

# What should the rules be – or should there be rules? Embodied popular education and the production of facilitated space

Aidan Jolly<sup>1\*</sup>, Wendy O' Connor<sup>2</sup>, Cristina Justino do Nascimento<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Co-Artistic Director (Research) at Collective Encounters; PGR at Edge Hill University*

<sup>2</sup> *Executive Director at Collective Encounters, and Master's Candidate at Italia Conti*

<sup>3</sup> *Member of the Collective Encounters Radical Researchers Group*

\* [aidan@collective-encounters.org.uk](mailto:aidan@collective-encounters.org.uk)

**Abstract** Drama facilitation takes place in “social world” spacetimes that are governed by hegemonic norms. These are created by a complex interplay of global historical processes, the specifics of local factors in the present, and the experience of participants. In Merseyside, UK, these processes create intersectional oppression, which, despite a rhetoric of “inclusion,” renders engagement in creative work either uncomfortable or unobtainable for diasporic and working-class communities in the area. These communities also continue to disproportionately experience various forms of violence. Our response is a trauma-informed “conscientization through the body,” using an eclectic mix of emergent methodologies that intentionally co-create emancipatory spacetimes.

**Keywords** Participation; drama; communities of practice; trauma; social change

## INTRODUCTION

Collective Encounters is a Theatre for Social Change (TfSC) organization based in Liverpool, UK. Founded in 2004, we run participatory drama and performance programs, including an open adult theater group, a women's theater group, and projects for care-experienced young people, migrants, and diasporic communities. We are increasingly involved in participant-led community research projects that re-imagine approaches to knowledge exchange and inform the development of new creative methodologies. We collaborate with a range of partners, from Liverpool City Council to community organizations and academic institutions. We run a national and international training program through our Centre for Excellence in Participatory Theatre, which specializes in “open space” events for peer-to-peer sharing and trauma-informed practice, and showcases socially engaged interdisciplinary arts practice. This paper examines the co-creation of new community-centered explorations of the production of space with our “Radical Researchers” participatory workshop group.

Aidan Jolly joined Collective Encounters in 2012, first developing a lived-experience group in St Helens, Merseyside, focusing on mental health, then projects with veterans and homeless people. He is now a co-artistic director, facilitating the Radical Researchers group and engaging with local universities to generate participant-led research projects. Wendy O'Connor joined as a participant in 2019, took part in training and performance projects, and is a member of the Radical Researchers. She is now the executive director of the company. Cristina Justino do Nascimento studied drama and education in Brazil. On migrating to the UK, she joined the Radical Makers training program for developing artists in 2021, and then also became a Radical Researcher. She works as a teaching assistant with young neurodiverse people at a local school. As authors, we bring our past histories, our lived experience and position, and our development as members of Collective Encounters to this article, which is a polyphonic synthesis of our learning processes and discussions that have co-evolved with the development of our research practice. This paper is developed from a participatory

workshop presentation at the “Norms and Storms” conference for the Participation Research Group at the University of Leeds, 2023.

Writing about embodied practice and the creation of space is paradoxical. Much embodied knowledge is tacit and unarticulated. Participants in the spaces we co-create embody ideas and practices from within the communities that nurture them. They each have their own unique story to tell, and from this, co-creation and co-learning can flourish. It is this that we attempt to describe. We invite anyone reading to pause and reflect. Consider, for example, the position you are sitting in, the pressure of the chair on your body (if you are sitting), the floor at your feet; where is the light coming from as you read this? Is it natural light? While you pause, you are becoming temporarily more embodied.

## THE PRODUCTION OF “SOCIAL WORLD” SPACES

An embedded assumption of Theatre for Social Change is that change is needed. For this reason, practitioners of this and related disciplines such as Legislative Theater (Boal, 1998) have to explain the current state of the world, and a theory of why this should be changed. We need to understand the conditions that produce “facilitated spaces.”

Space and time are usually regarded as fixed and immutable.<sup>1</sup> The space in which a particular activity takes place is often not open to question. Users of that space may register discomfort or pleasure in a particular place, they may feel threatened or welcomed, but this does not generally lead to critical thinking around “spacetime” unless the experience of a particular location is unusual or extreme. In fact, modern space and time are artificial constructs. In the emergent imperial powers of seventeenth-century Western Europe, the requirements of colonial governance, navigation, commerce, and finance, coupled with ongoing land enclosures and the development of a regulated labor system and disciplined workforce in the metropole, created a new metric against which a common spacetime could be imposed, with a rigid mechanistic outlook that saw all of life as clockwork:

Descartes suggested that bodily movement was the result of [ ]mechanical causes (and imagined that animals and men were, in reality, a type of complicated machine, similarly constituted. (Millenson, 1975, p.24).

Marx and Engels observed that this world view created a “metabolic rift,” through which man [*sic*] was alienated from his body and from nature (Foster, 2000). On this alienation were built the necessary ruptures that allowed for the expropriation of the commons and the exploitation of labor. The Enlightenment additionally enclosed the production of knowledge and culture into patriarchal educational systems (Grosfoguel, 2013).

Henri Lefebvre proposed that space – physical and sensory, social, and conceptual – is created by the “mode of production” dominant at any given historical period, with remnants of the preceding modes of production and suggestions of future modes intermingled with the present (Lefebvre, 1991). The “Neo-Cartesian” and “rational” space we live in is imposed by capitalist interests, which in the course of time become hegemonic, and are violently enforced when opposed. Lefebvre’s ideas were critiqued and developed by Sylvia Federici and Doreen Massey. Federici described the violent ways in which space became gendered, as over the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries production became a male domain and social reproduction a female domain (Federici, 2004). Massey combined space and time into “spacetime” and described how it becomes “compressed” as

<sup>1</sup> In the everyday world, that is. Discussions of space and time and ‘spacetime’ in this context should not be conflated with *Doctor Who* or Einstein’s theories of relativity.

processes of expropriation and exploitation accelerate, with this compression also being gendered in its expression in workplaces, homes, and civic spaces (Massey, 1994).

The decolonial critique of Linda Tuhiwai Smith shows how Western spacetimes destroyed indigenous forms of knowledge that used paradigms that were not based on Cartesian metrics. She builds on Lefebvre's work to introduce "colonial spacetime," which she regards as "ideologically dominant" in its mathematical exactness, and creates a language of space by which:

society is viewed (public/private space, city/country space), [ ] gender roles were defined (public/domestic, home/work) and [ ] the social world of people could be determined (the market place, the theatre). Compartmentalized, space can be better defined and measured. (Smith, 1999, pp. 50–51)

Spacetime is therefore an embodiment of normative, hegemonic, values. These tend to become internalized, and expressed in and through the body. For example, to be racialized is a highly embodied experience, rendering Black and Brown people subject to immigration controls regardless of their legal status (El-Enany, 2020), a status which is not usually under question for people racialized as white. The body becomes a site of resistance. As Federici puts it, "Our struggle then must begin with the reappropriation of our body, the revaluation and rediscovery of its capacity for resistance, and expansion and celebration of its powers, individual and collective" (Federici, 2020, p. 132).

### *The production of space in twenty-first century Liverpool*

In Merseyside, the local spacetime developed as a result of Liverpool's position as the main port of the UK slave traffic. This history, which is well documented (Mcdade, 2011), has led to the presence of an unusual mixture of working-class and diasporic identities which evolved together (Clay, 2020; Virdee, 2014; Zack-Williams, 1997). Through these, the city has become known apocryphally as a site of resistance to the culture of the dominant elite of the UK, particularly to central government. In this it is part of a greater narrative around the "problematic north" of the UK (Frost, D. and North, P., 2013; Hazeldine, 2020; Martin et. al., 2018; Webb et. al., 2022). Matthew Thompson describes how development of the current spacetime of the city has been marked by a Lefebvrian "violence of abstract space" enacted through regeneration and gentrification (Thompson, 2017).

## **THE EXPERIENCE OF "SOCIAL WORLD" CREATIVE SPACES**

The positionality of both participants and facilitators are important factors in the co-production of "social world" creative spaces. Working with so-called "marginalized" communities in Merseyside reveals a wealth of intersectional groups with a large degree of strength, cohesion, and commonality (Jolly, 2023). The Radical Researchers group comprised eleven participants with experience of TfSC practice. They were convened as part of a masters degree by research project involving Collective Encounters and Edge Hill University (Lancashire, UK) and investigating the creation and retention of community-centered knowledge (Jolly, 2022). The group met ten times for a series of workshops over winter 2021–2022. All the authors of this paper were involved. The outcome was a co-created set of practices designed to increase the impact and benefit of participant-led research for the communities of the participants.

Everyone in the Radical Researchers group had experienced some form of actual violence. Everyone described themselves as having been mis-educated. Some had come to the UK as adult migrants and had learned UK history from the perspective of the colonized education systems in their mother countries; some had left school at 14, feeling they were learning nothing, while a few were educated to degree level. All spoke of a range of topics excluded from their education,

ranging from the nature of the monarchy, climate change, different religions, and different forms of sexuality, to “racism, racism. I didn’t know what it was till I came to England” (Radical Researcher, 2022).<sup>2</sup> This suggests the widespread failure of educational systems to deal with histories that are not majoritarian or hegemonic (Jolly, 2022).

Most members of the group had experienced gentrification, describing this in terms normally applied to a war zone, such as buildings of value to them and which embodied community knowledge being “flattened” or “destroyed,” to be replaced by unaffordable housing. For them, the current processes of the production of spacetime in their neighborhoods are gendered, racialized, and expropriative, and their voices are unheard by those making the decisions about the disposition of this space (see also Kern, 2022). Collective Encounters’ own research<sup>3</sup> shows how these processes have led to the loss of suitable venues to host facilitated creative work, as community organizations and venues close and as meeting rooms are forced by commercial circumstances to cater for a more affluent clientele. They shape the identity, the health outcomes, and the fabric of the city very unequally, and they do not bring benefits to the poorer residents of the city.<sup>4</sup>

The Radical Researchers’ experiences of participatory drama spaces – often located in underfunded, cold, poorly maintained “community” spaces rather than purpose-built studios – are affected by their associations with prior experiences. Marginalized communities have less access to drama spacetimes and fewer role models to look to, and lack of experience of such spacetimes, combined with a general lack of social mobility in such communities, can create a belief that these are “not for me” (Brook et al., 2022; Daboo, 2018). Public art institutions often pay lip service to the idea of community, but in our experience the participatory groups are often excluded to make way for lucrative corporate events.<sup>5</sup> There is a strong connection between the external and internal worlds of oppression, such that there is an “indivisible unity” between the historical process that forms a given spacetime, embedded within its physical structure, and the memories and emotions that follow from the narratives and embodied experiences created by participants (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 8).

The authors’ prior experiences of creative and cultural spaces provide an illustration of these processes of “arrival” in the facilitated space created by the Radical Researchers. Wendy describes the evolution of her understanding as being influenced by class and by normative assumptions around “formal” cultural spaces:

Having grown up on a council estate, money was always tight. I was led to believe throughout my school years that only those with money could attend drama schools or higher educational settings, so from a young age I had already removed myself from that race. It is only now, in my mid-thirties, that my mindset has changed.

2 All quotes used from the Radical Researchers project were collected in the reflective sections of the workshops, and are used with consent.

3 Two reports commissioned by Liverpool City Region Theatre Network and Arts Council England and carried out by Collective Encounters (Burghes, Jolly, and Warnock, 2023; Jolly and Kilroy, 2023) highlighted the problems caused by the reduction in suitable spaces for participatory drama for youth theater, and by extension, all participatory drama.

4 LCR and Metro Mayor, (2020), “Liverpool City Region Plan For Prosperity Evidence Base,” Liverpool Region Combined Authority.

5 The Radical Makers and Researchers groups had access to a high-status city-center venue during the period when venues were re-establishing in-person working as the pandemic reduced in intensity. However, once the pandemic was considered “over” and the venue hire market began to return in earnest, the venue raised its prices and we could no longer afford to use it. Many participants were disappointed by this, as they had valued the location, character, and status of that space.

Aidan grew up in a new town where such spaces initially simply did not exist:

We were a family that never went to the theatre or art galleries or concerts – there were none to go to, but also we couldn't afford to. So when I did go on this one day workshop I met a scruffy group of people who worked out of a van (Incubus Theatre). This was a complete revelation to me. I got involved at University but didn't "get" it and got elbowed out by people who had been in youth theatres and were more confident. To this day, although I have a degree, I have no formal education in drama or music.

Cristina was engaged in drama in Brazil from an early age:

There were some drama lessons offered by cultural centres in Diadema, the city I have been lived for the most of my life. Diadema is an industrial, working-class city, one of the poorest and most violent in Brazil. At that time the Partido dos Trabalhadores<sup>6</sup> government offered free art and culture activities in cultural centres, schools, parks and other public spaces. The drama lessons offered were more experimental, with research based on the body, the character and the literature. These provided opportunities for critical thinking and innovation, and we learned not only drama, but dance, circus, and literature. It was great because it created a sense of collective and community bonds as well.

Such experiences, with their strong memories and emotive power, are deciding factors in shaping formative attitudes toward creative learning, especially when the opportunities for it are not made available in schools and when there is no sense of entitlement to "be creative" in formal spaces. Experiences like these motivate both facilitators and participants to seek creative outlet through informal or self-constructed spaces.

## **“RADICAL RESEARCHERS” AND THE CO-CREATION OF A GENERATIVE FACILITATED DRAMA SPACETIME**

The “norms” of social world spacetimes are increasingly exclusive and restrictive in their world view, and take place increasingly in a context of violence, erasure, and commodification. Collective Encounters’ response has been to develop a generative practice, creating new “norms” around trauma-informed and embodied working, that is co-designed with people with lived experience. This practice is constantly evolving, but is based on a mix of established and emergent methodologies: “Theatre for Social Change,” “embodied popular education,” a trauma-informed approach, an emergent pedagogy called “Understanding place,” and a recognition that we are becoming a community of practice.

***Theatre for Social Change (TfSC)*** is an approach to making theater in collaboration with marginalized people that has been practiced by Collective Encounters from our foundation. Emerging from an array of sources including the community theater of the 1960s and 1970s, the political theater of the 1930s, Carnival, and a range of international influences, it is participant-led, works outside “legitimate” theater spacetimes and aesthetics, and exposes rules, norms, and systems through a process of “making strange.” “Provocations” are used to highlight contradictions where a given system can be seen to break down and normative spacetimes can be called into question. Sarah Thornton, Collective Encounters’ founding Artistic Director, acknowledges that TfSC

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6 Similar to Labour in the UK.

is often hard to separate from practices generally referred to as “applied theatre.” She argues that intentionality, community, conscientization, and its “hyphenated” nature (Cohen-Cruz, 2005, p.106) “begin to distinguish TfSC as a discernable set of practices. While individually they are not unique to TfSC, taken together they do frame a field” (Thornton, 2014, p. 5). So does its underpinning with a theory of change that draws deeply on the movement theories of Hardt and Negri, (2004), Holloway (2010), and Cox and Nilsen (2014).

**Popular Education** emerged from the work of Paulo Freire in Brazil in the 1970s. It has been enriched by the feminist critiques of bell hooks and Antonia Darder (hooks, 2009; Darder, 2017). It is not simply knowledge exchange, of the kind increasingly being practiced by academic institutions in the UK. It also requires that popular educators must have the intent to (ultimately) level power dynamics between the facilitators and the group, and that they must be consciously working toward goals of liberation and social justice.<sup>7</sup> Like Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed, which it influenced, Popular Education can be appropriated, de-natured, and de-contextualized (Freire, 1997). The core of a Popular Education process is “conscientization,” the awakening of a view of one’s self in relation to community, society, and power (Freire, 2021).

At Collective Encounters, we have engaged in our own reinvention of the practice. First, we introduced the use of the “Spiral Model” (see Diagram 1), originally developed for trade union education in the global North (Arnold et al., 1991), by using a question-based approach in TfSC workshops. What emerged from combining the two practices is that Popular Education can be “embodied.” Freirean Popular Education tends to focus on verbal discussion. Yet drama techniques elicit the expression of non-verbal or somatic tacit knowledge. This knowledge is easily overlooked or excluded in a primarily text-based culture, but in fact the sharing of this kind of knowledge reveals other ways of being, knowing, and understanding. Somatic knowledge (that which we know in our bodies, by our daily actions) also plays a key role in two other emergent methodologies that we have developed in relationship with our TfSC practice.

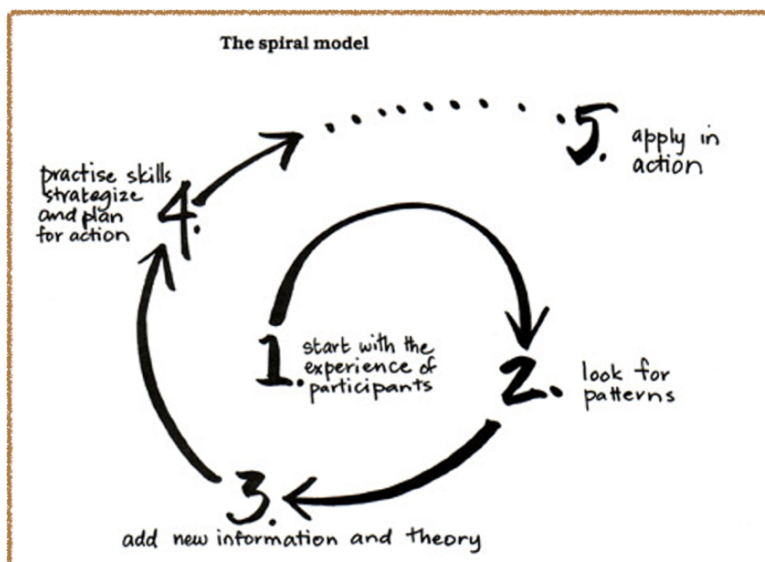


Diagram 1: The Spiral Model of Popular Education, after Arnold, R. et al. (1991)

7 “[T]hey [educators] have only absorbed the substance of my ideas to a certain degree, while remaining ideologically chained to a position that is anti-Freirean” (Freire, 1997, p. 328).

## TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

The somatic effects of trauma, and the value of creative responses to trauma, were first documented by Bessel van der Kolk (2014). At the same time, Judith Herman documented how an historic understanding of violence in society emerged in opposition to a patriarchal approach to the “treatment” of trauma, which she argues developed diagnoses that grew from gendered perceptions of normative behavior. She developed a feminist critique of research into mental distress and abuse that has led to a revolution in our understanding of trauma. As well as recognizing for the first time the scale and the impact of domestic violence on women and children globally, she also has linked the discussion and treatment of trauma with a requirement to fight for social justice (Herman, 2022).

A trauma-informed approach requires an understanding of how trauma impacts on participants and facilitators in workshop processes, as well as the value of lived experience in addressing it. It requires facilitators to be aware of the limits of the creative processes, and that while these may have therapeutic benefits and impacts, the facilitators are not therapists.<sup>8</sup> It involves acknowledging past and present systemic injustices, and the silencing of the voices of survivors of those injustices. One of the greatest impacts of creative work in this context is the facilitation of “the return of voice.” The return of voice is part of a greater return to the body, as most survivors of trauma may tend to regard themselves as being in conflict with their bodies, or at least with the somatic effects of trauma. As discussed above, the body becomes the battleground in which oppressive norms are experienced and resisted. But this is only a beginning: also required is an understanding of how physical environments may contribute to the recurrence of trauma by embodying power. This understanding has led to the co-creation of a second emergent methodology, that of a “spatial vocabulary of power,” or “understanding place.”

## DEVELOPING “UNDERSTANDING PLACE”

The “understanding place” methodology was co-created from a series of workshops with the Radical Researchers based on Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s decolonial critique of research practices (Smith, 1999). This methodology draws on her model of a “spatial vocabulary of power.” Part of the research aimed to establish whether an appropriate spatial vocabulary of power could be created for a city like Liverpool, which, as discussed above, is both inside and outside the colonial center by virtue of its port status. Smith uses a taxonomy of “the line, the centre, and the outside” to question how people think of power in their spacetime. The Radical Researchers addressed this as a way of “making strange” their local environment and making visible the embodiment of power. The workshops in which this model was developed began by making space and time strange to the participants. As discussed above, the metrics of space and time were conceived of by the European Enlightenment as immutable.

These metrics were made visible and explored in an embodied way by facilitating a drama exercise that was based on changing the norms of movement through space and time. An abstract pair of spaces was introduced in which the room was divided into “slippery space” and “sticky space”: in the former, it was difficult to stop moving, in the latter, difficult to move. Participants were encouraged to move around the space and cross an invisible line that divided the two spaces, modifying their movement accordingly. The rules for moving around in this space were attached to the space itself. By contrast, the next exercise made time strange. In this case, participants were assigned in equal numbers to “slow” and “fast” time, which was a property attached to the participants themselves. People in slow time had to demonstrate how this affected their movement,

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8 Therapy involves sets of skills and cultural paradigms that focus primarily on the aim of integrative mental health rather than a creative output.

as did people in fast time. They were asked to swap at random intervals. Finally, the exercises were combined, and people were asked to simultaneously switch between both slippery and sticky space, and slow and fast time. Participants were then invited to think about and discuss this experience, to consider what happened when they attempted to interact with others in different kinds of spacetime, and how they avoided colliding with each other.

Participants then considered norms that might exist in an actual spacetime familiar to them, asking whether those norms were allowed in that spacetime, whether they themselves were comfortable in it, and to make a shape or gesture that showed that. This led to discussion of how spacetimes embody power. The theoretical framework discussed above was introduced to the participants in a way that could be felt and acted out. We *feel* when we are not welcome in a spacetime, or when we are under threat in some way (whether from actual threat or from the legacy of trauma). By playing physically with abstract spaces, this can be explored somatically, and our somatic knowledge is made visible. Participants then went on to consider Smith's taxonomy of the line, the center, and the outside. They were asked to think about what, in the context of a familiar spacetime such as their neighborhood, constituted a line (and therefore perhaps a division or boundary), what was at the center, and what and who is "outside." This led them to create a work-in-progress script in which they explored the dynamics of power in a fictionalized version of their community, physically played out with humor and "joyful militancy" (Federici, 2020).

In the final workshop, participants engaged in a process of review and analysis, from which they created a framework for developing drama spacetimes which are radically generative of strategies for social change, and which enable the retention of learning for the benefit of the group. They propose four practices – Mapping, Guiding, Imagining, and Caring – which interrogate norms and aim to establish new ones. "Mapping" is the practice of surveying the existing epistemological and ontological terrain; "Guiding," the normative act of deciding which are the relevant ethical principles; "Imagining," acting as midwives to emergent knowledges; and "Caring" enables us to develop a recuperative practice that deals with "the paradox of change" by which those most subject to violence and most in need of change are often least able to imagine it. The participants' chosen ethical principles can be summarized in three categories: actions directed toward the defense of

### Embodied Spiral Model Popular Education

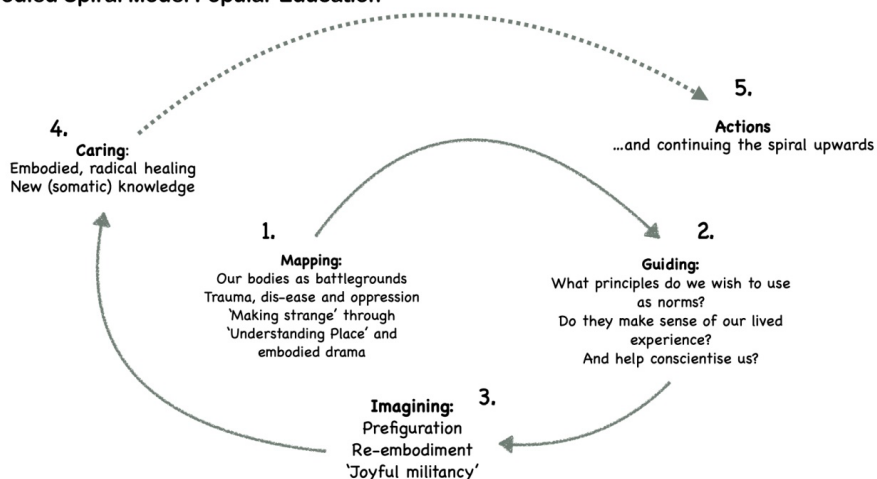


Diagram 2: Embodied Spiral Model Popular Education (illustration by authors)



community-centered knowledge; actions that co-produce community learning spaces; and actions that recuperate power, violence, and epistemicide (Jolly, 2022).

Each of these practices should be regarded as being creative and embodied. They are to be understood as mutually reinforcing in the spiral mode, rather than as a linear process with a definitive end point. This reproduces the spiral of Popular Education introduced above, but with the added aspect of embodiment. Diagram two illustrates congruences between the spiral model that we began with and the framework that emerged from the Radical Researchers project. The conscientization that takes place is a conscientization of the body, or a recognition of the somatic nature of oppression and how we can find embodied strategies to respond to bodily alienation and exclusion. To be “radically generative,” they must also have Freirean intentionality aiming for systemic change. This intentionality can include the somatic (hooks, 1994).

## DISCUSSION

How do the Radical Researchers’ principles contribute to the co-creation of new, less oppressive “social world” facilitated spaces? Co-created spaces are fashioned everywhere. The processes described above make this explicit and intentional. By exposing normative constructions of power with appropriate sets of ethical principles, any space decided on democratically by participants could potentially become a co-created anti-oppressive space: indoor, outdoor, private or public, stage, room, park, street, on known ground, or in neutral territory free from associations (sometimes these are called “temporary autonomous zones” – see for example, Holloway, 2010; Chatterton and Pusey, 2020).

What other principles might there be that are similar? There is clearly no monopoly on the development of liberatory drama practices. Nor is there a “point of arrival” after which the work is done. Collective Encounters’ practice, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, has continued to evolve. Research commissioned by the Liverpool City Region Theatre Network in 2023 investigated what constitutes best practice for inclusive working. While this was focused on marginalized young people, the measures it proposes provide a foundation on which co-creation can be built with any group of participants. Measures can be embedded at the participant level, within workshop practice, and at the organizational level. Many of them reinforce the kinds of principles suggested by the Radical Researchers, including the importance of lived experience and community-centered knowledge in co-creating the facilitated space, principles of embodied working, and a movement-based approach to dealing with trauma (Jolly and Kilroy, 2023). However, there are clearly limits to how a given set of principles should be generalized.

What might these limits be? Do the Radical Researchers’ principles suggest a generally applicable methodology? An “off the peg” approach is not desirable – there are many examples of transformative pedagogies becoming dogmatically universalized “narratives of redemption” (Fischman, 2020). However, there are ways in which methods for applying new norms to the creation of facilitated social world spaces can be shared. Aspects of the Radical Researchers methodology have been trialed with public health registrars, applied theater students, and co-created bid-writing workshops for a large public health research consortium; they continue to be developed with third-sector organizations and academics investigating the impacts of poverty in the Liverpool City Region. The key is intentionality. The specific methods used will not be emancipatory without careful choices around the normative aspects of how these are applied. Organizations need to embed “structural praxis” into their work. This will involve, at the minimum, developing cultures of reflective practice in which studying theory is welcomed and given time, and methods of translating that theory into practice are given space. Understandings of anti-oppressive working must be developed, reviewed, and applied to an ethic of care. This involves a commitment to investing in staff and freelance development and training, and to sharing knowledge and learning through

organizational and practitioner networks. Practitioners must also co-create social world spacetimes in which this kind of practice can flourish. We consider one such – communities of practice – below.

Even ignoring considerations of funding and resources, Theatre for Social Change demands a lot of its participants. It asks people experiencing all-consuming crises to step out and look at the world from a wider and deeper perspective. It asks people in struggle to make relationships and enter into commonality with other people who may have equal reason to mistrust each other. This apparent paradox can only be resolved in co-created spaces where the process of “making strange” leads to “making sense” of individual experiences of oppression by linking them with a move toward social justice, healing, and re-embodiment, so repairing the metabolic rift. In essence, the process outlined above can be regarded as “making strange with our bodies.” Drama expression uses the whole body, including facial expressions, gestures, movement, and sensation (smell, touch, taste, sight, hearing, internal proprioception). Participants have experiences that impact the way they will physically explore spacetimes and the way this affects their body (muscles, muscle memory, bones) in an integral way. People come to take over spacetimes as their own, and they enter into commonality with others engaged in the same work in the same space.<sup>9</sup> This is the embodied equivalent of the “return of the voice” to people who have been silenced – it is the return of the body to relative ease with itself, and the return to spaces from which people have been removed or excluded. The body is “a ground of resistance, that is, the body and its powers – the power to act, to transform itself and the body as a limit on exploitation” (Federici, 2020).

## RADICALLY GENERATIVE COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE?

According to Wenger-Trayner et al., 2023,

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, ...a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school (p. 11)

This learning is “an integral part of generative social practice in the lived in world” (p.35). One feature of a community of practice is the concept of “legitimate peripheral participation.”<sup>10</sup> The legitimacy derives from belonging to a group – belonging and learning are co-equal, each depending on the other. The idea of the periphery is proposed not by opposition to a central position or to “complete participation,” but in recognition that communities are complex and non-linear, with more than one, or no, center, and that the way people participate in learning is dynamic, and dependent on relationships within the group. We found the concept persuasive in that it was a non-stigmatizing way to describe how participants can claim more or less space in a group, and how this can change over time, without them always making a visible contribution to the group, and without invalidating their right to be in the group and define their participation on their own terms.

Communities of practice are structured around the domain (the purpose of the community), the community (that is, who is it for?), and the practice (what is it doing?). The Radical Researchers brought together people with common histories of trauma, violence, miseducation, and intersectional oppressions. Although the “domain” was set prior to the project and was extended as an invitation, they went on to co-create a practice in which every person was heard and valued,

9 A process physically embodied by “co-regulation,” in which bodily signals and rhythms usually not visible to us enter into a beneficial synchronization (Schwartz, 2021).

10 A workshop participant introduced to us to this concept in the course of a training event on trauma-informed practice.

impacting on the understanding and self-discovery of the participants, and communicating values and ideas told through dramatic narratives. In this sense, they became a community of practice that was also a site of Popular Education. Much of the impact of facilitation in the context of TfSC seems to be derived from providing spaces in which learning can be restarted for participants whose prior experiences of learning were traumatically interrupted.

However, the idea of communities of practice needs to be approached with caution. It is congruent with Popular Education in being a situated form of learning (located in a common domain or social world spacetime). However, Popular Education is an intentional process aimed at radically generative social change (“conscientization followed by praxis,” as hooks describes it in *Teaching to transgress*: hooks, 1994). A community of practice, being more focused on learning a particular set of skills, need not have this intention. While it may be possible to regard all popular educators as automatically creating communities of practice, it is not the case that all communities of practice lead to Freirean conscientization. Nor is there any proviso that communities of practice need to be “embodied.”

## WHAT SHOULD THE RULES BE – OR, SHOULD THERE BE RULES?

Social world spacetimes available for facilitated drama are usually created by the tacit imposition of norms, expectations, and rules generated by the society and economy in which they are embedded. It is possible to intentionally co-create more welcoming drama spacetimes, in which those silenced and disembodied by this process can generate a return of the voice and the body, through explicitly revealing and refashioning tacit norms such that “spatial” or “embodied” conscientization occurs. This is a creative, political, and normative endeavor that is therapeutic to a certain extent, but is not therapy. It is also an exercise in “ontological design” (Serafini, 2022), in that it can lead to asking the question, “How do we want to be?” A provocative question is whether this leads to replacing one set of norms with another. One of the Radical Researchers expresses this as follows:

I think it is interesting to see that, when you give us one word or you give us a topic and we all come together and create something, then if everyone done what we do, if we done this session and it was like by law, you have to do, in your community, a session like this to change the planet you live on, then it'd be a better place. (Radical Researcher, 2022)

She paradoxically suggests that people will only come together to make change if they are required to “by law.” There is a danger that the new norms become as restrictive as the old. But neither are emancipatory goals served by abandoning all norms – this replaces structure with “the tyranny of structurelessness” (Freeman, 1970), which simply masks power. Instead, it is possible to embrace norms that are collectively agreed, and to co-produce spacetimes with emancipatory intent. This process conscientizes both participants and facilitators, which in turn virtuously changes the power relationships at work in the space and allows for the integration of relevant embodied and healing practices, including the legitimation of participation on the participants’ terms. Normative choices of principle become an explicit part of our library of tools for change.

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