



EXCHANGING ENGAGEMENT: ALTERNATIVE ARTS ENGAGEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

MATTHEW DAVID ELLIOTT

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: MATTHEW ELLIOTT, YOUTH THEATRE DIRECTOR. FLAT 1, 25 SEFTON PARK ROAD, LIVERPOOL, MERSEYSIDE, L8 3SL, THE UNITED KINGDOM. MATTHEW@COLLECTIVE-ENCOUNTERS.ORG.UK
© 2016. M. ELLIOTT. THIS IS AN OPEN ACCESS ARTICLE DISTRIBUTED UNDER THE TERMS OF THE CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION-NONCOMMERCIAL 3.0 UNPORTED LICENSE ([HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY-NC/3.0/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/)), PERMITTING ALL NON-COMMERCIAL USE, DISTRIBUTION, AND REPRODUCTION IN ANY MEDIUM, PROVIDED THE ORIGINAL WORK IS PROPERLY CITED.

CITATION: CONJUNCTIONS: TRANSDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF CULTURAL PARTICIPATION, VOL. 3, NO. 1, 2016. DOI: [HTTP://DX.DOI.ORG/10.7146/TJCP.V3I1.23646](http://dx.doi.org/10.7146/TJCP.V3I1.23646)

KEYWORDS

EMPOWERMENT, CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, PLAY, ACTIVISM, SUSTAINAINABILITY, COMMUNITY THEATRE, THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, LATIN AMERICA

ABSTRACT

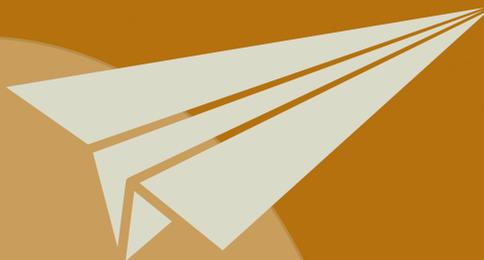
IN 1973, EDUARDO GALEANO (1940-2015), THE URUGUAYAN WRITER AND JOURNALIST CONCLUDED HIS SEMINAL BOOK OPEN VEINS OF LATIN AMERICA WITH THE FOLLOWING: 'THE LATIN AMERICAN CAUSE IS ABOVE ALL A SOCIAL CAUSE: THE REBIRTH OF LATIN AMERICA MUST START WITH THE OVERTHROW OF ITS MASTERS, COUNTRY BY COUNTRY. WE ARE ENTERING TIMES OF REBELLION AND CHANGE' (GALEANO, 1973, P. 261). AS GALEANO STATED, THE OPPRESSION OF POPULATIONS AND THE LOSS OF LIVES THROUGHOUT LATIN AMERICA LED TO 'TIMES OF REBELLION AND CHANGE'. ARTISTS, ACTIVISTS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY SOUGHT TO CHALLENGE AND RESIST AUTOCRATIC REGIMES TO SEEK ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF UPHOLDING THEIR DEMOCRATIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THESE METHODS AND PRACTICE HAVE TRANSCENDED THE DEMOCRATISATION OF THE CONTINENT IN THE 1980S AND 1990S. THE DESIRE TO ADVOCATE CHANGE THROUGH THE ARTS HAS CONTINUED TO BE RADICAL AND PROPOSES AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF BEING TO COMMUNITIES IN LATIN AMERICA. HOW CAN THIS PRACTICE BE TRANSPOSED TO BENEFIT THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK?

THE AUTHOR'S EXPERIENCE OF WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND HIS ENCOUNTERS WITH LATIN AMERICAN ARTS PRACTICE LED TO A NEED TO INTERTWINE THESE PRACTICES AND DEVELOP THEATRE AS A MODEL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE, WHICH ENGAGES THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK.

THE PAPER IS A PRODUCT OF A SIX-WEEK PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH PROJECT IN LATIN AMERICA (CHILE, ARGENTINA AND URUGUAY) THAT EXPLORED INNOVATIVE ARTS ENGAGEMENT FOR MARGINALISED YOUNG PEOPLE. THE RESEARCH WAS UNDERTAKEN AS A MEANS TO DEVELOP A HIGH QUALITY ARTS PROVISION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK. THE PAPER FOCUSES ON THREE AREAS: CONTINUITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND ACTIVISM, AND ASKS THE READER: HOW CAN THEATRE ETHICALLY ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DECISIONS THAT SHAPE THEIR SOCIETY? THE RESEARCH WAS FUNDED BY THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

MATTHEW ELLIOT TRAINED AS A FACILITATOR AND DIRECTOR AT THE LIVERPOOL INSTITUTE FOR PERFORMING ARTS AND GRADUATED IN 2011. MATTHEW UTILISES THEATRE AS A MEANS TO PROVOKE AND EXPLORE SOCIAL CHANGE. MATTHEW HAS WORKED WITH A RANGE OF MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, SPECIFICALLY YOUNG PEOPLE, IN A WIDE RANGE OF CONTEXTS INCLUDING EDUCATION SETTINGS, THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS. MATTHEW UNDERTOOK THE THEATRE AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT MA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS IN 2013. SINCE COMPLETING THE MA, MATTHEW HAS BEEN YOUTH THEATRE DIRECTOR AT COLLECTIVE ENCOUNTERS AND UNDERTAKEN PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH IN SOCIAL CHANGE PRACTICES WITH YOUNG PEOPLE. MATTHEW IS CURRENTLY AN EARLY CAREER RESEARCHER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF THEATRE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK AND CHILE.



Introduction

In 1973, Eduardo Galeano (1940-2015), the Uruguayan writer and journalist, concluded his seminal book *Open Veins of Latin America* with the following;

“The Latin American cause is above all a social cause: the rebirth of Latin America must start with the overthrow of its masters, country by country. We are entering times of rebellion and change.”
(Galeano, 1973, p. 261)

Galeano’s statement was written amidst a wave of military coups and dictatorships, which encompassed Latin America throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. By 1974, only three countries within Latin America could be termed as ‘democratic’. The military dictatorships came at great human cost. For instance, the National Reorganization Process in Argentina (1976-1983) resulted in 2,300 political assassinations and 20,000-30,000 disappearances (Kirby, 2003, p.77; Haerpfer, Bernhagen, Inglehart & Welzel, 2009, p.63).

As Galeano stated, the oppression of populations and the unfortunate loss of lives throughout Latin America led to ‘times of rebellion and change’. Artists, activists and the wider community sought to challenge and resist autocratic regimes to seek alternative ways of upholding their democratic and human rights. These methods and practices have transcended the democratisation of the continent in the 1980s and 1990s. The desire to advocate change through the arts has continued to be radical and proposes an alternative way of being to communities in Latin America. How can this practice be transposed to benefit the personal and social development of young people in the UK? This is the premise upon which this research is based.

For the past six years, I have been training and working as a community theatre practitioner. This has involved working with young people in a range of communities and settings based in the North West of England including prisons, education settings and managing the youth programme at Collective Encounters, a theatre company focusing on social change based in Liverpool. At present, I am an early career researcher at the University of Leeds, conducting research on the effects of theatre and the political participation of young people in the UK and Chile.

My experience of working with young people and my involvement with Latin American arts practice led to a need to intertwine these practices and develop a theatre practice for social change, which engages the political and social rights of young people in the UK. This need led me to spend six weeks in the southern cone of South America observing a range of practices, which are as follows:

- Colectivo Sustento, Santiago, Chile.
- Tercer Cordón, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Perimetral Festival, Montevideo, Uruguay.

The report will follow a chronological order and will highlight and discuss three recurring themes of the research: continuity, sustainability and activism. In all three countries, these themes acted as a foundation for each company’s practice and constituted an exciting and innovating way of engaging young people in the arts. The three components all have differences in their application in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay.

The organisations, communities and people I met during the research have been an inspiration to my practice in the UK. Questions were answered, but more questions emerged, and these are questions I welcome. How can theatre ethically engage young people in the social and political decisions that shape their society? The form will change but the aim will be consistent: the development of democratic rights for young people by young people; a society where young people are not ‘known and acted upon’ but are ‘those who know and act’ (Freire, 1996, p.18).

Devised theatre – Empowerment through play

All three practices outlined in this research utilise elements of devised theatre. A theatrical approach that can encompass a range of styles, content and ideologies, but encompasses an ethos of collaboration, playfulness and exploration, as Oddey (1994) describes:

‘Devising is a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative in the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing and re-shaping individuals contradictory experiences of the world. There is a freedom of possibilities for all those involved to discover; an emphasis on a way of working that supports intuition, spontaneity, and an accumulation of ideas.’ (Oddey, 1994, p.1)

The process of devised theatre with young people developed out of the wider community theatre movement in the 1960s as a means to enable young people to take control of the theatrical process and product (Richardson, 2015, p.11). A devised process enables participants to explore content without the constraints of text, hierarchical structures or predetermined agendas. Govan, Nicholson and Norman (2007, p.10) state that devised theatre founded its innovative style through the ‘interplay between the conceptual and the formal’; demonstrating the interdependence between the ‘artist’s beliefs and values’ and ‘forms of performance’.

The devising model can utilise a range of techniques, including improvisation, clowning and physical theatre. Underpinning the technique is the need for play, creativity and self-expression; to be released from the ‘constraints of text’ and ‘release an inner creativity that had been repressed’ (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p.30). Play in this context can be interpreted in numerous ways (playing a character, playing exercises, playing out future visions), but the ethos of empowerment and ownership enables young people to determine the ways in which they ‘play’. The model of devised theatre enables the ‘freedom of possibilities’, the enabling of young people to explore and investigate ideas and performance practice; ‘a rehearsal for the revolution’ (Boal, 2000, p.122).

Each practice demonstrated different approaches to devised theatre and the element of play it encompasses. These were explored through the means of clowning, satire and physical theatre with an aim for young people to be those ‘who know and act’. This was achieved by the empowerment of play; theatre as a safe space to experiment, explore and envisage futures, as Vygotsky (1978) famously stated: ‘...a child’s greatest achievements are possible in play, achievements that will tomorrow become her basic level of real action and morality’(p.100).

Colectivo Sustento, Santiago, Chile

Huerta Sustento; Sustenance garden. Colectivo Sustento space, Santiago, Chile.

As I departed from Chile, I wrote the following in a blog about the practice of Colectivo Sustento:

'In the back garden of a home in Santiago, there is a resistance happening: resistance to a system that perpetuates reoffending, advocates food dependency and produces illusions of freedom.'

To resist is an action that can encompass a myriad of guises, whether it be lobbying councillors, taking to the streets in protest or expressing dissent in public forums. It was apparent that a resistance was happening, but it was done in unique and innovative ways that empowered groups who would never be deemed to become empowered and find autonomy in a system that is rooted so deeply in to the pores of Chilean society: neoliberalism. Colectivo Sustento (CS) was established in 2012 and developed out of long-term community theatre projects under the former name of Teatro Pasmí. CS state their beliefs as follows:

'To create, to create together, to create from the earth. Colectivo Sustento is dedicated to community theatre and arts, and we are committed to social justice through our work with theatre, writing and photography. We believe that together we can imagine and create a more human and healthy way of living and relating.' (Colectivo Sustento, 2014)

This belief is delivered via two avenues;

- 1) Theatre. Workshops take place in the Colina 1 prison and at the CS space. The Colina 1 prison has two long-standing theatre groups, Fenix & Ilusiones. These groups have been functioning since 2002 and develop performances for a range of audiences including fellow prisoners, young offenders and

the general public. The theatre work at the CS space consists of ex-members of Fenix & Illusiones and theatre practitioners/activists.

- 2) Community garden. 'Take control of what you eat', this is the basic premise behind the community garden, but it also plays a vital role in sustaining elements of CS. The garden is a centre for training those who are interested in food autonomy and alternative methods of sustainability.

Both avenues rely on continuity as a means to sustain the collective's autonomy.

Historically, CS does not directly work with young people. However, the premiere of *Modecate* in 2013 enabled a long-term ambition to be fulfilled: members of Fenix & Illusiones performing to young people who are in custody or at risk of offending.

Penelope Glass of CS explains the origins of the idea:

'We devised this idea, called the tunnel and the tunnel was going to receive people who had been released and work with them for a certain amount of time with theatre, but also psychological, social work and legal support to be able to get over the transition time upon release, which is about 18 months.' (Glass, 2014)

The idea of the tunnel was proposed by members of the Fenix & Illusiones group when the first member of the group was due to be released in 2007. The idea was delayed due to a lack of financial support but was re-established when CS was formed with the identification that for the work to have social impact, the work in the prison needs to be continued when members are released (Glass, 2014).

A part of this idea was to work with young people, and the idea developed upon an experience in 2005 where members of Fenix & Illusiones performed at a school. The effect of serving prisoners performing in front of young people was tremendous on a range of levels and led to the development of the *Modecate* tour. *Modecate* deals with the theme of social control 'through the theatrical metaphor of madness' (Colectivo Sustento, 2014).

The performance toured three youth offender institutions with seven performances of *Modecate*. The performance was always accompanied with a post-show workshop and discussion. In Chile there is a 'school to prison pipeline' culture. Young people who grow up in some of the most deprived areas of Santiago have limited opportunities; unfortunately, prison appears most credible in certain scenarios with 3,054 children under 18 imprisoned in 2013 (US State Department, 2013).

Chile has the most unequal income distribution within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and there is a severe income imbalance with twenty per cent of the population controlling over half of the country's wealth (OECD, 2012; World Bank, 2012). Inequality has been proven to have negative effects on a range of sectors including health and education. For example, in unequal countries the educational attainment will be lower (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009, p.11/105).

Modecate aimed to break the pipeline and challenge such inequalities. This was achieved by offering a space of reflection. Young people stated a range of positive and reflective responses such as 'I identified, everything you said was real and moving, your message got to me' and 'we realised we can do much more than what we imagine' (Colectivo Sustento, 2014). But how was this achieved?

The most unique aspect of this work is that the prisoners themselves travel (under heavy escort and handcuff) and perform to the young people. It is something that could never take place in the UK. Individuals from a closed prison travelling to a youth offender institution to perform a play about social control would not only seem absurd but pretty ludicrous. But for CS, this is a rule and not an exception. For years, Fenix & Illusiones have been able to travel outside of the prison to perform to audiences as large as 3,000 people at international festivals.

As you can imagine, the process of organising external performances is not as smooth as desired and requires

extensive conversations with authorities. But the performance offers something to the prisoners and its audiences, in this case young people. It offers agency, an agency to change society.

The agency that Fenix & Illusiones have developed through collective critical reflection enables them to participate in changing the world from the confines of the most oppressive institutions in the world, the epitome of irony. As Glass (2014) states: 'Where do we find that agency? In a group, in a collective'.

The agency derives from their experiences of the criminal justice system, as Gabriel Jimenez, former member of Fenix & Illusiones and current member of CS, states:

'I think that the results we have seen with the kids in the different centres where we have been, have given us tremendous satisfaction. We are very happy, particularly since the idea seemed so absurd to many people that people from a prison would go to a juvenile prison to give positive advice!! ...it's strange.' (Jimenez, 2014)

As Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921-1997) stated: '...human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world' (Freire, 1996, p.106/7). He continued by stating that change cannot be achieved by the sole means of verbalism or activism, but through the merging of practice and theory: action and reflection: praxis.

The work of CS reflects and openly advocates this approach with artists, participants and audiences. The tour and the development of the work with young people moved the action and reflection beyond Fenix & Illusiones and towards others, beyond the self – a result of critical collective reflection, as stated previously. What makes this work an alternative to popular discourse regarding Paulo Freire and the use of critical reflection within the theatrical process? From my observation, I would like to suggest that this was a result of continuity.

Fenix & Illusiones have run consistently since 2002, with original members continuing to work with CS upon release via the notion of the tunnel. As opposed to the continuity of a project, they represent the continuity of a group. The group does not become an exclusive entity but grows and develops with old and new members. Through time they have been able to develop the unique nature of the relationship between theatre, participant and in this case, the prison. Time has been the enabler for action and reflection to take place.

How to sustain the continuity? In reference to the advent of Fenix & Illusiones, Glass states:

'We made a commitment to the guys, we talked about it and said to them, "we will come with or without funding", when we made that commitment, we said "we're really making this commitment", we're going to see how far we can go without having to rely on funding.' (Glass, 2014)

For continuity to take place, there was commitment; a commitment to the work which required the bare minimum of access, space and people. Community theatre is not a recognised form in Chile, as the arts council equivalent, Fondart, rarely recognise the value of community theatre projects. Alongside a lot of other projects I witnessed, CS debunked the idea of, 'no funding then no project'. Alternatives are developed.

During an interview, Glass (2014) stated that 'theatre is not the be all and end all for social change but it is an excellent tool'. CS identified that strength and possibilities of change occur via a multitude of approaches. Theatre is strengthened by other activities that also challenge and resist. Alternative approaches offer a means of sustainability.

The key example of this is the community garden. CS identify that the system in which they resist penetrates beyond the prison wall and manipulates basic human needs. In this case, food. With Gabriel trained in organic agriculture for two years by a local farm, the garden produces an array of food, from impressive watermelons in the summer to beautiful spinach in the winter.

The food covers the basic needs of the collective, but it does not solve all funding needs. However, it is ethical, and the collective have control of what they eat. The focus is on the creation rather than the production, as group member Carolina states in reference to the need for this work:

'Because there's a dynamic of breaking the dominant logic that has to do with individualism and productivity in economic terms' (Morales & Vera, 2014).

This way of working is currently being extended to develop theatre and gardening programmes in youth offender institutes. At first, it appears that this way of working is a reaction to the culture of arts funding and working in Chile. Inevitably, this plays a role in defining ways of sustaining the collective, but CS identify that to create change, theatre needs to be more than the act of theatre. The principle of resistance cannot be isolated to the workshop room but needs to permeate beyond.

The tacit and autonomous nature of CS enables the radical to happen. The autonomous nature of CS broadened the possibilities of engaging marginalised young people.

Time, commitment and agency have enabled CS to discover their work. But all three of these elements cannot be achieved overnight. The circular motion of action and reflection has exposed the cracks, openings and livelihood of these concepts. It has inspired reflection and the ability to find time where there appears to be none, and it has inspired commitment on the basis of a human (not economic) need and the will to support the agency of those who may never have been deemed to possess agency. For more information on CS, please visit <http://colectivosustento.org/>

Tercer Cordón, Buenos Aires, Argentina



Gabriel Jimenez & Francisco (Pancho) Morales, Juan Rodriguez rehearsal, CS space.



Tercer Cordon performing '¿quien es el jefe ahora?' – 'Who is the boss now?', Moreno, Buenos Aires.

Technique can be viewed as restrictive or sometimes inaccessible when engaging community groups, sometimes steeped in discipline, and the option of a dialogical relationship appears unfeasible. Tercer Cordon (TC) understands and seeks to change this. The technique is intertwined with pedagogy.

Clown + critical pedagogy = Tercer Cordon

Formed in 2000 by Fredy Perusso and Mariela Campanoni, TC runs a range of community groups from their space 'El Churqui', including a range of groups for young people, emerging artists and professionals. As well as community groups there are performances, either in the street or in 'unconventional' theatre spaces. This all culminates in the annual street theatre festival organised by TC, Octubre Callejero.

In relation to clown and politics, Davison (2013) states:

'We can see that clowning in the realm of politics holds an ambiguous position, at once critic, police, hero, enemy, representative of the people and a threat to the social order. Having seen such slippery behaviour already in other fields of clown endeavour, this should come as no surprise. The clown is apt to be assimilated into the needs of the moment, yet never completely so, it seems.'
(Davidson, 2013, p. 256)

The ambiguity of the clown's position in relation to politics enables a level of flexibility and autonomy. TC utilise this position as a means of artistic and political engagement for young people, both as audience members and participants.

An example of this is the show – ‘¿quien es el jefe ahora?’ – ‘Who is the boss now?’. The show was performed in parks and in the street. This show, with a traditional clown aesthetic – red nose, slapstick gestures and minimal words – interrogated the theme of power. What does it mean to have power? Who has power? And, can power be shared?

The question for me was how to transpose the complexities and contradictions of power to an audience of 8-12-year-olds? Clowning offered access to these issues through laughter and fun, thereby igniting the age-old argument between education and entertainment: do we engage beyond our laughter? TC demonstrated that the fun of clowning was the access point of engagement for young audiences, opening a space to discuss complexities of power.

In contemporary applied theatre discourse, there is a debate between the emphasis on effect as opposed to affect. Thompson (2009) argues that applied theatre is ‘limited’, as it merely focuses on ‘identifiable social outcomes’ and disengages the ‘radical potential’ for communities to participate in aesthetically beautiful articles and entities (p.6).

The lack of consistent funding can place companies under pressure but inevitably opens up a range of possibilities with no ‘identifiable social outcomes’ to conform to. To the advantage of TC, performances such as ‘¿quien es el jefe ahora?’ engage the ‘radical potential’ for audience members to participate in the aesthetics and technique of clowning; a form of theatre that is unique in position and style whilst interrogating the economic and social contradictions of the world in which we live: the process of conscientisation (Freire, 1996, p.17).

But how does this work when engaging participants as opposed to audience members? Can the clowning technique maintain its radical potential when transferred from performance to workshop space? Yes, when combined with dialogical facilitation, the technique enabled a continuity of engagement from the performance to the workshop.

TC partnered their performances with a participatory programme. Weekly workshops were held at the El Churqui, the only theatre/workshop space in Moreno, a small province north of central Buenos Aires. On a Tuesday and Wednesday evening, the groups of children and young people would come together to play theatre games, exercises and create group-devised work.

There were no vast differences in games or exercises compared with the UK, but the discipline and technique of clowning was very prevalent. The level of the participants engagement to the games and exercises was inspiring. For example, towards the end of a session, the group of 9-12-year-olds were left to devise a few short scenes with no assistance from the facilitator, and they then delivered a set of scenes equipped with dialogue and evident stagecraft.

The non-intervening nature of the facilitators combined with the independence of the group was motivating. The work demonstrated the potential of an authentic dialogical relationship between facilitator and participant.

From observations and conversations with TC, among other variables there appeared to be two themes at work: a) The combination of aesthetics with pedagogy; b) Continuity, two themes that appear to be inextricably linked. Underlying the discipline and playful nature of the clowning technique was the ethics of dialogue. Over time this appears to have created a group dynamic that identifies the needs of each participant as well as the group, resolving conflict and enabling constructive debate. In regards to theatre programmes within a developing context, Plastow (2014) states:

*‘And we should be aware of programmes that are instrumentalist, seeking to tell people what to do rather than engaging in dialogue from the starting point of the community rather than the funder.’
(Plastow, 2014, p.116)*

The starting point for TC is the dialogue with its groups, distancing itself from the possibilities of instrumentalism. However, is this led by choice or circumstance? Funded programmes are limited, but if a funding relationship is

formed, would the dialogue recede? Regarding Octubre Callejero, Mariella recalled that there were 'political differences' about the work between funders and TC, so they continued independently (Tercer Cordon, 2014). The work would not be hindered by the agendas of those who are in a position of financial superiority.

Continuity is the running theme in the projects in both Chile and Argentina. Both CS and TC demonstrate the benefits for their participant groups by maintaining a continuous relationship. For TC, the development of the relationship between aesthetics and pedagogy relied on the continuity that TC advocate.

In relation to my own practice, the notion of style and aesthetics has raised a lot of questions. If there are ethics underlying certain aesthetics, does it imply that it is possible to engage young people dialogically with any style? And, does this prevent the practice from becoming dogmatic? There are beliefs that certain forms of applied theatre are based around the aesthetics of credited practitioners, such as Brecht or Boal, but, not to discredit these approaches, TC has provoked thoughts around more pluralist aesthetics within the applied theatre discourse.

Theatre and change are two words that have a long-standing and, some would say, inseparable relationship. Theatre can create change on a multitude of levels, but context plays a very significant role within that belief. As Snyder-Young (2014) identifies:

'Most artists are aware that theatre projects cannot, generally, do things like stop wars, start revolutions, prevent the rise of regimes, stop the proliferation of nuclear arms, or put an end to global warming.' (p.132)

Theatre has advantages and limitations, as all forms of political activism do. In order for activism to be effective it is to know when to utilise it and identify 'whether theatre is the intervention their circumstances and goals require' (Snyder-Young, 2014, p.139).

TC perform at a range of political events with the understanding that theatre cannot be the solution to the issue, but it is envisaged as a wider and accessible medium for assisting the wider change and activities. In the months prior to my stay with TC, Argentina defaulted on their debt for the second time in 13 years (BBC news, 2014). Alongside other artists, activists and speakers, TC performed a short sketch with their acclaimed style of punk clown, detailing a range of views on the recent default and provoking a line of thought: 'Let's build a punk nation'. Theatre was one of the many mediums on offer at the event, and as opposed to being separated, these mediums were collaborative, suggesting survival by the creation of relationships with others who share the same ideas (Tercer Cordon, 2014).

TC member Fredy elaborates on the unfeasible separation of theatre from social injustices:

'My concept of theatre cannot be separated from my concept about life in general, where I see that there is a system of relationships based on injustice and where the ambition is for the individual to win out over others. So I think it is important to revert this. And our theatre has to do with that, to try to generate other forms of social relationships where we can connect to each other in a more equitable way, in a more fraternal way.' (Tercer Cordon, 2014)

Much of my reflection consists of deciphering what can be transposed to UK culture and what is possible to adapt. TC validated that technique and aesthetics can gain prominence within applied theatre discourse.

The emphasis on collaboration with alternative groups generated ideas as to 'who we are not working with?'. Community theatre relies on a range of partnerships, but TC demonstrated that alternative collaborators can be found. For more information, please see: www.facebook.com/tercer.teatro

Perimetral Festival, Montevideo, Uruguay*Theatre workshop with children from Hogar Paulina, Ciudad de la costa, Uruguay*

The Perimetral festival takes place in two separate areas surrounding Montevideo: Las Piedras and Ciudad de la Costa. It is jointly organised by Teatro Acuarela and Teatro La Sala. In 2014, when I attended the festival, it lasted eight days and consisted of performances, workshops and talks by a range of practitioners from Latin America. There were three to four performances per day, and each performance took place in a non-traditional theatre space, transforming community centres, school halls and bars. This chapter will focus on two elements: 1) The collaboration with Penelope Glass on delivering a set of workshops with two different groups of young people. 2) The work of Teatro Acuarela and the young actors group.

The workshops were organised by the festival organisers as part of the overall programme. The workshops took place in a range of different contexts as a means to exchange practice and experience between community organisations, arts practitioners and the young people they work with. It was arranged that myself and Penelope Glass of Colectivo Sustento would co-deliver workshops. The workshops consisted of an exchange of exercises and discussions about practices in Uruguay, Chile and the UK. The nature and purpose of the workshops and exercises were led by the young people.

Translated to English, Hogar Desafio means 'challenge home'. It is a secure children's unit in Montevideo. However, the institution resembled a prison with locked doors and a police guard at the front door. The United Nations commissioned a report in 2009 focusing on allegations of torture and ill treatment of prisoners.

The report found concern with the alleged ill treatment and beating of young people as a form of punishment. There was also concern as to the preferred use of imprisonment as opposed to alternative punitive measures (United Nations, 2009).

We visited the Hogar Desafio twice during the festival. The first time to deliver a short workshop and the second to watch a short performance the boys had created. Based on my experiences of having worked in prisons in the UK and Chile, the Hogar Desafio was a unique environment for a theatrical process. The workshops were short and with two separate groups; one with experience of drama and one with no prior experience. The workshops consisted of a range of exercises chosen on the basis of what the group enjoyed the most. And there was minimal resistance, contrary to stereotypes of participants within a judicial setting.

Uruguay is unique and incredibly innovative when it comes to the legalisation of Marijuana, abortion and same sex marriage. University education is free, and the arts are compulsory from primary education with the option of an arts education pathway in high school. Outgoing President Mujica has been named as the 'world's most radical President' (The Guardian, 2014). However, institutions such as the Hogar Desafio appear to have been left behind in the midst of the vast social reforms. What does this mean for artists working with young people in these environments? Should they accept the unjust treatment of young people? Turn the blind eye?

Hooks (1990) states that 'margins' open a space of resistance where communities create and 'imagine alternatives' (p.341). The drama group at the Hogar Desafio was working within this margin. Between the punitive regime and the caged play areas there was an element of resistance and autonomy. The work provoked thinking regarding the antagonism between micro and macro change. For the young people who have become wound up in forgotten reforms, theatre appeared to be a margin within which they could imagine alternatives. This was reinforced by the performance in the second workshop that utilised the traditions of Greek mythology to discuss and debate the young people's self-efficacy.

The Hogar Desafio emphasised the power of theatre on the margins as a means of resistance. However, the institution that oppresses the young people still continues to exist and does need to change. Maybe the change of the system does not come from the grand reform or the overthrow, but from the meeting of numerous margins: the 'multiplicity of interstitial movements' (Holloway, 2010, p.11).

The last of the workshops was given to a group of young girls from a children's residential unit in Ciudad de la Costa. The workshop was opened up to other artists at the festival, resulting in an 'international workshop' where practitioners from Argentina, Brazil, UK and Australia performed exercises with the group. This was a distinctive experience with no theme or concept for the workshop – it was just about playing games, eating together and generally having a fun time. It underlined an idea: the power of playing.

In reference to children's games, from which the majority of our games were derived, Barker (1977) states:

'Children's games are a readily accessible, and seemingly acceptable, framework for releasing physical and emotional energy. Pressure is released, and the human being is to some extent made free, in a framework which is not susceptible to social criticism.' (p.64)

The ability to play and eat without the overhanging demand to create a product or be limited by the means of theatre practice produced a vivid experience for all involved. In a workshop focused on affect as opposed to effect, in reference to Thompson's statement, the playing created a powerful space for participants to be 'free' and release their emotional and physical energies. The irony is that this conversation did not take place before the workshop and neither was there an acknowledgement of the power of playing. Maybe that is where theatres radical nature lies? No imposition, no agendas to be fulfilled by participant or facilitator.

The two workshops were dissimilar for a multitude of reasons: circumstance, environment, time, and so on. The practices exhibited during the festival are not at all examples to be followed religiously; each had their own contradictions and complications. However, each place had its own distinct character and opened up a wealth of questions and examples to aspire to. There was a link between the three places: empowerment. By different means – whether by playing, exchanging or performing – a critical consciousness was in development, a desire to make sense of their world.

The second part of the festival was organised by Teatro Acuarela, more specifically their young actors group. Organisation, planning, transport and any other logistical challenges were met by the young people of Teatro Acuarela. The young people did not carry out the orders of an adult; every initiative and preparation was led by the young people. What was the process? What made them capable of organising a festival for international artists?

Boon & Plastow (2004) argue that empowerment entails more than the 'amelioration of oppression and poverty', but the 'liberation of the mind and spirit' (p.7). Inevitably, this entails the ability for participants to become 'conscious beings' and having the agency to choose 'how their lives will be lived'. From conversations with group members, it became evident that they had been working together for numerous years, some of them since the ages of nine and eleven. Teatro Acuarela demonstrated that the form of empowerment artists may desire has to maintain continuity and correspond with the realities of the participant groups they engage with.

By investing their time, artistic director Fernando Palle and other members of Teatro Acuarela have made such empowerment possible. They have enabled the young people to also adopt the ability to empower others. It was a handover of responsibilities to the group that created the autonomy in them to manage their own development. Ultimately, this led to the young people organising the Perimetral festival. This approach was core to the work of Teatro Acuarela.

Fernando states:

'I said to them that they had reached the limit with me, that I didn't have much more to teach them. I had taught them all I could teach them. And they had taught me heaps. Heaps, I have learnt heaps with them. And now it was the time to start functioning as a theatre group, with a certain level of autonomy. And that's how they came to create the Acuarela Theatre Group.' (Palle, 2014)

Uruguay offered the means for the practical implementation of the research findings. The work also offered insight into a range of institutions that work with and for young people, which proved to be both enlightening as well as concerning. The practices in Uruguay demonstrated an alternative way for organisations to work with arts organisations, or in some cases, embedding the arts in everyday provisions for young people. Teatro Acuarela is a proven example of the benefits to maintaining the arts as part of a young person's personal and social development. For more information on Teatro Acuarela, please visit <http://escueladeteatroacuarela.jimdo.com/>

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research has proven that there are a range of alternatives for engaging young people in the arts, sustaining practices and enabling a creative political debate. Chile, Argentina and Uruguay all have different ways of working, but themes of continuity, sustainability and activism were evident and very strong. The report has highlighted these themes as important learning points for the work in the UK. There are issues and struggles within the work, such as the lack of recognition by various bodies and financial vulnerability, which are challenges to the work in Latin America. The report aimed to celebrate the innovative practices that are found throughout the southern cone of Latin America.

Young people and theatre in the UK face unprecedented challenges: 76 per cent of young people feel that they cannot influence governmental decisions; continued austerity measures will affect living standards alongside increasing social inequalities (Equality Trust, 2014; National Children's Bureau, 2015; Guardian, 2010); and arts funding in the UK has been dramatically reduced in recent years with real-term cuts of £457m since 2010 (Arts Council England, 2014). Accordingly, alternative ways of financing activity need to be addressed if any work is to continue. There is a need to re-engage young people in politics and theatre in a way that is informed and led by young people. The development of the research is to determine how the tenacity and resilience of Latin American practice can begin to inform and sustain a socially engaged theatre practice in the UK.

To return to the work of Paulo Freire, the need to interrogate the socio-economic contradictions of the society we live in is still present and ongoing. The work in Latin America has underlined the importance of this interrogation, the need to be critical through the means of play and the development of conscientisation.

The development of the critical consciousness is crucial for ameliorating the alienation of young people from politics, and the recognition of individual and societal contradictions enables an imagination of alternatives, as Holloway (2005) states:

'Rather than looking to the hero with true class consciousness, a concept of revolution must start from the confusions and contradictions that tear us all apart.' (p.146)

I conclude with the closing monologue of *Moderate* by CS, the practice speaks a lot louder by itself. The monologue proposes an idea: in order for theatre to enable social change, it needs to transcend the stage that it is happening on:

'I stop talking because I had too much pain in my throat. But who cares about that? Who cares what a person like me thinks? What one of us thinks? Who really cares? No one cares. I could take advantage of this moment to say important things I could talk about world injustice, my peoples' pain but why say so many things if no one is listening and if they listen, they don't care. I am not intelligent, I am not a good person I have nothing... but I know what's going to happen. This is going to end, and we won't see each other again. And everything will go back to normal. You will go back home, you will sleep and tomorrow you won't remember anything. And I'll still have this huge pain here in my throat. Everything that has been said did anybody hear it? Will anyone be different after this? What happens after the lights go out and the applause dies down, will depend on you. So that when someone speaks, someone also listens, really listens.'

Bibliography

- Arts Council England (2014). Further information on our funding decisions. Retrieved from: www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/doc/further_information_funding_decisions_27101
- Barker, C. (1977). *Theatre Games – A New Approach to Drama Training*. London: Methuen Drama.
- Boal, A. (2000). *Theater of the Oppressed*. Eastbourne: Pluto Press.
- Boon, R. & Plastow, J. Ed. (2004). *Theatre and Empowerment – Community Drama on the World Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Colectivo Sustento (2014). Create. Retrieved from: <http://colectivosustento.org/creation/>
- Colectivo Sustento (2014). Fenix & Ilusiones. Retrieved from: <http://colectivosustento.org/creation/fenix-ilusiones-2/>
- Davison, J. (2013). *Clown: Readings in Theatre Practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Equality trust (2014). About Inequality. Retrieved from: <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/about-inequality/scale-and-trends>
- Freire, P. (1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.
- Galeano, E. (1973) *Open Veins of Latin America – Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. New York. Monthly Review Press.
- Glass, P. (2014). Interview with Colectivo Sustento. 20th August. Colectivo Sustento Space, Santiago.
- Govan, E, Nicholson, H. & Normington, K. (2007) *Making a Performance – Devising Histories and Contemporary Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Haerpfer, C.W., Bernhagen, P. Inglehart, R.F., & Welzel, C. (2009). *Democratization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heddon, D. & Milling, J. (2006). *Devising Performance – A critical history*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holloway, J. (2010). *Crack Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Holloway, J. (2005). *Change the World Without Taking Power*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hooks, B. (1990). Marginality as a site of resistance. Ferguson, R., Gever, M., Minh-ha, T.T. & West, C. (eds.), *Out There – Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Jimenez, G. (2014). Interview with Colectivo Sustento – 2. August 20, 2014. Colectivo Sustento Space, Santiago.
- Kirby, P. (2003). *Introduction to Latin America*. London: Sage Publications.
- Morales, F & Vera, C. (2014). Interview with Colectivo Sustento – 3. 20th August. Colectivo Sustento Space, Santiago.
- National Children’s Bureau (2015). NCB Member Briefing – Summer Budget 2015. Retrieved from: http://www.youngncb.org.uk/media/10865/ncb_summer_budget_2015.pdf
- Oddey, A. (1994). *Devising Theatre – A practical and theoretical handbook*. London: Routledge.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012) *Income Distribution – Inequality*. (Online) Retrieved from: - <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=26067&Lang=en>
- Palle, F. (2014). Interview with Fernando Palle. September 14, 2014. Perimetral festival, Montevideo.
- Plastow, J. (2014). Domestication or transformation? The Ideology of Theatre for Development in Africa. *Applied Theatre Research*, 2(2), pp. 107-118. Retrieved from: http://0-dx.doi.org.wam.leeds.ac.uk/10.1386/atr.2.2.107_1
- Richardson, M. (2015). *Youth Theatre – Drama For Life*. London: Routledge.
- Snyder-Young, D. (2014). *Theatre of Good Intentions: Challenges and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change*.

Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

The Guardian (2014). José Mujica: is this the world's most radical president? Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/-sp-is-this-worlds-most-radical-president-uruguay-jose-mujica>

The Guardian (2010). Politics isn't interested in young people. Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/nov/25/politics-young-people-apathy>

Thompson, J. (2011). *Theatre Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

United Nations (2009). Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Manfred Nowak. Retrieved from: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hr-council/docs/13session/A-HRC-13-39-Add2.pdf>

US State Department (2013) Chile 2013 Human Rights Report. Retrieved from: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220640.pdf>

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society – The development of higher psychological processes*. Cole, M., John-Steiner, V., Scribner, S. & Souberman, E. (eds.). Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Wilkinson, R. & Pickett, K. (2009). *The Spirit Level – Why more equal societies almost always do better*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

World Bank (2012): Chile Overview. Retrieved from: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/chile/overview>