was necessary from their usual speech patterns. It perhaps made the piece more accessible and the dialogues more personally relevant.

The most numerically balanced audience/performer dynamic was created at the County Hall performance, and therefore resulted in forthright conversations about the labels of 'youth' and 'politician'.[64] Having the presence in the room meant that we managed to elicit some friction around core issues such as university student investment in community, secondary student's voice in political affairs & local budgetary cuts, and the ways in which politicians are accessible, accountable, and informed by the constituency of 'youth'. Several of these concerns were of strong personal relevance to our performers, others clearly of less passion and weight. Regardless of this, however, they participated in the Fishbowl with vigour and energy.

Several of the university students commented after the County Hall performance that they felt they'd 'performed' the dialogue just as much as the theatre within the piece. As the youth representatives in the room, they'd felt an obligation to pretend at a passion that may not actually have existed. Gavin Bolton's reflections upon the shift which occurs when DIE is placed before an audience became powerfully realised in this moment (Bolton 1986). Here, the movement from being 'as if' for themselves in the studio was translated into an 'as if' for an external audience in performance – and not just in performance of

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more attendees for the second half as several girls brought their friends in to watch the remaining *Entanglement* piece.

64 Which was, of course, the only site which was already 'adult-centric' in terms of its daily routine uses.

the theatrical material. It was within the performance of themselves, as participants, voices, and young people in the dialogue.

The young people's perception of their own dialogue as a kind of performance also reflects Augusto Boal's advocacy that any participation is performative. 'The aesthetic space is the creation of the audience: it requires nothing more than their attentive gaze in a single direction for this space to become "aesthetic", powerful, "hot", five-dimensional' (Boal 1979, 71–72). This 'hot' aesthetic space, which Suzanne Lacy advocates is created simply through the direction of a spectator's gaze, raises questions for how the aesthetic quality of the work is evaluated (Lacy 2006). In this case, the Fishbowl Discussions were a kind of public action lifted into art, a raw, improvised, unpredictable set of conversations which were held in place by the structure of the performance and prompted by the group's interests. But so too was our mere presence at the sites – each of which was assuredly not neutral ground. The performance which took place at each of the youth centres, County Hall, and at the schools shows encompassed far more than just the devised theatrical material. In many cases, the performance was the entire staged encounter, from the moment the Vital Spaces team arrived until the moment they left again.

Staged & sited encounters

On Our Terms was challenged, limited, enabled, and at times made more powerful by its sited-ness. This was sometimes effective – as when it brought young people into a traditionally institutional setting like Devon County Hall, and sometimes less effective – as when it failed to bring adults into young people's spaces, leaving them to talk amongst themselves. The strongest external dialogues emerged from the sites with the most polar divides between participants. Finding this balance within territorialised sites to create both a *safe* performance and healthy risk-taking-dialogue space was difficult, but, I wish to argue, not impossible.

Burbules advocates that the site, circumstances and context of dialogue have a clear impact:

> The situatedness of dialogue, considered as a discursive practice, means that the dialogical relation depends not only upon what people are saying to each other, but the context in which they come together (the classroom or the cafeteria, for example), where they are positioned in relation to each other

(standing, sitting, or communicating on-line), and what other gestures or activities work with or against the grain of the interaction (Burbules 2000, 263–264).

Attention to the 'facilitating and inhibitive characteristics' of these circumstances is essential to ensuring that the dialogue is a tool for critical pedagogy rather than perpetuating existing inequalities (2000, 264). Here, the potentials of theatrical forms and methods become rife with possibility. Within our limited experience of *On Our Terms*, the embodied, physical, and interactive components of the performance helped to de-stabilise and shift the power dynamics which would have already been present in the room. By embedding the dialogue(s) within a theatrical frame, which fluctuated between full participation, audience spectatorship, and facilitated conversations, the existing 'grain of the interaction' was impacted. Perhaps not as fully as it could have been – but potentials simmer here for future work.

Healthy conflict

Purposefully pushing the boundaries of who belongs in what space can result in fireworks - or silence. Our Fishbowl discussion at County Hall occasionally felt like a hotbed, and I was apprehensive as I watched it unfold between politicians with a strong grasp of rhetoric and debate and our young students who are trained as performers, but not as debaters. The contrast between existing literacies and ability to speak codes was clear, yet the frame of the theatrical event allowed for a certain degree of equal footing. The young people's grasp of rhetoric and ability to quote statistics was not at the same level of proficiency as the local councillors, but their embodied performances in the physical pieces gave them an authority, legitimacy, and status within the space. This shift in power manifested within the dialogues as well, and a degree of respect was clearly conveyed across both parties. This mutual respect is not a given, and I would advocate that the artistic/theatrical space helped to nurture its possibility. A theatrical frame can serve to create safer environment, but the opposite can certainly be true with dialogical work.

As explored earlier, Mary Ann Hunter's exploration of *Skate Girl Space* triggered unexpected dialogic outcomes and elicited concerns amongst the adult artists involved in terms of young people's safety in a site-specific territorialised setting where dialogue erupted, unplanned and un-facilitated as a

part of the performance. Here, there are clear concerns about how to facilitate such processes with young people in a safe and ethical manner. Hunter also raises pertinent questions about the aims of community-based performance which are relevant to young people's theatre projects. If 'youth theatre' is always seen as something that speaks to a youth identity, or is celebratory in nature, does this limit the potential dialogues?

Within the Vital Spaces work, there was an audience discomfort with regard to youth theatre moving from a celebratory model to one which actively sought and cultivated sites of healthy conflict. This discomfort raises questions for me, which are echoed by Hunter, who wonders, 'While "celebratory epic" models of community theatre attempt to achieve community cohesion - sometimes by celebrating diversity, sometimes by responding as community to adversity - Skate Girl Space provoked, agitated, and disrupted community to enable community action' (Hunter 2001, 334). This process of agitation is not a comfortable one, nor is it one which youth workers and teachers typically undertake with young participants. Here, the dialogical intentions mirror some existing Applied Drama research with regard to citizenship and the National Curriculum.

The inclusion of Citizenship work within PSHE core secondary teaching has created sites for work with young people with regard to identity, place, and purpose. More common responses to the National Curriculum's citizenship requirements have to do with educating and participating, not dissent (Marshall and Bottomore 1992; J. Beck 1998; Nicholson 2005; Kane and Middaugh 2006). Counteracting apathy is certainly a worthy endeavour, but I would advocate that creating safe sites for healthy and honest conversation must include the cultivation and celebration of dissent as a practice of citizenship, an initiation into adulthood, and as a way of embracing multiple literacies which can better equip all of us to 'border-cross' and experience other people's perspectives on issues of concern.

Within the field of Applied Drama, theorist Helen Nicholson has reflected upon this complex idea of citizenship: 'If citizenship is about *acting* as a citizen, with all the implications of performance that this phrase entails, how might practising drama encourage people to become participant citizens?' (Nicholson 2005, 23). She draws upon Chantal Mouffe's notion of 'embodied citizenship', where the role is a performed set of actions, linked to how we identify ourselves.

Mouffe argues that 'A 'well-functioning democracy' […] calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions' (2005, 23). Nicholson's concerns that these notions of citizenship for young people can ignore necessary and vibrant dissent are key to how performances like *On Our Terms* are evaluated. The bursts of dialogue which occurred throughout the performance resulted in occasionally tense frictions between the young people and adults taking part. Additionally, audience perceptions of the performed pieces varied widely site to site, although they often agreed that the underlying theme was about 'being heard.'

Certainly, this was a theme which had emerged during the studio development. Sarah certainly saw the performances as a chance to gain an audience about the issue with those in executive positions at the County Council level. The local press had run several articles on the young people's petition activity, creating a sense of divisiveness and perhaps, defensiveness, from the local authority. But Sarah's passion and advocacy for young people's voices to be present in decision-making which impacts youth services was a powerful example of an activated citizenship, hungry for a respectful engagement and dialogue from those in the decision-making seats. Here, there is potential for a healthy kind of conflict by providing a safe forum to move the conversation away from defensiveness and debate, and toward a more open setting where the given could, perhaps, have been suspended. We cannot know, because the relevant officials, in spite of best intentions, did not show up.

In terms of future work, it leaves me asking: where are the safe boundaries for this kind of practice? On a continuum between fireworks and silence, where is the richest theatrical/dialogic space in which to pitch the work? When dealing with vulnerable minors, what safeguards, ethics and project parameters are necessary to ensure that the artists and the young participants are engaging in a positive experience? Some of the answers may lie in the structures which these hybrid performances take. In his field report on a four year MIT study into dialogue practice, William Isaacs suggested that 'one practical response to polarization is to pay attention to the "container" or "holding environment" in which dialogue occurs. Focusing attention on the environment that "holds" dialogue allows participants to "see the water in which they have been swimming"' (Isaacs 1994, paragraph 7; Romney 2005, 13). By purposefully honouring the presence of the site as a contributor to the dialogue,

and by framing the performance to suit the non-neutrality of the ground, artists may actually see an explicit and thoughtful awareness of site as a helpful presence, rather than a limiting one.

Certainly, I feel that we placed many of these parameters as bulwarks around *On Our Terms* effectively. My own presence as a potentially mediated force was helpful, as was the somewhat middle-ground stance of various youth workers and drama teachers at the school sites. Their position as a bridging agent between the worlds helped to create both trust and a common language. Also, the establishment of the room as an altered site through the entrance on the White Carpet was helpful in creating a space apart from the everyday, in which non-everyday conversations could occur.

The sites were also chosen carefully. Devon County Youth service had invited us to perform the piece in an alternative site – the open forum of urban city street - but we elected to decline this invitation, as we felt the boundaries of four walls were necessary to hold the participants in an unwritten contract of privacy, trust, and attention. That said, even the four walls of each respective site had a porous quality – allowing both environmental ambience to leach in, as well as potential participants to leak away. (This is always a challenge when performing at youth centre sites, where a natural participatory ebb and flow is more usual for an evening session.) This porous quality to the performance space could be seen as a positive. At County Hall, our preparations involved shoe-less adolescents rolling blank white paper out into an office hallway, amidst bemused expressions from County Hall officials who bore witness to it. These kinds disruptions of the everyday routine are part of the performance, and the young people were very aware of how strange their presence in the site felt. Hushed tones, and a general sense of unease marked the twenty minute preparatory period at this site. We had disrupted the routine of the bureaucratic halls, and it felt like a performance in of itself. But disrupted routine also creates possibilities.

Our presence at each site felt like an invasion of an already-existing ambience. Our imposition (and I choose that word carefully) of an artistic space upon a traditionally non-artistic site at times felt unnatural. This was true at the County Hall, where the performers felt they had to 'perform' as youth the entire time they were there – whether it was tacking up posters in a mature and respectful way, or in their dialogue tone during the Fishbowl. But it was also

true at the Blackbird Centre in Exeter, where the performers became very aware of their own lived privilege when surrounded by an environment of socio-economic deprivation and a strong inherent sense of community... of which they were clearly outsiders. Miwon Kwon explores this notion of site-specific well-meaning 'Plop' artists using site for their own purposes, regardless of of needs and wants of those who live within that site regularly.

> [...] the sitting of art in "real" places can also be a means to *extract* the social and historical dimensions of these places in order to variously serve the thematic drive of an artist, satisfy institutional demographic profiles, or fulfil the fiscal needs of a city (Kwon 2002: 53).

Kwon goes on to postulate that a potential solution to this use/abuse is to focus the work on dialogue around issues of common concern, but even this is difficult to advocate as an agenda-less practice. I would argue that Kwon's advocacy for community concerns as a 'more genuine point of contact, a zone of mutual interest' (Kwon 2002, 111) between the artists and the community in which they work is potentially deceptive. What constitutes a 'community concern'? Whose questions get answered? And what happens out of it? In my experience of *On Our Terms,* it was clearly the issues that we brought into the space that were discussed, despite some attempts to elicit audience responses. Our perceptions of relevant and resonant issues within our 15-person company's lived experience of 'youth' were not necessarily relevant and resonant to the lived experiences of our audiences. Particularly given the one-off nature of the touring production, creating genuine conversations of relevance becomes a challenging task. It does prompt questions about what a longer-reaching and more sustainable model of young people's dialogic theatre could look like, building upon the cross-group conversations that occurred at the various youth centres and youth clubs.

Defining our young participants as a part of a larger community of youth is made somewhat ridiculous when you compare Piers' studio narratives of romping through corn fields as a child with the daily grounded experience of the all-girls Blackbird group with smoke breaks needed every 40 minutes. Similarly, banding all the County Hall Officials together as one community of interest ignores complex diversities of political affiliation, geographic concern, and budget priorities. The conceptualisation for *On Our Terms* emerged from what we'd hoped to be an ethical and grounded place – that of young people's lived

experiences and identifications in Devon, aged 15 to 21. What is perhaps more difficult to negotiate however, are the vast disparities in this lived experience, just as the disparities in 'youth culture' are often invisible.

Facilitation

This distinction between the lived experiences of 'youth' articulated by the Vital Spaces group and that of the young people they encountered during the tour is important to make explicit. Each site we performed in had a different power balance, and at each site the facilitation tactics shifted accordingly. At County Hall, the adults in the room certainly felt pressure to perform as caring and supportive of young people, and the facilitators were hard-pressed to push the dialogue beyond this polite and careful 'caring'. At the various school sites, the presence of uniforms and school codes/bells/discipline, press cameras, and strict school routines prevented a meaningful honest dialogue from emerging. At the youth club sites, clearly the perceived territoriality of the site itself rendered a reciprocal dialogue with absent adults impossible, which had the trickle-on effect of deepening and enriching the insular dialogue amongst the community who already attended the sites with the 15-person performance company.

The absence of adults at various sites raises a troubling set of final questions for my own PAR reflection. What evidence is there that the communities involved in the project *wanted* to participate? At what level was the project imposed upon communities? And, given the erratic nature of adult participation in the project, what degree of neutrality did our facilitators bring into the space, myself included?

Burbules shares lingering concerns with questions of inclusion and openness within dialogic models, in spite of the clear link between dialogue and critical pedagogy. He questions the 'inherently self-confirming form of the {dialogue} model', pointing out that through its assumed 'hegemony of reasonableness', it may be implemented in problematic ways (Burbules 2000, 257). An unquestioning belief in the inherent power of dialogue as a liberatory and pedagogical practice is naïve at best, and the concerns expressed by Ellsworth about its 'modes of address' are important to raise here. Burbules defines this same idea as 'tacit rules of engagement' within a dialogue structure, which can make it seem that those with opposing points of view can be 'at fault

for remaining outside the conversation' (Burbules 2000, 257).

Again, there are important praxis points here from larger-scale dialogue initiatives like Animating Democracy. Attempting toward a sense of neutral justice, some of the participating artists developed further the notion of facilitator 'multipartiality', more commonly used in family therapy work. As Patricia Romney clarifies:

> It means working on behalf of everyone in the room. It means not taking sides, but being on everyone's side, in terms of a constructive and equitable or just resolution or dialogue. To achieve multipartiality, one must metaphorically "step up" to the metalevel of dialogue. That is, that level (perhaps an aerial view) from which one can see the shared and common interests of the participants.' (Korza, Bacon, and Assaf 2005b, 9).

But not all dialogic artists agree that this is a practical or possible set of working parameters. Romney further advocates that facilitators should be 'seen as fair, but not as neutral. We're not looking for neutrality, but for a level playing field' (2005b, 10).

To my mind, an honest articulation of your own opinion as a facilitator is necessary – both to make it explicit to yourself, but also to those with whom you're working. Essentially, though, is the ability of the facilitator to keep an open mind – to remain open to 'emergent unanticipated consequences' and to be willing to 'emerge from the encounter as different persons' (R. Anderson, Cissna, and Arnett 1994, 13–15). But pretending to a neutrality which does not really exist seems to me the least ethical option of all. I have to be honest; I was frustrated at the lack of councillor attendance at the youth centre sites. Hours of work and communication had gone into setting up the performances, and there were high hopes from the participants that some practical outcomes might emerge from the conversations. So when I attended the final performance at the Blackbird Club, it was difficult for me to find the fairness I can so easily describe above.

Inside the absences

The young people who'd devised the piece were disappointed by the lack of attendance from Channon and other officials, but the grounded outcome of the final performance at the Blackbird Centre in Exeter captures for me one of the enigmatic elements of this kind of work. The ostensible failure - getting the right bodies in the room - could be lauded as a failure by young participants to

speak the necessary marketing/email codes, or just a busy time for local officials, but what occurred that evening could never have happened if the officials had been present.

That evening the research's reflexive cycle was brought full circle. The Vital Spaces Project had begun its work in 2009 in youth centres, and subsequently I had drastically re-evaluated the ethics of targeting such sites based on our experiences there. But two years later, at the end of the performance at the Blackbird Club, a performance marked by its honesty and blunt responses from participants, our 15 performers stayed for over an hour by choice - dancing in their disco to music, playing pool, and cooking chips in their kitchen. I sat on the sofa, tired from two weeks of touring and watching a 20 year old university student lose at snooker to a 13 year old girl in a sideways baseball cap, and something rang from within the PAR praxis cycle. We'd built a piece which had been devised by a group of young people who'd *chosen* to come together and work out of a love for theatre, who had something to ask that was important, and they'd entered the space respectfully. The important work of that evening took place in the facilitation and dialogue, yes, but Paul Willis's notions of a grounded aesthetic were never more powerfully realised in my mind than when I watched, laughing, as two of our secondary student performers tried to teach the worm dance move to the Blackbird attendees.

The responses the evening's performances had elicited included honest statements about teenage pregnancy, family strife, peer pressure, schools attendance, and drug/alcohol abuse amongst teenage populations. If local councillors had been there, as was intended, I wonder if those responses would have occurred at all. I wonder if the presence of untrusted and unknown people with powerful titles would have silenced the group. Already reticent, we'd had to accommodate the Blackbird girls' needs in various ways beyond the smoke break intermission. The pre-show music had been changed from a playlist created by one of the university students. A youth club attendee had walked into the booth where I was playing the cd and smiled at me. 'Can I turn that shit off and put on something decent?' As I stepping backward, she rapidly changed it to one of the cds thrown into a haphazard drawer under the sound system, pushed the volume fader from my setting of 3 up to 8, then smiled at me again, nodded, and left the booth. Grounded aesthetic. The tone in the room had changed palpably.

If the local councillor had been there, would this have happened? Unlikely. Also equally unlikely that this particular young woman would have stayed, and in that case we would have accomplished only the alienating act of driving the young woman from their local youth club by infiltrating it with people who they find uncomfortable. The dialogue which emerged around confidence, hopes, aspirations, and limitations within their neighbourhood community was the most specific, most laden with personal anecdotes, most emotional, and friction-filled we facilitated during the touring of *On Our Terms*, and this was also the performance with the lowest attendance by 'those in positions of power and authority'. The only adults in the room were myself and three youth workers. Instead, it became a dialogue between two groups of young people. And the dialogue continued, in less structured but no less important ways, via dance, snooker, chip-cooking and laughter for a long time after the performance ended.

Extended outcomes & sustainability

If theatre artists are invited into various sites to facilitate a conversation, what kind of promise exists that any kind of change will emerge from all this talking? Often, as I explored in Chapter II, youth theatre work is used as a tokenistic go-between - a brightly coloured plaster on a gaping wound of deprivation, inequality, voicelessness and oppression - or as a helpful press release to combat pervasively negative media. I would argue that we were welcomed by the Devon County Youth Service and various sites because the project looks good on paper, and makes people feel that something positive is happening. But what are the potentials of an artistic space – a space rich for its imaginative potentials, but limited in terms of its political change clout? If this is the premise in which artists enter the public sector, then what recourse is available to them in terms of maintaining an ethical path with their own art?

A month after *On Our Terms* closed our participant Sarah finally gained her audience with Christine Channon at Devon County Hall. She and two classmates presented their petition and engaged in a conversation about the youth centre cuts. At the end of the meeting, Sarah asked Channon why she hadn't attended the performances, in spite of her emailed RSVP response declaring that she would be there. Channon responded, 'I just wasn't given enough notice.' This kind of dismissive and patronising reply captures for me

the simplicity with which young people's efforts can be branded inadequate. Because of my proximity and investment in the process, I was able to see another perspective on this encounter. The young people's abilities to code-switch, learn political manoeuvring like petitions, and to engage in a complex web of bureaucratic networking were trivialised, and their efforts negated by a single patronising sentence which relegates them to a status of 'not enough'. The failure of local officials to navigate the territories and sites of youth power - the failure of local officials to engage in meaningful consultation through an artistic/theatrical language was never raised. It was never a subject of conversation. Except here.

It is clear to me that in this small experimental project we didn't do a good enough job of speaking and accessing the necessary literacies to deepen the dialogue about 'youth', on both sides. The teaching of these codes and strategies needs to be explicit, critical, and thoughtful, as a means of working with young people toward a stronger sense of participation in the systems that affect them.

However, this action research project does reveal the possible potentials of such work, if actualised with the expectation of openness, respect, and success. The adults who attended the County Hall performances did so with an inspiring degree of vulnerability, bringing with them into the room a glimmer of the possibilities here. As Freire says, 'As the encounter of men {sic} seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the dialoguers expect nothing to come from their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious' (Freire 1970b, 303). In the hour after the County Hall performance ended, two Exeter city council employees sat down to discuss youth consultation strategies in their respective districts, a conversation that would never have occurred otherwise.

The dialogues which emerged from *On Our Terms* were at times surprising, and occasionally inflammatory. At times they were too insular and contained within the various communities to result in an 'impact' which can be quantified. At times, they may have been trite or false. Often, we veered into bad facilitation or self-help workshops. But it is in the crevices and cracks of the work that I see the potentials, in the in-between spaces. Or, as Grant Kester articulates, 'It is in the nature of dialogical projects to be impure, to represent a practical negotiation (self-reflexive but nonetheless compromised) around

issues of power, identity, and difference, even as they strive toward something more' (Kester 2004b, 123).

Conclusion

The final PAR project created by the Vital Spaces Company was an experiment. In it, the beginning explorations of internal/external dialogue, code-switching, and dialogical exchange glimmer with potential for future exploration. *On Our Terms* went a long way toward framing dialogical exchange within a theatrical context, which does begin to change some of the fundamental 'dialogue model' inequalities bemoaned by Ellsworth and Burbules, and creates a site where such work can speak back to core elements of critical pedagogy and young people's identity. By creating a space where the young people crafted and authored the performance, by attempting to ensure that the work was marketed and promoted by the young participants, by training them as facilitators to lead their own sessions with other young people as participants, the model begins to indicate a future direction for such extended dialogical work.

For future projects to be successful, however, it seems vital that such work be grounded upon an inclusive ethos that it place young people's ideas and voices at its heart, and that it remain responsive to the needs and issues at play. Additionally, I would advocate that young people's participatory theatre practice needs to include a deep appreciation of how such spaces work to cultivate, honour and teach multiple literacies. This ability to border-cross, to code-switch, to move between worlds is a vital skill, and one which young people have few safe spaces to experiment with. In Henry Giroux's words, 'At stake here is an understanding of literacy as both a set of competencies to be learned and a crucial condition for developing ways of intervening in the world' (Giroux 26, Section 3, Heading 5, paragraph 10). Participatory theatre spaces create sites where embodied, emotional, social, and cultural literacies can be experimented with – they are powerful pedagogical sites.

Conclusion

As the Vital Spaces work culminated with its final PAR projects in 2011, I was left sifting through pages of field notes, piles of White Carpets rolled up, and several binders full of the participant and facilitator writing, in a diverse array of informal and formal mediums. There were a lot of post-its. It is tempting to want to hold tightly to each ratty and dishevelled post-it, fearful that it may be the most important key to drawing final conclusions, but I know now that the final conclusions cannot be drawn from individual scraps. The fragments are important, but the whole of the project has always been, fundamentally about how young people are making sense of their place in the world, and how theatre can create a means for them to speak back to a society which can tend to ignore, victimize, romanticize, criminalise or trivialize them.

Even if I were to heap the ratty scraps together into a pile, they could not amount to the messy and ongoing set of questions which now emerge from this thesis and its findings. The findings have been the result of a responsive and PAR-led journey which required my own research processes to adjust accordingly. I began this work with what felt at the time to be an urgent set of questions about how young people in a particular place were constituting a performed sense of self, and how theatre practices might help to expand or enhance experimentations with these identities. I end with a much more complex set of questions and recommendations about how such performances are chosen and enacted. These questions both enable and require further interdisciplinary study. I also end with a far more nuanced and ethically troubled set of questions about what facilitation and co-research is capable of, and where the ownership lies in the work, questions which need long-term research in partnership with young people to explore more fully. As an educator who now works outside the world of secondary education, I see the peer-led and co-researched format of this PAR work as part of a growing methodology which may open up a set of research techniques with regard to pedagogy and social justice.

This PAR approach was not without its tensions. I felt a constant responsibility throughout the research in regard to whose aesthetic choices were valued, which voices would be honoured in the research, and how much my own agendas were shaping the research. I feel certain that more young-

person-led models are possible, and that this thesis is a partly co-authored and co-researched one, but there is a long way to go.

I began this thesis with questions about intention, and end with the same questions within my own practice. My presence within the studio, the school hall, the youth centre, and the city street was a factor in each of the pilot projects conducted during the Vital Spaces work, and to deny that this presence influenced the findings would be wrong. All I can do is to name, as simply and clearly as I can, the ways in which I may have steered the work toward my own aims. The elements of social justice, agency, literacy and authorship which permeate this thesis are the same themes which permeated my classroom as a secondary teacher. It is no accident that they are here, and in retrospect I can now see that it is no accident that the research was conducted through devised theatre as a form. This research has made it clear to me exactly how important the dialogic, pedagogic and literacy elements of that process are. What I previously identified as interesting by-products of devised theatre practice, I now see as pedagogical tenets which potentially move toward a new model of practice.

The Vital Spaces process was a scaffolded and supported one. It moved from solo creative writing exercises into sharing that writing with a small group of peers. These sessions allowed the participants to hear each other's perspectives and gave them space to juggle those perspectives into an ensemble artistic statement. This alone was a complex process of listening, negotiation, meaning making, and dialogue. When the young people took that work to a larger audience and discussed their artistic work with that audience and heard what meaning they made out of it - this process of moving from internal dialogue to external dialogue was also a process of practicing authorship, of learning to trust their own voices, of realising they might have something important to say, that people would and should listen. Of course, sometimes, often, people don't listen. My hope is that the participants of the Vital Spaces work not only identified the lack of listening as a failure on the part of the adults, but that it outraged them, inspiring them to speak louder next time.

A creative process such as this one requires that a spark of critical consciousness sits at the centre of the work, and this is a problematic notion, as we encountered at with many of the Vital Spaces pilots. How can theatre spaces, particularly dialogic ones, most effectively serve as sites for

conscientization? What if nurturing a critical and social consciousness requires the presence of a skilled facilitator, and the work loses young person-led ownership as a result? At the end of three years, I still sit uncomfortably with how a critical social consciousness can be kindled within theatre spaces without the work lurching awkwardly into dogmatic polemics or an adult-led model. This is a tension I am going to have to live with because I'm not willing to abandon the work as impossibly idealistic or overly didactic. I feel certain the answer lies in an honest, respectful exploration of young people's own stories, and a telling of those stories outward. In those stories are heartache, despair, warmth, humour, sadness, injustice, compassion and hope. In resisting simplistic theatrical forms or methods which create false binaries, in embracing the plurality and being fearless about frictions, in continuing to draw connections to larger social pressures, perhaps *conscientization* is possible. Perhaps it is ethical, or even emancipatory for all involved. I believe that such theatre work can move beyond the binary of aesthetics versus social efficacy and look toward another possibility, one which is socially effective because of the quality of its aesthetic output.

This is ongoing work, and it seems fitting to end the thesis with recommendations about future possibilities for such practice. Concluding three years of work, I now am interested in moving forward with two key elements of the Vital Spaces work: the timing/duration of the pilot projects, and the practical involvement of the co-researchers. Whilst this thesis was indeed a co-authored journey, and the young people's involvement was essential, it seems likely that my own voice and findings have ultimate authority here in the written volume. Within my own practice, then, two key factors emerge as important next steps. Firstly, how to sustain a long-term model of co-led research with young people over a longer period of time, but building upon the findings of these pilot projects. This requires funding, sustainability and project partners who understand the ethos of the work. Secondly, the manner in which such research is written up and disseminated needs to honour the young people's voices and literacies.

My present and ongoing work is looking at how digital literacy and mediums might open up authorship of research to a co-ownership of findings. If young people's voices can be included, not just in academic writing, but as embodied, vocalised, and heard elements of research, the findings must

certainly be richer and more whole as a result. The tensions which the Vital Spaces research encountered were partly to do with the visibility of small-scale performances to a larger audience, particularly one which might be sceptical about attending young people's theatre. I see digital mediums as a means of sharing a wider plurality of voices and perspectives to a broader and more diverse audience, and my own practice is now exploring the possibilities of how these literacies connect to live performance practices. The ways in which we capture and disseminate the findings from such research projects must necessarily be as multi-literate as the young people taking part. These are my own next steps, but the Vital Spaces research findings potentially have greater relevance than what I am capable of pursuing as a researcher. Beyond these two core areas, there are a number of more specific findings from each chapter of this thesis which have importance to the larger field and which deserve to be articulated here in the conclusion of the thesis, and which I hope might serve as future areas for others to study.

Within Chapter I, I advocated that performance studies and theatre research have important contributions to make the existing discourse(s) and methodologies employed within research about 'youth identity'. This contribution would be best made in inter-disciplinary forms, and likely partnerships exist in the fields of critical ethnography, sociology, and human/cultural geography. Such collaborations and future discourses would be fascinating with regard to young people's constructions of identity, and it seems imperative that such research involve those young people as co-authors and authorities.

In Chapter II, this thesis discussed the existing landscape of young people's participatory theatre practice in the UK, with particular attention to the ethical concerns around authorship, coercion, deficit, and unspoken agendas. Despite these concerns, some truly remarkable practice is occurring, much of it unmapped. The Vital Spaces work is a small-scale model, but there are many others presently active which merit discussion and further attention. Research which looks in-depth at young people's theatre practice in this country is badly needed, whether qualitative in-depth case studies or large-scale quantitative analyses. I would argue that both are needed, and better holistic documentation of such practices is essential as well. This again speaks to the importance of artist and educators archiving and capturing their practice on their own terms,

developing evaluative measures apart from those required by funding agencies, but also to the funding of in-depth research into existing models of young people's theatre practice which measures its success in more than just behavioural outcomes.

The discussion of critical pedagogy in Chapter III began to explore how a pedagogical frame of analysis is crucial to understanding young people's participatory theatre, and it drew upon a historicised understanding of such practices as the descendants of TIE/DIE in the UK. This pedagogical frame requires that social action and transformation are part of the criteria for success, and that such participatory theatre work continue to examine ways in which dialogue and critical consciousness can be activated in these theatre settings. The analysis of multiple literacies as key skills in enabling border-crossing was begun in this chapter, and again performance studies has much to offer the existing discourses in education and pedagogy studies. The ways in which embodied, emotional and cultural literacies can be rehearsed in theatre settings are only just beginning to be articulated, and further research here might pick up some of the unfinished work from the legacies of TIE/DIE. The cultivation of multiple literacies is an area of study relatively unexplored within young people's theatre practice beyond the initial work of TIE/DIE. Given the existing emphasis within the UK National Curriculum on literacy and numeracy and the relative challenges at keeping drama/theatre arts within such curriculum frameworks, an articulation of literacy as a diverse set of spoken, oral, and embodied skills could prove beneficial both from a research and an educational advocacy standpoint.

In Chapter IV, I described in detail the findings of the first two years of action research, dwelling specifically on how 'devised dialogues' became the medium of choice, but also on how the theatre work created was profoundly insular. In terms of recommendations for future work, I wish to be clear that the shift from youth centres into theatre spaces in 2010 was an important one for the research, but in that decision we abandoned the possibility of engaging with young people who might not have otherwise have sought out theatre or performance as a medium. This is important to re-state. In responding to the ethical dissonance created by 'plop art' which is predicated upon perceived deficit, the research may well have avoided an important area of research with young people who are initially resistant to theatre or performance. There is

clearly more work to be done here, given the range of funding initiatives in the UK which specifically commission artists and theatre-makers into these sites. One of the missed opportunities from the Vital Spaces work was the absence of a dialogue between youth workers and young people about ownership, creative work, agency, and power. Further work which might cultivate such conversations within the public sector is much-needed, and I regret that I was unable to facilitate this this during the Vital Spaces pilot projects. However, such practices would be best led through an integrated and well-established presence, which brings in youth workers and young people as partners, not one which is temporary or run by outside agents with little investment. Sustained models of integrated practice must be the medium.

In the fifth and final chapter, this thesis interrogated how a specifically dialogic theatre piece tapped into internal and external dialogue about young people's identity and sense of self, with an emphasis on turning these conversations outward to a society which might 'need this art' (Thompson and Low 2010). The studio-based internal dialogue and the external dialogue facilitated by the performances represent a starting point for further study. The dialogic medium which was explored in *On Our Terms* was an experiment, and the findings revealed that longer, more sustained, more scaffolded practice and research might yield results which can demonstrate public policy change or social impact. Such large-scale work seems imperative, and has both pedagogical and participatory significance, but requires the cultivation of multiple stakeholders. This is a complex requirement, as those involved arrive with disparate levels of social and cultural capital. The difficult balance is in how to ensure equal footing between those who already function within positions of power and authority and those who might be less comfortable in those spaces. There are compelling connections here to some of the emergent literature from within participation studies.

When I look forward to what dialogic theatre with young people might look like, it becomes increasingly clear that such work must be inter-generational in order to achieve social efficacy. A disadvantage of may be that the work might lose some of its pedagogical and critical potency for the young participants. To my mind, then, a tiered outreach model may well be the best answer – one which begins with a young person-led form. This could then expand outward to become an effective intergenerational model, but one which

is led created by young people – on their terms. This would, again, require long-term sustained work over a period of time. It is fitting, perhaps, that the Vital Spaces short pilot projects should lead toward longer-term models, but given the erratic nature of issue-specific funding from within participatory arts practice, it seems likely that such work would need to be led from within the academy or research fields.

The questions which began this thesis were: how are young people in this particular place performing a sense of self? How does that performance change or adapt? How can theatre sites serve as safe spaces to experiment with alternative performances? How can theatre sites engage with critical questions about the social forces which influence and shape those performances? It has become clear that devised theatre with, by and for young-people provides vital spaces for meaning-making about young people's identity, agency and authority. This thesis represents a starting point. There is much more to be done, and in ending with recommendations for further research, I end with hopefulness. The findings of this research contain a sense of what is possible here. In devised and participatory theatre settings young people may well be able to encounter difficult questions and concepts which cannot be fully grappled with in school or other formal (authority-filled) settings. Additionally, the very artistic mediums employed within these sites may allow young people to express answers which are nuanced, subtle, conflicting, contradicting, voluminous, abstract, and poetic. Perhaps, most importantly, within theatrical languages young people can work to find some of those meanings together, negotiating such meanings in collective ensembles and perhaps finding common threads.

This is hopeful stuff. But in the optimism, I wish to also end with clarity that this work is important to all of us. Questions about how young people in our society are making meaning, developing senses of self, and finding a voice in their world are relevant to everyone. Theatre practice which engages with young people about issues of identity and critical pedagogy must take into account the necessity of turning these conversations outward to involve more than just the 'near and dear' in the work. Who is listening to young people? How do we behold such performances? Who bothers to show up? How can theatre sites create powerful, compelling and high quality performance work which demands larger attention? How can such work keep a centre of vivid

imaginative artistry which is owned and authored by the young people? I end this thesis with these questions. These are not the same ones which began the research, but new and perhaps even more vital ones.

Appendices

Appendix A
Vital Spaces/Vital Signs project summary

Project Title	Dates	Location/Site	Number of young people aged under 18 who took part (consistently)	Number of facilitators and respective ages	Additional support staff or other notes
Pilot A: *Hele Horror Films*	January-March 2010	The Apple Youth Centre, Hele, Torquay	15 young people engaged long term, aged between 11 and 15. Two young people continued on to the editing stage.	5, all aged between 18 and 20.	2 regular youth workers attended all sessions, one continued on to support the editing stage.
Pilot B: *Torbay Documentaries*	February-May 2010	Central Youth Centre, Torquay town centre	10 young people consistently took part, although their ages ranged from 15 to 23.	5, all aged between 18 and 20.	9 youth workers worked on the project in varying capacities. Two attended the editing sessions.
Devised Dialogue #1 – *Proof of Identity*	April-June 2010	West Exe Community College (drama studio), Queen Elizabeth Community College (drama studio) and the University of Exeter drama department	67 young people participated from both secondary schools, as part of their regular drama class.	8, aged between 19 and 23.	2 secondary drama teachers, myself as module tutor and Fiona Macbeth as supervising module convenor for DRA2026.
Devised Dialogue #2 – Devon Youth Theatre and *Borderline*	January-April 2011	Kings School (Ottery St. Mary), Coombeshead College (Newton Abbot), Matthews Hall (Exeter), St James School (Exeter), Uffculme School (Uffculme) and Tiverton High School (Tiverton), additional rehearsals took place at the University of Exeter's drama department, and	100 young people took part in the outreach phase, and 27 continued on to devise for the Northcott Stage. They ranged in age from 12-17, with the largest numbers averaging at 14 years old.	5, aged between 19 and 22.	Additionally, one mature student took part as a facilitator, and the project was supported administratively by DAISI, represented by Peter Vanderford. Three professional artists were included: Meghan Searle (vocal coach), Pip Jones (choreographer) and myself. Additionally, Fiona Macbeth served as the DRA2026 module convenor.

		the final performance took place at the Exeter Northcott Theatre.			
Devised Dialogue #3 – *On Our Terms*	April-May 2011	University of Exeter drama department, the Blackbird Youth Centre, Wonford (Exeter), Platform Youth Centre, the Coaver Club, Devon County Hall, Exeter.	150, aged 12-18. 10 aged 31-64.	19, aged between 15 and 23.	Myself, support from Devon County Council and area youth clubs.

Appendix B

Curricular summary of the *Proof of Identity* project

The *Proof of Identity* curriculum was developed over six workshop sessions at the University of Exeter, delivered over four sessions with a group of year 9 B-Tech drama pupils at West Exe Community College, and over a single session with two groups of year 9 and year 10 drama pupils at Queen Elizabeth Community College in Crediton, Devon.

The curricular development and final materials are detailed below:

Session One: the eight facilitators of the VSC volunteered for this project, based on an interest in pursuing issues around 'identity, language, and territory' for young people. Their passion and investment were clear – sparking a discussion which explored their own experiences of these issues from their recent adolescence.

Session Two: Readings (about action research and seeing the younger students as co-researchers) and initial devising of workshop materials through the VSC's own 'performance' pieces.

Session Three: They performed their devised workshop models, and practised the facilitation. Feedback was provided, and the workshop components were revised accordingly.

Session Four: The strongest workshop themes/concepts were identified:

> *Codes Shifting* - the different languages we use, a physical piece involving a rotating centre.
> *Hesitating Monologue* – not being able to say what you want/need to say.
> *Hidden Rehearsals of Self* - layering clothes, practising speech
> *Solitude Alley* – having to walk and perform your identity in uncomfortable sites/places.
> *Ribbon Territories* – trying to draw lines around your own independence/solitude, but having them invaded or disregarded by others.
> *Cringe Scene* – Having others misinterpret your boundaries/need for space.

From these six performance components, the VSC developed correlating workshop materials which were interactive. For example, to accompany the *Hidden Rehearsals of* Self piece, they created a workshop exercise which distributed photos of various people, and asked the younger students to 'label' what kind of person the image depicted. This exercise then moved into a devising session where younger students created a scene about assumptions in pairs, speaking aloud the inner monologue that occurs when you see a particular kind of 'performed' identity expressed in a public space.

Session Five: The relevant workshop materials and performed scenes were finalised, and facilitation assigned to various VSC members. Rehearsal of individual facilitation occurred.

Session Six: Run-through of the workshop.

Delivery to West Exe:

Over four sessions (two week duration), the VSC facilitated and supported the year 9 B-Tech students to devise and create their own devised piece for performance. Then, using the same structure and exercises, they devised a

piece of similar length/content, based on their own experiences of the core issues. These two pieces were rehearsed individually by each group.

Delivery to QECC:
The VSC brought their devised performance *Proof of Identity* to perform for two drama classes at this Crediton secondary school. They requested and were given feedback from the participating classes about the effectiveness of the performance piece and its relevance to the core themes. Following the 15-minute long performance, they led a 30-minute workshop with both classes, which used elements of the original workshop from WE.

Final 'Devised Dialogue' outcomes:
The West Exe group and the VSC came together to perform for each other and an invited audience at the Thornlea Studios, University of Exeter campus. With an audience of about 30, plus the 22 secondary students, and the 8 VSC facilitators, the event had a celebratory air.

Final Conclusions:
The success of this parallel format sparked my interest in developing the notion of 'devised dialogues' further. The use of theatrical languages/forms to 'exchange' between the two groups proved more powerful than simple conversation could have. This led to the curricular structure for DYT.

Appendix C

Curricular summary of the *Devon Youth Theatre/Borderline* Project

Outreach Phase:

Week One: Met with the DRA2026 module, presented the rehearsal schedule set forth by DAISI and the scheduled 'outreach' sessions planned. The six university students who could commit to the schedule became the VSC. Individual schools contact details were distributed, and each VSC member took responsibility for primary contact of the respective school/community group.

Week Two: The VSC each brought their 2-3 'best' devising exercises which they had found to be effective in creating quality/interesting theatre. During an informal session, they facilitated their chosen exercises, and positive feedback was provided.65

Week Three: The exercises which had most powerfully tapped into 'personal narrative' and explored 'alternative theatrical languages' were selected. The VSC took part in a movement workshop, delivered by choreographer Pip Jones.

Week Four: A teacher twilight was delivered to drama teachers from across Devon by myself. The workshop materials were those created by the VSC facilitators. Feedback was sought from these professionals about the usability of the material, and enthusiasm was expressed about their effectiveness in working with secondary students. The VSC 'spliced' the workshop together, combining various devising exercises into the morning's structure, and setting aside substantial time for the participants to devise in the afternoons.

Week Five: First week of delivery. The VSC delivered all-day workshops to Kings School in Ottery St Mary, Tiverton High School in Tiverton, Coombeshead College in Newton Abbot, and Matthews Hall in Exeter. 66

Week Six: Second week of delivery. VSC delivered shorter workshops to St James School in Exeter and Uffculme School in Collumpton.67

Showcase: On the 5th of March, 2010, five of the six groups came together at Roborough Studios, Exeter, to spend a full day in the studio. The curriculum for this day is listed below.

Outreach Workshop Curriculum:

10-11:00 – Names & Mapping. We used various name exercises, according to the invidual group's dynamic. Some of the options included 'Zombies', 'Joe, Joe, Joe', 'Jump In/Jump Out' and 'Yes.' The mapping exercise is one developed by Clark Baim of Geese Theatre, and provided a way of learning about the group whilst beginning to explore personal narrative and gesture.

11-12:00 – Standing Alone, Interruptive Monologues, 'This is not a....' These exercises were more high focus, and tapped into higher-risk personal narrative.

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65 I find it particularly useful to 'bolster' facilitation skills in the early stages. For many younger facilitators, the proximity of age/experience to those they are facilitating makes it difficult to feel confident in their leadership. We discussed qualities of 'good' facilitation first – repeating audience phrases, honouring high-stakes offerings, asking open-ended questions, etc. By providing purely positive feedback in the first few sessions, this confidence can grow. By later facilitation, the VSC were quite naturally self-critical anyway.

66 Not all six members of the VSC were able to attend every session. This proved to be quite useful in terms of rotating facilitation responsibility. By the end of the outreach phase, almost every member of VSC had facilitated every component of the workshop.

67 These workshops were shorter because they took place during the school day. This somewhat limited the devising output, but also allowed for us to reach schools who might not have been able to take part otherwise.

The last exercise explored various ways of using a stimulus object in 'non-literal' ways, which set up the introduction of The Box after lunch.

12:30-1:00 – Introduction of devising stimulus, postcards, and 'creative constraint' cards. The postcards were sent from the previous session's group. The 'Creative Contstraint' cards included additional criteria which they had to include in their performance.68

1:00-1:45 – Devising

1:45-2:00 – Feedback

2:00-2:45 – Devising/revising

2:45 – Final showings, writing postcards, evaluation.

Showcase Curriculum:

10-10:30 AM – Welcome & Full group session. During this first welcome, the young people were gathering into their five core groups, but there was an attempt to defuse any sense of concern or competition for the day. The tone was intended to be celebrative and positive... a chance to make friends from across Devon.

10:30-1130 - Create devised pieces with VSC facilitator and one other university support person. Here, the small devised pieces from their original session were revisited, and discussions ensued about how to turn them into one large devised piece. This process varied, according to group dynamic, size, and facilitator style.

11:30-12:30 – Feedback sessions & work with feedback

12:30-1:00 – lunch

1:15-1:30- Full group activity

1:30-2:15- rehearsal and polishing with new feedback helper

'Tech' rehearsal as needed. The lighting was quite minimal for the showcase performance, and live music was provided for all the groups by one of the VSC facilitators, an accomplished pianist.

2:15-2:30 – break/set up space for performances, allow parents/audience to arrive

2:30 - 3:30 – Showcase Performance.

3:30-4 - housekeeping, Northcott information, DYT company information, feedback on process, celebrations.

4-4:30 – DYT Company application overview & recommendations from the VSC facilitation team.

Phase Two:
DYT Company

Week One: Out of 48 applications handed in by the outreach participants, 27 young people were selected to continue on as part of the DYT company. This selection process was essential for several reasons. Firstly, the devising process requires a certain set of skills which are not typical to a theatre 'audition'. A loud speaking voice was of less importance than the ability and willingness to listen/respond to other's ideas. Secondly, the company size needed to be of an efficient and useful scale to rehearse and perform in the sites available. Future projects would ideally involve more young people all the way through the final performances.

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68 For example: 'a fall', 'a salute', 'an apology', 'a spin', 'redemption', 'a sigh', 'a spiral', etc.

Week Two: First rehearsal. Following full-group warm ups, the three theatre professionals each took a third of the company and led a rotating 45 minute workshop throughout the morning and early afternoon. Pip Jones led contact improvisation, Meg Searle led a vocal/music workshop and my session introduced 'motor' writing and dialogue creation. Following these three workshops, each group devised a piece which performed for the large group.

Week Three: The VSC performed their *Play in Six Acts*, which was followed by a motor writing session and a debrief. Then another set of rotating 45 minute workshops, and a devising session.

Week Four: The already-existing devised pieces were revisited, and emerging themes identified. Consistently throughout the first few sessions was a theme of 'resistance' or 'pushing back' against various pressures, thoughts, people, etc. This core concept became the spine of the piece.

Week Five: With the core theme of 'Resistance', the leaders clumped core concepts which had emerged into three narrative strands: identified as 'Pushing back against the voices in your own head', 'Resisting the fog of negativity from outside' and 'learning to do it yourself, stand on your own.' The students chose the narrative strand which interested them the most, and developed the strand into a particular narrative/set of stories which they felt best explored the concept.

Week Six: The narrative strands developed into three storylines, which loosely drew on personal narrative but quickly moved into fantastic mediums. The storylines became:

1. The Bedroom: Two 7-year old boys are playing together in a bedroom with various toys. When they manipulate the toys, live actors behind them on the stage come to life and enact the play in far more realistic ways. Through a series of projected 'drawn' images, one of the boys becomes increasingly reticent and moody, and the other friend storms out, stating 'You're no fun any more!' A subtext story emerges in which a recent family divorce has placed the boy in an awkward situation with his mother, and his attempts to escape into his own fantasy world are proving ineffective. A tension emerges between his childhood escapism and his more stressful daily reality.

2. The Toy Box: A group of toys within the boy's toy box come to life in militant fashion. Their precision and tactical language reveal that a social crisis is occurring in which some of the toys 'have to be let go.' One older puppet, named 'Judy' is selected as needing her 'strings cut' and the story begins to follow Judy's attempts to puppet herself after being released by her puppeteer. This thinly-disguised story was the young people's perspective on the Northcott Theatre being 'cut' by the Arts Council funders, and it also captured a core narrative about adolescence being a time of learning to walk independently from your parents.

3. The Book: Within one of the storybooks in the boy's room, a story of a life is enacted, in which a single man's existence is told through a series of abstract flashbacks, asking the question, 'Choice: Do you want to exist or live?' From early childhood through teenage romance through death, the lead character in the book has to decide whether to take risks and 'live' or simply to 'exist' safely. This piece is read by the protagonist boy, who then steps into the action and has to participate in a Standing Alone moment where he finishes the line 'I regret...' by stating 'I regret not telling Mum.'

Week Seven: Sequencing & Splicing. The various narrative strands were plaited around each other to form a cohesive piece. Again, this element of the devising process as led by myself, the other two theatre professionals and the

VSC facilitators. In future work, this part of the process should be more owned/led by the members of the youth company, but this requires a familiarity with devising processes and narrative structures.

Week Eight: (Tech and Production week): With a load-in to the theatre on the Monday, the DYT Company spent a week in technical and dress rehearsals before their performance on 16 April 2011. Additional elements were developed and refined – including several all-ensemble movement sequences, work on the original music, and the ending, which involved the protagonist boy and the puppet Judy 'learning' a duet dance together which becomes increasingly adept, ending with a full-body plank lift. Ultimately, each company member ended the piece by stepping over the 'Borderline' which lay across the downstage and crossing up into the audience whilst joining in to the original song. In the final performance, this 45-minute long production was followed by a talk-back session with the audience.

Appendix D

Curricular summary of the *On Our Terms* dialogic project

Aims: This piece attempted to build on the curricular approaches described during the DYT project, but also to return to youth centres first encountered during the pilot projects in year one. Its overt aim was to 'start a conversation' between young people and those in power around them – school administrators, teachers, youth workers, local councillors, etc.

On Our Terms interactive workshop structure:

Gathering In Phase:
    The White Carpet: As the audience for each performance arrive, they are invited through the door into the performance space, and asked to remove their shoes. They then step onto a long white roll of paper. Written at regularly spaced intervals along this roll are various questions/prompts, which ranged from the silly ('Draw what you had for breakfast') to the serious ('What are your best memories about this place?' or 'What do you think of politicians?' or 'What do you think of when you hear the word 'youth'?) During this time, music plays, and when the participants finishes entering the space, they are invited to sit down in a circle and the performance begins.

Warming Up Phase:
    Mapping on a Line: The audience is asked to rise and participate in a variation of the Mapping exercise used during DYT outreach. Rather than a world map, however, the mapping occurs on a continuum line, and various questions are responded to in an embodied (rather than written) capacity. Questions ranged from 'How do you feel about marmite?' to 'How far did you have to travel to get here today?' to 'How much of an adult or youth are you?'
    The Maze: A performance piece is then presented, which involves six performances (a blend of secondary students and university students) in a physical theatre piece. Through a series of simple revolutions and rotations, two main characters attempt to seek each other out, but a maze keeps getting in the way. Despite several moments of almost-contact, the 'seeker' character battles through a long string of obstacles, only to find themselves manipulated into a false pose/role, and unable to speak when finally face to face with the 'sought'. This piece is facilitated in a Joker-style, and the audience asked to respond.

The Meat:
    Image of Power: The participants are then asked to stand up in a circle and participate in a Boal image exercise in which the final power dynamic of *The Maze* is re-created and any participant can step in and adjust the power ratio by assuming a silent frozen pose. This series of tableaux then turns into a spoken exercise, which is a variation of Standing Alone.
    Standing Alone, Circle Version: Through a series of prompts, the participants are asked to speak and respond to various unfinished phrases, such as 'I don't feel listened to when...' or 'I feel empowered when...' or 'I think Devon County Council should...' or 'I think people my age should...' The last prompt is used as a starting point for a Fishbowl Discussion.

Fishbowl: Again, in a seated circle, four volunteer participants are surrounded by the rest of the group. These four engage in a debate/discussion about the last topic. At any point, a discusser can be tapped out by someone in the outer circle, who takes their place and continues the discussion.

Post-It Venting: Sticky notes are passed around, and everyone writes down the 'one thing you wanted to say but didn't get a chance to say.' Audience members are then encouraged to sit back down into an end-on formation.

The Closure Phase:

Entanglement: Four performers entangled on a tabletop perform a physical theatre piece which depicts one of them trying to escape and being pulled back/restrained by the other three. In rotation, each of the four attempts to escape, but they are stopped by various limitations – one is stuck under the table, another trapped in a rotating mechanical cycle, another trapped behind a fence of legs/limbs. The piece grows in frustration/energy, and ultimately ends with all four drooping back into their original entangled poses in defeat.

A facilitator steps forward and returns the piece to the last attempted escape, where one dancer is trapped under the table, having just uttered the phrase 'You're not hearing me!'. With audience help, the table and 'restraining figures' are identified, and the audience speculates about what the trapped figure is trying to communicate. They are then asked what the table structure represents in their own lives, and together the audience imagines small steps that could be taken to break down or overcome their own metaphorical 'table' issue.

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